



EXPEDITIONS



Responsible Tourism

Responsible travel

Our guide to helping you be a more responsible traveller

This may just be a small guide to keep in your pocket but the issue of responsible tourism is a big one. Badly managed travel and tourism can lead to the destruction of habitats, local resources and communities.

Here at STC Expeditions, we believe that tourism has the potential to be highly beneficial to the host destination. We believe we have a duty to preserve the areas and cultures that our groups visit and to make every effort we can to arrange tours and expeditions which have a minimal impact.

This is responsible tourism and it's something we are passionate (some might say obsessive) about.

On tour, our in-country tour/expedition leaders play a vital role in this and many are recognised as leaders in the field of responsible tourism. However, it is not just down to us or them; responsible travel is also dependent on you. There are many things that you can do to minimise the bad and maximise the good when you travel.

That's what this section is all about. This guide gives a few basic tips and suggestions on how to travel responsibly. We hope your adventure with us will be the first of a lifetime of travel. Join us in making tourism an industry which really benefits the world.

Keep an eye out for ways that you can *think outside the box*, useful *examples* and a few *moral dilemmas* surrounding responsible tourism.

If you have any questions, please don't hesitate to check out our website or get in touch.

Happy travels!

What do we do?

We are pretty proud of the efforts we've made in this field, but our work is not finished. Through our in-country leaders, we have the ability to bring positive economic benefit and employment in our destinations. We design specialist Girls' School programmes in which we aim to build connections with local women which bring positive impacts to both parties involved. We support local businesses and enterprises by visiting and learning about them, especially on our business and economics trips. We support, teach and encourage the protection and preservation of the environment and resources when we travel: from being careful with water usage and disposing of waste effectively while trekking, to carbon offsetting all our client's flights. And that is just the start of it; check out our website for more information.

What can you do as an individual?

It might seem like a minefield, but there is a lot you can do to ensure you make a more positive impact on your travels. Yes, it takes a bit of effort and planning but trust us, it's worth it. Responsible tourism makes for a better travel experience.

Do your research:

This exciting new country you are arriving into is home to its own history, wildlife, people, culture, food, language - the list goes on! While you will never be able to learn everything, you should make an effort to learn as much as you can. A few words in the local language will go a long way in making locals happy and also enhance your trip. Make yourself aware of customs, traditions and laws. Being unaware of these could, at best, cause offence or, at worst, result in you getting into some serious trouble. Remember, small things such as holding your partners hand could be seen as very abnormal in some cultures. Imagine how upset you would be if a tourist to the UK skipped one of our neat and orderly queues!



Start at home:

Unplug everything you won't need whilst away and leave behind any excess packaging, recycling in the UK is probably a lot better than wherever you are going, particularly if it is somewhere remote.





Meeting the People:

It is easy to be amazed by how other people live, even in your own country. It is also easy to forget that the incredible faces you are staring at are people like you and that this destination you are just visiting is their home. Just as you would like visitors to act politely and respectfully in your home, you should do so in theirs. Research before you travel will allow you to fit in and interact better with local people.

Consider the local culture:

Consider things such as suitable dress codes for your destination and if in doubt **dress conservatively**. Small acts such as removing your shoes before you enter someone's home or a religious building can be very important.



Be aware that the local culture could be very different to your own, and in some places, this might challenge your comfort zones - for example in places where only men are allowed. Whilst you may not agree with the local way of doing things, remember you are a guest in their country and it would be highly disrespectful to argue or ignore customs.



Bring a smile and be polite:

It is amazing how much a smile and basic manners will cheer people up and help you to interact with local people. It costs nothing and makes a huge difference.

Photos:

Remember to **always ask before taking photographs of people** and respect a person's right to decline. Do you like having your photo taken by complete strangers? Remember to **actually engage with people**; locals are not a show for you to enjoy! They are real people trying to get on with their lives. Really engaging with them will allow a better connection and enhance the experience for both parties, whilst probably giving you a better chance of getting a good photo.



Be ethical:

Ethics are a difficult thing and by nature there is often no right or wrong answer. That is why we can't just hand you a "to do" list on being a responsible traveller. Instead, it is up to you to ask questions and assess each situation before you make a judgement call. Your ability to travel ethically will be enhanced by any research you do before you travel into your specific destination.



Think outside the box!

Some areas are predominantly vegetarian. Whilst you might not be willing to commit to this lifestyle, why not give it a go while you are there! No doubt the food will be better (the chefs will be able to taste and check it for one!) but vegetarianism has also been proven as a more environmentally friendly way of living!

Moral Dilemma:

Begging

You see a small child sat on the roadside begging; do you give them money or not? This is a tricky one! On one hand £2 worth of the local currency could go a long way to feeding this child. And it will also sit well on your conscience to know that you have done something good and helped to make their day a little better. On the other hand, do you know the full story? Is this child being kept from school in order to keep begging and bring the family money? In the long term this will be detrimental to the child and mean that they may never find proper work or security.



Going local:

Although travelling ethically can be difficult, there are simple things you can do to ensure that your presence is beneficial to local communities. Small things such as **using locally owned businesses, guides, hotels and restaurants** will ensure that money stays in the local economy. **Buying goods from local artisans** and **paying a fair price** will encourage local people to develop their skills. Remember that although haggling is often expected, an extra pound here or there for a product won't do much damage to your pocket, but could make a big difference to the vendor. We can't say this enough... **go local!** Eat local food, try local activities, meet local people. All of these actions help to promote employment, the local economy and cross cultural understanding - and let's face it, the world needs as much of that as it can get.



Think outside the box!:

Have you ever considered buying local clothing styles? You might not be brave enough for a sari in India but why not try a kurta/Svalbard combo (traditional female clothing consisting of baggy trousers and a long top). You could even get some handmade, bringing money to the local economy!

Don't flaunt wealth:

Your presence, particularly in remote communities, may cause a stir. Blending in will make your journey more enjoyable as well as preventing you from causing offence. Small actions such as **keeping jewellery and other personal effects** to a minimum are a good idea as it could otherwise be perceived as flaunting wealth.





Be environmentally savvy:

Aren't postcards perfect? Beautiful scenes of unspoiled beaches and green fields. We believe that every traveller has a duty to keep nature just as beautiful as it is on a postcard.

Taking care of the environment:

You are hopefully doing this anyway, but just because you are abroad doesn't mean you should forget to put your litter in the bin, turn off lights and all of the usual eco-friendly activities recommended at home.

Consider **biodegradable soaps and shampoos and sustainable products.**



If trekking and exploring in the wild, make sure you follow good procedures for protecting the environment. **Travel in smaller groups** to avoid startling wildlife, **keep to tracks and trails** to prevent further erosion, **be wary of lighting campfires and make sure all rubbish and waste is disposed of correctly.**

Do your research!

Each destination has its own unique environment and, with that, their own unique issues to deal with. Consider problems such as water scarcity and act accordingly. Interacting with locals will help you to learn how to behave correctly.



Conserving local resources...

...can only have a positive impact and this includes little things like reusing your towels or giving your clothes to the local washer woman instead of trying (and probably failing...) to do it yourself.



Moral dilemma: Water

Nowadays, there are many products on the market which make it quick and easy to purify your own water which will help to reduce waste tenfold. But this has a knock on effect. It means you are no longer buying water from the local vendor which could have an effect on his/her livelihood. A solution? Why not buy your fizzy drinks, at least these are often in glass bottles and reused, but purify your own water?

Wildlife interactions:

With luck, we hope you'll see some incredible wildlife - just remember, it is their home you are visiting! **Be respectful of special sites** such as breeding areas and nesting grounds, **keep your distance** and observe quietly so as not to scare or injure animals and **never feed wildlife** as human food can make them ill. A lot of plant life can take many years to grow and only seconds to destroy; **be content with taking away just a memory** and avoid picking or touching flowers, plants or corals.



Moral dilemma: To buy at home or away?

It is nice to be prepared for a trip. To have your toothpaste, clothes, books and everything you need for your adventure! Plus, it is often easy to find eco-friendly products here in the UK so it's a win-win. But if you take everything you need with you, you are taking away an opportunity to invest in the local economy by buying goods while you are away. There is no easy answer!

Volunteering: the biggest moral dilemma?

Volunteering has the potential to be a life changing experience when you travel, but the same should be the case for the community you work with. Before you embark on any form of volunteering abroad, make sure to **do your research** around the initiative to be sure that your assistance will **bring long term social, economic and environmental benefits to the areas and communities involved.** Whenever a project is included in one of our school expeditions, we spend extensive time with our in-country teams to ensure that it meets our standards, the abilities of the group and the needs of the local community. If, at some point in the future, you are considering a volunteering project of your own, perhaps whilst on a Gap year or such like, do take the time to mull over these questions:

- Does the project add value to the community or impose upon it? If it does add value, how so?
- What sort of local consultation went into developing the project?
- Is there a local organisation involved in the day to day management of the project?
- What are the time frames of the project? Are there long and short term goals?
- Are you taking away opportunities for local staff to be employed and are you actually qualified to take on these roles?
- How is your money being spent?
- Is the provider a responsible travel organisation?

Unfortunately, we hear too many stories of misguided volunteer projects, where they have either been left unfinished or local communities are upset by the constant flux of people coming and going. Be sure to really think about your volunteering opportunity and only take part if you truly feel that it will bring long term good to all of those involved.

A final thought to take away with you!

Travel is not a right. It's a privilege. And with that privilege comes responsibility.

We've all been somewhere which was beautiful once. Somewhere that used to be untouched and perfect before mass tourism ruined it to become just another holiday hotspot where the local culture has been pushed aside for western ideals or repackaged as a tourist attraction. Tourism doesn't have to be like this! Promoting the values of responsible tourism will help to preserve our world and its incredible experiences for future travellers. It allows local communities to retain what makes them unique, while benefitting from the tourism boost to their economies.

Please help share our crusade.



Safe water and water purification options

Please try your best not to buy bottled water. There are many methods of purification and water treatment that can make tap water anywhere in the world safe to drink. Some take some time, some are instant, some are costly and some are cheap.

Make a choice on which you prefer, but travel prepared to clean your own water so you can:

- Avoid creating a trail of plastic water bottles everywhere you go
- Ensure the safety and supply of your water
- Save money and time

To put this all into perspective, if we didn't treat water, a two-week trip with 24 passengers each drinking 2 litres of water a day would result in 336 plastic bottles being discarded into the environment. Not good.

Here at STC Expeditions we have signed the **Travellers Against Plastic** (www.travelersagainstoplastic.org) pledge which says:

I pledge to use my company to promote sustainable travel and will encourage travellers to avoid buying bottled water when they travel. In addition, I will provide our travellers the proper information they need to treat their own drinking water. I also pledge to spread the word to travellers I meet, both at home and abroad.

Please consider signing the pledge yourself to not use plastic water bottles while travelling. And then **be** the change you want to see in the world.



Ways to purify or treat your water

Example of chemical treatment:

Potable Aqua Tablets

- Proven effective
- Simple to use
- Takes about 35 minutes to take effect
- Cost: £5–10 per bottle of tablets
- Cost per bottle of water: 20p



Mechanical Filtration.

Example 1

Grayl – The Water Filtration Cup

- Works like a coffee press
- 16oz of clean water in 15 seconds
- Easy to use: no sucking or squeezing, pumping or need for batteries
- Cost: approximately £55 for the cup and £30 for a purifier attachment
- Filters flavour, odour, particulates and many heavy metals (i.e lead, arsenic, chromium) and chemicals (i.e chlorine, benzene, chloroform) plus:

Filter (included) 99.99% of bacteria (i.e E.Coli, Salmonella) and 99.94% of protozoa (i.e Cryptosporidium, Giardia)

Purifier (optional) 99.999% of bacteria and protozoa plus viruses (i.e Hepatitis A, SARS) – ideal for developing world travel

- 300 uses per replaceable Filter & Purifier

You can purchase on the TAP website:
www.travellersagainstplastic.org

Use the promo code **GRAYL-LOVES-TAP** and Grayl will donate 5% to TAP.



Mechanical Filtration.

Example 2

Lifestraw Go Bottle

- Immediate filtration
- 750ml bottle
- Cost: approximately £35 RRP
- Filter cleans 1000L of water and can be replaced with an £18 filter. That equates to 3.5p per litre for the first 1000L, then 1.8p thereafter



Example of Ultra Violet treatment:

Steri-PEN or Camelbak UV Bottle

- A small light-weight device that disrupts the DNA in bacteria and viruses through ultra-violet light
- One Steri-PEN cleans 8,000 bottles of water. One charge of the battery will last for one 10–14 day trip
- The technology is 100% proven and safe on clear water, but it can't be used on murky/cloudy water
- Cost: £35–£120
- Cost per bottle of water: 0.01p

Questions to ask yourself

Nothing beats good old self-reflection alongside a life changing adventure! Ask yourself these questions to get the brain juices flowing...

Pre-departure

How do you feel about travelling?

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What is your perception of your destination?

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What are you looking forward to the most?

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What are you nervous about?

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Whilst travelling

Who's the most amazing person you've met whilst you've been away?

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What has surprised you?

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6b King Street, Exeter, EX1 1BH

t: 01392 660056

e: schools@thestc.co.uk

www.thestc.co.uk