

Sustainable Tourism

Sustainable tourism is about meeting the needs of today's tourists without having a major long-term effect on the environment of the area in which tourism takes place and on the culture of the people who live there. So, sustainable tourism is concerned with reducing the negative impacts of tourism and planning to increase the positive impacts. It also means that, in the longer term, the lifestyle and culture of the people living in the area is not affected by tourism.

Sustainable tourism is a term which has been explained in a number of ways. Sustainable tourism is clearly related to sustainable development, which recognises that the Earth's resources are limited, and that, unless certain steps are taken, these resources will run out. Thus, it is necessary to preserve resources as much as possible. This is what sustainable tourism is about.

A number of forms of sustainable tourism have been identified:

- **Economic sustainability** is about ensuring that tourism businesses are profitable and provide employment for local people. It is not the case that sustainable tourism is about stopping people visiting an area. Tourism is increasingly seen as a **vital** form of income for many communities which rely on the income from tourism to survive.
- **Ecological sustainability** relates to looking after the physical environment of an area, including animals and plants.
- **Cultural sustainability** is about supporting people who live in an area to maintain their culture. Local people can be taught new skills to enable them to benefit from tourism.

Buy local, eat local, stay local

The maxim of, '***buy local, eat local and stay local***' is a good example of how all tourists can act in a responsible manner and support sustainable tourism.

Buying local means purchasing produce grown locally from local producers rather than from supermarket chains. This helps to reduce the number of 'food miles' as well as supporting businesses in the locality.

Eating local – means eating in restaurants and cafes run and managed by local people as opposed to multi-national chains. This will provide more employment and reduce the amount of '**leakage**'. (Leakage means that money spent in the locality does not stay in the area.)

Staying local – refers to staying in locally run and owned accommodation rather than in hotels owned by multi-national companies or chains. Again, this will help keep more money in the locality and support the local community.

Responsible tourism and ecotourism

It has been shown that sustainable tourism involves a set of policies, principles and ideas to reduce the impacts of tourism on the environment and the people living in the destination. Sustainable tourism aims to ensure the long-term future of the areas in which tourism takes place through careful management and planning.

Responsible tourism is about the actions of tourists and tourism organisations to support the principles of sustainable tourism. Responsible tourism is also often referred to as *ecotourism*, *alternative tourism* and *green tourism*.

As with sustainable tourism, there are a number of definitions of responsible or ecotourism, each with a slightly different meaning. One good definition which describes ecotourists is given below:

'Travel to natural areas with a view to respecting, enjoying and being educated about the natural environment and the culture of the local community in a manner that is low-impact and sensitive to the long-term sustainability of these features.'

Ecotourism and responsible tourism are seen as an alternative to mass tourism which has been shown to have very little respect for local culture and has had a significant negative impact on the environment of the areas in which it has developed.

Mass tourism has little respect for the local culture or environment.



Seven basic principles of ecotourism or responsible tourism have been devised. These are:

1. *Travelling to natural destinations*

Ecotourism involves travelling to natural as opposed to purpose-built resort destinations, understanding the natural history of the destination and causing as little impact on the destination as possible.

Monument Valley, in the American state of Utah, would be seen as a natural destination.



2. *Developing environmental awareness*

Ecotourism involves experiencing and learning about the natural environment.

Providing information about the area for people using a footpath helps to make people aware of the environment in which they are walking.



3. *Minimising impact*

Ecotourism attempts to reduce the impacts of tourism and the use of resources through approaches such as:

- using local building materials
- using foods produced locally
- using renewable energy sources
- making use of recycling wherever possible
- reducing water consumption
- monitoring or limiting the number of visitors



Using food produced locally reduces impact by reducing the costs of transporting the food. It also helps to sustain the local economy.

4. *Providing financial benefits for conservation*

Ecotourism can provide opportunities for providing funds for financing projects which support environmental management. This may include making a charge for tourists to visit natural attractions or to enter National Parks.

Visitors to National Parks in North America have to pay an entrance charge.



5. Providing financial benefits to the local community

Ecotourism involves reducing the amount of leakage from the communities in which tourism takes place. The local community should benefit more and be involved in decisions relating to the planning and development of tourist facilities. (Buy local, stay local, eat local).



Fish caught by a local fisherman are sold to the restaurant in the same village to be eaten.

6. Respecting local culture

Ecotourism incorporates educating ecotourists about local customs, practices, dress-codes and appropriate behaviour. Ecotourists are more likely to purchase gifts and souvenirs which are locally produced and provide direct employment for the local community.



Buying souvenirs produced by local people supports ecotourism principles.

7. Supporting human rights

The final aspect of ecotourism involves respecting human rights. This may involve not travelling to countries which have a poor record of human rights or exploitation. It involves not buying products made by people working in very poor conditions or practices which involve the exploitation of animals.



*Buying fake souvenirs would **not** be ecotourism.*

The table below summarises the differences between ecotourism and mass tourism.

Ecotourism	Mass Tourism
<p>The type of destination visited....</p> <p>Likely to be a natural destination with a particular landscape or an area with a specific culture.</p>	<p>More likely to be a purpose-built resort destination. May not have local communities present.</p>
<p>The accommodation used.....</p> <p>More likely to be accommodation owned/managed by a local family or business</p>	<p>More likely to be a large purpose-built hotel or resort complex not in keeping with the local environment</p>
<p>Food & drink....</p> <p>Much will be in locally owned restaurants and will include locally produced foods and drinks.</p>	<p>Most will be in fast food chains or hotel restaurants and consist of foods imported into the resort.</p>
<p>Tourist activities....</p> <p>Will include visits to local natural and cultural attractions.</p>	<p>More likely to be dominated by time spent in built attractions such as theme parks and water parks.</p>
<p>Interaction with local communities...</p> <p>There will probably be some interaction with local people and the local language will be used.</p>	<p>Less likely to be any interaction, other than to provide services such as waiting and cleaning. Local language not used.</p>
<p>Souvenirs bought..</p> <p>Bought from local people and supporting the local economy and possibly using local culture and crafts.</p>	<p>Tacky, cheap 'mass produced' products bought. Probably not produced in the locality.</p>

Case Study – A sustainable tourism project in the UK – Dartmoor National Park Authority

Dartmoor National Park is one of the most famous in the UK and like all national parks is under pressure from tourist activity. The park is looked after by the Dartmoor National Park Authority (www.dartmoor-npa.org.uk), which does not own the park, but has to manage the park so that the quality of the landscape and the communities of the park are preserved so that future generations can enjoy the area.

The National Park Authority has worked with a number of other organisations to develop a set of strategies which support sustainable tourism within the park. These cover ecological and economic sustainability.

The sustainable tourism strategy covers a number of projects which help to protect the environment of the park and the communities which live within the area.

These projects include:

1. 40 mph!

A speed limit of 40 miles per hour has been introduced within Dartmoor National Park. This helps sustainability because lower traffic speeds reduces pollution from engines and reduces the risk of injury to the animals that graze on open areas within the park. *Take Moor Care!*



2. Encouraging the use of public transport.

Using public transport is more sustainable than using private motor vehicles. Bus services in Dartmoor are used by local people as well as by visitors. Tourists using public transport are more likely to stop in the villages and spend money on local produce. Public transport also reduces the number of cars on Dartmoor, which cause congestion and both air and noise pollution.

Bus stop signs are highly visible so that people can see that buses are available.



3. Working with attractions – the 'Wealth of Wildlife' scheme.

The National Park Authority has worked with attractions on Dartmoor to let the attractions know what wildlife, including plants, birds and animals, could be found around their premises. Visitors could then be informed about the range of wildlife. Informing visitors helps sustainability.



Also, information about what wildlife could be found at different times of the year was included. This supports sustainability because it encouraged people to come for repeat visits to see the area in different seasons. Sustainable tourism is often about encouraging tourists to visit the area more often to support local communities, not sending them away!

4. Supporting local farmers

Visitors are often attracted by the 'farming landscape' of fields and animals. The National Park Authority works with farmers and local restaurants and shops to help ensure that locally produced produce is available as much as possible. This supports the farmers and the tourism businesses as well as helping to support the, 'buy local, stay local and eat local', maxims.



5. Informing visitors

One of the key areas of sustainable tourism is about informing visitors. If people are informed about the area they are visiting, they are more likely to understand the need to look after the environment and respect the area. The 4 Visitor Information Centres on Dartmoor provide a range of information about the work of the National Park Authority, walks and other activities, weather information and so on. The better-informed visitor is likely to respect the area more.



6. Providing Car Parks at 'Honeypot' sites

Some visitors do not, or cannot walk very far from their cars. These people tend to visit the most popular 'honeypot' sites. By providing car parks the National Park Authority makes the park accessible to everybody as well as reducing congestion and damage to roadsides if there was not enough parking places. So providing adequate car parks supports sustainability.



7. Dartmoor Charter for Sustainable Tourism

The Charter is an award scheme for tourism businesses that are working to safeguard the special qualities of Dartmoor. These businesses are using sustainable practices such as recycling and are making the visitors aware of the need to follow sustainable practices. A member of the scheme is the Believer Youth Hostel, that uses energy-efficient fridges and provides a range of information which encourages visitors to make use of local events and facilities. People staying at the hostel who arrive by public transport or bicycle are given a £1 per night discount.



8. Visitor Management

At more popular sites a number of visitor facilities are provided. At more sensitive locations, smaller car parks and less facilities are provided. Some car parks can be closed in winter to allow the vegetation to recover from the impacts of visitors.



9. Working with coach operators

A coach driver's handbook has been produced outlining which roads within the park are suitable for coaches. This ensures that coaches keep away from narrow roads where they might get stuck and cause damage. Also, coaches are advised to travel along roads in a certain direction, so that they do not meet other coaches coming in the opposite direction! Less congestion means less pollution. The guide also shows which restaurants and other tourism businesses accept coaches, allowing passengers to spend money in the community.



10. Working with cyclists – the Dartmoor Freewheeler

This is a 'bike-bus' service which collects people from surrounding towns and villages during summer weekends, brings them into the national park and then allows them to cycle home – mainly downhill! This encourages leisure use of the national park without increasing vehicle traffic and pollution. Cycling allows people to enjoy the national park while causing very little or no impact.

11. Encouraging more people to stay

The National Park Authority has worked with accommodation providers in a scheme called 'Moor to stay for'. This is because most day visitors add very little to the local economy. If people stay they spend more money on accommodation and other services, thus supporting the local community in a sustainable way.



Case Study – A sustainable tourism project outside of the UK – Kasbah du Toubkal, Morocco

Introduction

The Kasbah du Toubkal project is a very good example of sustainable tourism involving cultural and economic sustainability. The Kasbah, or castle, was once the home of a tribal leader, but was derelict up to 20 years ago. Over this time the Kasbah has been transformed into one of the most magnificent accommodation available in North Africa, and has won many awards for the sustainable tourism that the project has supported. The Kasbah is an extraordinary project, the product of a partnership between Berber hospitality and European enterprise.

Location and setting

The Kasbah is located in the High Atlas Mountains of Morocco in North Africa and is situated in the Toubkal National Park. Mount Toubkal itself is the highest peak in North Africa (4,176 metres). The Kasbah lies in the foothills of the mountains, close to the village of Imlil which is the home to about 5,000 people, scattered amongst small settlements. The village lies just beyond the main system of roads and every visitor to the Kasbah has to walk or take a donkey ride for the last 15 minutes of their journey



Background

The Kasbah was 'discovered' by a British man called Mike McHugo while trekking in the High Atlas Mountains in 1989. They were guests of the local community. Mike had built up a good friendship with a local mountain guide. What was discovered was the ruins of an old castle on the top of a great rocky outcrop. As someone who was involved in the tourism business, Mike saw the opportunity to develop the site, and he was able to buy the land. Part of the success of the project is that Mike has a friendship with the local people which has existed for over 30 years.

Building the Kasbah

The Kasbah was rebuilt using traditional techniques and local labour. Every piece of material had to be carried up to the top of the hill using mules and there was no electricity in the area until 1997. All of the builders involved in the project were recruited from the locality. Although it was built less than 20 years ago, some visitors believe that the building is over 100 years old when they first arrive!

Today the Kasbah has 8 en-suite bedrooms, a three-bedroom family house and a dormitory for group accommodation as well as conference facilities. The Kasbah has accommodation to meet a range of budgets. The Garden House complex has been rented by celebrities!



Not a hotel!

The publicity for the Kasbah informs potential visitors that it is not a hotel. It is an extension of the local Berber tribe's hospitality and it is run entirely by local Berber people. There is no manager from Europe. Nothing has been done in the Kasbah without the involvement and approval of the local community. For example, the Kasbah does not serve alcohol, out of respect for the local Islamic traditions. Visitors are allowed to bring alcoholic drinks with them, but are asked to take their empty bottles away when they leave. All of the food served is produced from the Imlil valley in which the Kasbah is situated.

Helping the local community

All of the staff at the Kasbah are from the local community and have been trained to a high standard. About 40 people are employed in the Kasbah. A local management committee has been set up which involves people from the community and representatives of Mike McHugo's company, Discover Ltd. All visitors staying at the Kasbah pay a 5% levy which is passed on to the management committee. This money is then used to fund projects in the community. Amongst the improvements funded by this community are:

- A 4x4 ambulance service for the Imlil valley
- Rubbish clearance schemes
- Building accommodation to allow children in outlying villages to attend school
- Providing safe water supply for outlying villages
- Providing an internet café



Tourist code

Discover Ltd has produced a tourist code for visitors to the Imlil valley.

Tourist code

We are all guests of the local inhabitants of this area. From before the Roman conquest of North Africa the Berbers were the original inhabitants. We owe it to them to respect their environment and culture. We will be the richer if we also learn from them and minimise our negative impact.

Introduction

The Berbers of the High Atlas follow Islam and as such do not drink alcohol nor eat pork. They are tolerant of western habits and wish tourism to develop for the mutual benefit of themselves and visitors. We do not wish to see the area turn into an artificial playground but to develop in a sustainable way for our and future generations. Please be considerate during your stay. By following the Code of Conduct below we believe you will not inadvertently cause embarrassment or damage to yourselves or our hosts.

Protect the natural environment

- Limit deforestation – make no open fires and discourage others from doing so on your behalf. Where water is heated by scarce firewood, use as little as possible. When possible choose accommodation that uses kerosene/gas or fuel-efficient wood stoves.
- Remove litter, burn or bury paper and carry out all non-degradable litter. Imlil has a rubbish collection system - please assist and show good example by depositing litter in the bins. Graffiti are permanent examples of environmental pollution.
- Keep local water clean and avoid using pollutants such as detergents in streams or springs. If no toilet facilities are available, make sure you are at least 30 meters away from water sources, and bury or cover wastes.
- Plants should be left to flourish in their natural environment – taking cuttings, seeds and roots is illegal in many parts of the High Atlas.
- Help your guides and porters to follow conservation measures.

Respect local traditions, protect local cultures and maintain local pride

- When taking photographs, respect privacy - ask permission and use restraint.

Sustainable Tourism

- Respect religious and cultural places - preserve what you have come to see, never touch or remove religious objects.
- Giving to children encourages begging. A donation to a project, health centre or school is a more constructive way to help.
- You will be accepted and welcomed if you follow local customs. Use only your right hand for eating and greeting. It is polite to use both hands when giving and receiving gifts.
- Respect for local etiquette earns you respect - loose, lightweight clothes are preferable to revealing shorts, skimpy tops and tight-fitting action wear. Hand holding or kissing in public is disliked by local people.
- Visitors who value local traditions encourage local pride and maintain local cultures, please help local people gain a realistic view of life in Western Countries.

