

Sustainability & Responsible Tourism

Our vision has always been to run a tourism business that allows everyone involved in providing a holiday to share in the economic benefits and not to suffer ecological or social damage as a result. Although we help people travel and discover new places around the world, we believe that it is in the host communities that tourism can most markedly improve people's lives.

We maintain a huge number of avenues and initiatives in order to further our vision. As we see it, these all essentially sit under the one banner of 'Responsibility'. As a very brief introduction to some of the issues involved we outline a few of our initiatives in relation to individual issues below. Each of these is a whole subject in its own right, we are happy to expand on our approaches to any one of these, please contact us for additional information.

Economic Equality

We have a principle of trying to retain as much of the trip fee as possible in the host country. This also extends to the skills and resources that are required to run trips. In this way we are not exploiting the country or community purely for our own gain. This is very common in the tourism industry, it makes for very fragile local communities, dependent on external organisations.

The ultimate aim is the ability for us to be financially independent in the long term whilst benefitting from the resources, marketing and support of the UK Headquarter. We also try to buy supplies for our trips from small, local, independent businesses where again, the money stays in the locality rather than being sucked out to a large, distant chain or corporation. We encourage our clients to do the same when buying their souvenirs etc.

Wages & Tips

We ensure that we pay fair wages to all of our staff, we are not prepared to drive down wages in the pursuit of low cost ventures at the cost of local people's livelihoods. This extends to the people who we employ for specific ventures such as porters, yak and camel drivers and so on.

At the same time we have seen the negative effect that can result from individuals or organisations paying way over the odds for goods or services. It can distort the whole of the local economy, driving up prices so that the local people can no longer afford them. We therefore build relationships with local people, suppliers and the community to ensure that we pay a good, fair price. We ensure that we pay a sufficient wage that tips are not a necessity for the employee.

In some destinations organisations have driven such a hard bargain on wages that tips have become the only way that employees can make ends meet. We do not practice this. It can lead to a huge amount of misunderstanding and bad feeling between clients and staff where clients can see it as a hidden cost and staff see it as a sleight on their service if they do not get a tip. You can be assured that on Adventure Alternative Nepal trips, giving a tip is optional. Our staff are briefed as such and they pass this on to any others that they employ.

Porters' Rights

It is common for trekking groups to employ porters when travelling to areas that are not served by roads or other forms of transport. Often porters are from poor, uneducated backgrounds and the employment provides very welcome income. The work is of a very physical nature and is often necessarily in remote and sometimes moderately hostile environments. As with all employees, Adventure Alternative Nepal strongly upholds the rights of porters to a fair wage and fair working conditions.

Through our working methods we naturally meet and exceed the International Porter Protection Group (IPPG) 5 guidelines on the safety & treatment of porters. We ensure that porters are properly equipped and have our own bank of clothing for their use throughout the trek. Our own in-country leaders on treks nearly always started their careers as porters themselves.

They are therefore very aware of the issues relevant to their porters, this is supplemented by guidance and training from the office here in Nepal. We provide appropriate health, rescue and insurance cover for porters and they are not penalised if they have to leave the trip early due to sickness. Through Moving Mountains we have also contributed to porters' working and living conditions, most recently by providing mattresses at a number of the porters' hostels along the route to Everest Base Camp in the Khumbu region of Nepal.

Volunteering & Projects

Many Adventure Alternative trips include an element or phase of volunteer work in the host country. This is planned and provided through our partner development NGO, Moving Mountains. Moving Mountains was set up alongside Adventure Alternative, both by Adventure Alternative UK Director Gavin Bate and Pasang Tendi Sherpa.

As a commercial organisation, Adventure Alternative UK supports and underwrites the activities of the NGO and also provides and/or funds all of the administration for the charity. The development goals of the NGO are drawn up and appraised by the trustees in partnership with the host community committees. The strategies are planned on a long-term basis with each group and phase building upon the achievements of the last. This is essential in creating schemes that are sustainable and efficient in the long term.

We also adhere to the Fair Trade Volunteering (FTV), 5 criteria for ensuring that the volunteer work is of genuine, sustainable benefit to the host community. In some instances, other organisations' volunteering projects have cynically or naively been set up in such a way as to be wasteful or un-sustainable. In the worst cases it is clear that the planning has been rushed through and the project included simply to further the marketing and economic purposes of the trip provider. We take great care to ensure that projects are planned and reviewed in such a way as to be as efficient and sustainable as possible.

Sensitivity to Community & Culture

When we travel abroad, we are guests in the home of others. At Adventure Alternative we always try to ensure that this essential principle is remembered and that our clients are given the necessary information and guidance to allow them to be respectful guests. This is greatly helped by our excellent teams of in-country staff. They are able to provide an insightful and genuine view of the country from an insider's point of view. This gives every trip far more depth and relevance, beyond the activities and views.

We have advice documents available relating to each country. These include information on the country, laws and on cultural awareness. The latter helps enormously in the first days of a trip prior to 'tuning in' to the local customs and taboos. We undertake social impact assessment before our ventures and seek ways to minimise and risk of negative impacts and promote the positive. We also use our contacts and social impact survey to regularly assess the effects of our presence and make any necessary adjustments.

Pollution, Waste, Flora & Fauna

Adventure Alternative takes its commitment to the environments, in which we travel, very seriously. Aside from the moral and ecological imperatives, we acknowledge that we are very often benefitting from the beauty of the natural landscapes, and that they should be promoted as a valuable resource in their own right. As such we adopt methods that minimise the negative impacts of our presence.

This is assisted by a comprehensive Environmental Impact Assessment and mitigation measures. We also promote the education of local communities where the concepts and motivations of sustainability are less widely known or accepted. We have produced our own educational Sustainability Handbook that we use to inform clients and staff. We also produce posters and easily-digestible guidance notes with practical tips on how to minimise negative environmental impact of our activities.

Carbon Dioxide Emissions

We recognize that air travel is usually the only practical way of getting to most of the destinations in which we work. Along with virtually all forms of transport, air travel does release significant amounts of carbon dioxide into the atmosphere.

We are supporting a tree planting cooperative with the indigenous Penan people of the Sarawak region. We offer all clients the option of offsetting some or all of the carbon dioxide emissions associated with their flights via a carbon calculator and donation tool on the Moving Mountains Trust website.