

TourismConcern

Campaigning for Ethical and Fairly Traded Tourism

Exploring the World A Code for Responsible Travellers

Tourism Concern works with communities worldwide who are working in or affected by tourism. Cultural norms are different all over the world and we often travel without realising we are breaking cultural rules or damaging the environment.

The rise in independent travel, backpacking and people taking gap years has meant more travellers impacting on destination countries and their host communities. To raise awareness of these impacts Tourism Concern held the first ever young traveller's conference in April 2001. It was a big success - independent travellers, backpackers and those expecting to work overseas on their gap year met people from destination countries, discussed the ethical issues of exploring the world and tried to produce guidelines for travelling overseas. The weekend was fun and informative with excellent debates on travel and delegates ended up devising a code for responsible travel. Debate continued after the weekend, with steering group meetings and discussion on a dedicated list-server. We have now drawn up a responsible travel code.

As you can see we have tried to be non-preachy and presented the code as a way of getting more out of your travels whilst putting more back. The code is available here in full and can also be obtained as a leaflet from Tourism Concern, if you would like a copy or would like to help distribute it just contact michael@tourismconcern.org.uk.

Exploring the World Independent Travellers Code
devised at Tourism Concern's
Young Travellers' Conference, April 2001

We believe that being sensitive to the ideas in this code means getting more out of your travels and giving more back to the people you meet and the places you visit. The code is not aimed only at young travellers. It applies to everybody who loves travelling, whether on a budget holiday or staying in a luxury community run centre - See Mark Mann's *Good Alternative Travel Guide 2002*.

- ***Learn about the country you're visiting***

Start enjoying your travels *before* you leave by tapping into as many sources of information as you can. To get the most out of a trip, seek out lots of information and you'll find more chances for enjoyment. There is lots of material around for just about every country and it needn't be difficult to locate. Remember; don't just look in the obvious places like guidebooks. They will probably be your first port of call, but also try reading some of the classic and contemporary literature of the country. Music can plug you right into the pulse of a place. For example, the stereotypical image of Cuban music is the Buena Vista Social Club but the Cuban music scene is diverse and dynamic. The Internet is a fantastic resource and numerous sites carry hoards of information.

When planning your trip, it's very important not to forget the issues that Tourism Concern campaigns on. When you are researching the countries you wish to visit do not forget to check out the behaviour and dress codes which will be expected of you – don't visit a religious site looking as though you forgot to get dressed that morning.

One of the major impacts holidays and travel have on a destination is economic. If you want to make sure you bring some economic benefit, find out whether there are any community or locally run/ owned places to stay and eat.

- ***The cost of your holiday***

Think about where your money goes - it is very easy to forget your conscience when you are on a budget trying to save every penny. By all means haggle (it is part of the culture after all) but don't go over the top – pay a fair price and maybe the person you're buying from will feed his or her family that day. It doesn't really hurt to be fair and realistic, in fact it can be very rewarding. Try and put money into local people's hands by spending your money in the local economy. Drink local beer or fruit juice rather than imported brands; more often than not they are cheaper and just as good if not better. If it is freshly squeezed juices against bottled 'who-knows-how-long-ago' carbonated, flavoured, E numbers.

Thinking about where your money goes also includes trips, guides and places to stay. Locally owned accommodation using locally sourced products is a way to make sure your money goes directly into the local economy. Tours and excursions run by locals will educate you and benefit them. The success of Erling Kavita, a tourism advisor to local communities in Namibia explains why community-run tourism projects can be the difference between life and death for those communities. So if at all possible support community projects.

Haggling or bargaining is seen as an integral part of the culture in many places, something that you are expected to do. There can even be a kind of status symbol tied up with travellers' ability to get a bargain. But some travellers often get the culture of bargaining wrong and go too far. It's not normal in our culture to haggle so travellers often have misconceptions about how it's done. "I must have the cheapest price for this", "I don't want to be ripped off" are common comments but we can cause a lot of offence being overly suspicious or aggressive. The equivalent of 20p to us may mean the difference between a meal for a family or not – and this is not an exaggeration, in Ghana (circa 2001), the average wage is around 80 pence a day out of which a Ghanaian has to find food, rent, clothes and pay bills – the thought of saving for her own holiday is probably totally out of the question!

Remember how wealthy you are compared to local people.

- **Culture**

Open your mind to new cultures and traditions - it will transform your experience, you'll earn respect and be more readily welcomed by local people.

Be observant and respectful of local norms, adopt local cultural practices where you can without seeming patronising. Remember – minds are like parachutes, they work better when they are open. Keep watching and learning. Choose your destination according to your beliefs. If you are not willing to compromise a belief then choose another destination

Be discrete about your personal point of view on cultural differences. Behave and dress appropriately.

You need to know the laws and attitudes to drugs and alcohol in your destination countries. It is important to obey the law – you are not exempt from it, and you cannot bribe your way out of trouble. You may find in some places that alcohol and drugs are seen as culturally offensive, as well as dangerous to you and the young people who get dragged into the drugs trade.

“The effect on the local community of travellers taking drugs when visiting the hilltribes of Thailand can be devastating. People become trapped into selling drugs to travellers and become addicted themselves, especially young people who want to be like the travellers.” Jaranya Daengnoy, Thai tour organiser, Responsible Ecological and Social Tours (REST).

- ***How big is your footprint? – minimise your environmental impact***

Learn local methods of waste disposal, remember that most Third World countries don't have waste collection services. So minimise your waste by using biodegradable products, limiting packaging and maybe take a water filtering bottle. Be sensitive to limited resources i.e. water, electricity and fuel, these will almost certainly be at a premium in poorer countries. Batteries are one of the most damaging products to leave behind.

Support the conservation not the exploitation of wildlife. Stick to the rules laid down by local governing bodies, for example not going off-road in National Parks.

Help preserve local wildlife and habitats by respecting rules and regulations, such as sticking to footpaths, not standing on coral and not buying products made from endangered plants or animals.

Exploring rainforests, mountain trekking, going through remote desert regions, diving in a coral reef – all of these are things that travellers' dreams are made of. But if everyone who visited such environments did it without working out how to limit their environmental impact, damage would soon follow.

- ***Guidebooks***

Use your guidebook as a starting point, and not as the sole truth - it's just another source of information. Talk to local people, then *discover your own adventure!* Using one resource exclusively will give you a very one dimensional view. Use your guide book as just that – a guide. Read up, talk to other people – particularly local people – they can provide a wealth of information. Unlike guidebooks they are up to date. Don't come home having given more time to reading the 'book' than to seeing the things it's telling you about.

- ***Photography***

Often the traveller wants photos to remind them of their travels – but there are times when photography can offend and be intrusive. How do you get the photos of your lifetime without making enemies of the people you are visiting? Simply take time to consider the impact it has on local people and how you can reduce that impact, if it's inappropriate, don't take it. Don't treat people as part of the landscape, they may not want their picture taken - put yourself in their shoes, ask first and respect their wishes.

Flash photography can damage works of art – ask first.

The ideas expressed in this code were developed by and for independent travellers. They show what individuals can do to play their part towards Tourism Concern's goal of more ethical and fairly traded tourism. We can only carry on this work with the support of people like you. To join Tourism Concern call (UK) 020 7753 3330 or visit www.tourismconcern.org.uk

This Tourism Concern initiative was supported by
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Our high profile campaigns like the production of this code, highlight the issues that travel and tourism can bring to destinations and show what we can do to make a difference. This code is only one of the many areas in which we work; see our website for further details www.tourismconcern.org.uk