

Exploring Responsible Tourism: How Small Actions Make a Big Impact

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By Dr Teh Pek Yen

In conjunction with World Tourism Day, let's explore the concept of responsible tourism. It can be traced back to the early root that initiate to promote environmental conservation that related to ecotourism, it has since then expanded to three aspects: environment, economy, and society, aiming to create a healthier tourism ecosystem for both tourists and hosts.

Why is this topic relevant to you? Because anyone can be a tourist, but the real question is: do locals benefit? While tourists pay and consume, locals often lose irreplaceable resources like their environment, culture, and traditions.

Places like Venice, Kyoto, and Hallstatt have responded to overtourism, showing they have reached their limits. These examples remind us to reflect on our travel habits.



As tourists, we must recognise that whenever we travel, we are consuming local resources. This impact is particularly pronounced in destinations with limited resources, such as island destinations like Bali in Indonesia or mountain regions like Sapa in Vietnam. Locals often compete with tourists for essentials like food, water, and land. Meanwhile, small businesses struggle against global franchises, and cultures risk becoming commodified for tourism.

However, there are small steps we can take that, when adopted by many, can collectively make a big difference to local communities. Here are a few suggestions:

1. **Visit Local Museums:** Museums provide insights into the past and present of a destination. By visiting, you gain a deeper understanding of the place and develop a stronger connection to its culture.
2. **Support Local Businesses:** Micro and small businesses often earn less directly from tourists. Try opting for local cafes and shops over global brands to directly support micro and small businesses.
3. **Reduce Conflict:** Speak softly in public spaces and take photos from a respectful distance. Not all locals are comfortable being photographed, especially for social media. If you find yourself in residential areas, keep noise to a minimum, particularly at night
4. **Appreciate Local Culture and Traditions:** Support local artisans by purchasing their handcrafted goods and appreciating their artistry. Encourage them to continue their craftsmanship rather than forcing them to conform to tourism demands. Attend the local cultural performances, support the performers to sustain and preserve the beauty of arts.
5. **Minimise Waste and Plastic:** One aspect I love about Bali is the enforcement of no plastic bags – many tourists use reusable bags when shopping. Why not adopt this practice everywhere? Carry a reusable bag or coffee cup to minimize single-use plastics!

There are thousands of ways to contribute to making a tourism place better for its residents. Importantly, as tourists, we must express gratitude for the hospitality of locals and not take their kindness for granted. Travel with respect and care. Let's start with these baby steps on your next trip and make a difference!



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