

Theresa Boehl, Myght Contributor

How to Ensure Your Travel Dollars Impact Communities



As one of the most important contributors to the global GDP, the travel industry has tremendous potential to help communities, economies, and ecosystems around the world. According to the [World Travel & Tourism Council](#), one in 10 jobs worldwide were connected to the travel industry in 2019, with one in four new jobs created by the travel sector in the five years leading up to that year. Though travel in general has taken a hit lately due to COVID-19, it's clear that despite temporary roadblocks and challenges, this industry isn't going anywhere.

With so much potential to get money to important causes that support the environment and local economies, it's no surprise that interest in sustainable and responsible travel is booming.

In fact, in [Skift's 2019 Millennial and Gen Z Traveler Survey](#), more than half of millennial and Gen Z travelers surveyed said they thought it was important to choose travel companies that prioritize sustainability, and most would even be willing to pay more to work with those companies. According to the survey, the number of travelers overall who would be willing to invest more money in eco-friendly travel increased from 40 percent in 2018 to 53 percent the following year.

But there are some sobering facts, too. Even well-meaning tourists can contribute to revenue "leakage," which happens when high- or middle-income groups, often from somewhere other than the host country, end up with those tourism dollars instead of local communities that could greatly benefit from that money. So it's worthwhile to take the time to understand how to ensure more of your money reaches the pockets you intended.

Read on for our tips on how to see to it that your money gets to the right people with the right causes.

WORK WITH A RESPONSIBLE TRAVEL ADVISOR

If you're new to responsible travel and don't feel you have the time or expertise to plan your trip, enlisting the help of a [responsible travel advisor](#) can be a lifesaver. These professionals have the right [training and skills](#), not to mention personal travel experiences, to build trips that can make a difference. They can connect you with independently owned hotels, restaurants, tour guides, and transportation companies.

You won't have to vet the eco commitments of hotels or search for locally owned restaurants yourself. They'll do the hard work for you.

STAY AT A LOCALLY OWNED HOTEL, NOT A CHAIN

Accommodations can count for a big chunk of your travel budget. That's why choosing wisely can have a huge impact for the people in the communities you visit. All too often, hotel chains are owned by foreign entities not necessarily committed to the people and the environment of that destination.

Try to find a smaller hotel, eco-lodge, or bed and breakfast owned by a member of the local community. You can feel good knowing you're supporting a business that brings job opportunities and has a long-term interest in seeing the destination flourish. Like our [CGH Earth](#) Hotel partners in South India who supported us during our 2019 October trip coordinated by [Travel with Us India](#).

Watch our short clip, and if you want to book a trip you'll be able to gain exclusive benefits through Myght.

EAT A LOCAL RESTAURANT SERVING IN-SEASON FOOD

When your food is grown in the surrounding region and not imported from elsewhere, there's a smaller carbon footprint required for your meal. Aside from being more ethical and environmentally friendly, this is often the best way to "live like a local," since you'll be eating food that's naturally abundant in the region, and thus incorporated into traditional cuisines.

BRING REUSABLE TRAVEL ITEMS

Travelers and travel providers are paying much more attention to the effects that waste has on the environment, from plastic in the oceans to problems with waste management.

The plastic straw ban is a start, but as a traveler, you can bring your own items with you to cut down on the amount of waste you generate. Stock up on reusable items like straws, cutlery, cups, shopping bags, and containers to use while you travel. It's also best to bring your own toiletries rather than use the hotel's supply to cut down on the number of small plastic bottles that are disposed of.

Anything you can bring along that will decrease the amount of waste you generate is a good thing.

AVOID OVERTOURISTED AREAS

Imagine if your hometown became swamped with visitors overnight, with crowded restaurants, opportunistic businesses, and a shortage of affordable housing making life as you knew it impossible. For locals living in overtouristed places, this is what life is like every day.

There are so many negative consequences to overtourism, it's hard to know where to start. Consider venturing to a place that hasn't been overrun with visitors at the expense of the quality of life of the resident

BUY LOCAL SOUVENIRS

Just because a souvenir bears the name of the place you're visiting doesn't mean it was made there. Ask vendors to confirm whether something you have your eye on was made locally. Even better, try to find a local artisan who makes a living from providing such keepsakes. Chances are you'll be much more impressed with the quality.

CHOOSE ETHICAL DESTINATIONS

Embracing responsible and socially responsible tourism is about more than choosing the right accommodations, restaurants, and activities. Sometimes it means zeroing in on the **right destination** – one that goes above and beyond to share its treasures responsibly, in ways that nourish the community and environment.

Every year, nonprofit organization Ethical Traveler publishes a top ten list of ethical destinations that they've determined "have improved the most in terms of promoting human rights, preserving the environment, and supporting social welfare—all while creating a lively, community-based tourism industry."

For 2020, that list includes Armenia, Cabo Verde, Costa Rica, Dominica, Jamaica, Mongolia, Palau, The Gambia, Trinidad and Tobago, and Uruguay. Still deciding where to go for your next vacation? This list is a great place to start.

AVOID FLIGHT TRANSFERS

Those dirt-cheap short hops from point A to point B can be tempting, especially if you're trying to cover a lot of ground during your trip. But according to reports from the Cambridge Institute for Sustainability Leadership, around 5% of global greenhouse gas emissions are attributable to tourism.

Cutting down on flying can help reduce this number a lot. Consider overland options like public transit, trains, or local tourism companies committed to environmentally friendly transit. Getting around by foot or bicycle is another great option.

LOOK FOR LOCAL TOUR GUIDES

Travel is all about connecting with people and cultures, and there's no better way to acquaint yourself with a destination and its people than hiring a local tour guide. You'll feel good supporting this person's venture while getting a more authentic, in-depth look at the destination.

A walking tour is even better – you'll take transport out of the equation and get to spend more time fully immersed in the area. Not sure how to go about finding a good guide? A responsible travel advisor in Myght's network can point you in the right direction.

Ready to explore your options for finding responsible travel advisors? Connect with one of our vetted **responsible travel advisors**.

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