

Sustainable Tourism: A Challenge for Asian Tour Operators

Tourism is currently one of the top industry providing jobs and income to a lot of Asian countries today. That is why the call for sustainable Eco-Tourism has become stronger during the last decade. In order to protect the different Asian destinations or tourist spots, local governments and NGOs have started educating the people about the importance of keeping the spots protected especially forests, temples and natural environment. In the last decade, there has been an increase in the call for the protection of the environment through planting, cleaning and emphasizing to everyone, both tourists and local residents, the importance of a sustainable environment.



The Problem

It is a fact that a lot of people from the developed countries are drawn to the forests, animals, unknown culture, temples and wildlife in Asia. Thus, no wonder there is a number of tour operators that promote Asian destinations. However, not all tour operators practice responsible tourism or sustainable tourism. The fact is that many times the tourist destinations included in the package provided by the tour operator conducting business in Asia are threatened. Most of these places are very fragile, and when the tourists are uneducated, they could cause great stress to the environment.

The Solution

In order to avoid the degradation of these tourist spots, some tour operators have devised different programs to ensure that sustainable tourism is upheld on each tour they produce. How do these operators conduct their tours to produce a sustainable trip? Here are some guidelines how sustainable trips look and feel like:



- **Local Transportation.** Instead of using air-conditioned expensive cars and transportation modes, the package tour includes local transportation as much as possible. Most of the tour operators encourage interaction with the locals.
- **Accommodation.** Tour package includes accommodations at locally owned inns and hotels rather than expensive 5 star hotels.
- **Local Community Projects.** Some tour operators in Asia hold volunteer works at local communities like tree planting and feeding programs.
- **Souvenir Items.** For this kind of tour package, the operators encourage the participants to buy their souvenirs directly from the locals rather than in big souvenir shops.

Top Tour Operators

Here is a short list of some tour operators that promote and uphold sustainable tourism in Asia:

- **G Adventure Tours.** Aside from the previously mentioned guidelines for sustainable tourism, GA tours have also conducted other activities. The company offers the chance for its clients to join in the Planeterra Project. The company focuses mainly on social and environmental projects such as supporting the Bal Prakash Children's Center in India or conducting their own G Adventure 20/20 Vision Centre program in Cambodia. They also hold fundraising campaign such as the Dollar-A-Day-Program for the Planeterra Project. Tour participants can join this campaign when they click on the campaign's name during the online booking. GA tours continue to provide sustainable projects in Asia.
- **On The Go Tours.** Another company that follows the guidelines listed above for a sustainable tour is On The Go Tours. This company operates in Asia as well as in Africa. They not only provide its participants with an opportunity to explore the different Asian countries but also to contribute to both social and environmental campaigns for each country. One of the programs that On The Go Tours promotes is the Change for Children campaign wherein participants are asked to donate their unwanted currency for the children of China, Egypt and India. The company ensures that they will use the money to buy basic needs such as clothes, educational supplies and other things that these underprivileged kids need. Another campaign they hold is the Climate Care where they encourage their clients to be wary of the harmful effects of CO₂ to the environment and thus, promote only flight providers that do not contribute to CO₂ build up in the environment. For animals, this company supports TOFTigers. The campaign is about protecting the wildlife of India.



- Intrepid. One of the cheapest providers of tour packages in Asia and in the world, Intrepid also follows the guidelines listed above. The company ensures that their environmental policies are implemented company wide. Aside from supporting the local industries in Asia, they also employ locals and ensure that their company follows the basic 3Rs at their offices. 3R refers to reduce, reuse and recycle. The company promotes this practice at their offices to ensure that accumulated waste will be lessened.

The company is a known supporter of the fight against CO2 emission. In 2006, they were able to achieve the status of a carbon neutral company through their Carbon Management Plan. Since 2007, they had been offering their customers the chance to participate in the fight against CO2 emission when they booked their flights. Aside from these, the company has been supporting some international compliant company projects in China, Vietnam, India, Thailand as well as Brazil to offset CO2 emission.

Together with its clients, these companies have been supporting the local tourism and the campaign to protect the world. The challenge to have sustainable tours has been thrust upon everyone. It is not the responsibility of the tour operator alone. It is everyone's responsibility.

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