

[HTTP://WWW.ECOTOURISM.ORG/SITE/C.0RLQKXPCLMF/B.4835365/K.563B/YOUR\\_TRAVEL\\_CHOICE\\_MAKES\\_A\\_DIFFERENCE\\_\\_THE\\_INTERNATIONAL\\_ECOTOURISM\\_SOCIETY.HTM](http://www.ecotourism.org/site/c.0RLQKXPCLMF/B.4835365/K.563B/YOUR_TRAVEL_CHOICE_MAKES_A_DIFFERENCE__THE_INTERNATIONAL_ECOTOURISM_SOCIETY.HTM)

## YOUR TRAVEL CHOICE MAKES A DIFFERENCE



### Here's how!

By choosing responsible travel, you can have the fabulous vacation that you've dreamed of, while ensuring that the money you spend at your destination is benefiting the environment and the local people.

- [What is Responsible Travel?](#)
- [Responsible Travel Myths](#)
- [Five Easy Steps: Planning Your Trip](#)
- [Do's and Don'ts While Traveling](#)
- [Seek Quality Assurance](#)
- [Don't Be Fooled by "Green-Washing"](#)
- [Flying Responsibly](#)
- [Giving Back to Conservation & Communities](#)



### **What is Responsible Travel?**

Responsible travel is travel with a purpose. When choosing destinations, accommodations, and tour operators, consider which ones work to protect the environment and benefit local cultures and communities.

Who travels responsibly? Anyone can be a responsible traveler! You can get back to nature, or bathe in luxury... hike into the rainforest, or explore the city... stay close to home, or travel to the exotic location of your dreams. Responsible travel provides many options and is often very affordable.



## Responsible Travel Myths

**Myth:** I have to sacrifice quality and luxury of accommodations.

**Reality:** Many lodges, hotels, and B&Bs have very high standards for quality and luxury. They bring nature and culture within your reach, while still assuring your level of comfort.

**Myth:** It's expensive!

**Reality:** Responsible tours and accommodations come in a range of prices, depending on the level of comfort and convenience you desire.

**Myth:** It's too difficult to be a responsible traveler.

**Reality:** The internet makes it easy to plan and book responsible travel. When you arrive at your destination, there are simple steps you can take to make your trip environmentally and socially responsible (see "What You Can Do While Traveling" above).

**Myth:** It means traveling to tropical jungles.

**Reality:** Responsible travel often brings to mind images of exotic tropical locations, but the reality is that destinations, accommodations, and tour packages exist on every continent.

**Myth:** It's for backpackers.

**Reality:** People of all interests, ages, incomes, and backgrounds can travel responsibly, and there are plenty of family-friendly options.



## Five Easy Steps: Planning Your Trip

Making informed choices before and during your trip is the single most important thing you can do to become a responsible traveler. With a little planning, you can improve the quality of your trip, while making a real difference to the people and places you visit.

- 1. Search the web:** Look for information and resources on responsible travel, ecotourism, or sustainable tourism. [Ecotourism Explorer](#), TIES' interactive online directory, makes searching for your perfect eco-holiday easy!
- 2. Consult guidebooks:** Choose guidebooks with information on your destination's environmental, social and political issues, and read before booking. Guidebooks vary in quality, even within a series, but Lonely Planet, Rough Guides, and Moon are among the best.
- 3. Make contact:** Call or email tour operators that have firsthand knowledge of the place you are considering visiting. Check the websites of all accommodations.
- 4. Ask questions:** Let tour operators/hotels know that you are a responsible consumer. Before you book, ask about their social and environmental policies. For instance - What is your environmental policy? What percentage of your employees are local citizens? Do you support any projects to benefit the local community?
- 5. Choose wisely:** Are the businesses you're considering certified? Do they have eco-label ratings, or have they won eco-awards?



## Do's and Don'ts While Traveling

By exploring alternative travel choices, you can have a unique trip and avoid leaving negative marks on cultures, economies, and the environment.

- 1. At the hotel:** Ask about environmental policies and practices. Talk with staff about working conditions. Does the hotel support community projects?
- 2. Language:** Learn a few words of the local language and use them.
- 3. Dress:** Read up on local conventions and dress appropriately. In many countries, modest dress is important.
- 4. Behavior:** Be respectful of local citizens' privacy. Ask permission before entering sacred places, homes, or private land.
- 5. Photos:** Be sensitive to when and where you take photos/video of people. Always ask first.
- 6. Environment:** Respect the natural environment. Never touch or harass animals. Always follow designated trails. Support conservation by paying entrance fees to parks and protected sites.
- 7. Animal products:** *Never* buy crafts or products made from protected or endangered animals.
- 8. Pay the fair price:** Don't engage in overly aggressive bargaining for souvenirs. Don't short-change on tips for services.
- 9. Buy local:** Choose locally-owned lodges, hotels, and B&Bs. Use local buses, car rental agencies, and airlines. Eat in local restaurants, shop in local markets, and attend local festivals/events.
- 10. Hire local guides:** Enrich your experience and support the local economy. Ask guides if they are licensed and live locally. Are they recommended by tour operators?



## Seek Quality Assurance

Have you heard of the AAA or 5-star rating systems? These long-standing labels judge hotel quality and services. Many certification programs have also been created in travel and tourism to rate the environmental and social impacts of tourism businesses.

Using independent auditors, these programs are important tools for distinguishing genuine ecotourism or sustainable tourism companies, products or services from those that are merely using "eco-" as a marketing tool to attract consumers.

Certification programs can help travelers to make responsible choices. A growing number of companies have earned eco-labels, and we encourage you to purchase from these businesses.

TIES, together with industry partners around the world, promotes sustainable tourism

certification as one of the most effective ways to mainstream sustainability in tourism. To learn about TIES' and other local, national and international organizations' efforts in supporting credible certification programs, see: [Global Partnership for Sustainable Tourism Criteria \(GSTC Partnership\)](#)



### **Don't Be Fooled by "Green-Washing"**

"Eco" is a fashionable label used widely in the tourism industry. It sounds appealing, but much of what is marketed as "eco" is simply conventional tourism with superficial changes. So it's important to check behind the labels.

[Ecotourism Explorer](#) offers various tools to help you avoid green-washing and find authentic travel experiences.

- ✓ Easy-to-use searchable map to find the eco-holiday of your choice.
- ✓ Latest information on tourism businesses' achievements and contributions.
- ✓ Interactive features for travelers to exchange reviews, comments and suggestions.



### **Flying Responsibly**

Your flight can be the most polluting aspect of your travel. It is estimated that air traffic accounts for 10% of greenhouse gases worldwide.

Opt for more environmentally friendly transport such as trains, buses, and passenger boats. Plan your trip so that you minimize air travel, and choose, whenever possible, to stay longer in a destination instead of making many short trips.

You can help offset unavoidable footprint by contributing to credible carbon offsetting programs that support conservation, renewable energy, and other energy saving projects. Learn more about carbon offsetting programs and climate-friendly travel: [Traveling with Climate in Mind](#)



### **Giving Back to Conservation & Communities**

A growing number of tourism businesses are helping to financial and material support community projects and offering travelers the opportunity to get involved. Many of TIES members around the globe are leading the efforts to give back to local communities and enhance the livelihoods of local people through ecotourism. Find best practice examples in your favorite destinations at [Ecotourism Explorer](#)

We encourage you to contribute to and participate in these projects, and support those companies that are making positive impacts on the lives of local hosts. Like others, you'll find you enrich your travel experience when you help contribute to the well-being of the

communities that you're visiting.

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## Support Ecotourism

Your support will go a long way in helping TIES help the global ecotourism community. All donations go directly to strengthening our initiatives uniting conservation, communities and sustainable travel. [more...](#)



## Ecotourism News

Headlines on key ecotourism news to help you stay up-to-date on the latest news from TIES global network, industry trends and critical issues. [more...](#)



## EcoCurrents

The EcoCurrents section on Your Travel Choice Blog features a collection of educational articles on current industry trends and best practice examples from around the world. Stay informed, speak out and spread the word! [more...](#)