Sustainable Travel, How to leave only the smallest footprint

Tourism and Tourists Running Rampant

Have you've noticed how much more populated tourist spots have become? Those famous sites like the Eiffel Tower in Paris, The Acropolis in Athens, or the Seven steps in Rome, all seem to be even busier than ever.

Perhaps you've seen hoards of tourists trampling through an epic natural event such as the baby turtles hatching in the beaches in Costa Rica on social media. All to take the perfect selfie. But at what cost?

No doubt whenever you are next on that idyllic little island getaway that surpasses all natural perfection. The last thing you want to do is to share it with these very same tourists.

How and where do we find the balance of sharing, yet keep it pristine?

These are questions I often ask myself as I write about my travels. On the one hand, I truly believe that travel enriches our lives beyond measure.

Having grown up in a clean, safe, pristine country like Australia I recall my initial shock at being on my first international trip in Asia. The currency, haggling, pushy

sellers, the rubbish, the dirt and difference to life as I'd known it.

And yet, the more we travelled, the more we learn to appreciate what we have. We grow up and extend our empathy and love for the world around us.

Have you ever noticed how the children in all countries laugh and play? That for the most part people everywhere are generous and kind, no matter what their social status.

We wouldn't be who we are today without travel. The opportunity to explore the world and recognise that we are simply just like everyone else, a human being from earth. On a miraculous blue ball in space that we all share with a few million other people.

And as such, surely travel is a good thing, when its done right.

Yet, when we look at the impact that excessive travel is having, we are reminded that it would be better if we made the effort to travel conscientiously and sustainably.

So that we can keep this magical planet in its natural pristine state.

How do we travel sustainably, respectfully and leave only a small footprint?

Here are some handy tips that can be practised whether you visiting somewhere close to home or abroad:

1. Respect Nature

- Don’t Litter, sounds obvious yet there is always rubbish, let’s not add to it.
- Keep the use of plastic and throw away items to a minimum, wherever you may be.
- Tread mindfully, there is no need to stomp or shout when walking through an otherwise peaceful forest. We want to see the wildlife, not scare them away.

- Turn your cell phone off.
- Once in a while put the camera down, experience being part of nature. Look at life through your own eyes, no lens required.
- Breathe, practice being mindful and present.

2. Respect Animals, and Native wildlife

Game shooting is beyond appalling, as are zoos, circuses and anywhere that animals are misused for human entertainment or leisure.

You can get up close to local wildlife ethically, research before you go and know the difference.

There are real reserves that treat hurt animals and were set up to protect them, like the White Lion Protection Trust. Or there are those, such as canning zoos in Africa where lion cubs are grown up and get used to being with tourists, so they can more easily be hunted and shot.

Understand the reality of this, don't ignore it. Investigate before you go, read reviews and educate yourself. When you make an educated decision you can then support the right organisations, and remove your support from those that treat animals so appallingly. Where you choose to spend your money can make all the difference.

We can choose to be custodians of this planet and its

inhab

3. Respect other people, and respect their lives and customs

Common sense rules the day. However, let us count the times we've seen people do the opposite:

- **Research** Before going to a new country what is the correct way to behave and what is not. This way you know that touching a person in India with your left hand is an insult. In the process, you'll save yourself from any obvious embarrassments.
- **Be polite** at all times.
- **Dress modestly** if you attending a religious building, ceremony or are in a country where the women dress modestly, or that is religious.
- **Be Quiet** and respectful during a ceremony so that other people can listen and enjoy.
- **Don't judge**: People live the life they are living. Countries habits vary, and you're lucky to have the opportunity to be there and see something new, enjoy it move on.

4. Photo Taking: Little respect goes a long way, and results in a better photo

- Ask if it's ok **before** taking a photo
- **Be respectful** when there is a ceremony, procession by not getting in the way and holding it up.
- Notice if people are flustered or uncomfortable with you taking a photo
- Once and awhile **put the camera down** and be present
- Don't disrupt or touch wildlife in their habitat for a selfie, watch from a safe distance where they won't be stressed, or invaded by your presence

5. Research where you are staying, who you are paying (where possible)

- Stay, tour or visit spots that hire locals and **support the local community**
    - Ock Pok Tok in Laos is my favourite example; it is run by a small community collective. They have fair trade practices and stands for the empowerment of women. You can sleep, eat or learn natural dying and weaving of Silk that is such a rich part of the Laotian Culture. I enjoyed seeing and meeting the inter-generational women that worked there from young to old, laughing, weaving and creating.

Small acts of respect and common sense go a long way in the world

When we travel we have the opportunity to vote and support sustainable practices with our dollars. We have the opportunity to learn from local cultures, and to be role models along the way.

Local communities flourish when we use our dollars to support them by staying in their accommodation and eating in their restaurants. By choosing to spend our money locally rather than with bigger international enterprises.

By travelling with a smaller footprint, by travelling mindfully and conscientiously, we move through the world, leaving it in the same state for those that follow.