

Globetrotting with a Conscience

If you were a tourist last year, you certainly weren't alone. Countries around the world registered an all-time high of 808 million international tourism arrivals in 2005. Tourism contributes a major share to the global economy, accounting for an estimated \$6 trillion of economic activity in 2005. Nearly 234 million jobs—8 percent of total world employment—are directly or indirectly linked to travel and tourism, while 76 million people work in the industry.

In many cases, however, the bulk of the money you spend on vacation doesn't directly benefit the places you visit. The U.N. Environment Programme estimates that if you buy an all-inclusive package tour, about 80 percent of your money goes to airlines, hotels, and other companies that are based in your home country or a third country. The host community, meanwhile, sees little economic benefit from your visit.

A growing number of tourists are seeking alternatives to conventional "mass tourism." They are interested in protecting the environment and supporting the local communities that they visit. Numerous operators, hotels, and tours now offer "responsible tourism" options, often to meet increased traveler demand. Certification programs can help you identify which accommodations, tour operators, and other products are truly responsible.



DID YOU KNOW...?

- * The World Tourism Organization projects that there will be 1.6 billion international tourism arrivals annually by 2020, with 46 percent visiting Europe, 25 percent East Asia and the Pacific, and 18 percent the Americas.
- * More than 100 million passengers have taken a cruise since 1980. In 2005 alone, 11 million people took a cruise, according to the Cruise Lines International Association.
- * A passenger traveling from Amsterdam to London would produce more than three

times as much carbon dioxide traveling by plane than by train, reports Climate Action Network Europe.

- * Ecotourism, pro-poor tourism, geotourism, and sustainable tourism are all types of tourism based on the idea that, if done well, travel can have a positive overall impact.
- * When surveyed, more than two thirds of U.S. and Australian travelers, and 90 percent of British tourists, agreed that protection of the environment and support of local communities should be part of a hotel's responsibility.

CHALLENGE YOURSELF AND OTHERS:

Next time you fly, offset the carbon emissions produced by your flight. Several companies now allow you to calculate the amount of carbon released during your trip and to purchase carbon credits for that amount. The companies use your donation to plant trees, contribute towards clean energy, or otherwise "sink" the carbon produced during the flight.

SUCCESS STORIES

❖ Some 2,472 beaches and 635 marinas in 35 countries were awarded Blue Flag status in 2005, indicating that they meet high standards for water quality, safety, and environmental management.

❖ Since 2003, Fair Trade in Tourism South Africa has certified 18 South African tour operators and accommodations that provide fair wages and working conditions for their employees.

❖ In May 2004, more than 80 U.N. officials, tour operators, professors, non-governmental organizations, and funders gathered to discuss the growing Travelers' Philanthropy movement: how to help travelers contribute most effectively to the host communities they visit.

❖ The Africa Foundation, created by safari company Conservation Corporation Africa, has raised \$4 million for education, health, and income-generating programs near its lodges in East and South Africa—financing the training of 250 teachers, university scholarships for 140 students, and the creation of 100 classrooms and 18 preschools.



SIMPLE THINGS YOU CAN DO:

- ✓ Before you book a tour or accommodation, ask about the company's social and environmental policies. Do the majority of employees come from the local area? Does the business support projects that benefit the local community or surrounding environment?
- ✓ Look for websites specializing in responsible travel, ecotourism, or sustainable tourism. Consult guidebooks with information on your destination's environmental, social, and political issues—read before booking!
- ✓ Patronize local businesses: Choose locally-owned lodges, hotels, and bed & breakfasts. Use local buses, taxis, and car rental agencies. Attend local festivals and events. And hire guides that are licensed and live in the area you are visiting.
- ✓ Choose wisely: Are the businesses you're considering certified? Do they have eco-label ratings, or have they won eco-awards?

FOR MORE INFORMATION

- ☛ **The International Ecotourism Society (www.ecotourism.org)** provides ecotourism resources, information on how to become a responsible traveler, and links to other ecotourism groups.
- ☛ **World Tourism Organization (www.world-tourism.org)** is a specialized U.N. agency that provides information and statistics on international tourism.
- ☛ **Planeta.com (www.planeta.com)** hosts an online forum on tourism and provides a variety of ecotourism articles and guides.
- ☛ **National Geographic's Sustainable Destinations Resource Center (www.nationalgeographic.com/travel/sustainable)** is the place to learn about geotourism. It also has information for tourism professionals, travelers, and residents living in tourism destinations.
- ☛ **Responsibletravel.com (www.responsibletravel.com)** offers travel tips, recommends destinations, and organizes responsible travel campaigns.