

Sustainable Tour Operator Criteria

There are an increasing number of tour operators who are marketing their products as 'ecotourism', 'cultural tours', and 'reality tours'. Hereby China Luxury Travel Network provides the sustainable criteria to tour operators in China, to evaluate their management and operation process.

Sustainable Internal Management

1. The company has developed and implemented a long-term sustainability management system that is suitable to its reality and scale, and that considers environmental, social-cultural and economical aspects.
2. Provide regular training in how to avoid negative environmental impacts, in safety and in providing service. Evaluate the performance of staff, at least annually.
3. Provide clients detailed trip information before trip, information about nature surroundings, local culture, and culture heritage, weather condition, suggested packing list as well as explaining appropriate behavior while visiting natural areas, living cultures, and culture heritage sites.
4. Develop an environmental plan for office daily operations. Have a written environmental plan that states your company's commitment to conservation, to using resources in a sustainable way. Include detailed instructions and stick on the bulletin board. Post the plan on your official website as well.
5. Use post-trip feedback form to confirm that your tour was operated in a sustainable way. Feedback from clients is a good way to find out if your tour met their expectations. Ask your clients whether or not they felt the tour avoided unnecessary negative environmental impacts, and if the tour operator demonstrated consideration of the natural and cultural environment. Written trip reports and share with the whole company.

From environmental aspect

Maximize benefits to the environment and minimize negative impacts.

I. Conserving resources

- 1) The purchase of disposable and consumable goods is measured, and the business actively seeks ways to reduce their use. (like camping catering products...)
- 2) Energy consumption should be measured, sources indicated, and measures to decrease overall consumption should be adopted, while encouraging the use of renewable energy.
- 3) Water consumption should be measured, sources indicated, and measures to decrease overall consumption should be adopted.
- 4) The transportation you choose for your clients makes a difference. Opt for the means of transport that has the least environmental impact. Minimize the use of fossil fuels and try to use non-motorized transport whenever possible. Where motorized transportation is necessary, choose the technology that causes the least environmental damage and minimal noise (four-stroke instead of two-stroke engines, for example). Do not use motorized transport such as snowmobiles and helicopters unnecessarily; these should only be used to get from one area to another or for seeing specific sites.

- 5) Choose accommodations compatible with local traditions and that minimize negative environmental impacts. Choose lodging that has effective waste treatment systems, recycles and disposes of non-recyclable garbage appropriately.

2. Minimize Consumption, Waste and Pollution

- 1) Greenhouse gas emissions from all sources controlled by the business are measured, and procedures are implemented to reduce and offset them as a way to achieve climate neutrality.
- 2) Wastewater, including gray water, is treated effectively and reused where possible.
- 3) A solid waste management plan is implemented, with quantitative goals to minimize waste that is not reused or recycled.
- 4) The use of harmful substances, including pesticides, paints, swimming pool disinfectants, and cleaning materials, is minimized; substituted, when available, by innocuous products; and all chemical use is properly managed.
- 5) The business implements practices to reduce pollution from noise, light, runoff, erosion, ozone-depleting compounds, and air and soil contaminants.
- 6) Compress garbage and take it with you.
- 7) Recycle where possible and encourage the communities that you visit to develop recycling programs if they do not have them already. If feasible, provide financial support to encourage the development of these programs, and show your commitment to the communities you and your clients visit.
- 8) Limit energy use, including your use of heat and warm water. Keep records of your water and energy consumption, and recycling and waste-reduction efforts.
- 9) Support efforts to clean up waste and polluted areas by providing money, lobbying governments and businesses, contributing your time and that of your staff, and by encouraging your clients to support these efforts as well. Ensure that no trace of your visit remains behind.

3. Conserving biodiversity, ecosystems, and landscapes

- 1) Wildlife species are only harvested from the wild, consumed, displayed, sold, or internationally traded, as part of a regulated activity that ensures that their utilization is sustainable.
- 2) No captive wildlife is held, except for properly regulated activities, and living specimens of protected wildlife species are only kept by those authorized and suitably equipped to house and care for them.
- 3) The business uses native species for landscaping and restoration, and takes measures to avoid the introduction of invasive alien species.
- 4) The business contributes to the support of biodiversity conservation, including supporting natural protected areas and areas of high biodiversity value.
- 5) Interactions with wildlife must not produce adverse effects on the viability of populations in the wild; and any disturbance of natural ecosystems is minimized, rehabilitated, and there is a compensatory contribution to conservation management.

- 6) Promote the maintenance of large, undeveloped areas. The undeveloped regions of the Arctic, for example, have a unique value, and are one of the primary reasons why tourists come to the Arctic. This unique value is undermined by roads, pipelines and other kinds of unsightly large-scale development that fragments the environment.
- 7) Use only established trails and existing campsites to avoid creating new ones.
- 8) Avoid disturbing wildlife. Instruct your clients on local wildlife behavior, and make sure that they view it from an appropriate distance.
- 9) Follow responsible practices for camping and tours, including those that concern waste disposal.

From social cultural aspect

1. Maximize social benefits and minimize negative impacts to the local community

- 1) The company actively supports initiatives for social and infrastructure community development including, among others, education, health, and sanitation.
- 2) A code of conduct for activities in indigenous and local communities has been developed, with the consent of and in collaboration with the community.

2. Maximize benefits to cultural heritage and minimize negative impacts.

- 1) The company follows established guidelines or a code of behavior for visits to culturally or historically sensitive sites, in order to minimize visitor impact and maximize enjoyment.
- 2) Historical and archeological artifacts are not sold, traded, or displayed, except as permitted by law.
- 3) The business contributes to the protection of local historical, archeological, culturally, and spiritually important properties and sites, and does not impede access to them by local residents.
- 4) The business uses elements of local art, architecture, or cultural heritage in its operations, design, decoration, food, or shops; while respecting the intellectual property rights of local communities.
- 5) Coordinate with the communities that you visit to ensure that you are welcome, and that your visit is not disruptive.
- 6) Arrange visits to communities well in advance, and avoid visits that are not pre-arranged.
- 7) Reconfirm your visit, preferably 24 hours in advance, and be prepared to pay the community for costs associated with cancelled visits.
- 8) Arrange what you and your clients will do during your visit with the community beforehand. Be sure you have permission to visit and to undertake the activities you have planned.
- 9) Find out what size of group the community prefers for the planned activities.
- 10) Keep away from sites where people are working, including hunting and fishing sites, unless you have specific agreements with locals.
- 11) Be aware of the laws and regulations in the area in which you are operating, and obtain the necessary permits.

- 12) Respect the culture and customs of the people whose communities you visit, and make sure that your clients do so as well.
- 13) Give all visitors a thorough cultural briefing before visiting local communities. Where possible, hire local lecturers to conduct these briefings. Include information on local customs and traditions and on appropriate behavior for tourists in the area.
- 14) Ask permission to photograph or videotape.
- 15) Ensure that your clients respect religious grounds, churches, cemeteries and other sites with religious or cultural significance, and that they do not remove any artifacts.
- 16) Respect historic sites and markers, and make sure that your clients do not remove any artifacts. If access to historic or archaeological sites is restricted, obtain permission before visiting. Ensure that your clients behave respectfully, particularly if a site has religious significance.

From economical aspect

Maximize economic benefits to the local community

1. Operate in ways that benefit the communities you visit, particularly with respect to supplies. If feasible, buy supplies and services locally. Ask communities what supplies you should bring with you so that your visit and use of supplies does not cause hardship to local people. Encourage your clients to buy locally-made handicrafts and products.
2. Whenever possible, hire local staff (especially women and minority) and contract local businesses. Train and hire local people for your operations. Where local people lack the training you require, provide it. Use locally-owned businesses as subcontractors. Develop long-term partnerships with local operators, businesses and suppliers. A local connection most often means a better tourism experience. Training is offered as necessary.
3. Where possible, choose accommodations owned, built and staffed by local people.
4. The company has implemented a policy against commercial exploitation, particularly of children and adolescents, including sexual exploitation.
5. The international or national legal protection of employees is respected, and employees are paid a living wage.