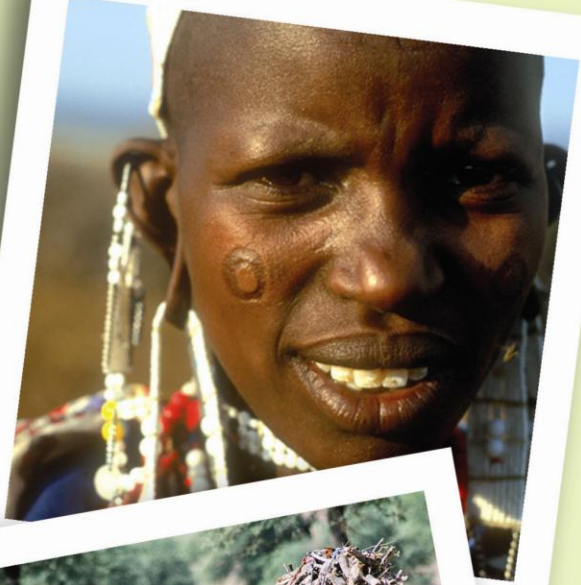


responsible tourism policy



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Welcome to the world's biggest industry. By the year 2010 it is forecast that more than one billion people will take an overseas holiday - and you may be one of them. The impact of tourism has already been immense and it will certainly increase. The travel industry can bring many benefits to local communities, including an injection of cash and employment for local people, preservation of native habitats and indigenous wildlife, and cultural exchange. However, without care, tourism can also have a negative impact: destruction of natural habitats; diversion of scarce resources; disturbance of wildlife; and the violation of tribal peoples' rights.

We acknowledge that it is our duty as a responsible tour operator to ensure that we do all we can to make the experience for you as our client, and for the countries we visit, as positive as possible.

We aim to set responsible tourism standards within the travel industry and to minimise the impact of our challenges on the environment within which we operate.

We ensure that every challenge we run benefits both the charity being supported, and also the local communities with whom we interact.

The social, economic and environmental impact of our challenges is considered at all stages of planning a challenge. Our responsible tourism policy covers our operations in the UK, whilst on the challenge and also advises travellers how they can minimise their impact on the environment and benefit the host communities as much as possible.

aim of this policy

This responsible tourism policy is at the heart of all of the company's actions. It is used to educate our staff, expedition leaders, local agents and suppliers, partner charities and participants on the importance of responsible tourism.

internally

We recently appointed a Responsible Tourism Manager to ensure that these guidelines are adhered to throughout our business operations both on challenges overseas and at our head office in the UK.

Comments from client feedback forms are passed back to the relevant ground agents we use in country and where appropriate, positive changes are implemented. In addition, we have recently implemented a series of environmental audits which are carried out in country by our expedition leaders and help us to keep a focus on what is really happening on the ground.

what do charity challenge do?

Charity Challenge aim to:

- use locally owned transport, accommodation, guiding services and restaurants in the host communities, ensuring financial gain benefits the local community.
- minimise our environmental and social impact by limiting group size to an average of 15-20 participants.
- educate our guides and expedition leaders on cultural norms and sustainable tourism practices.
- follow local and international guidelines about environmental protection.
- ensure every staff member on expedition gets a fair wage, and is tipped appropriately.
- follow the guidelines set out by the International Porters Protection Group for the treatment and rights of porters on an expedition.
- encourage participants to learn about and integrate with the host communities, and have respect for local customs and cultures.
- offset the greenhouse gases produced by our UK operations and from staff air travel.
- offset the international flights of all clients travelling through our company (see below).
- ensure that all staff at home and abroad operate within our guidelines for responsible tourism, and are fully informed about our responsible tourism policy, and share this knowledge with expedition participants.

support for local projects

As part of our commitment to the local communities we interact with during our challenges, we donate approx US\$400 per group to a local community project.

local community support

We employ local guides, porters and other essential support staff and we try, where possible, to use locally owned accommodation. This way, local challenge costs can truly benefit the local community. We train our overseas support teams thoroughly in all aspects of our responsible tourism policy.

air travel and climate change

Tourism is the single biggest service industry in the world.⁽¹⁾ It accounts for 10.4% percent of the world GDP and 8.2% of total employment worldwide which is equal to 231.2 million jobs.⁽²⁾ For many developing countries, tourism is one of the main sources of foreign exchange.⁽³⁾ Therefore, reducing travel to these countries is not a long term solution to climate change. Any potential solution to global warming comes at a cost; investment in renewable energy, cleaner technologies, waste reduction processes, and so on. We believe that the solution lies in both raising awareness of the impact travel can have on the world climate, and addressing the ways in which we operate our challenges. We have recently fully automated our UK operations, reducing the amount of paper, toners, envelopes, etc., that we use. We are also raising awareness of carbon footprint issues with our overseas agents and partners. Through the offsetting, we are funding projects in renewable energy and energy efficiency which fight climate change and benefit communities around the world. We have teamed up with Climate Care (www.climatecare.org) and will be offsetting the long haul flights undertaken by every client and member of staff who travels through the company.

what you can do pre-expedition

You have a very important role to play in ensuring our guidelines for responsible tourism are carried out during the expedition. Participants are encouraged to enter into the spirit of adventure, but to do so with respect for the places and people you visit. For the truly responsible traveller this starts at home.

remove all unnecessary packaging

Many countries do not have the same refuse disposal systems as you are used to. An expedition can cause a surprising amount of waste. We ask that you all do as much as possible to minimise this, and to see that rubbish is disposed of responsibly. Be particularly aware of the problems of disposing of batteries, if in doubt bring them home with you.

read about the destination you are going to in advance

Knowledge of the local culture and environmental issues will help you become a more sensitive traveller. See the Fact File for more information, and the reading list in the Q&A Sheet for your expedition.

learn a few words of the local language

A few well-chosen words will go a long way. If you are able to communicate even at a very modest level you will feel more comfortable in the environment you are in and put your hosts at ease. Basic words are included in the Q&A sheet.

raise money for a local charity

If you would like to take part in a Charity Challenge expedition and would like to raise money for a local cause in the country that you are visiting, you can support one of the many UK or Irish registered charities who work internationally. This way, the funds you raise will benefit the host country. Visit the *Associated Charities* section on our website and click through to the charities listed under *International Aid*.

what you can do whilst on the expedition

During the expedition is when you will have the biggest influence on the environment, so this is your chance to minimise the negative impact and to make it as positive as possible for all involved.

be conservative with water

In many places, water is a scarce resource and without careful use, local people and wildlife suffer. We always provide a generous amount of clean drinking water on our expeditions, so you do not need to continually buy bottles of water, which generates a huge number of plastic bottles which are often buried, as recycling facilities are not available. When cleaning your teeth turn the water tap off whilst you are brushing. Dirty water used from washing either yourself or dishes should be scattered on the ground 100ft away from river sources if a drain is not available. Do not use non biodegradable soap in lakes or streams.

don't leave rubbish behind

Please take it with you. Your rubbish is not often biodegradable, is always unsightly, and may take years to biodegrade especially in desert or mountain environments. In some instances rubbish can cause great harm to wildlife. It may seem that local communities have little regard for their environment and contribute heavily to the problem of rubbish, but waste disposal is often very limited. Please don't let our presence add to these problems. Please carry your rubbish with you and dispose of it at the next camp or town you come to. Try and leave the area

as you would want to find it, this may include picking up other people's rubbish at your camp site. Try to use the same water bottle without buying new ones each time yours has run out.

smoking

If you must smoke, you should collect the matches and cigarette butts when finished and put them in your pocket and dispose of them properly when you get to camp. Not only does it present a fire risk, cigarette butts take many years to decompose and may harm local wildlife.

noise

Noise should be kept to a minimum so as not to disturb the animals, or any other game watchers. Animals should not be touched, goaded, fed or disturbed in any way. Don't try to approach animals as this may cause them to panic and injure themselves as they run away. On tours where animals are used for transportation we aim to ensure that animals are well looked after, are fed well and given realistic loads to carry

damage

Try not to damage any plant life, which you come across. This includes not picking flowers, which might be rare. When trekking, follow your guides and keep to the path. Going off the beaten track could result in damaging sensitive soil and vegetation. Removing coral damages the marine ecosystem and is nearly always unsustainable. If you are near coral, please bear in mind it is made up of tiny animals and takes centuries to grow. Treading on coral can cause severe long-term damage.

gifts

If you wish to take gifts of books or pens for use in schools, please ask your tour leader how this can be done in a fair and responsible way. It may be possible to visit a school at some point in the expedition that Charity Challenge supports through client donations. Buying products made from endangered species threatens their existence. Remember, in most cases it is illegal to import into the UK products from elephant ivory, rhino horn, furs, endangered tree species, butterflies, orchids, cacti, coral, sea turtle products, snake skin and wild game meat. Similarly, when on the beach, don't buy shells because that encourages the seashell trade. Do not be tempted to buy ancient artifacts such as pottery, which possibly were stolen from graves or unexplored tombs etc. Be aware that some goods may be manufactured through child labour.

accommodation

Most expeditions begin and end in a hotel. When you stay in at your hotel please turn off air conditioning and lights when you are not in the room. Also ask the expedition leader to talk to hoteliers about towel washing option and please use the towels more than once rather than asking for (or allowing) them to be washed every day.

toilets

As many of our expeditions will take you off-the-beaten track, there are often a lack of toilet facilities. On treks it is unlikely you will have a flushing toilet. Instead a toilet tent will be erected and a pit dug. The pit should be dug at least 30m away from any water sources, and any paper rubbish should be collected and burnt, not buried. If you are out for the day and no toilet is available please ask your tour leader what the appropriate action is and ensure you don't leave any paper waste behind. Where a toilet is provided, please use it, as opposed to finding your own rock to crouch behind. Only if there is no risk of fire use toilet paper and burn it but ask the expedition leader first.. Toilet paper is unsightly and takes a long time to break down.

social impact

As well as impacting upon the physical environment, tourism can have a huge and lasting impact on the people and culture of the country you are visiting. By following local guidelines and by being respectful of culture and traditions, you will gain as much out of the expedition as possible and hopefully leave behind a positive impression.

you may be confronted by extremes of wealth and poverty

Unfortunately, beggars are a fact of life – some are genuine, others are trying to cash in on the tourist trail. Whether you give money or gifts is a personal matter. If you give anything to any local people, try not to be 'condescending', e.g. don't throw pens out of the vehicle to children as you pass a village. Don't give sweets to children. Although it may seem as though you are giving them a treat, many countries we visit have little or no dental care, and by giving sweets you are contributing to their tooth decay. It will also encourage children to beg and see tourists as little more than a source of sweets and treats. Don't show off your relative wealth, with displays of money and material goods such as camera equipment or jewellery. It's not only making you a potential target to be robbed but is also highlighting the poverty gap that may exist between yourselves and those in the host country.

tipping

Tipping is perfectly acceptable and can form the base of the local economy, with some relying mainly on tips. Your expedition leader will advise you on tour when and how much is appropriate, and refer to your Q&As. Please feel free to take with you pens books, pencils etc but please give them to your expedition leader to distribute and not

directly to children or communities you meet as this may build expectations and can create problems for future travellers.

bargaining

Prices are generally low due to low wages and poor working conditions. Only start to bargain if you intend to buy, as it's not fair to knowingly mislead a hardworking vendor. When bargaining for goods, please bear in mind that 10 cents is nothing to you, but might be a lot to the vendor. Always have a figure in mind that you think is fair to pay and don't feel aggrieved if you find the same product for less. Don't get angry or aggressive when bargaining remember the vendor is just trying to make a living, even though it may be at your expense.

locally made goods

Do not buy endangered plants, animal skins, or anything made from cacti, coral, shells, starfish, ivory, fur or feathers. We encourage you however to buy locally made goods and crafts and seek out shops or markets that work as co-operatives. This means that a fair amount is paid to the producers and discourages mass-production. You may also be able to buy more unique goods and souvenirs. When in markets or busy areas, avoid public displays of wealth such as watches, rings, jewelry and ipods. The golden rule of traveling is if you don't need it, don't take which is especially true for jewellery.

respect

Respect local customs and follow high standards of courtesy. Treat images of the heads of state with respect. Be aware of the differences in social behaviour and behave appropriately. Standards of acceptable behaviour vary greatly from place to place, and people of developing countries can often be easily shocked by 'western' behaviour. Displays of intimacy are often considered not suitable in public. Don't make promises you can't keep. So if you say you are going to write, do. Learn some words in the local language to help make contact and conversation.

photography

Ask permission before taking someone's photo. Many people don't like having their photo's taken and there may be religious reasons for this. Don't pay children for photos' as it will encourage them to beg. If they have the opportunity to go to school they may not be so willing to do so if they can make money from tourists by looking cute. Be cautious when taking photos of bridges, official buildings, persons in uniform, planes and airports, or religious buildings and ceremonies. Ask your expedition leader for advice if unsure.

physical contact

Acceptable physical contact and body language varies in different destinations. Knowing the social norms in the destinations you are travelling through will help you to avoid embarrassing situations and enhance your chances of meeting the locals.

local dress code

Observe the local dress code in the areas in which you are travelling, e.g. cover up in holy places. Local people can feel deeply offended when visitors do not observe the dress code and this can also cause unwanted attention. Respect property and their surroundings. Leave places you visit as you found them, or even better. Ensure you know the appropriate behaviour for the situation you are in, for example, ask your tour leader if it is essential to remove your shoes before entering a building.

treat local staff with respect and humility

No matter what their role is on your expedition. We aim to ensure every person involved in the expedition has a fair wage and has the right to work in safe conditions. As members of the International Porter Protection Group (IPPG) that sets guidelines and working conditions for porters, we aim to ensure the porters we use are treated in an acceptable way and paid fairly. Visit the IPPG website for further details www.ippg.net about porters' rights and working conditions or talk to your expedition leader.

don't have any involvement with drugs or prostitution

Not only are both illegal in most countries we visit, but the trade presents real dangers for the people involved, many of whom are forced to do so against their will.

what you can do post-expedition

If you promise to send photos back to someone please ensure you do so. This is an excellent way of sharing a positive interaction and many locals love to see themselves in print.

room for improvement

We are supporters of Tourism Concern and members of their Ethical Tour Operators Group who meet to discuss ways of setting best practice in ethical tourism. We are constantly looking for ways to improve our operations to further benefit the local communities in which we operate. As such, we welcome your thoughts on any ways you feel we can improve our responsible tourism practices. *Please send your comments to info@charitychallenge.com*