
The Traveler's Ethical Charter

Introduction

The Traveller's Ethical Charter was created par the tour operator Atalante, quickly joined by the travel guide editor Lonely Planet.

Atalante

A tour operator specialized in adventure and nature travel throughout the world. The trips proposed are often in untouched and intact regions, where the impact of careless tourism may have enormous consequences for man and natural areas. The involvement of ATALANTE in this Ethical Charter is intended to encourage travellers and other tour operators to travel "cleanly".

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Lonely Planet

A travel guide editor which is particularly sensitive to travel ethics and which allows its readers, through the quality of information provided, to travel completely inde-pendently.

LONELY PLANET considers that it has a responsibility for the behaviour of its readers and an essential information role to play, so that they do not perform, through ignorance, acts which have an effect locally. LONELY PLANET has always heightened the awareness of its readers to respect local cultures.

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The Charter

1. Respect is the way to a most fulfilling encounter

One of the attractions of a trip is the diversity of peoples and cultures encountered. However, each culture, religion and way of life is subject to rules and traditions which it is better to respect and understand than to judge. A trip cannot be envisaged without respect and humility towards the people, property, culture and way of life of the country visited. This respect is expressed in simple outlooks, from day to day.

- Each country lives according to a pace which is its own. In certain cases, haste and impatience are not the best ways of endearing oneself to others.

- Clothes which are too tight-fitting, too revealing, too ostentatious or too informal may cause offence in some places. The same applies to codes governing physical contact (stroking a child's head, a man shaking a woman's hand, sitting next to a woman, kissing in public. etc.).
- A good photo is taken with one's subject, not of him or her. The best advice for a photographer is to take time to establish a climate of trust, ask for permission to film or take photographs (asking the parents in the case of a child) and to accept any possible refusal.
- It is preferable not to promise to send photos to people whom you have photographed unless you are sure you can honour the commitment (including cases where a quid pro quo or remuneration is asked for).
- Respecting the recommended vaccinations serves to avoid the introduction of diseases into the country visited. It is important to observe the correct dosage recommended by the World Health Organization when using anti-malarial treatment: overdosing risks increasing the resistance of strains, to the detriment of the local populations.
- Sex tourism is an affront to human dignity and is forbidden by law. It does not always look like prostitution at first sight. There are many examples of travellers who return from such and such a country marvelling at the "fantastic sexual openness"(!) of its inhabitants, without even realizing that it is only motivated by the poverty in which those people live.

2. Money, goods and food do not have the same value everywhere

The difference in the standard of living of the traveller and the local population of the country visited, where it exists, can be the source of misunderstandings and differences of opinion. Being received in a village or a family sometimes supposes a great sacrifice for the local populations. What is offered to the traveller, together with what he/she offers, must be measured in local value.

- Contributions and gifts are not innocent gestures. They may often take on a connotation which is condescending, scornful or out of place (for example throwing coins or sweets to local children to get rid of them, etc.). Excessive gifts, contributions and tips, taking into account the general standard of living of the country visited, destabilize the local economic balances. Children who receive money for photos or from begging are no longer sent to school, and earn more money than their father: this can cause considerable distortions in family structures (lack of respect for the father and elderly people).
- Certain gifts can be dangerous when they are handed out at random, particularly medicines. Hospitals and health centres, where they exist, are often no longer in a position to manage them. Similarly, sweets and confectionery have consequences long after our departure (tooth decay).
- Using local hotels rather than state or foreign hotel chains, local transport, paid services of the local population (guides, cooks, mule drivers, porters, cleaners, etc.) is often the best way of ensuring money from tourism benefits these people directly.
- A camera or even a pair of shoes may be the equivalent of several months or years salary in the standards of the country visited. Showing them off or flaunting them may cause offence or be interpreted wrongly.
- Bargaining is part of the sales culture in certain countries. Refusing to do it is often interpreted wrongly and may contribute to an increase in the cost of living. On the other hand, it should not be forgotten that trifling sums for the visitor may be of considerable importance for the person receiving them.
- As a general rule, travellers should avoid abusing the temptation of deprived populations to sell sacred or traditional objects, or those which form part of the national heritage (unless they are made specifically to be sold to tourists).

3. Only our footprints remain behind

The natural surroundings and cultural sites are often the main tourist riches of a country and the principal reason why visitors travel there. Travellers have a responsibility towards the environment of the host country.

- Travellers should avoid leaving waste behind them, whatever it may be. All means (biodegradable packaging, etc.) which help to limit the waste arising from tourism should be used. It is best to limit the packaging in your baggage which will have to be left in the country.
- It is preferable to take away with you all non-destroyable waste (plastic bags, batteries, etc.) after a trip to a country which does not have the infrastructure to dispose of such waste.
- Certain waste (papers, toilet paper, etc.) can be easily burnt, although, in certain cultures, fire has a sacred role, and it may be considered offensive to use it to destroy waste. As a general rule, you should obtain information on local methods of waste management. In certain areas, jam jars, for example, can be left for the local population who recycle them into jewellery or saleable objects.
- In certain regions it is preferable to use gas or other means of combustion which consume little wood to do your cooking. If there is no alternative to wood, it is better to use dead wood found on the ground. Charcoal is a great consumer of fresh and living trees.
- Certain fragile ecosystems insist on respect for specific safeguards: do not stray from paths or drive off-road, limit what you trample underfoot, do not use motorized vehicles, etc.
- Viewing of animals must not alter their natural behaviour or upset their daily routine. It is preferable to maintain a distance which the animals consider to be safe, and to avoid making too much noise.
- Local teams which guide you when viewing animals are often prepared, for money or to ingratiate themselves, to flout these rules. Consider that the viewing of an undisturbed animal is more interesting than that of an animal which is distressed by your presence.
- Feeding animals alters their diet and may be dangerous. Monkeys, for example, become aggressive and begin to steal.
- The use of tape recorders or other devices to attract and view animals, not to mention touching them, is not recommended, for their own health and for that of human beings.
- Avoid fishing in lakes or seas where the fish are rare, or where there are species at risk of extinction.
- It is important to respect the rules in force in nature Reserves or Parks. Paying the entry or residence taxes is instrumental in conservation and preservation of the sites. Requesting a receipt for these taxes ensures that the money does not go astray.
- Certain "souvenirs" which form part of a host country's natural heritage must not leave that country. Graffiti and other marks left behind are mutilations which are often impossible to remove.
- Agreements on species protection (CITES) – which are aimed at protecting more than 2,500 animal species and 30,000 plant species which are under threat – forbid trade in skins, ivory, tortoise shells, coral, shells, and the importation of live exotic animals.
- Drinking water is often a scarce resource which must be used sparingly and must not be polluted. Travellers should opt wherever possible to use washing powders/ liquids without phosphates, biodegradable soaps and detergents, and do their washing and ablutions upstream of settlements and away from drinking water points.
- It is always better to ask for permission to use the village well or pump and not to wash near it, even if the inhabitants do so.

Epilogue

Our presence can bring money, a useful element for development in certain areas of the world; but our naïveté and our clumsiness can also lead to irreparable damage. One of the essential keys to mitigate this is simple: be informed. We believe that there are no good or bad travellers, just people who are badly informed.

Through their professional activities, Atalante and Lonely Planet have been involved for a long time in applying or making people aware of these principles which constitute a travel philosophy. There are no hard and fast rules, because each country requires a different approach. Nonetheless, it is our wish to share these values with the largest number of travellers and professionals in the tourism industry. Share your observations and experiences with us.

Suggest any solutions you might have:

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