

# POSITIVELY TRAVELLING

Forget the outdated idea of 'ecotourism'... now that the wider concept of responsible tourism is becoming more accepted, countries around the world are setting up programmes to develop the positive aspects of tourism and minimise the negatives

It wasn't so long ago that going on a 'green' holiday meant taking a very expensive wildlife holiday in Central America or dry-stone walling in Devon. Nowadays it's mainstream; the market for 'responsible travel' is growing at an estimated three times the industry rate and is predicted to come 5 per cent (or £1bn) of the market in the next 10-20 years.

All that is great news for operators, but has green travel progressed from its socks-and-sandals past? Does it really make any difference to the world? And what's actually in it for traditional holidaymakers?

The green agenda in tourism has moved on from 20 years ago when 'ecotourism' was marketed as a panacea for tourism's darker side. Ecotourism's popularity, characterised by the mantra of the 90s traveller 'Take only photographs, leave only footprints', grew amid the awareness that tourism could provide positive benefits to conservation and the environment. However, small groups of well-intentioned ecotourists visiting relatively remote places in the spirit of conservation have little to do with mass tourism. Things began to change in 1992 when the Rio Earth Summit and the subsequent Agenda 21 for the travel and tourism industry called for the entire tourism industry to become more sustainable and to act more responsibly regarding its impact on holiday destinations.

Nowadays, 'responsible travel' is the term most commonly used by the travel industry. The ethos of responsible travel is to encourage the positive aspects of tourism as well as include provision for environmental protection and responsibilities to local people and cultures. In more general terms, responsible travel has a broader agenda within the mainstream tourism industry, from winter breaks in South Africa to package holidays in the Mediterranean.

It's progress the travelling world can ill afford to resist. Tourism is now arguably the largest industry in the world. According to the World Travel and Tourism Council, tourism (and its associated activities) generates over 10 per cent of Global Domestic Product and employs 200 million people. There are nearly 700 million international travellers a year, a figure which is expected to double by 2020. The staggering growth of tourism has

brought increasing pressure on the environment and communities. Aircraft emissions are one of the significant contributors to greenhouse gases; golf courses and hotels complexes have been built on fragile ecosystems; and homes have been displaced to make way for tourism development.

The growth of tourism to developing countries is the focus for particular apprehension. Many of us are now choosing increasingly affordable long-haul trips to Africa, Latin America and Asia where the economic prosperity that tourism brings often comes into sharp contrast with the negative impact tourism has on the environment and on local communities. In 1999, Tourism Concern ([www.tourismconcern.org.uk](http://www.tourismconcern.org.uk)) set up the International Fair Trade in Tourism Network to campaign for more equitable share of the costs and benefits of tourism investment. It says that sometimes as little as 10 per cent of the money spent on a holiday remains in the destination economy since much tourism development consists of all-inclusive package holidays run by transnational corporations that take most of the money generated from the holiday. Tourism Concern believes responsible tourism can provide holidays that offer a better exchange of culture with local people as well as ensuring income from the holiday goes towards the local communities. On its website there is a travellers' code on how to get more out of your travels and give more back to the people you meet and the places you visit. By using local guides rather than expatriates, for example, you gain a better insight into the environment and culture of the destination. And by eating fresh produce sourced locally, rather than food shipped in from abroad, you can directly contribute to the local economy.

So far, so green, but do people actually want this kind of holiday? Holidays are woven into the fabric of our lifestyle; we expect to go away at least once a year, to forget our worries and enjoy ourselves. Are we really looking for a more responsible holiday? Research shows that there is an increasing demand from consumers for more corporate responsibility and ethical standards in travel. In a survey earlier this month by Responsible-travel.com, 80 per cent of people said they are more likely to book a holiday with a company that

Trekking across a glacier on Mt Rakaposhi, Pakistan



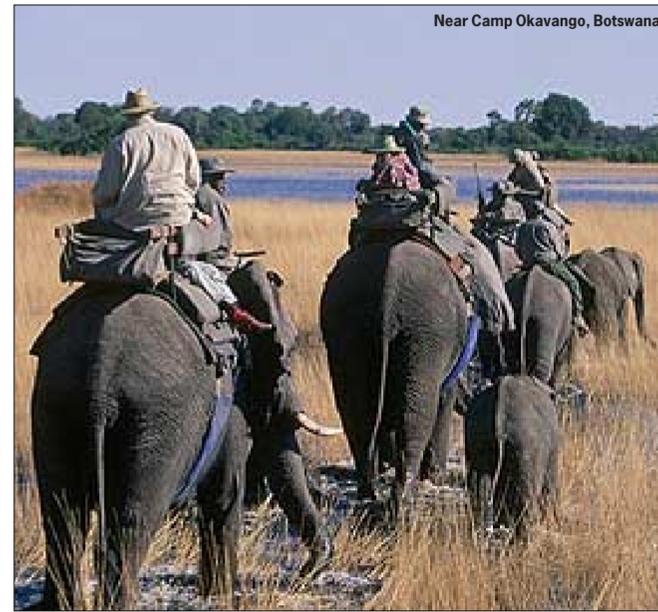
There is a huge diversity of trips available, from B&Bs in Wales to lodges in Costa Rica, walking in the Loire to kayaking in Canada

Daintree National Park, Australia



has a responsible travel policy. In the Association of British Travel Agents 2002 annual survey of package holidaymakers, 75 per cent said that 'the provision of social and environmental information in tour operators' brochures is important' and 65 per cent said the reputation of the holiday company on environmental issues is 'either very or fairly important in affecting their choice of holiday company'.

But when it comes to actually booking holidays, are we as keen to put our money where our mouths are? Tony Hare, a tourism marketing consultant, says it's the pleasure of the holiday not the worthiness that's at the top of our minds when we book our trip. 'After all, what might "responsible tourism" mean... not getting drunk? Making your own hotel bed? If it doesn't sound like fun, that's not good news for anyone thinking about booking a holiday'. However, he says responsible tourism will become more popular the more holidaymakers believe it can mean a better type of holiday. 'The term "responsible tourism" may emerge rather as "digital technology" has done', he explained. 'We didn't start buying DVDs and home entertainment systems because they were digital, we did so because they



Near Camp Okavango, Botswana

appealed, they seemed a step up. Until a few years ago "digital technology" was a commonplace term only among technical people, yet it has only now become familiar. So will the concept of "responsible tourism"?

So don't book a responsible holiday only out of moral obligation. The idea is that you should want to go on one because you'll also have better time. Responsible travel is meant to be just as relevant to holidays in The Gambia as it is to package holidays in the Mediterranean, and there is now a huge diversity of trips available - from B&Bs in Wales to lodges in Costa Rica, walking in the Loire to kayaking in Canada. Harold Goodwin at the International Centre for Responsible Tourism ([www.icrtourism.org](http://www.icrtourism.org)) says going on a responsible holiday is about being aware of the impact of your holiday and doing something about it that's fun. For example, if you want to buy local crafts for souvenirs or gifts, it's far better to buy them from a stall at the local market, rather than at your hotel or at the airport. 'By purchasing directly from local crafts people', Goodwin says, 'you are directly benefiting their local economy, you can feel better about yourself, and you can have a more enjoyable holiday'.

Leading the way in responsible

Scuba-diving off Grand Cayman



Meeting children in Izinga, Tanzania



travel is Tribes Travel ([www.tribes.co.uk](http://www.tribes.co.uk)), the 2002 winner of the British Airways Tourism for Tomorrow Award. According to its managing director Amanda Marks, responsible tourism 'doesn't have to mean an in-your-face, back-packing and wholemeal yogurt experience'. She says it's first and foremost about having a great holiday. Although she admits winning the award has given her business a boost, she says people don't come on holiday with Tribes solely because it has good ethical credentials. She says people choose Tribes' holidays because they appreciate that the types of holidays they offer are more enjoyable for the very fact they involve local people as part of the experience. 'The thing that people remember most when they return from our holidays is how they got to know the locals', she said, 'and when you see how your holiday benefits the very people and communities with whom you come in to contact, that's when going on a responsible holiday really hits home.'

So how do you go about choosing a more responsible holiday? You can request to see if the operator you book with has a written responsible travel policy, which describes how your trip will benefit conservation and local people. The Association of Tour Operators ([www.aio.co.uk](http://www.aio.co.uk)), which represents about 150 independently owned UK tour operators, provides its own responsible tourism guidelines that are now part of its membership criteria.

And it's not just certain operators that are becoming the watchdogs for responsible tourism, the Government is also getting involved. The Foreign and Commonwealth Office ([www.fco.gov.uk](http://www.fco.gov.uk)), runs a Know Before you Go campaign, which encourages travellers to familiarise themselves with the customs and culture of their destinations. It also supported The Travel Foundation ([www.thetravelfoundation.org.uk](http://www.thetravelfoundation.org.uk)), the new charity set up to help manage the travel industry more sustainably. There are a number of mass market tour operators, such as First Choice and Sunvil Holidays, which offer the opportunity to give a donation towards this charity when you book a holiday.

You can also keep an eye out for travel companies that have an eco-certification. There is no one global accreditation scheme for green or fair trade tourism, but there are individual schemes that recognise travel companies and

projects that act more responsibly. The Green Tourism Business Scheme ([www.greenbusiness.co.uk](http://www.greenbusiness.co.uk)) is an audited grading scheme for best practice in green tourism in the UK. The Blue Flag Scheme ([www.blueflag.org](http://www.blueflag.org)) provides an eco-label for almost 2,900 beaches and marinas across Europe and South Africa; The Nature and Ecotourism Accreditation Program ([www.ecotourism.org.au](http://www.ecotourism.org.au)) in Australia provides accreditation for ecological sustainability, natural area management and 'the provision of quality ecotourism experiences'; the Fair Trade in Tourism South Africa ([www.fairtourism.org.za](http://www.fairtourism.org.za)) trademark recognises certain special tourism ventures for their efforts in sustainable tourism in South Africa.

There is of course, one glaring stumbling block to responsible tourism: air travel. How can we travel responsibly when so many holidays include a return flight that contributes so much to greenhouse gases? Shouldn't we all just stay at home... isn't that the most responsible option? The World Wide Fund for Nature (WWF) believes 'it is more useful to think about responsible tourism within the context of a wider sustainable development strategy'. Because although there is a hefty environmental price to pay for our holidays, there are ways we can lessen our ecological footprint. If you do have to travel by air, you can make a donation to Future Forests ([www.futureforests.com](http://www.futureforests.com)) or Climate Care ([www.climatecare.org](http://www.climatecare.org)), an organisation which supports the development of renewable and clean energy projects that reduce carbon dioxide emissions. There are also many benefits of travelling, both domestically and abroad: cultural education, wildlife and environmental conservation (many of the world's protected natural areas are subsidised by tourism income and would struggle to survive without it), and there is enormous potential economic benefit to host communities.

Responsible travel is about fitting our holiday aspirations in with the bigger picture. According to Dr Graham Miller, lecturer in management at the University of Surrey, 'the tourism industry and we, as responsible citizens, have to realise how tourism affects the world around it, otherwise the very foundation on which tourism is based - the destinations - won't want to sustain tourism and nor will they be able to in the long term.'

Richard Hammond

## ADVERTISEMENT PROMOTION



## YOUR TRAVEL COMPANION

Where can you go for all the best holidays? Log on to [responsibletravel.com](http://responsibletravel.com) and start planning your next trip

Are you looking for a different, more authentic travel experience? Whatever the type of holiday: adventure holiday, beach holiday, safari, cultural tour, conservation holiday, yoga holiday or wildlife experience; whether you are a family, single or a couple, young or old; whether you are on a tight budget or want luxury - you can do it responsibly.

At [responsibletravel.com](http://responsibletravel.com) you will find thousands of holidays, run by leading specialist operators and unique accommodations in 120 countries. They all start from the premise that local is best; local guides, locally sourced food and the best of local culture, so you will enjoy more of the real nature of your destination, for a more fulfilling holiday.

It's a way of travelling that's better for you and better for the destination. Every operator and accommodation publishes and abides by responsible travel policies. So you will know that you are not only going to get a great holiday, but that local communities will benefit properly from your stay and the environment is being looked after.

By going to [responsibletravel.com](http://responsibletravel.com), you'll save time on finding the right holiday. That's because the site has such a wide choice, with holidays from the main specialist operators as well as many smaller ones, that the gem you are looking for will probably be there. It saves you making lots of telephone calls and sifting through piles of brochures. All the destinations featured in this supplement are included in holidays available on the [responsibletravel.com](http://responsibletravel.com) website.

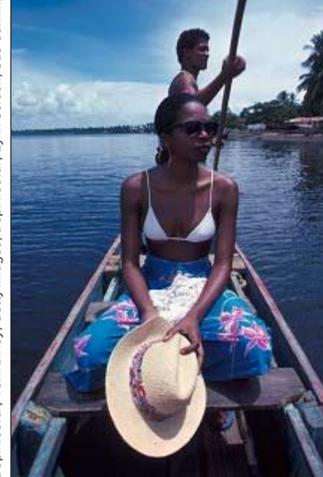
Once you have found something you like, your inquiries will be put straight through to the operator or accommodation. You will be dealing with the experts, not to an agent who will never have been there and will know nothing about the holiday, saving you time and energy once again. You then book direct with them.

So if you have had enough of mass tourism, want a new type of holiday experience and want an easy way to find it and to book it, then go to [responsibletravel.com](http://responsibletravel.com).

  
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Arian Tower jungle lodge hotel, Rio Negro, Brazil



Crossing the lagoon in Alagoas, Brazil