How travellers can help rebuild better tourism

Tourism is one of the world’s biggest employers and plays an essential part in the global economy.

It has the power to unite people from different backgrounds, building tolerance and understanding. If managed properly and responsibly, tourism also protects natural areas, wildlife, and people.

Responsible tourism is when travellers, destinations and tourism businesses work together to ensure the impacts of travel are positive, and that travellers have great experiences whilst boosting the economy. This is a really important part of how our world recovers from COVID-19 and as a traveller, you can help build back a better tourism industry. This guide provides information about how you can help.

Help to prevent COVID-19 outbreaks

The best thing anyone can do to help economies recover from the COVID-19 pandemic is to prevent the virus from spreading. Every single one of us plays an important role in this both at home and when travelling.

This means following instructions you are given about wearing a mask, washing your hands, and practicing social distancing. It also means monitoring your own health for symptoms, and if you feel unwell, self-isolate immediately and get tested as soon as possible.

Click here to read more about coronavirus symptoms.

Support responsible tourism businesses

Look for reputable certification labels that show a business has had to independently verify that they are operating responsibly, and if they do not have a label, see if you can find a sustainability policy on their website that indicates they are trying to do better. Some examples of certification labels in tourism include Travelife, NEPCon Preferred by Nature and Ecotourism Kenya. You can also look for tourism businesses that work with GSTC, the Global Sustainable Tourism Council.

Click here to see a list of travel companies that support Travelife for Accommodation, a good indication that they are taking action to operate responsibly.

Read ABTA’s ‘Get Ready for Travel’ guide

ABTA, the UK travel association, have produced some information about travelling during the pandemic. It explains how to prepare for your trip and gives ideas for keeping safe when you are travelling, your return journey and advice for when you get home. Click here to read the guide.

Make a responsible tourism pledge with Make Holidays Greener

Travelife and ABTA, the UK travel association, run this campaign every year to encourage holidaymakers and the industry to create better places to live and visit. Click here to visit the Make Holidays Greener website where you can find out more about how to get involved.

Prevent pollution and lower the carbon impact of your trip

Reduce plastic waste by bringing reusable items such as a shopping bag and refillable water bottles. Refuse things like plastic straws and stirrers.

Follow any instructions about recycling and dispose of your waste properly and safely.

Try to pack less for your trip to lower the carbon emissions from your travel by air, car, or bus. This is because the more weight an aircraft or car is carrying, the more fuel is needed for the trip.

Help to conserve energy by switching off lights and other equipment when they are not needed and remembering to turn off air-conditioning when you open doors or windows in your hotel room.

The production of meat has a higher environmental impact than plant-based food, so consider opting for a few vegetarian or vegan meals during your trip.

Consider offsetting the carbon emissions from your trip. Many airlines and travel agents have a way for you to do this when you book.
**Support local and small businesses**

This is important at home too, but when you are travelling you can really help the place you are visiting to recover by making an effort to shop and eat at local businesses outside your hotel at least once or twice during your trip. You can also help by booking local tours and visiting local attractions that are open. Just remember to follow coronavirus prevention measures whenever you are engaging with local people and fellow travellers.

**Protect and respect local people**

Engaging with local people can be a really rewarding travel experience, so spend some time learning about local culture, customs and traditions. Be sure to observe these during your trip, especially when visiting areas outside your hotel and sites of special cultural or religious significance. You might also want to learn a few words of the local language, even if it is just how to say hello and thank you.

Do not take photos of people without their permission and only buy art, historical artifacts and other items that represent culture or history from reputable, licensed sellers that are respecting relevant laws and intellectual property rights.

If you are concerned that any person is being exploited or abused, then report what you have seen. You might feel unsafe or uncomfortable about doing that during your trip, so you can complain to your hotel and/or your travel agent when you return, or even to the local tourism organisation. If you are staying at a Travelife Certified property then you can click here to report an issue you see at your hotel to us.

**Help to safeguard children**

Help to keep children safe and healthy by learning about how to identify signs of abuse or exploitation, and how to report these to the right authorities. Speak to hotel staff, your travel agent, or your holiday rep if you are not sure what to do. You can support children in need by making donations to reputable charities, there is no need to visit them. Avoid orphanage visits, and even school visits can be disruptive to children’s education. Click here to visit the ECPAT website and find out how to report sexual abuse and exploitation of children.

**Protect biodiversity**

Always dispose of your waste properly so that you do not leave any litter, this includes food waste that might harm wild animals if they eat it.

When visiting natural attractions, follow any instructions given to you about how to protect them. This could be things like staying on marked pathways, not leaving behind any waste, and wearing sunscreen that does not harm reefs.

Do not take (or buy) things like coral and shells from natural areas as this can disrupt sensitive ecosystems.

Make sure you do not buy or consume any endangered species, including items made from material such as ivory. You can find more about this at the CITES website.

**Protect the welfare of animals**

If you come across wild animals, including ones that visit your hotel, avoid feeding or touching them.

Ask hotel staff about how to engage with any stray cats or dogs. Many hotels will have a programme in place to manage this problem and one of the best ways you can help is to support local animal welfare charities, such as shelters or rescue organisations, with a donation.

Do not participate in any activities that could harm the mental and physical wellbeing of animals. This means avoiding anything involving feeding or physical contact with animals that are traditionally wild such as elephant riding or bathing, swimming with dolphins, stingray feeding and so on. It also means activities where animals are forced to perform in ways that are unnatural to them, for example photos with tigers, walking with lions, snake charming or shows where animals must perform.

When engaging with captive, domestic, farm or working animals, keep an eye on how they are treated. If you suspect these animals are not being treated properly, you should raise it with the company responsible for these animals and your hotel. You can also report this to Born Free, an international organization that monitors animal welfare, by clicking here. If you are staying at a Travelife Certified property then you can click here to report an issue you see at your hotel to us.

**Reduce stress on resources in the place you are visiting**

Reduce the amount of water you use by taking shorter showers, turning off the tap when you are brushing your teeth and making use of any low-flush options on toilets when you can.

Reduce the amount of waste that you create by opting for reusable bottles, cups, and straws, and only taking items on your trip that you really need.

Try to use public transport if it is available, such as an airport bus or train, rather than a private transfer. You could also consider renting a bike to get around. All of these are great ways to experience local culture.

**Tell us about a Travelife Certified hotel**

Whilst you can always tell us about something you think is not right, we also would love you to tell us when you think a Travelife Certified accommodation provider has done something well! This helps us to show the tourism industry that being responsible really does create better places to live, work and visit. Click here to give us feedback about a Travelife Certified hotel.