



ETHICAL  
SCHOOL  
ADVENTURES  
SINCE 2006

# Responsible Tourism Policy

10 January 2024



## Introduction

We believe travel and tourism has the potential to bring positive outcomes to the communities, cultures and environments we visit. If mismanaged or ill-thought through, it also has the capacity to do the opposite. That is why responsible and sustainable tourism is one of the key values of our business.

We strive to connect our clients with the people they meet, nurture the cultures they experience and protect the beautiful environments they are lucky enough to explore.

## Our Impact on People

We are committed that everyone involved in an STC tour or expedition, from teachers and students to the local crafts people and camp cooks, all have the right to be treated equally and fairly. We will not discriminate on the grounds of sex, colour, religion, ethnic origin, age, disability, sexual orientation, nationality or marital status.

### Staff and Suppliers

See local leader section.

We seek to develop long term relationships with our overseas partners and suppliers to encourage their economic growth and also allow us to invest in and provide training and development in their sector. We will provide ongoing training with regards to the principles and practices of responsible travel and safety management and seek to involve both our direct and indirect staff as well as influencing the practices of our suppliers.

We aim to use locally owned service providers such as hotels, activity organisers, restaurants and vehicles in order to spread the economic benefit. These providers, where possible, have accreditation such as Travelife Partnership or Certification, ensuring their attitude to responsible and sustainable travel is in line with our ethos.

Both in country and in the UK, STC Expeditions supports fair pay and employment practices. This includes our third-party suppliers and third party providers or workers such as tuk tuk drivers. See our sustainability policy for more details.

Through our strong relationships we seek to learn from those that know their country best and to understand the key issues affecting each of our destinations and to share best practice amongst the network of suppliers that we have created

### Local Leaders

We believe passionately in our local leaders are the best in the business; not only do they have an unrivalled enthusiasm for showing off their homeland, but it also means they are the most informed on local issues, trekking and escape routes and, of course, the language! This allows participants to gain much more from their trip while also increasing their safety overseas.

The use of local leaders directly benefits the local economy by employing local people and inspiring the next generation to look at alternatives to heading to big cities for work which often leads to rural degeneration. Our local leaders also benefit the economy in other areas from guiding you to the best restaurants, to advising on which craftsmen to purchase souvenirs from. They can also give assistance on the fair price to pay and generally ensure that while undertaking activities such as trekking, our groups are making the least possible impact on the areas they visit.

### Going Local

As far as possible we strive to use local suppliers, restaurants, staff, accommodation and transport. This positively impacts local economies whilst also allowing us the opportunity to help develop their businesses for the future by helping them adhere to our strict safety policies in place.

One of our favourite examples is Sindyanna Galilee, whom we often visit during our trips to Israel and Palestine. A not-for-profit, female-led, fair-trade 'business for peace'. This NGO sells Arab producers' olive oil, honey, almonds and soaps on the international marketplace before channelling all profits back into education for Arab women, bridging cultural divides and encouraging sustainable agriculture and supporting organic farming. The organisation is run by both Arab and Israeli women who share a vision of peaceful co-existence.

## Training and Development

In order to make travel sustainable we must be sure that those involved in our tours and expeditions have the correct knowledge to work safely and responsibly. We work hard to ensure that everyone involved meets our due diligence checks and receives the training they require. This raises the bar in the industry and encourages more to follow suit and train new employees to meet these standards too. All of our local leaders are already experienced guides and we work with them to develop skills, focus on safety management, working with schools, and responsible tourism. This is also our opportunity to learn from our leaders and ensure we are doing everything we can, in each destination, to travel well. In 2024 we added a section on climate change and carbon labelling to our tour leader training and our ethical travel workshop which all of our clients undergo.

We support the training of local people to allow them to earn a living for themselves and gain valuable skills. This might be through supporting female guides in areas where women are not given these opportunities, or working with local NGOs and cooperatives where locals can gain valuable skills and build an economy for themselves.

## Local People, Children and Communities

STC Expeditions will work to prevent the exploitation of children in tourism. We will always respect the cultures, customs and religions of our destinations and try not to influence them unless absolutely necessary. Moreover, we will work to educate our participants and encourage them to act in a respectful manner.

When creating our itineraries or researching new destinations for our trips, we will always consider the economic, environmental and cultural issues which may arise.

STC Expeditions actively discourages participation in project work which involves working with children or orphanages. We seek to promote only volunteer work which:

- places the overseas community or organisation at the heart of the visit, with the remit being set by them.
- is beneficial and worthwhile for all involved
- fosters cultural understanding and exchange on an equal basis.
- sticks to the guideline that if it wouldn't be ok in the UK it is not OK overseas –
- ensures any potential negative impacts have been considered and mitigated e.g taking work away from local people,

We will provide support to organisations and local communities visited by our groups, especially where project work is concerned to ensure the longevity of the outcome.

While designing our tours, we seek to balance the needs of larger groups to ensure that our type and scale of tourism is appropriate to local conditions and infrastructure.

## Our Impact on the Environment

STC Expeditions aims to achieve a zero-litter policy on our tours and expeditions and to provide support and training for our local teams to facilitate this.

Through our local leaders, we seek to encourage our clients to consider the environmental impact of their actions whilst they are abroad in order to help protect the natural environment. We actively discourage the participation of activities which exploit wild or domestic animals or activities which may harm the natural habitats of wild animals.

Clients are given information and encouraged to use environmentally friendly products and kit such as clothing, containers and biodegradable washing products.

Our local leaders are knowledgeable in the intricate issues surrounding their local environments and provide instruction and advice for our clients as to the best way to look after it.

Where possible, STC Expeditions encourages all suppliers to seek environmentally appropriate options when running trips, including accommodation and transport and seeks options which will have a minimal effect on the local environment while also promoting their positive impact.

## Responsible water consumption and waste management

The use of disposable plastic bottles while traveling is hard on the environment, hard on the communities left with the garbage, is expensive and it can often be unhealthy. No traveller wants to leave a trail of plastic water bottles behind them, but many don't know how to avoid it.

STC Expeditions advises all participants to use responsible methods of obtaining clean drinking water. Advice is given in line with 'Travelers Against Plastic' policies and this is also enforced with induction and training with local suppliers. The STC does not condone the use of single use plastic bottles. No single use bottled water is provided on STC Expeditions' trips. All clients are briefed on the use of self-purification methods of water and/or clean drinking water is provided in locations where it can be purified and/or boiled.

STC Expeditions will not promote the use of single-use meal containers such as disposable polystyrene trays and plastic cutlery. If cutlery and meal containers are not provided, clients are advised to bring multi use containers such as metal mess tins or multi-use plastic bowls.

## Waste Management

All in country teams are trained to respect the environment and are aware of the effects of waste management. Teams are briefed to reduce excess waste with food consumption and also to responsibly recycle or dispose of any other waste.

## Accommodation

When selecting accommodation for STC trips, ground agents should seek properties and accommodations which adhere to the following STC Expeditions' accommodation guidelines for sustainability:

- The accommodation is actively engaged in aiming to reduce energy and water consumption.
- The accommodation actively seeks to reduce the volume of solid waste produced.
- All waste water is treated to meet national regulatory standards.
- All employees are protected with relation to national laws and their employment complies with local employment legislation.
- The accommodation implements measures to ensure that children are protected from exploitation and potential forms of abuse.

Should, at any point, STC Expeditions feel that suppliers do not meet the required level of adherence to the above, we retain the right to cancel the contract without notice.

## Transport

Due to safety requirements and itinerary limitations, STC Expeditions uses privately owned coaches and other vehicles, rather than public buses. Where possible, public transport on trains and ferries are used.

As part of our Carbon Action Plan our itineraries are constantly being re-designed to maximise the use of zero-carbon activities such as trekking, cycling, canoeing and rafting.

## Vehicles

Transport on our itineraries adhere to the following guidelines for sustainability:

- Any vehicles used for STC itineraries should be able to transport the groups safely and efficiently. All transport is checked via our standard operating procedures checks.
- All vehicles should not overbear on capacity i.e. not using a 50-seat coach for 20 participants.
- Vehicles should have regular maintenance checks and annual services to ensure roadworthiness and keep emissions as low as possible.
- Vehicles are used appropriate to their environment, 4 wheeled drive for off road. Reducing excess damage to the environment.

## Internal Flights

STC Expeditions actively looks to avoid including internal flights in our itineraries, where possible. Instead we seek to redesign itineraries, use alternative means of transport (e.g. long distance trains or buses) and/or adding additional days to the itinerary if necessary to avoid the need for internal flights.

## Educating our clients

We understand that any overseas visit can be overwhelming for some of our clients and we work hard to ensure that they feel safe and comfortable while travelling with us.

Prior to any trip overseas, STC Expeditions will host an information evening for our participants to give them an insight into and understanding of the people and destination which they will be visiting. This includes an interactive ethical travel workshop, ensuring participants gain as much as possible from their trip whilst acting in a respectful and responsible way. We also provide a Responsible Travel information guide to all participants. Our local leaders will act to assist our clients in acting responsibly while away and encourage them to do so.

## Working with animals

Innocent tourist attractions such as donkey rides, horse & carriage rides or a camel trip can camouflage serious maltreatment of animals. This may be in the form of overloading, or extremely long working days with no water and high temperatures. We do not believe in supporting such activities and clients should be aware of the issues, circumstances, the appearance of the animals and the conditions in which animals may work.

In any situation where the public interacts with captive animals, either directly or indirectly, high standards of animal welfare should be paramount. Animals have specific needs, regardless of their situation. Whilst there are many examples of good practice, some captive wild animals suffer poor animal welfare standards and as such may suffer for the benefit of the visiting public. Moreover, visitors can be at risk from animal attacks in situations where a supplier allows close contact to occur between tourists and wildlife.

STC Expeditions has strict working animal policies and ensures that where animals are provided for support on trips, thorough checks are conducted on the provider for animal welfare through our standard operating procedure checks.

A good source for advice is Brooke Hospital for Animals <https://www.thebrooke.org/>

STC Expeditions have taken the corporate pledge to World Animal Protection <https://www.worldanimalprotection.org.uk/> to ensure that any animals included within an itinerary, whether sanctuaries, whale watching tours or working animals on trekking routes have the highest standards of welfare. STC Expeditions ensures that no performing animal farms or shows are visited on their trips, only regulated sanctuaries that have an active involvement with rehabilitation and education of welfare with animals.

## Souvenirs, purchases and tipping

STC Expeditions will:

- Advise all clients about current living wages and rates.
- Advise all clients on the ethics and etiquette around bargaining and tipping.
- Provide advice on the ethics of buying souvenirs, particularly on the types of illegal souvenirs to look out for and not to purchase (e.g. Ivory, corals and shells).

## Volunteer Work and Projects

Volunteer projects can enhance a journey abroad and we believe that they have the potential to be worthwhile and life-enhancing for both the participants and the local community they choose to work with. When our suppliers propose volunteering opportunities, we investigate the real worth of the project and will only approve it if we believe it will be beneficial and worthwhile to the community involved. We aim to work at the grass roots level in conjunction with the community, NGOs and conservation organisations to achieve this.

STC Expeditions does not support any volunteering activity involving the care of children or exploitation of animals and we only encourage participation in activities which our clients are qualified to do. When working with our suppliers, we focus on the following points to assess the viability of a project:

- Does the project add value to the community or impose on the community?  
If it adds value, then how?
- What sort of local consultation went into developing the project?
- Is there a local organisation involved in the day-to-day management of it?
- What is/are the timeframes of the project (there should be both short and long-term goals)?
- What local employment is being created as part of the project?
- How is the money paid being spent?



## Industry Wide Groups and Accreditation

STC Expeditions work with a variety of schemes and external agencies and companies to help us to act more sustainably and demonstrate our commitment to this cause.

### Travelife ([www.travelife.org](http://www.travelife.org))

An international sustainability certification system dedicated to making travel more responsible and sustainable. We have been Travelife Certified (the highest level) since 2018 and work with Travelife to consistently develop this area of our business. This certificate covers 200 separate criteria and confirms we adhere to ISO14001 (environmental management), ISO26000 (social responsibility) and many Global Sustainable Tourism Council Criteria.



### Tourism Declares <https://www.tourismdeclares.com/>

On 16th January 2020, STC Expeditions joined the global campaign 'Tourism Declares' and declared a Climate Emergency. We have published our climate emergency action plan and are working hard to reduce our Carbon emissions to 55% below 2017 levels by 2030. Please refer to our Carbon Action Plan for further information on how we plan to reduce our carbon emissions.



**eCollective** <https://www.ecollectivecarbon.com/>

With the help of the Carbon Consultancy, eCollective, we have calculated the emissions our business produces and worked out how much carbon each of our trips create.. Carbon labelling allows you, your school, students and parents to make informed decisions about the trips that you book. For us, labelling our trips gives us a base line to work from. In line with Science Based Targets Initiative guidance, we know that we need to reduce the emissions from our trips and our business by 5% each year.

**Trees for Life** <https://treesforlife.org.uk/>

We partner with the fantastic Trees For Life - a multi-award winning conservation charity working to rewild the Scottish Highlands. Through Trees for Life we have committed to plant a tree for every individual who travels with us. As a result, we are now helping to restore, protect and expand a unique habitat of global importance – home to rare wildlife and incredible biodiversity, whilst also locking up additional carbon.

Trees for Life

**Child Safe** (<http://thinkchildsafe.org/>)

Child Safe movement has been developed to reduce the negative impact on children in tourism around the globe. STC works alongside the Child Safe movement in developing child friendly itineraries.



**Travellers Against Plastic** (<http://www.travelersagainstplastic.org/>)

TAP Campaign is an outreach initiative which aims to educate global travellers about the harmful impacts of plastic water bottles usage and encourage travellers to be prepared to clean their own drinking water. The STC have taken the company pledge with travellers against plastic to show our support for this scheme.



**World Animal Protection** (<https://www.worldanimalprotection.org.uk/>)

STC Expeditions have taken the corporate pledge to World Animal Protection to ensure that any animals included within an itinerary, whether sanctuaries, whale watching tours or working animals on trekking routes have the highest standards of welfare.

## Contact

We don't pretend to get everything right, or know all the answers, so if you can help us in our journey, then please get in touch. We are committed to doing all we can to improve our sustainability and make our small corner of the travel industry a better place.

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Adrian".

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