

SAGE encourages your group to travel lightly on the planet. We offer ways to be respectful of and responsible toward local culture, communities and the environment.

From Lonely Planet (an excellent source for guide books):

“Today, more than ever, we're utterly convinced of the incredible importance of travel. It's only through traveling, through meeting people that we begin to understand that we're all sharing this world. We are all coming along for the ride, despite the barriers which governments, religions and economic and political beliefs often seem to build up between us.”

While traveling provides unmatched experiences, we need to be aware that the choices we make have an impact. Travel not only impacts your life, but the lives of those in the locations you explore.

While planning and throughout your travels, consider abiding by the following Credo of the Peaceful Traveler, from the International Institute for Peace through Tourism: (<http://www.iipt.org/credo.html>.)

Grateful for the opportunity to travel and experience the world and because peace begins with the individual, I affirm my personal responsibility and commitment to:

- *Journey with an open mind and gentle heart*
- *Accept with grace and gratitude the diversity I encounter*
- *Revere and protect the natural environment which sustains all life*
 - *Appreciate all cultures I discover*
 - *Respect and thank my hosts for their welcome*
 - *Offer my hand in friendship to everyone I meet*
- *Support travel services that share these views and act upon them and,*
- *By my spirit, words and actions, encourage others to travel the world in peace*

Before and during your journey, consider the following ways to become a responsible traveler:

Cultural Awareness:

- Research the area you intend to visit, but don't rely entirely on guide books:
 - If possible discuss the culture with those who have previously visited or are from the area. Once you have arrived, talk to locals and observe their way of life to see what is respectful and appropriate.
 - Try to find out about local customs; make note of how these customs are different from your own and why that may be.
- Key issues to be conscious of:

- Religion: What are the main religions in the area? What are the fundamental principles they live by? Religion is often a good indicator of what is acceptable in terms of clothing, dress and social interaction.
- Holidays: What are the major holidays celebrated? Observing holiday practices and even participating in celebratory events are great ways to experience another culture.
- Language: Which languages are spoken? Is it typical for locals to learn English in school? Try to learn some basic words in the host language; your efforts will be greatly appreciated.
- Social Interaction: How do locals say hello to one another: A handshake? A hug? A kiss on the cheek? Do these interactions depend on your gender? Do they depend on your age? Other cultures may have “personal bubbles” that differ from Americans. You may find that locals get very close to you when talking to you, or they may prefer more distance than you would anticipate.
- Dress: What is considered appropriate? Observe natives to know what is acceptable. In some countries shorts and tank tops are appropriate. However, more modest cultures might require you to wear long sleeve shirts and long pants.
- Affection in public: Handholding or kissing might be acceptable, but in some countries you will want to avoid ‘PDA’.
- Bargaining: you should bargain in the spirit of the situation, in good humor, and not as a means to save money or to compete with locals who are not purchasing these goods as souvenirs. More often than not, you come from a household that on average earns much more than the locals you are interacting with. A dollar is likely worth more to them than to you.
- Begging: you should carefully evaluate requests. As a rule of thumb avoid giving money to beggars. If you do want to help locals out, you should instead donate to local charities, shop at local stores and eat at local restaurants. You’ll be helping them out in a better way and you’ll experience the culture more fully.

Community Respect:

- Tourism inevitably upsets the natural balance of a community. International attention and companies have the potential to degrade the tradition and character of a community and it is important that you do not play a part in the potential collapse of the areas you visit.
- Does the community actually gain from your visit? Has their way of life turned into a tourist attraction? Is your visit helping to maintain their traditions and improve their quality of life? Are you forgetting that the photo you may snap on the street may be capturing poverty, not beauty? Try to remain grounded throughout your travels and keep the local community’s best interests at heart.

- SAGE's commitment to employment of local guides helps ensure that you will be learning local culture, tradition and customs.
- While in foreign communities a good rule of thumb is to always be polite and respectful. American customs and ways of interacting may be offensive.
- Always ask before taking photos of locals.

Environmental Kindness:

- Previously pristine and undisturbed ecosystems, which have evolved over thousands of years are experiencing a major influx of visitors and damaging activities. It is crucial that we act responsibly within these environments to protect the delicate flora and fauna, which are home to thousands of species. As a responsible traveler it should be your goal to enhance the natural integrity of the area.
- Try to conserve energy and water while you travel:
 - Don't leave the tap running
 - Use biodegradable soap or detergent
 - Don't litter; ask around for a bin or if possible a recycling bin
 - Re-wear your clothes to avoid wasting energy, water and time. It is a luxury of the United States that we wash our clothes after every wear, despite the item's need to be washed.
- Within a natural area, stick to marked paths and do not disturb your surroundings.
- Take advantage of walking, biking, or public transportation as much as possible. You will not only experience local daily travel and get the chance to interact with natives, but you also will reduce your environmental impact.
- Additional ways to be kind to the environment in your daily life can be found on our [carbon offsets page](#).

Additional Suggestions:

- Responsible traveling extends beyond your trip. Upon returning home, tell family and friends about your experiences:
 - What surprised you, what made you smile, what made you sad? What do you wish you could change? What do you hope never changes?
 - Encourage your friends and family to also travel responsibly.
- Consider keeping a blog or a journal throughout your trip and make note of ways to be responsible toward and respectful of the local community and environment.
- Look for organization, programs and projects to contribute your time, your voice and your knowledge to continue to support the causes you feel strongly about after having experienced them first-hand.