

Inkaterra | FamilyTravel.org | 22 August 2017 | VPM: 12,000



FAMILY TRAVEL AND RESPONSIBLE TOURISM

POSTED ON AUGUST 22, 2017 · WRITTEN BY ETHAN GELBER

"The younger that one becomes aware of the importance of preserving our delicate planet, the more involved and dedicated they become in their life," says Claire André de Cerff, the research and development manager at Inkaterra, a collection of properties at the forefront of ecotourism and sustainable development in Peru.



Learning about marine life in Fig. Photo courtesy of Tourism Fig.

The quote above cuts to the quick of a topic all too often mired in industry jargon and politics. Many, many travelers have no idea what "responsible tourism" means or why it should be paired with family travel. Nor do they care how it dovetails with associated concepts like "sustainable travel," "impact travel," "transformational travel," or even old-school "ecotourism." Academics and niche-market tour operators are known to quibble about this stuff, but you and other travelers should not need to.

Far more important to all of us, especially adults traveling with children, should be what underpins a legitimate, gibberish-free appeal: that as more and more of us hit the road, especially family groups of two or sometimes three generations, it behooves older generations to unselfishly share with the young not only the majesty of today's world but the critical skills needed to preserve it for tomorrow. So that in future years, those youngsters can wonder at the same majesty with their kids and grandkids.

We do this by taking responsibility for our actions as travelers.

In other words, "Families should embrace responsible travel because it's a simple way to show their kids — the world's future — that the planet needs a hand," advises Stephanie Sheehy, General Manager of Il Viaggio Travel, a tour operator based in Costa Rica and certified with level 4 (of 5) sustainability according to Costa Rican criteria.

Fortunately, it really is simple, as Sheehy and a group of travel experts have made clear in <u>How to Be a Responsible</u> <u>Family Travel Champion: Top Tips</u>. Now we just need to act, especially given the pressing environmental, cultural, social and political problems we face as a planet.

"With 2017 being the United Nations-declared International Year for Sustainable Tourism for Development, we are hoping that this will increase the overall awareness of the environmental, economic and social impact of travelers," remarks Jonathan Reap, the PR manager in North America for <u>Tourism Fiji</u>, the Fijian government's tourism marketing arm.

So am I. So are a lot of people. So are many traveling families and the businesses that support them. That's the reason for this article: a collection of reasons and arguments that we hope will convince everyone to engage in more responsible family travel.

Responsible Travel Is Better for the Environment

"Travel, like medicine, should begin with the principle of 'first, do no harm,'" counsels Bryan Jáuregui, Co-founder of Todos Santos Eco Adventures, a leading adventure travel companies in the Baja peninsula.



As I once optimistically wrote in an <u>earlier piece about responsible travel</u>: "Objecting to the sustainable use of resources or equitable sharing of profits with local providers would be like lobbying against kindness." As travelers, or at any other time in our lives, why would any of us choose the path of harm, especially once we understand the true nature of the choices available to us?

But that's the kicker isn't it? Just how well are we able to make informed choices when we assess how much two different travel options impact the environment when we travel? On a gut level, we know we're not always pushing down the right paths, in part because we don't always know what the best and most responsible actions are within the budgets we set for ourselves.

Luckily, we have access to an ever-growing roster of companies actively creating and marketing tours, hotels and experiences that embrace environmental awareness and nature conservation. These companies are guided by a belief "that

responsible tourism plays a major role in helping people to enjoy, experience and connect with the amazing natural environments in which we live," observes Sonja Jones, Content Marketing Manager for <u>Wilderness Scotland</u>, an adventure travel company specializing in journeys and wilderness experiences in Scotland.

This is often for bluntly altruistic reasons:

"It feels great to leave a place better than it was before you arrived," notes Angela Pierson of <u>Wallace Pierson Travel</u>, a family-run travel agency.

"We are committed to making the world a better place," emphasizes Rafa Mayer, the founder and CEO of <u>Say Hueque</u>, which specializes in customized tours for independent travelers in Argentina and Chile.

"Responsible travel is essential to the longevity of a travel destination," says Ruben Pachon, Content Manager of <u>Sandos Hotels & Resorts</u>, all-inclusive lodgings that are differentiated, innovative and sustainable.

But do the motivations matter, when it's the actions and the results that count?

That is all the more reason why it is incumbent upon us, the travelers, to "make sure that the operator is reputable and engaging in true conservation for the benefit of the place/habitat/wildlife and not just paying lip service to make a buck and potentially harming the place/wildlife they are purporting to protect," resolves Bryan Jáuregui of Todos Santos Eco Adventures.



Orphaned elephants at feeding time at a facility where tourist donations make all the difference. Photo courtesy of Elevate Destinations

Responsible Travel Is Better for Locals

Sandra Desautels, Director of Marketing for <u>Elevate Destinations</u>, whose trips benefit local communities and conservation, and are designed to help connect with people and projects that matter, tells us that "Responsible travel must respect the people who are our hosts, their culture and the places we visit."

Unfortunately, as travelers, we are mostly reflexively more concerned with our own entertainment and satisfaction than we are alert to how that singular focus affects the locals who host us in their communities.

Most poignantly, in pursuit of travel satisfaction, travelers spend "high sums of money. But what is left to the community? In most cases nothing," laments Fernando Jiménez D., Experience and Sustainability Manager, Arenas del Mar Beachfront & Rainforest Resort, part of the <u>Cayuga Collection</u>.

That is not necessarily the fault of travelers. Tourism today is structured in such a way that the huge share of tourism money leaks away from local communities. There are, however, proactive ways that travelers and mindful tourism businesses can ensure that the financial proceeds of tourism are apportioned more fairly.

"It's important that we give back, and we always invite our clients to partake in that initiative," shares Rafa Mayer of Say Hueque.

After all, asks Mike Wang, Director of Sales for <u>Travelex Insurance Services</u>, a leader in providing travel insurance, if "Travel is a way to experience life through the lives of the people in the community," shouldn't the rewards return largely and directly to the community?

I like to think of it as some form of karma, especially across generations.

"Traveling responsibly has a ripple effect and demonstrates the value of respecting others and appreciating the beautiful natural and cultural assets of our planet," follows up Sandra Desautels of Elevate Destinations.

You may not be around for your kids to thank you, or for the children of the people you visit today to acknowledge how your few thoughtful actions altered the courses of their lives, but that should never be a reason not to do the right thing.



Kids learning about nature on a trail in Peru. Photo courtesy of Inkaterra

Responsible Travel Is Better for You (the Visitor)

"The concept of visiting an area and coming prepared to leave it a better place ecologically, culturally and economically, while taking away memories of having supported conservation and been part of the community itself, is a rewarding and lasting experience for young and old," suggests Guillermo Mulder, Experience and Sustainability Manager at Lapa Rios Lodge, part of the Cayuga Collection of small, sustainable luxury hotels, resorts and eco-lodges in Latin America.

As mentioned above, travelers are often inherently selfish. While on holiday, they are focused on their own enjoyment. But there is a way to expand one's sense of enjoyment to include the satisfaction of altruistic acts and responsible behavior, "thereby building cultural bridges and fostering global citizens," points out Jennifer Spatz, Founder, Global Family Travels, which creates service learning tours for families that also directly improve the lives of people in the communities they visit.

It's a win-win exercise that ensures both the integrity of host communities around the world, especially in developing countries, and the reward for being a sensitive, responsible behavior. And, of course, the knowledge that you are teaching your kids how to be good, upstanding people.

It is a reminder of two important things:

First, it goes to the heart of the old bromide that doing good makes you feel good. Thankfully, it's true. "Responsible travel practices will often lead to a more pleasurable and rewarding vacation experience," comments Jonathan Reap of Tourism Fiji.

Second, it confirms that "responsible travel is a learning opportunity for the whole family," says Fernando Jiménez D. of Arenas del Mar Beachfront & Rainforest Resort.



This is worth preserving, isn't it? The Perito Moreno Glacier in Argentina. Photo courtesy of Say Hueque

What Is There to Lose?

"I believe travel, especially international, by default encompasses responsibility. For starters, by exposing voyagers to other cultures, travel creates more tolerant, educated and open-minded individuals, therefore creating a better world one traveler at a time," opines Enrique M. Velasco, Director of Coltur, a Peru-based travel company focused on custom-made travel experiences.

That is certainly true. A traveler's decision to leave his or her comfort zone and discover something new — and to do so with children and introduce them to different ideas and influences — is already a bold step in the right direction. But there is still a lot more to travel, which is what *responsible* travel is all about.

"Our aim is for travelers to come away with a better understanding of natural resources, and the conservation of habitat and species, while highlighting social issues in addition to sightseeing and having fun together as a family," argues Sandra Desautels of Elevate Destinations.

However, traveling families have to be willing accomplices for this kind of travel to make a difference. After reading all of this, you may decide that it isn't quite your flavor of travel, which runs more to the sun, sand and surf experience. To which I ask, what is there to lose by being a little more conscientious?

The answer, of course, is: the purity of the air we breath and the water we drink, the vitality of the plants and animals around us, the survival of the cultures and languages that fascinate us, the longevity of the traditions and histories that excite our children, and a world through which our children can move as happily and freely as we do today.

Which brings us right back to where we started, with Inkaterra's Claire André de Cerff's note that children need to be informed travelers too so that they can make enlightened decisions about their future. Here she is with a logical conclusion: "It is important for children to learn to respect the natural world at an early age so as to be a part of the movement to save it for future generations."

That's family travel and responsible travel. That's responsible family travel.



In Their Own Words

The 14 experts who shared their thoughts with me have all been introduced above, but what follows below is more of what they had to say about family travel and responsible travel.

HOW DOES RESPONSIBLE FAMILY TRAVEL HELP THE ENVIRONMENT?

"We believe that responsible tourism plays a major role in helping people to enjoy, experience and connect with the amazing natural environments in which we live. It is our hope that connecting to wild places will inspire all of us to greatly value the natural world and to embrace a more sustainable way of living.

For many of our family trips the tour's activities are designed around achieving the John Muir Award – an initiative by the John Muir Trust that encourages young people from all backgrounds to connect with, enjoy, and care for wild places. To achieve the award they complete a four-part conversation challenge: Discover, Explore, Conserve and Share.

We also impress on our guests and guides to Leave No Trace. And we apply a voluntary conservation contribution scheme of £5 on each booking.

- Sonja Jones of Wilderness Scotland

In order to maintain our idyllic surroundings and remain attractive to tourists, it's vital that we care for our ecosystems and support our local community, and give our guests the resources to do the same.

- Ruben Pachon of Sandos Hotels & Resorts

We put together experiences that demonstrate our commitment to conservation initiatives – whether that's protecting habitat, water conservation or championing the survival of a particular species. Our aim is for travelers to come away with a better understanding of natural resources, and the conservation of habitat and species, while highlighting social issues in addition to sightseeing and having fun together as a family.

— Sandra Desautels of Elevate Destinations

We only work with well-established, reputable conservation groups that are run by qualified, dedicated individuals. Poorly-run programs can actually traumatize young travelers. For example, in some poorly-managed sea turtle rescue operations, people are not given proper instructions on how to safely work with the turtles, with the result that hatchlings sometimes get stepped on or even eaten by pets that should not be on the beach. We work with groups that have excellent techniques in place that protect both the turtles and the humans trying to help them. This positive interaction gives the whole family a strong connection to the turtles and an interest in learning about the threats they are facing and how they can modify their own behaviors to help the turtles. For example, plastic straws are one of the key environmental threats to sea turtles and simply refusing to use them can have a hugely positive influence on the sea turtle's habitat. This makes the family members more responsible citizens of the planet in general.

— Bryan Jáuregui of Todos Santos Eco Adventures

Our hotels are defined by their eco-friendly design inspired by traditional architecture and built with native materials, in harmony with the environment. Our philosophy is that we should leave the natural world as we found it — creating the least carbon footprint as possible. It is important for children to learn to respect the natural world at an early age so as to be a part of the movement to save it for future generations.

— Claire André de Cerff of Inkaterra

On every itinerary, we include visits to national parks where our specialized guides talk about the unique aspects of the ecosystems, the biodiversity, conservation, flora and fauna.

— Stephanie Sheehy of Il Viaggio Travel

HOW DOES RESPONSIBLE FAMILY TRAVEL HELP LOCAL COMMUNITIES?

At Arenas del Mar, we have many opportunities to support the talent of the area, and we believe that this is a very good way to practice responsible tourism. This is where cultural events, such as plays and dance, as well as local artisans, can show their skills to generate a constant income and have a better quality of life. Small farms can be seen benefiting from a tourism that emphasizes the culture of a place that is visited and not only its natural beauties.

— Fernando Jiménez D. of Arenas del Mar, a property in the Cayuga Collection

We believe that responsible travel should allow for authentic engagement and collaboration with the communities we visit, and to understand and support their needs by creating inclusive and equitable economic opportunities that still preserves their culture. Responsible travel must respect the people who are our hosts, their culture and the places we visit.

Both parties have an opportunity to make a difference together on local service projects aimed at improving the lives of people in the very communities we visit. Whether it is supporting a community conservation and educational project in Zimbabwe, building a soccer field in Nicaragua or working at a Panda Preserve in China, we provide plenty of age-appropriate ways for everyone in the family to give back.

— Jennifer Spatz of Global Family Travels

We prioritize using in-country partners and lodges that are committed to reducing waste and pollution in their operations. We prefer to work with lodges that hire and train local staff and benefit local communities in various ways – perhaps through sponsoring local schools, health clinics, or well-water projects. For example, we have a South Africa itinerary where all the lodges are Fair Trade Certified and the touring activities include time spent with beneficial, local social projects.

— Sandra Desautels of Elevate Destinations

Inkaterra has been at the forefront of ecotourism and sustainable development in Peru since 1975, spending the past four decades dedicated to authentic travel experiences, aiming to preserve biodiversity and local cultures.

- Claire André de Cerff of Inkaterra

We support owner-managed accommodations across Scotland and especially in remote communities. We are committed to engaging local businesses throughout our entire operation and ensuring that the economic benefits are distributed in an equitable way. This helps protect and preserve local culture and enhances our client's overall experience.

— Sonja Jones of Wilderness Scotland

HOW DOES RESPONSIBLE FAMILY TRAVEL HELP TRAVELERS?

The Satisfaction of Doing the Right Thing

Everyone has the power to make an impact on the destinations they visit, just as much as the destinations are likely to leave an impact on them. By sharing a mutual respect and practicing responsible travel, everybody wins.

— Rafa Mayer, Say Hueque

We feel that by setting the stage about how learning and interacting and sharing with the people you visit, families embrace the experiences and see a completely different side to travel. It feels great to leave a place better than it was

before you arrived.

— Angela Pierson of Wallace Pierson Travel

We like that families that visit us not only enjoy the abundant wildlife, but take with them a memory of having supported conservation and having been part of the community itself. [This happens] through activities like planting a tree in the recovering rainforest, learning about the intricacies of the rainforest and the basics of conservation by a local guide, personally handing over a donation to a school or just joining the local kids in a soccer game.

— Guillermo Mulder of Lapa Rios Lodge, a property in the Cayuga Collection

A responsible trip is often synonymous with a great cultural adventure. It is really giving yourself the possibility of knowing another culture, as well of knowing the efforts that each place makes in favor of the conservation.

— Fernando Jiménez D. of Arenas del Mar Beachfront & Rainforest Resort, a property in the Cayuga Collection

Both my wife and I were born into immigrant families, which meant traveling to different parts of the world to see relatives. So we know first hand the transformational effect travel has had on us. When we travel with our kids, and take them out of their comfort zone, we both can literally "see" how their minds expand.

In the case of my wife, she likes to expose [our kids] to cultures that are as non-Western as possible, and teach them how being culturally different does not mean better or worse, and about being respectful of and embracing those differences as a way to enrich everybody's lives.

— Enrique M. Velasco of Coltur

Traveling responsibly has a ripple effect and demonstrates the value of respecting others and appreciating the beautiful natural and cultural assets of our planet. It's impactful for kids to see their parents make enlightened decisions about how time and money is spent on a family vacation – whether that is highlighting water conservation and habitat restoration or providing access to education for underserved children.

For many families, their children's requests are the impetus for a trip that gives back in some way. Parents have reported that their children are eager to include volunteering or giving back to people or wildlife in some capacity. Families are increasingly interested in engaging with other cultures and exploring outside of their own cultural and economic bubbles.

— Sandra Desautels, Elevate Destinations

Our travelers also have the chance to become immersed in the culture of the destination by experiencing daily life with locals. Many of our trips include a homestay with a local family, or the opportunity to cook a meal with our hosts to learn about their cultural traditions. These immersive experiences allow participants to learn from each other in ways that will open their hearts and minds to a greater awareness that we are all connected.

— Jennifer Spatz of Global Family Travels

Once they have embraced responsible tourism, families will leave a lighter footprint on the destination and leave with a deeper understanding of the country and its people which is beneficial to all parties. Additionally, responsible travel practices will often lead to a more pleasurable and rewarding vacation experience. In Fiji, these experiences are right at our visitors' fingertips. With constant interaction with the Fijians, families have the opportunity to learn, share and educate one another on their respective history and culture. By the end of their vacation they will feel very much at home, and will inevitably be somewhat melancholy to say goodbye to their extended family in Fiji.

— Jonathan Reap of Tourism Fiji

Supplementing Education with Real-World Learning

As parents, we "entrust" a significant portion of our children's education to the school we have chosen for them. This translates in us allowing others to educate our kids in areas that are not our expertise (history, science, etc) but, by default, the values of the school and its teachers are embedded in such education. Since nowadays both parents work, we have few occasions to educate our children in more "soft" skills, such as our particular family's values, what we consider important, etc, etc.

Family travel is a tremendous opportunity for families to come together and have uninterrupted time for themselves and strengthen family bonds. But it also created an invaluable opportunity for parents to pass on to their children the part

of the education they don't get at school (such family values) or to complement their education in areas that we believe they're not being exposed to at school / we would like to dig deeper than what they get at school, and, as children grow older, also factor in their interests and therefore share such interests.

— Enrique M. Velasco of Coltur

I have said for years that if you took two high school graduates and sent one off for a four year degree, and the other to travel and truly experience the world for four years, you would have a hard time deciding which one had a better education and you may well choose the traveler!

- Angela Pierson of Wallace Pierson Travel

How do you act responsibly and do no harm? In Todos Santos we help families do that by communicating to them the importance of not only having a total blast in the pristine natural beauty of Baja – which is extremely important – but of preserving the natural beauty and culture for all generations to come.

In our hotel, tent camp and on all of our adventures we do our best to set the example for conservation and preservation, teaching as we go, so that visiting families can live responsible travel and incorporate these practices into their home lives and other travel that we do.

— Bryan Jáuregui of Todos Santos Eco Adventures

We believe that families should embrace responsible travel as a way to become more engaged with the world, by connecting with others who may be different than us, yet have the same human needs. We believe the most powerful way to learn is through first-hand experience, by allowing the country and its people to be our teachers.

— Jennifer Spatz of Global Family Travels

Families should embrace responsible travel in order to pass our knowledge on to future generations. Children who begin traveling responsibly from a young age will be able to easily identify the most sustainable destinations and hotels for their future travels.

- Ruben Pachon of Sandos Hotels & Resorts

People attracted to responsible travel are generally also people looking for a different, unique, life-changing experience. Responsible travel means that certain things won't be available at your destination of choice, but a chance on a lasting memory, sense of belonging and, in the case of families, for parents to see their children connect and learn from different cultures.

— Guillermo Mulder of Lapa Rios Lodge, part of the Cayuga Collection

Since travel is an amazing learning experience in itself, it allows a great opportunity to also incorporate responsible and sustainable practices as part of that experience. Sustainability starts at home, and should be incorporated in all aspects of life, when possible.

— Claire André de Cerff of Inkaterra

The Fijian people have a very rich history of living off of the land and have for thousands of years; with their own sustainable practices in farming, fishing and agriculture. Offering tours to visit a local village, participating in a kava ceremony or simply kicking back and watching Fijian warriors perform leave visitors with a deeper knowledge of the Fijian people, their beautiful way of life and an innate understanding of why this is where happiness lives.

— Jonathan Reap of Tourism Fiji

We include an interactive workshop, which can be hand-painting oxcarts with local artisan, learning how mascaradas are made or lessons on how to cook tortillas. If a family wants to interact with local families, we can have them visit a home where they can share a meal or visit a local school and make a donation. These are some examples of how we include unique responsible activities that help families bond, learn about and experience the unique real Costa Rica. By the way its important to mention that the selection of each activity is based on the members ages, limitations, needs and expectations.

— Stephanie Sheehy of Il Viaggio Travel

As parents, my wife and I take it as an obligation to educate our three kids to the best of our abilities, and we both believe that travel is as important a classroom as the school we have chosen for them. Responsible travel provides an unparalleled opportunity for parents to pass along values, interests and ways of seeing things that they feel their children are either not getting enough of at school or subjects they would their kids to dig deeper into.

— Enrique M. Velasco of Coltur

Making Travel About Meaningful People-to-People Connections

In partnership with community-based tour operators and local non-profit organizations, Global Family Travels creates service learning tours for families featuring a unique mix of cultural and educational activities, home stays and participation in local service projects aimed at directly improving the lives of people in the communities we visit. We align many of our trips with the United Nations Sustainable development goals.

— Jennifer Spatz of Global Family Travels

Working with local partners means our groups always receive a warm welcome from the locals wherever we go.

— Sonja Jones of Wilderness Scotland

Our philosophy of responsible family travel is to take the ideology of being socially and culturally aware when you travel and to apply this to family experiences that benefit both the travelers and the travel providers. We do this through creating a focus on educational, sustainable travel practices and activities offering firsthand authentic experiences with the Fijian people, their culture and unique way of life.

— Jonathan Reap of Tourism Fiji

I was telling some parents at our school about a conversation with my kids (ages 5 and 7) about how fortunate we are. When the kids asked why, I explained how safe our home is and we eat/drink anytime we want, but some people might not eat one meal every day. I then explained that TRAVEL helps! When asked why, I said because we can *say* "someone, somewhere doesn't get to eat everyday," but when we travel and meet those people, we know what will help them in a sustainable way and can send them water filtration systems or animals that help them for a long tine.

— Angela Pierson of Wallace Pierson Travel

Many of our guests participate in some sort of community engagement, cultural exchange or even volunteering with a conservation activity through a local nonprofit. It's common for our travelers to come back home wanting to provide continued support to a cause through sponsorship or some sort of economic or knowledge contribution.

— Sandra Desautels of Elevate Destinations

Our internal philanthropy committee regularly partners with leading non-profits to give back to our local community, and we also arrange voluntourism opportunities for those interested. For example, we recently arranged a weekend trip for a group of visiting students from Texas to volunteer at a local elementary school where they helped repaint the building, practice English with the children and clean the grounds.

- Rafa Mayer of Say Hueque

We only offer cultural activities that provide opportunities for true interaction, as opposed to simply observing. Spending a night on a ranch with a ranch family that teaches the visiting family skills like leather working, cheese making and tortilla making – and of course all about their way of life. Spending an afternoon working as an English-language mentor with young school children, working with them one-on-one to give the kids an opportunity to practice with a native speaker of English. Working with a community service group to help their members build greenhouses, clean parks, learn about composting and so forth. This type of active, hands-on interaction with local people gives visiting families a true feeling for the local population and at least some small understanding of the culture that they can't get just from looking at a ranch or seeing kids in a school play.

— Bryan Jáuregui of Todos Santos Eco Adventures

AS ALWAYS, RESEARCH IS VITAL TO FINDING LEGITIMATE RESPONSIBLE FAMILY TRAVEL PARTNERS

It is very important to do research before booking a trip or an experience to make sure that the operator is reputable and engaging in true conservation for the benefit of the place/habitat/wildlife and not just paying lip service to make a buck and potentially harming the place/wildlife they are purporting to protect. This is easy to do and there are a big number of truly great operators and conservation groups to choose from.

- Bryan Jáuregui of Todos Santos Eco Adventures

Families should not only think about sustainable responsible travel as rural tourism. Because we have five-star boutique green services available all around the country. So no matter the budget, the needs and expectations, any trip in Costa Rica can be responsible.

— Stephanie Sheehy of Il Viaggio Travel

The most important thing is to seek to know the place to be visited very well. That is why, when choosing the activities that can be carried out, take into account that they are sustainable and that do not affect ecosystems.

— Fernando Jiménez D. of Arenas del Mar Beachfront & Rainforest Resort, a property in the Cayuga Collection

Travel is a way to experience life through the lives of the people in the community. Doing your due diligence by protecting your family while traveling from things such as medical emergencies and delays helps the whole family enjoy the trip.

— Mike Wang of Travelex Insurance Services



Inkaterra

- * Sustainability Policy
- * Family Experience

Visit here for more about Inkaterra.

Link to Story: http://familytravel.org/family-travel-and-responsible-tourism/