

Green Guidelines[®] for Tour Operators

The mission of The Nature Conservancy is to preserve the plants, animals and natural communities that represent the diversity of life on Earth by protecting the lands and waters they need to survive.

The Vision of Success for the Conservation Journeys Program of The Nature Conservancy is to offer a program of high quality, strategically planned trips that showcase our work and support our conservation efforts around the globe. As The Nature Conservancy continues to grow and support the largest membership of any conservation organization, it is the responsibility of Conservation Journeys to provide our members with trips that comply with the Conservancy's mission and values.

The following guidelines have been developed by the Conservation Journeys Program, in coordination with the Ecotourism Program, in keeping with our vision, as well as in response to concerns expressed by Conservancy members who have traveled with us in the past. Our members and travelers assume that the trips we offer are designed with the utmost environmental and cultural sensitivity. Therefore, it is the responsibility of the Conservation Journeys Program to meet members' expectations as we strive to provide the most environmentally compatible and culturally responsible trips possible without compromising the comfort that our members deserve. In addition, we are working with the Conservancy's Ecotourism Program to include as many Conservancy partner organization ecotourism facilities and programs in our trips as possible, another way to advance our conservation efforts.

These guidelines provide criteria that must be met by tour operators working on trips for the Conservancy. Although operators may use the services of separate in-country tour operators and guides, it is the responsibility of the U.S.-based tour operator (or contracted tour operator) to ensure that the following guidelines are met for all trips, not just Conservancy trips. During Conservancy trips, leaders will make notes on the areas covered by these guidelines. Together with these notes and member evaluations, our trip program managers will make a yearly evaluation and have discussions with each operator we employ.

GUIDELINES

1. Mission:

The tour operator has adopted a policy and business practices compatible with those of The Nature Conservancy that govern tourism operations. The operator has a strong interest in working with the Conservancy to achieve our mission of “preserving the plants, animals and natural communities that represent the diversity of life on Earth by protecting the lands and waters they need to survive” and may provide corporate financial support.

2. Financial Contributions to Conservation

The tour operator contributes financially to conservation through implementing a formal donation program and/or by making its own direct corporate contributions including but not limited to a licensing fee that will be put toward conservation in the places the trips visit.

3. Support Community-Based Tourism:

The tour operator partners with local communities to provide services to clients and create benefits that address local communities’ needs. At destinations within host countries, the operator employs mostly local residents living in or near the areas being visited and purchases most of its supplies from local businesses.

4. Promote and Implement Environmental Best Practices:

The tour operator implements best practices to minimize its environmental footprint by reducing natural-resource consumption (water, fuel, etc.) in areas of lodging, transportation, etc. through use of renewable energy and efficient technology. Waste and sewage are disposed of properly, using best practices for each area (recycling, composting, etc.). The operator will integrate sustainability principles in the selection criteria and service agreements of suppliers, choosing locally owned and operated suppliers where possible.

5. Promote Responsible Visitor Behavior:

The tour operator educates travelers before and during the trip on low-impact travel and conservation-compatible practices (including ecological and cultural-sensitivity practices). The operator will provide pre-departure materials that contain information pertaining to culture, natural history and conservation issues (including responsible behavior). Recommended reading lists pertaining to the sites will also be made available.

6. Monitors Impacts:

In order to avoid the overuse of sensitive sites, the tour operator is aware of and in compliance with the capacity of the visited areas. The operator keeps the number and behavior of tours/travelers compatible with the fragility of visited environments and works with protected area managers, the Conservancy’s partners and/or other local NGOs to implement impact monitoring plans.

7. Policy Compliance Monitoring

The tour operator will provide a report once per year to the Conservancy which documents and evaluates the fulfillment of the above points and necessary actions required to change and/or improve practices.