

Community Based Tourism 101

Community based tourism is a concept that is becoming more popular among travelers, particularly between European and U.S. travelers. The concept of sustainable and fair travel involves the idea that the economic benefits of traveling into country are directed towards the local communities and benefiting the most vulnerable segments of the population. But how can the travelers ensure that their dollars are reaching the most vulnerable people when they travel to a developing country?



The best way of ensuring this is by supporting and visiting community based projects in developing countries. In these projects, a rural or indigenous community would develop a tourist program where the visitor has a chance to get close to the local culture, know the local ecosystems, and enjoy the local food in the most traditional way. Often, these community tourism projects count with facilities where the visitor can stay at traditional cabins or at the houses of the local community.

The traveler who visits these communities gains a unique understanding through a personal cultural exchange with local culture, an experience which he can never get by staying at the traditional places where the average traveler goes to. Some of these communities are located at remote rural areas of difficult access to the traveler, and public transportation usually doesn't go to these places, so it is important to plan in advance and to make all of the proper arrangements before trying to visit these communities.



The benefits of this practice are not only reflected economically, but also environmentally. Many of these local communities are located in remote jungles or forests, and before finding a living from the tourism industry, they were involved in activities such as illegal logging, deforestation, and traffic of endangered species. Some of these communities have found out that conservation can actually be of more long-term benefit than the exploitation of their natural surroundings. The very fact that preserving their natural environment now provides them with a source of income is a huge step for the conservation efforts at these particular areas.

In order to provide quality services for the traveler, some of these communities have undertaken environmental training efforts, often supported by the local universities, where they gain a better understanding of their natural environment and the symbiosis of the ecosystem. It is amazing to hear some of the flora and fauna explanations by some of these local guides. The very fact that they have spent most of their lives at these places provides them with a unique understanding that you will not be able to get elsewhere, in particular when it comes to local medicine practices and how to use the local herbs for treating some particular diseases and other medical conditions like headaches and insect bites.



In order to ensure the continuity of these projects, it is important that the traveler who is interested in these types of experiences is aware of these programs and also that he or she gets in touch with sustainable tour operators that include these communities within their programs.

CBT Definition

Community-based tourism is socially sustainable tourism which is initiated and almost always operated exclusively by local people. Shared leadership emphasizing community well-being over individual profit, balances power within communities, and fosters traditional culture, conservation, and responsible stewardship of the land.

Communitybasedtourism.org

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