

Ethical Tourism – Getting Fair on Holiday

Judy Murchie is well-travelled. Africa, in particular, has got under the 31-year-old's skin, and recent trips include the well-trodden route overland from Nairobi to Cape Town. "It was great fun," says Murchie, a studio manager in the UK, "but touristy. I felt I wasn't really seeing the country."



So a year ago, Murchie signed up to a trekking trip in Ethiopia with a difference: led by a local guide, she hiked between villages, slept in comfortable, purpose-built huts and got to know the locals.

See First-Hand Where the Money Goes

"The scenery was breathtaking," she says. "We stayed in villages and talked to the people there about their lives. One night, they celebrated the birth of a baby, and we danced with them all night. It was an amazing experience." Better still, Murchie could see first-hand where the money from her trip was going. "Through the income from hosting tourists like me, one village had built a grain bank," she says.

This is ethical – or responsible – tourism at its best: holidays that benefit both local communities and tourists. The trip that Murchie took is run by TESFA (Community-tourism-ethiopia.com), who support and train local communities in Ethiopia, enabling them to host small groups of tourists in their villages and act as guides.



Similar low-impact initiatives are springing up all over the world, but whether it's India, Thailand or Kenya, the concept is the same: local communities manage trips themselves, earn money doing so and spend the profits where they choose. And tourists like Murchie get an authentic holiday.

Package holidays involving a far-flung beach and a resort are less beneficial. Hotels built on prime

beach-front land can displace communities, wrecking their homes, livelihoods and traditional ways of life – and lead to rising inequality, crime, greed and corruption.

From Ethical to Fair Trade Tourism

All too often, locals never see tourists' money, as most of it goes directly to the multi-national corporations that own the resorts, or to the tour companies who arrange the trips. From 2000 to 2005, the money flowing into Africa from tourism more than doubled from \$10.5 billion to \$21.3 billion, yet poverty levels remain acute.

“Many poor countries encourage investment from the big tourism developers by granting them huge tax breaks and selling off state-owned land for cheap. Small businesses have to compete with this, and pay higher prices for food and property,” says Tricia Barnett, director of Tourism Concern (Tourismconcern.org.uk), a UK charity that campaigns against exploitation in tourism. “What’s more, the jobs available to local people in the major resorts are typically menial and poorly paid”.



In recognition that tourism will only tackle poverty if these unfair terms of trade are addressed, Tourism Concern has for several years been working with other organisations towards the development of an internationally recognised and independently audited ‘fair trade’ label for tourism. Their efforts are underpinned by the enormous growth of fair trade markets in Europe, bolstered by greater public awareness of trade justice issues.

There are literally hundreds of ‘eco’ or ‘sustainability’ labels relating to tourism. However, most of these are only recognised locally or regionally, and few, if any, are independently audited and monitored.

Fair Trade Principles

A fair trade tourism label would clearly signify that a hotel or tour operator is committed to fair trade principles, including fair pay and working conditions, fair purchasing and sharing of benefits, and respect for human rights and the environment. “Such a label would enable consumers to go on holiday in the knowledge that a fair share of their money was reaching the employees, service providers and local people in their holiday destination”, says Barnett.

In fact, Fair Trade Tourism in South Africa (FTTSA) is a not-for-profit organisation that has already developed a fair trade certification scheme for South African tourism products. FTTSA's work will serve as an important test case for fair trade tourism the world over.

In the meantime, even those who wish to indulge in the comfort of an all-inclusive holiday can do their bit, however small. Use local transport; learn a few local words; ask for towels and linen to be changed less; leave tips in cash; ask before you take photographs; and keep air-conditioning to a minimum. Or, simpler still: "Just talk to your waiter or cleaner," says Barnett. "Find out about their lives – and it may just alter your worldview."

In other words, ethical tourism, at its simplest, is a state of mind. It means being aware of the country you're in, treading lightly, interacting, communicating and behaving appropriately.

How do you find good ethical holidays? The Ethical Travel Guide, published by Tourism Concern, or Responsibletravel.com are good places to start. If you choose your next holiday wisely, and you never know – it might just be the best trip of your life.



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