

## What In The World Is Geotourism?

Let's make one thing clear from the start....Geotourism is not taking a vacation in your Geo Metro, not that there is anything wrong with that. No, what we are really talking about here is a new movement or awareness on the part of many travelers that could have far reaching affects for the travel industry. So let's define what this is all about.

**Geotourism** incorporates the concept of sustainable tourism--that destinations should remain unspoiled for future generations--while allowing for enhancement that protects the character of the locale.

**Closely related to this is the term "ecotourism." Are they the same?** Not quite.

**Ecotourism** focuses on the ecology of an area meaning the local culture and activities that relate to the preservation and conservation of flora and fauna. The ecologically and socially conscious are attracted to this type of travel as they promote recycling, energy efficiency, water conservation and finding new ways to live on the planet.

**So how is that different from "geotourism?"**

Sustainable tourism...that is the key. So what does that mean? Beyond what is stated above, it also encompasses the belief that the character of a locale must be protected. One of the principles shared by geotourism and ecotourism is that tourist revenue can promote conservation. So while the two "ism's" share some characteristics, geotourism is actually broader in scope. It extends beyond nature travel to encompass culture and history as well as environmental concerns. Today more than 154 million American adults can be described as travelers having taken at least one trip 50 miles or more, one way, away from home and/or including one night or more away from home, within the past three years. What has become evident to many in the travel industry is that consumers are seeking out uniquely different experiences when they travel, and have a set of possibly previously unspoken requirements of destinations, tour companies, lodging businesses and even transportation. What has evolved in recent times is consumer awareness and concern that destinations are morphing into homogenous places that offer like experiences.

Environmental issues have evolved into more basic concerns for popular destinations such as the National Parks, which are affected by simply too many visitors. Not only are the parks sustaining irreversible environmental damage, but the quality of the visitor experience is suffering at the same time. So here is where sustainable tourism enters the picture. It seeks to preserve, and not damage, the destination through good stewardship. By applying limits and good management practices, natural habitats, scenic appeal, heritage sites and local culture can all be sustained. Geotourism adds to sustainable tourism by building on the geographical character of a place in order to emphasize its distinctiveness to the benefit of both the visitor and resident.

**Ok, this is all very nice, but what is the bottom line?** It all sounds good, but who really benefits from all this? The simple answer is ...everybody. Communities and their residents benefit by the work they do to discover their own heritage and how to make it appealing to visitors. When the community understands the beneficial role of geotourism, it becomes an incentive for wise destination stewardship. Tourists benefit as local people develop pride and

skill in showing off their locale, tourists get more out of their visit. Destination-savvy travelers seek out businesses that emphasize the character of the locale. Tourism revenues in turn raise the local perceived value of those assets. So there you have it. An increasing trend in travel that should lead to better travel experiences not only for us, but for generations to come.

About the Author:

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**"Responsible travel suits life's curious adventurers and enthusiasts".**

### **Getting more out of your holiday**

Responsible travel is about bringing you closer to local cultures and environments by involving local people in tourism. It's about doing this in a fair way that helps ensure that they will give you an even warmer welcome. For example, a local guide from the destination will open your eyes to their cultures and ways of life far better than an expat guide could ever do – they will also earn a much needed income from you.

The responsible traveller prefers smaller groups, and to meet some local people (as well as fellow travellers) rather than be surrounded by 1000's of people from back home. They don't like being herded about in a large crowd like nameless faces and understand that travelling in smaller groups makes local people and cultures more accessible.

The responsible travellers wants to get a little bit more out of their travels, and to give a little bit back to the special places and people that they encounter. They want deeper and more real travel experiences. The responsible traveller values authenticity – experiences integral to local people's traditions, cultures and rituals - rather than those created for tourism, or those whose existing meanings and uses have become lost as they have been packaged up for tourism. No more 'Greek nights' in resorts with the only Greek people there to serve food please!

At the same time the responsible traveller understands that some cultural experiences are best kept private, and that their visit would be an intrusion. They believe that travelling with respect earns them respect.

### **Rediscovering nature**

Responsible travel is about re-discovering how to experience nature and to be in it, feeling it, smelling it and learning about it rather than just looking at it. Through this they replenish their souls. They would rather get out on foot than sit in a big bus, and are determined to leave no physical evidence of their visit but their footprints.

The responsible traveller understands local peoples relationship with environments, and that income from tourism can be a powerful incentive for conservation. The responsible traveller values diversity – diversity of people, cultures and environments.

They believe that they can grow as individuals through these experiences, and that their trip can make a positive contribution towards conserving global diversity.

Above all else the responsible traveller wants to cut loose and experience their world. The experienced responsible traveller knows how difficult it can be to do the right thing – and is humble and learns from their mistakes. Whether they travel independently, or through a leading responsible travel operator, the responsible traveller makes and experiences a difference.