

Travel Etiquette: How Do You Travel?

We travel to ski, dive, watch birds, visit galleries and museums, to enjoy the scenery or the sunshine, to hang out in someone else's place. Travel is about choice, leisure, relaxation, escape and freedom. It is also about work, business and pilgrimage. We travel for many different reasons and few places are now beyond the reach of tourists and travellers.



In some destinations tourists are so numerous that they determine the character of the place, the tourists dominate. A cathedral or museum becomes a tourist place, tourism the dominant use. Sites like the Tower of London, the British Museum and Westminster Abbey, attract visitors in such numbers that they are predominantly attractions - cathedrals are perhaps best experienced during services or concerts when the gawpers and their cameras are excluded. Public spaces too are dominated by tourists crowding Trafalgar Square, climbing on the sculptures.

Tourism is not a pollution free industry. Travel causes greenhouse gas emissions and contributes to global warming. Hotels need to be encouraged to reduce their water and power consumption and to buy locally to support the local economy. But we as travellers make a difference too; we affect the places we visit and the people who live there. As Tourism Concern has been pointing out for twenty years we take out holidays in their homes. Valene Smith and others have established the host - guest aspiration; an aspiration that locals should be treated as hosts and the tourists as guests. Ambitious perhaps, but without ambition and an effort to change the nature of tourism, and the way we travel as individuals and groups, only deterioration is possible as numbers increase.



When we travel we all make choices. How we travel, the choices we make, make a difference to our experience and enjoyment of it, and the people and places we visit. The old adage 'travel broadens the mind' is only true if we travel with open minds and engage with people in the destination. We live in a world of diversity. Cultural and natural diversity is our heritage and it is there for us to enjoy. But to enjoy as guests, we need to travel with respect and treat other people, their places and their environment with respect.

If you travel with respect you will have a more authentic experience, get closer to the local people and have a better experience. The choices we make when we travel – how, when and where we go, where we stay and what we do, make a difference. As Krippendorf pointed out, when we travel we can build up or destroy human values – it is our choice. When we encounter difference we can turn away or explore it – either way we can do it with respect and do it politely.

We need always to be conscious of how we feel as 'the visited', tourists cluttering our streets and squares, photographing us, peering into the windows of our homes invading and denying our privacy, coaches, engines running, outside our houses, groups of tourists aware only of themselves oblivious to others. People behaving badly because they are away from home; forgetting their manners, acting as though they have bought the restaurant or park when they have only rented it, unaware of the others with whom they share it and of their enjoyment of it, uncaring about the disturbance they cause to others, behaving not as guests but as invaders.

Travel etiquette is about good manners, about treating the locals, their values and their environment with respect. As a traveller or holidaymaker you chose to go there, travel in a spirit of enquiry, cultivate the habit of asking questions and listening to the answers – not a Western habit, and accept that other people are different, not necessarily wrong. We travel for fulfillment to satisfy our needs for enjoyment and experience but that enjoyment, our indulgence, should not be at the expense of others. We should surely treat others as we would like to be treated ourselves.

At the heart to Responsible Travel is the aspiration to make “better places for people to live in, better places for people to visit”. As tourists, we become travellers when we are able to accept a place and truly experience it, as guests.

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