HOW CAN YOU TRAVEL RESPONSIBLY?

There are many codes for tourists and tour operators, here are some issues that you might reflect on.

BEFORE YOU TRAVEL

• To get more out of your holiday learn about the destination and its people, consider whether the trip you are planning will really offer you the opportunities you seek to meet with local people and to explore their environment.

• Patronise companies, operators and hotels who minimise their negative environmental and other impacts and maximise their positive impact by, for example, booking locally owned hotels, employing local staff at all levels in the organisation and contributing to conservation.

• Seek out tourism products and services that demonstrate social, environmental and cultural sensitivity and which make a demonstrable economic contribution to conservation and sustainable local livelihoods.

• Consider whether there is anything you can do to reduce the environmental impact of your trip.

WHILE ON HOLIDAY

• Consider how you like to be treated by tourists in your community and reflect on what constitutes appropriate behaviour in a place that may have very different cultural values.

• Consider what local products you are purchasing – is the economic benefit going to the local community, are you encouraging the unsustainable or illegal use of cultural artefacts or plants and animals?

• Can you make a contribution through supporting a local conservation programme or charity?

• Consider whether you can reduce the environmental impact of your visit by being frugal in consuming water and energy.

When you get home share your experiences with others, and tell your operator or agent if you feel that there are ways in which your holiday could have been more sustainable.

CASE STUDY 1: EARTHWATCH

As an environmental charity, Earthwatch is active in supporting research around the world, promoting conservation and running environmental education programmes. Earthwatch’s Volunteer Programme allows people from all walks of life to join scientific research projects as field assistants, giving them a hands-on role and a unique insight into conservation.

Every Earthwatch project needs volunteers in order to be successful. Projects vary enormously, from botanical inventories in African rainforests and research into frogs in Australia, to studies of migratory birds in Kenya. Over 1,240 projects, in 45 countries, are supported each year, and none could go ahead without the involvement of volunteers.

Internationally, 4,000 people join Earthwatch project teams every year, and over the last 30 years Earthwatch volunteers have contributed over 3,000 man years to environmental research. In addition, because each volunteer makes a financial contribution to join an Earthwatch project, the charity is able to provide the funding the projects need – over its history Earthwatch has provided some £20 million to projects around the world. Earthwatch projects buy their supplies locally, and recruit staff from the country hosting the project. This means that the contribution made by volunteers not only funds research, but also benefits the local economy.

By working on an international project, Earthwatch volunteers have decided to do something very different with their free time and their money. Indeed, because most volunteers use money and time usually set aside for their holidays, their contribution represents ‘new’ money for conservation – money that would not normally be contributed to environmental research.

CASE STUDY 2: CENTER PARCS

Center Parcs has 19 holiday villages around Europe in forest settings. The essence of the Center Parcs concept is to escape from everyday life into a forest environment to enjoy a range of leisure activities integrated into and enhanced by nature.

Center Parcs is widely acknowledged as an exemplar of sustainable tourism. The company has integrated the built environment into the natural forest and has a philosophy of ecologically enhancing the existing environment. It is committed to taking forested sites of low ecological value and transforming them, while maximising their positive impacts by, for example, booking locally owned hotels, employing local staff at all levels in the organisation and contributing to conservation. Center Parcs has integrated the built environment into the natural forest and has a philosophy of sustainable tourism. The company has integrated the built environment into the natural forest and has a philosophy of sustainable tourism. Center Parcs has integrated the built environment into the natural forest and has a philosophy of sustainable tourism. Center Parcs has integrated the built environment into the natural forest and has a philosophy of sustainable tourism. Center Parcs has integrated the built environment into the natural forest and has a philosophy of sustainable tourism. Center Parcs has integrated the built environment into the natural forest and has a philosophy of sustainable tourism. Center Parcs has integrated the built environment into the natural forest and has a philosophy of sustainable tourism. Center Parcs has integrated the built environment into the natural forest and has a philosophy of sustainable tourism. Center Parcs has integrated the built environment into the natural forest and has a philosophy of sustainable tourism.
The advent of mass tourism has raised a range of concerns about the sustainability of tourism. Initially triggered by the growth in international holidaymaking with the introduction of charter flights in the 1950s, the worldwide mounting anxiety about the impacts of domestic tourism. The World Tourism Organisation (WTO) defines a tourist as anyone who spends 24 hours away from home, whether on a business trip or on holiday. However, tour operators and travellers shy away from the word ‘tourism’—we prefer to be called travellers or visitors rather than tourists.

The growth of international travel has been staggering:
- there were 25 million international tourist arrivals in 1950
- this had grown to 532 million in 1994
- and is expected to triple to 1.6 billion by 2020

**Economic impacts**

Tourism, if properly managed, can support conservation either financially, through an in-kind contribution, or even more directly through the visitors’ activities: Earthwatch volunteers contribute through working as scientists’ field assistants in research teams; RTCV volunteers do so by, for example, repairing walls or paths. In fact, visitors contribute whenever the amount they pay in admission or use fees (for hides, accommodation or other services) exceeds the costs of their visit.

**Misleading labels**

Tour operators market their tours using a range of language designed to present their products as different from, and superior to, mass tourism. These alternatives to, and superior to, mass tourism: for example, are to be restricted to 500 people per day.

**Eco-tourism**

Ecotourism has been the term most widely used and understood. The phrase, ‘take only photographs, leave only footprints’, is often used to describe the ideal tourism scenario. Yet leaving only footprints is not enough. Local communities need to benefit from tourism and to be compensated for the costs of living with the natural heritage generally denies them access to it and their heritage generally denies them access to it and their heritage. Their Homes, Our Holidays.

**PROTECTED LANDSCAPES**

The reality, though, is that in most protected landscapes this is not the case, and that visitors are not sufficiently subsidised. In order that visitors are relatively affluent hosts, admission charges and other fees are going to have to be raised significantly. The pay-back schemes being introduced in the Lake District in northern England and elsewhere are one way of tackling the issue. The essential test is re-investment, as the contribution made by the tourists or the tour company needs to be sufficiently large to provide a re-investment in the maintenance of cultural or natural heritage.

**THEIR HOMES, OUR HOLIDAYS**

The phrase, ‘take only photographs, leave only footprints’, is often used to describe the ideal tourism scenario. Yet leaving only footprints is not enough. Local communities need to benefit from tourism and to be compensated for the costs of living with the natural and cultural heritage that we want to visit - our use of their heritage generally denies them access to it and imposes costs on them. International and domestic tourists have a range of social, cultural and economic impacts in the destinations, aspects of sustainability which have been less attended to. Tourism Concern’s campaign slogan Their Homes, Our Holidays captures the essence of the problem.

However, if the industry is well managed locally, if tour operators and tourists take responsibility for their actions, tourism can provide good opportunities for local sustainable development and meet the triple bottom line aspirations of the Rio Summit.