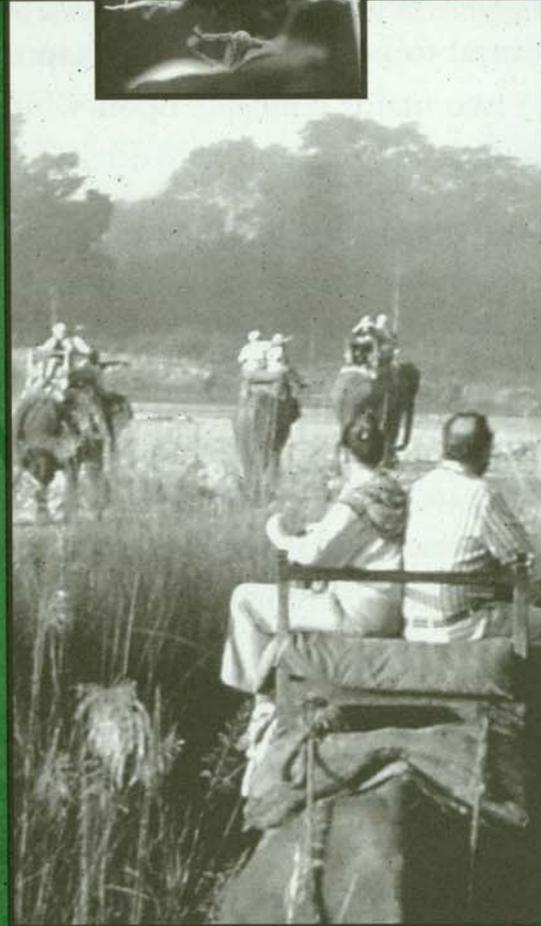
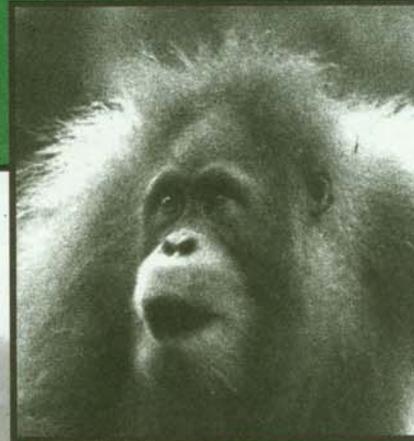


# Guidelines for the Ecotraveler



**M**any unique natural areas around the world are becoming popular tourist destinations. Unfortunately, many of these areas are fragile, and tourists who are unaware of environmental issues in these regions often contribute to their destruction. For this reason, those of us who travel need to reevaluate our behaviors and heighten our sensitivity to the impacts we have on the environment. As ecotourists we can act responsibly to both increase our enjoyment and aid in the protection of natural and cultural environments.

**Responsible travelers are people who realize that every country – and every culture and species of wildlife within every country – has the right to be itself, that every country has its own worth apart from any value visitors place on it.** Scott Graham, *Handle with Care*

Central to becoming a more responsible traveler is an understanding of the two major concepts upon which the principles of ecotourism are based: *biodiversity* and *conservation*.

**Biodiversity** is the immense range and variety of life on the planet. It refers to the variety of genetic materials within species, the variety of species in all taxonomic groups, and the variety of communities, ecosystems, and landscapes within which species evolve and coexist. Not only is biodiversity valuable because it is a source of food, energy, fiber, medicines, and other goods, but it also influences environmental quality. Moreover, cultural, recreational, aesthetic, and spiritual benefits are derived from exploration of and contact with life's diversity.

**Conservation** is the protection of biodiversity by guiding human activities within nature. It must take into account the multiple levels of biological organization, as well as the multiple scales of space and time over which the processes that sustain, perpetuate, and alter lifeforms operate.

These concepts of biodiversity and conservation are the foundation of the following guidelines for the ecotraveler.

# 1 PROTECT FRAGILE ENVIRONMENTS

*Be sensitive to the environment  
and help preserve its biodiversity.*

**Ecotourism** is purposeful travel to natural areas to understand cultural and natural history of the environment, taking care not to alter the integrity of the ecosystem while producing economic opportunities that make the conservation of natural resources financially beneficial to local citizens.

Megan Epler Wood,  
*Nature Tourism*

- **Leave what you find.** Allow others a sense of discovery by not taking wildflowers, plants, fruits, animals, rocks, or archaeological artifacts from your natural surroundings.
- **Do not introduce any plants or animals** to the environment. This can disrupt the delicate balance of the ecosystem you are visiting.
- **Ask before you buy.** Inquire about the origins of items for sale in order to avoid buying products made from threatened natural resources (e.g., animal skins, tortoise shells, ivory, and coral). For a complete list of all endangered species, consult the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species ([www.wcmc.org.uk:80/CITES/english/species.htm](http://www.wcmc.org.uk:80/CITES/english/species.htm)).
- **Follow established guidelines.** Ask your guide or local authorities about their specific guidelines for limiting tourist impact on the environment.
- **Use pre-existing sites for camping.** Reduce destruction of vegetation by restricting activities to the area where vegetation is compact or absent.
- **Stay on designated paths.** Creating new paths or widening existing paths causes soil erosion or compaction, possibly destroying vegetation that can take years to regrow. Do not cut across switch-backs.
- **“Pack it in, pack it out.”** In wilderness areas, pack all discarded food and trash back out with you. Properly dispose of what you cannot pack out (e.g., human waste and waste water). Since many societies do not frequently use or have the means to dispose of packaged or manufactured goods (e.g., batteries, toiletries, paper goods), be sure to pack out any items you have brought that will produce added waste.
- **Keep pollutants out of water sources.** All camping activities should take place at least 200 feet away from streams or lakes. Do not dump any objects or waste over the side of a boat, even if you think they are biodegradable.
- **Use biodegradable products.** Bring biodegradable soap, toothpaste, and bug repellent. Use small quantities of these products.

Richard Houghton/AMNH

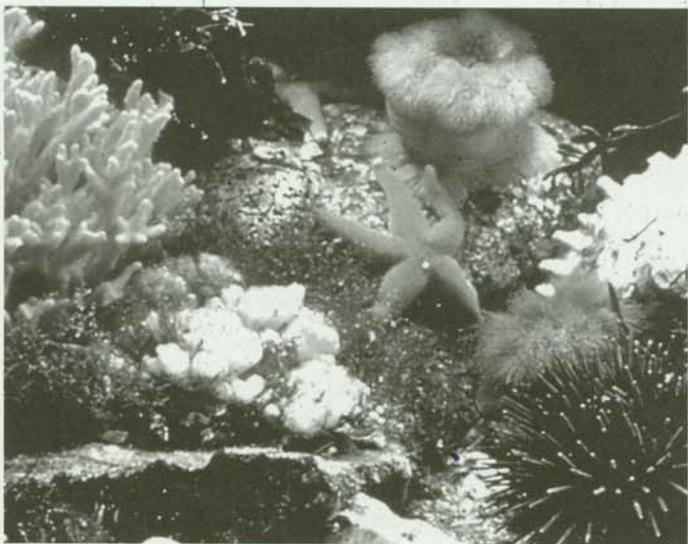


## 2 DEFER TO WILDLIFE

*Your presence should have minimal impact on animals' normal behavior and habitat.*

- **Animals have the right-of-way.** Remember that you are a visitor in their habitat. Forcing animals to move makes them burn calories needed for survival. Do not remove or rearrange foliage, stalk animals, or try to make animals move for the sake of a better look or a great photograph.
- **Move quietly and slowly in the presence of animals.** Noise can cause stress in animals and affect their behavior.
- **Keep a safe distance from animals.** If disturbed, animals may desert their young, abandon nests, or stop feeding or mating. Stay on designated paths, and use binoculars, telephoto lenses, and other aids to view and photograph wild animals without causing them stress. In some instances, such as whale watching, there are pre-established regulations regarding the distance that must be maintained between people and the wildlife.

AMNH Special Collections



- **Avoid touching animals or handling bird eggs or baby birds.** Rather than attempting to help injured animals or birds, contact the appropriate authorities.
- **Respect the integrity of coral reefs.** Do not touch, stand on, or break off pieces of coral. Do not pollute the waters, as this may cause disease in the reefs. Damaged reefs take many years, often decades, to regenerate.
- **Never surround an animal or come between adults and their young.** High risk behaviors such as these can put both you and the animals in danger.
- **Let animals eat their natural food.** Feeding animals can make them dependent on "human" food, which can alter their natural eating and foraging habits, and can lead them to attack people to get food. For the same reasons, avoid leaving food or food scraps lying about.

# 3 CONSERVE RESOURCES

*Electricity and drinking water are scarce resources in many parts of the world; always consider the impact your visit has on the capacity of local ecosystems.*

A thing is right when it tends to preserve the integrity, stability, and beauty of the biotic community. It is wrong when it tends otherwise.

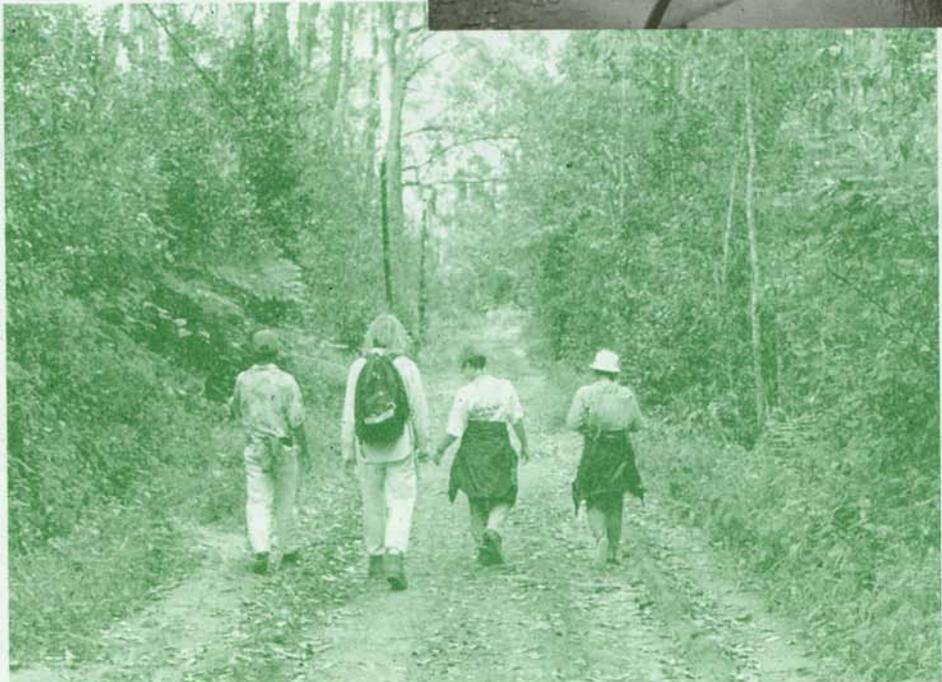
Aldo Leopold,  
*A Sand County Almanac*

- **Conserve electricity.** Use electrical appliances only when necessary. Reduce the need for lighting after sundown by adjusting your schedule so that you are active only during daylight hours. Use moderation when heating and using hot water. In hot climates, hot water is often unnecessary for comfortable bathing.
- **Conserve water.** Use towels and linens more than once to reduce water use for laundry. (Some hotels already have a system for using linens for multiple days; in others you may have to request this.)
- **Use environmentally-sound methods of transportation.** To reduce the emission of hydrocarbons walk, bike, or canoe whenever possible rather than using motor-powered transportation.



Melanie Stiassny/AMNH

Emily Gaenzle



# 4 RESPECT

## THE PEOPLE YOU VISIT

*You make an immediate impression on the people you visit. Mutual respect can lead to a richer cross-cultural experience.*

- **Be aware of local customs.** Consult with your local tour guide in order to learn proper behavior standards (e.g., greetings, eating habits, dress standards, gift-giving rituals, tipping customs) relevant to the area. Your adherence to local customs is a sign of respect and will increase local acceptance of you.
- **Appreciate and protect cultural heritage.** Avoid touching or rubbing against rock or cave art, friezes, carvings, or monuments since this contributes to their erosion. Never remove cultural artifacts from historical or archaeological sites. You can discourage the removal of cultural objects from their native lands by not purchasing them. Purchase souvenirs from appropriate retail outlets.
- **Respect differences in culture.** During your trip, you will probably encounter people with thought patterns and ideas of time that are different from your own. It is important to recognize that, while different, these concepts are equally valid.

Penelope Bodry-Sanders/AMNH



- **It is generally ill-advised to initiate discussions of local politics, religion, or economics.** Be careful not to offend your hosts by criticizing their government or religious practices.
- **Respect the privacy of others.** Seek opportunities to enhance your understanding of the local culture, but use discretion to avoid intruding on the private lives of others. Make sure to ask before taking photographs.
- **Follow your tour operator's recommendations for gift-giving in the region you visit.** Often gifts are presented to a group through village elders, headmen, and community leaders who can distribute them as needed.
- **Support local businesses.** You can encourage local conservation efforts by ensuring that the money you spend goes to local residents. Local residents who benefit from tourism may be more motivated to conserve the natural environment that attracted you to that destination. Ask your tour operator about economic returns to local communities.

# 5 LISTEN, OBSERVE, AND REFLECT

*Each trip is a unique opportunity to consider your relationship to nature and other cultures.*

■ **Take time to listen to people who are willing to share.** Ask them questions and learn about their culture.

Melissa Blunt



■ **Stop and focus on the details.** Consider leaving your camera behind for a day to experience the sights through your eyes rather than your camera lens.

■ **Reflect on the biodiversity of your new surroundings** and on the ways it differs from what you are used to.

■ **Inform your tour operator** if you observe any management problems during the trip.

■ **Should your local guide or tour operator violate regulations** or act disrespectfully towards the environment or its inhabitants in an effort to make your visit more exciting or interesting, express your concern.



Penelope Bodry-Sanders/AMNH



Emily Gaenzle

# 6

## PREPARE

### FOR YOUR TRIP

*Learn as much as possible about your destination before you leave home.*

- **Explore the natural history, local ecosystems, geography, and environmental issues relevant to the region.** Your local museums or zoo may have educational programs on the area. Prior knowledge of the wildlife, plants, and ecology of the region will make you more aware of what to look for.
- **Study the culture of your destination.** Guidebooks provide excellent introductory material, but generally your visit will be enhanced by searching further for information. Find out about the history, customs, and religion of the region you visit from local libraries, tour operators, national tourism organizations, and the country's embassy. Look for books written by local authors and consider reading fiction set in the area.
- **Seek out people who have visited the place you are going.** Ask them about their experiences and for travel tips relevant to the region.
- **Look up your destination in an atlas.** Consider buying maps to take with you.
- **Check your library, TV guide, video store and the Internet** for resources featuring the place you are planning to visit.
- **When traveling to an area where another language is spoken, learn some phrases.** Use a phrase book or cassettes so you can communicate with the people you meet.

*Check your health. Good health is essential for successful travel. Many health problems travelers face can be avoided by appropriate travel preparation.*

- **Make sure you have all of the necessary immunizations for your destination.** Some immunizations should be commenced at least two months before departure, in order to have time for them to take effect. Consult your local health department or the Centers for Disease Control's National Center for Infectious Diseases ([www.cdc.gov/travel/travel.html](http://www.cdc.gov/travel/travel.html)).
- **Find out how rigorous the activities on the trip will be.** It is important to be physically prepared.



# 7 APPLY

## WHAT YOU HAVE LEARNED

*When you return home, relate your discoveries about natural and cultural environments to your everyday life.*

- **Share your experiences** with your family, friends, and community.
- **Learn about and support conservation organizations.** Consider joining conservation organizations and volunteering with conservation projects in your home town.

Central Park Conservancy

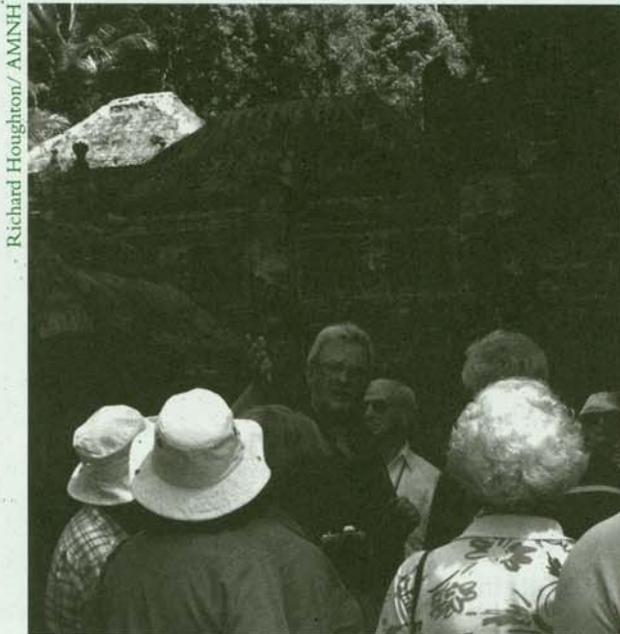


- **Experience nature at home.** Explore your local woods, fields, and mountains and observe the variety of life in your own corner of the world.
- **Identify local environmental problems.** Gather information on how your community is confronting environmental problems. Consider getting involved and helping to find solutions.



Central Park Conservancy

# DISCOVER THE TRUE ECOTOUR



Richard Houghton/AMNH

Despite efforts by environmentalists and the tourism industry to establish a set of guidelines outlining the essential components of an ecotour, there is no general agreement on standards and principles. Therefore, it is up to you as a travel consumer to be discerning. Discovery Tours has developed a set of standards to ensure tourism that is responsible to both natural areas and local cultures.

## At Discovery Tours:

- We exert economic pressure on tour operators to ensure responsible and ethical behavior toward local ecosystems and people.
- We look for hotels and ships that conserve water and energy, reduce air pollution, recycle, use biodegradable cleaning detergents, and in general, act responsibly toward the environment.
- We monitor whether the tour operator respects the carrying capacity of the area and resists overbooking travelers into ecologically fragile areas.
- We strive to educate our travelers about areas of cultural and environmental sensitivity. Rather than having one-sided encounters where the local people “perform” for the visitors, we encourage interactive dialogue between tourists and local people.
- We are careful to respect the wishes of local people, and strive to involve them in the educational and logistical aspects of our tours.
- We utilize and support local resources as much as possible. We support environmental and economic interests in the region by purchasing food locally and by hiring locally-owned businesses for transport and accommodations.
- We insist on the removal of any imported items and on the proper disposal of garbage and sewage.

American Museum of Natural History  
Central Park West at 79th Street  
New York, NY 10024-5192

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The Center for Biodiversity and Conservation is dedicated to bringing science-based solutions into the conservation process and to fostering public discourse on biodiversity conservation issues.

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Since 1953, Discovery Tours has been conducting educational trips, focusing on natural and cultural history, to some of the world's most remote and wondrous places.

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