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The Local
Experience Curator

A COMPLETE GUIDE TO *RESPONSIBLE TRAVEL*



Part 4: During Your Travels

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The beginning of Responsible Travel is Responsible Transport

Every trip has the potential to be an experience of a lifetime. Those experiences are made even more meaningful when we know that we've had a positive impact on the places that we've visited.

As we delight ourselves in each destination, indulging in landscapes, food, and culture, we must also carry with us care and awareness for all the people involved in making the visit possible. Moreover, we must care for the environment and be aware of our carbon footprint, so as to protect the environments in which we find ourselves – and this starts before ever taking off, with responsible transport.

Advances in how we circumnavigate the world means that the world is smaller today than it ever was. A trip that not long ago took weeks can now be completed in no more than half a day. This degree of ease has, of course, made world travel more accessible.

With more people embarking on planes to travel the world over, though, comes more damage to the environment. Indeed, approximately 2% of global carbon emissions are the product of air flights and it's estimated that in 30 years' time, this figure will increase by 16% or even more.



Time + Distance = Irresponsible Transport Choices

When there are constraints around time and distance, responsible transport isn't always a priority. We want to get to our destination as quickly as possible to enjoy what time we have there.

What can we do to change our travel habits to achieve the best of both worlds? Responsible travel habits start from booking your flight through to packing your luggage and picking the excursions at your destination:

- Consider an airline that's committed to lowering carbon emissions. Ethical airlines will offer this information on their website or may even advertise it.
- Some airlines go above and beyond a commitment to reducing carbon emissions. For example, some airlines have policies regarding waste reduction or non-reusable materials.
- Pack light, because each kilo of luggage impacts the carbon emissions of the plane. Bringing a reusable water bottle with you can also reduce waste.
- Avoid taking short flights when you can travel by car, bus, or train. When taking a flight is absolutely necessary either due to distance or time, you can reduce your carbon emissions by choosing flights with the least stopovers.
- When choosing excursions, look for those that are close to where you're headquartered. There may be tours or points of interest within walking or biking distance, which is your best option.
- When transportation is necessary, choose wisely. Using buses, trains, or shared vehicles instead of personal cars is a great way to reduce carbon emissions when you're heading out on a day trip.

Travel Slow Because You Only Live Once

Embrace the idea of moving slowly and even short trips can be slow trips!

Slow doesn't have to mean boring. Instead, it refers to allowing yourself to lavish every moment of your trip, everything you see, every bite you taste. Traveling slower might mean you cover less ground, but the places you do visit, you will know in detail. Moving more slowly gives us the time and space to understand why we have traveled to a particular destination. All the unique characteristics and quaint differences that led our heart here.

A slow trip allows us to immerse ourselves in the experience, creating a dynamic and interactive adventure with enough time to get to know the place and, perhaps most importantly, ask ourselves what action we can take to improve it.

In this way, a slow trip can become a pilgrimage to understand the world on a deeper level. It feels more authentic, more ethical, and more ecological.





Moving slowly & on your own path

When the US created its systems of National Parks, the intention was to attract visitors. After nearly 150 years, that goal has been achieved, and the consequences are highly visible on busy hiking trails and high-traffic roads.

While there are points of interests you surely don't want to miss in your destination of choice, don't forget about the incredible experiences waiting for you when you walk your own path. That is, when you connect with the sites and places that are less-traveled.

When you can experience a solitary sunset over the Andes mountains or share a greeting from a local resident of a small community, those experiences are the ones that stick with you.

Broadening your mind & heart

Traveling expands your knowledge of the destination and gives you a better understanding of your own reality and where you fit into the world. It broadens your point of view and it can make you both more tolerant and more tolerable. But traveling is not only good for the mind, it's good for the heart. It's an opportunity to leave a busy life behind you, to take a break from the details of your personal world and recharge your batteries.

How to be a slow traveler

When you decide to become a slow traveler, you cease to be a tourist or a mere spectator. Instead, you become the protagonist of the story... you take control of your experience. You can choose to visit the market and get to know the fruits and flowers. You can immerse yourself in local communities, learning about their language, traditions, and culture. You become part of the landscape on long treks, instead of just a day tripper.





Connecting with The World in an Ecological Way

There are many ways to connect with the world in a more ecological way and keep our earth and the environments that we visit healthy. As an added bonus, some of these ecological travel recommendations also keep our bodies and minds healthy.

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Walking cities

Instead of allowing a taxi to ferry you around from the restaurant to the next tourist site and then back to the hotel, discovering a city by foot is an opportunity to find festivals, parades, markets, and a look into local culture that you wouldn't otherwise notice. Our smartphones are the answer to ever getting lost or missing out on must-see sites.

In some places, such as the Peruvian Amazon, boats can be used as a primary means of transportation (because traveling by road or foot often isn't possible). Boats take you between villages and cities, to jungle lodges along the river's edge, hidden beaches, and conservation areas. Using local boats provides such a deep perspective of local life and, if you're lucky, you might even spot some wildlife from the safety of the river.



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Well-worn trails

In Peru, the opportunities for hiking and cycling are endless and the places your feet can bring you are unimaginably beautiful.

Cyclers will be pleased to know that Peru has an incredible cycling route running from north to south, through jungle and coastline. In the Andes, you can hike to some of the most infamous sites in the country on a trek between Machu Picchu and Lake Titicaca.

When trekking the Inca Trail for 4 to 7 days isn't an option, choose to take the train. Reaching a height of 4500 meters above sea level, this train delivers spectacular views of the Andes mountains, its sloping valleys and river canyons.

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Flora and fauna safari

Nature lovers are slow travelers by nature. To spot a rare bird or find the tiniest flower, one must walk slowly and pay attention to the finer details. But you don't have to be a naturalist to connect with your destination in a more ecological way.

Peru is a megadiverse country that will inspire that part of any traveler. From vicuñas along isolated highway roads leading into the Andes to record-breaking numbers of birds along the coastline and thousands of varieties of orchids in the cloud forests around Machu Pichu, you're sure to have dazzling interactions with nature regardless of where you go.



Eating for Experience

"The discovery of a new dish is of more benefit to humanity than discovering a new star"

One of the greatest pleasures of traveling is experiencing that beyond which is already known: a ceviche in the port in Lima or churros with hot chocolate in the south of Spain. Not only does this bring satisfaction to our palate, but we also have the satisfaction of knowing that we are supporting local producers.

And in so doing, you'll also be witness to the way the food is served. The traditional methods for preparation, the customs around cooking and serving, the history of each product and where it comes from. Eating local also serves us in our endeavor to reduce our carbon footprint. In this case, it translates to energy savings in terms of fuel consumption. The less distance your food travels from the farm to your plate, the less impact it has on the environment (and the more impact it has on the economic position of local producers).

Local & seasonal

Eating local is a step in the right direction. Eating seasonally takes that even further. Eating fresh, seasonal fruits and vegetables supports local producers and feeds your soul.

Wandering into local markets will expose you to produce the likes of which you've never seen. It makes for fun conversations with people running the stalls, who are delighted by your naivety about what, for them, are common items. They'll be more than happy to show you how to consume what you're drawn to sample.

What to eat and what not to eat

Being a responsible traveler comes right down to knowing what's on your plate, where it came from, and whether or not it's something you should be eating from an ethical point of view. This includes respecting closed season for wild game and especially marine animals.



Minimizing waste while eating out

More than 1.3 million tons of food are discarded around the world every year. Nearly 40% of this waste originates from restaurants. There are restaurants that recognize this fact and do their part to reduce waste.

Food establishments accomplish this in all kinds of innovative ways, such as zero-plastic policies, composting policies, minimizing water use in the kitchen, and using local and seasonal products.

In Peru, there are restaurants with orchards and small farms on their premises. Much of what appears on their ever-changing menu comes directly from the lands they maintain with intelligent reduce and reuse programs. They're composted with scraps from the restaurants and edible waste is fed to livestock, for example.





Respectful, Responsible Travel

"Where you go, do what you see"

It costs nothing to be nice, in life and while you're on vacation. That means treating people as you wish to be treated. And when visitors are courteous, locals remember the positive energy they've left behind.

From the servers and hotel managers to tourist guides and drivers, everybody deserves the same respect and kindness with which they receive you.

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Rewarding great service

Showing gratitude for great service may come in the form of a well-deserved tip, but it can also be a review highlighting impeccable service and attention to detail.

Be aware of controversial sites (and behaviours)

Just because a site exists, doesn't make it an appropriate place to visit. Places that may be considered disrespectful to visit include prisons, homes of former criminals, or severely impoverished neighborhoods. Knowing the history of the places you visit will help you navigate these kinds of tourism pitfalls.

Regardless of where you are, you should also be mindful of controversial behaviors, especially regarding photographs. Snapping photos of local people and children can be seen as disrespectful. You should always ask before taking a photo of a person and, where appropriate, offer a tip in exchange.

Learning about the local

Having respect is the key to learning on your trip. Respect earns the trust of the locals, and they're the true knowledge keepers.

They know where the hidden gems are, in terms of everything from great food to secret trails and waterfalls. You might earn an invitation to a birthday party or a small street festival, and all of these are opportunities to learn about the local from the closest vantage point.

Knowing rituals and customs in advance

If you're planning to visit holy sites such as temples, churches, and mosques, make sure you know any local customs in advance. There may be certain times you're able to visit, clothing that should be worn, or rituals that need to be observed.

Remember that these rules can change from country to country and even region to region, so what's acceptable and appropriate in one place may change in another.



Tips and gratuity

Tipping is different everywhere you go. In some countries, servers, bartenders, and kitchen staff are paid a living wage. In these countries, tipping is neither mandatory nor expected.

In others, the people responsible for your excellent meals depend on tips to supplement their income. Tipping is never mandatory, but it is expected.

The expected percentage differs from country to country and so do the places you're expected to tip and the places you aren't (for example, a coffee shop versus a gourmet restaurant).



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Shopping

The purchases you make have an impact. There are ways to shop responsibly while on vacation. Buying from local producers improves the local economy. It ensures that your souvenir didn't travel from a factory around the world to get to your shelf. It keeps local traditions and histories alive and it makes use of what's available.

At the same time, be aware of purchasing common souvenirs that do more harm than good. For example, the sale of Andean camelid products is common in Peru. To meet demand, some producers engage in unethical practices, so always ask for a certificate that demonstrates that the animal was obtained according to regulations. So, what can you buy?

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- Souvenirs handmade by expert hands.
- Items with cultural significance: a cross from Santiago de Compostela, a Jade pendant in Guatemala, an Andean cross in Cusco.
- Avoid souvenirs made with animal bones or skins.
- Do not buy original antiques unless you are a collector and have all the paperwork in order.
- Don't purchase taxidermized insects or butterflies, nor seashells and coral pieces.

Pay a fair price for what you acquire so that the person who produces the work is consciously paid. If haggling is part of the local culture, haggle ethically by asking your local guide what's appropriate.





Protecting the Natural Environment

"If I knew the world would end tomorrow, I would still plant a tree today"

We still have the opportunity to improve our planet. As travelers we play an especially important role in that transformation. The way we get to, from, and around our destinations has a deep impact, but so too does the way in which we engage with that destination and what it has to offer.

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Hiking

Outdoor trips give us the opportunity to recharge, observe life outside of our comfort zone, and to engage with our environment responsibly.

A walk is a personal encounter with nature. We can be more respectful when hiking by bringing a bag to collect waste we find along our way, staying on the marked path so as not to destroy natural habitats, and never leaving behind waste, organic or otherwise.

The only thing that should ever be left behind you is your footprint.

Camping

Tents and the presence of people can disturb local flora and fauna. If you're camping, only stay in designated camping areas.

Instead of cutting wood to cook over a fire, bring gas cylinders and cooking stoves. If firewood is readily available and a firepit established, don't burn anything inorganic and clear the space of ash and coals before leaving.

When cleaning personal items while on a campsite, use biodegradable detergent and never rinse in natural water sources like streams or rivers.

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Keep pristine places pristine

Just like staying on hiking trails, you should never wander into nature without knowledge of where you're going. Not only can that put you in potential danger, it can also place wildlife, plants, and natural land and water features in potential danger.

If you're exploring, do so with a guide who knows the area intimately. They'll know where you can explore safely. Keep in mind that, in Peru, the national park system is regulated, and each park has its own rules. Following those rules is a great way to ensure that you're keeping our pristine places pristine.



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Using social media responsibly

Half of the fun of doing some activities is sharing it with the world. But we must do so responsibly.

Instead of simply sharing photographs of wildlife, share the conservation efforts behind those photographs. You can share with your followers what tours you did that were ethical. Help them avoid unethical tours by making them aware of their existence and providing tips on what they should be looking out for.

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Outdoor wonders we must visit

When it comes to experiencing the outdoors in a responsible way, Peru has no limits. These are some of our favorite places to take our guests.

- Machu Picchu is undoubtedly the most enigmatic place in the country. Approaching it by foot is perhaps the most authentic way to experience it.
- Gocta waterfalls, also known as 'The Chorrera', is 771 meters tall and surrounded by thick jungle that can be trekked with a knowledgeable guide.
- Manu National Park is a protected natural space and infamous for its mega diversity.
- Huascarán National Park is where you'll find the highest point in Peru: El Huascarán. At 6768 meters above sea level, it houses dozens of glaciers, hundreds of lagoons, and indescribable hiking trails.
- Quelccaya Glacier is the largest glacier in the world and it's located in southern Peru. The entire glacier can be crossed in 4 days and at its maximum height, it's 5850 meters above sea level.
- Lake Titicaca has impressive sunsets and sunrises, especially if you sleep on its islands.

