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# *SUSTAINABLE TOURISM FROM A-TO-Z*

50+ sustainable tourism terms you  
should know and how to use them



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# *INTRODUCTION*

What's the difference between sustainable tourism and regenerative tourism? Is this product sustainable or eco-friendly? What is external certification and why does it matter?

Conversations about sustainability can be confusing, and that's especially true for travel and tourism! Complicated jargon can distract you from understanding the issues and impact of your travel and lead you to unintentionally make poor decisions. It's time to demystify all that terminology. Let's go!



# HOW TO USE THIS GUIDE



Think of this as your 'sustainable tourism dictionary'. This guide is a go-to resource to help you make sense of common words and phrases thrown about by industries when discussing sustainable tourism. You could also use it at home too, such as when you're trying to make conscious purchases or explain sustainability to family and friends.

As the industry evolves, and sustainability becomes a priority for consumers and businesses, it's important to understand exactly what people are talking about. This list covers lots of relevant terms you'll stumble across when planning a trip, all arranged in a handy A-to-Z format.



# TIPS FOR TALKING ABOUT SUSTAINABILITY

I know what you're thinking: "If I don't know what these terms mean, how will I be able to use them in conversation with other people". Here are our top tips for talking about sustainability.



## **No. 01 — USE EXAMPLES**

Many people will be fuzzy on terminology, so talk about specific experiences that show these concepts in practice to help with understanding. Alternatively, send them a copy of this A-to-Z guide!



## **No. 02 — CONNECT TO REAL LIFE**

Not everyone is as fanatic about travel as we are so help people understand through examples they are familiar with. Use the terms in conjunction with the news or when shopping to help people understand how the choices they make can affect people around the world. This helps make sustainability more real at home.



## **No. 03 — SPEAK WITH ACTIONS**

Practice what you preach by modelling behaviour so that people can see what responsible and sustainable travel can look like. Offset your flights. Shop consciously. Be mindful. Don't litter. Highlight just how fun sustainable tourism can be. Lead by example and others will follow.



## **No. 04 — DON'T GET PREACHY**

You might be passionate, but not everyone you talk with is as knowledgeable as you are about sustainable travel and tourism. Many people are on a journey to become more responsible and these changes don't happen overnight. Try and find shared connections and remain encouraging.

# THE GLOSSARY

## **ACCESSIBILITY**

The opportunity for everyone to enjoy travel experiences regardless of age, background, budget, and ability. Accessibility is vital for inclusivity in travel.

## **ACCREDITATION**

A process that tourism companies go through in which a third party officially recognises that a company meets certain standards. Look out for accreditations when booking a trip to ensure your hotels and tour operators meet environmental standards and keep an eye out for fake logos: that's greenwashing.

## **ANIMAL WELFARE**

Animal welfare means how an animal is coping in the conditions in which it lives. Wildlife should be left wild (heck, it's in the name) and allowed to behave as naturally as possible. Travellers should not ride, touch, or feed animals.

## **BIODEGRADABLE**

Material that can be broken down by bacteria or other living organisms into natural elements. Almost everything is biodegradable, even some plastic, though it may take these products centuries to break down entirely. This differs from compostable.

## **BIODIVERSITY**

The variety and complexity of plant and animal life. In the natural world, every ecosystem is perfectly balanced and works in harmony to contribute to our planet's overall health. Therefore, biodiversity and ecosystems should be protected

## **COMPOSTABLE.**

Compostable products are broken down in the soil to leave behind a single organic material called humus. This contains vital nutrients for plants and animals to thrive. Compostable is better than biodegradable.

## **CARBON EMISSIONS**

The release of greenhouse gases into the atmosphere. Tourism contributes to 10% of the world's total emissions, but you can reduce your carbon emissions through carbon offsetting.

## **CARBON FOOTPRINT**

The total amount of greenhouse gases produced by an individual or business usually represented in tonnes of carbon dioxide. Activities that have a large carbon footprint include flying, taking a cruise and overconsumption of animal products.

# THE GLOSSARY

## **CARBON NEUTRALITY**

When the amount of carbon released by a business is balanced through an equivalent amount of carbon removal or carbon offsetting. This is also known as having a net-zero carbon footprint.

## **CARBON OFFSETTING**

The process of compensating for carbon emissions by participating in or donating to a project that reduces greenhouse gas emissions to slow climate change. Projects can benefit local communities as well as the planet, examples include planting trees or providing fuel-economic cooking stoves to local people. Carbon offsetting is not the same as carbon removal.

## **CARBON REMOVAL**

The process of compensating for carbon emissions by actively removing carbon from the atmosphere and locking it away for decades, centuries, or millennia. This could slow, limit, or even reverse climate change.

## **CERTIFIED B CORPORATION**

Certified B Corporations are businesses that meet the highest standards. They prioritise people ...

over profit, care for our planet and are transparent with the public and the law. Accreditations from third parties show that an operator has conformed to these high standards.

## **CIRCULAR ECONOMY**

An economic system designed to eliminate waste and encourage the continued use of resources. This is a closed-loop where raw materials from traceable suppliers are used to create products. These are reused or repurposed and then broken down back into materials instead of being disposed of.

## **CLIMATE POSITIVE**

Activities that go a step beyond carbon neutrality by removing more carbon dioxide than they produce.

## **COMMUNITY TOURISM**

Experiences that focus on the communities you visit when you travel. Local people are prioritised in making decisions for their communities and tourism has a direct positive impact.

# THE GLOSSARY

## **CONSERVATION**

The care and protection of plants, animals and natural areas so they can continue to exist for future generations. This is also known as nature conservation.

## **CORPORATE SOCIAL RESPONSIBILITY**

A management concept in which companies integrate social and environmental issues into their business models. This may include carbon offsetting, giving to charity, sponsorships, paid time off for employees to volunteer, participating in fair trade practices and investing in the environment.

## **DEGRADATION**

The deterioration of the environment. This can happen in many different ways including the destruction of ecosystems or habitats, extinction of wildlife, depletion of natural resources, or reduction of biological diversity.

## **DISASTER TOURISM**

It sounds very negative, but it can be fantastically beneficial for tourists to intentionally book a trip to an area that has been affected by a natural disaster. This can help to stimulate the economy and boost tourism.

## **ECO-HOTEL**

An environmentally friendly property that demonstrates ecological sustainability and whose accommodation makes a valuable contribution to the environment or a community. Eco-hotels are usually based in a natural environment and may promote conscious activities, such as ethical wildlife tourism.

## **ECOSYSTEM**

How animals, plants and microorganisms interact with their environment. These interactions can be very specific, which is why it is important for the conservation of biodiversity.

## **ECOTOURISM**

Responsible travel to natural areas promotes conservation, has a minimal environmental impact and is socially and economically beneficial for local populations. A 'take only photographs, leave only footprints' approach to travel.

## **ENVIRONMENTALLY FRIENDLY**

Products, services, materials, and actions that do not harm the environment.

# THE GLOSSARY

## **ENVIRONMENTAL IMPACT**

The impact or consequences that the activities of an individual or community have on a natural environment.

## **ETHICAL**

### **CONSUMPTION/CONSUMERISM**

Purchasing products that are not harmful to the planet or its people.

### **ETHICAL TOURISM**

Any form of tourism that has a focus on individual people and destinations. Ethical tourism involves making conscious decisions to leave a positive impact on your destination. This term is synonymous with responsible tourism.

## **EXPLOITATION**

Treating someone or something poorly or unfairly to benefit from what is produced. Examples include destroying a forest to profit from the wood or the mistreatment of garment workers.

## **FAIR TRADE**

A global movement in which producers are paid fairly for their products. This improves social and environmental standards for producers and limits exploitation.

## **FLIGHT SHAMING**

Flygskam in Swedish. The social movement born in 2017 encouraged people not to fly due to the carbon emissions the aviation industry produce.

## **GEOTOURISM**

Tourism that sustains or enhances the distinctive geographical character of a place – its environment, heritage, aesthetics, culture, and the well-being of local people

## **GEOTAGGING**

A feature that lets users mark a geographic location on images shared through social media platforms. When something is geotagged, other people can accurately identify where a photo was taken. This can contribute to overtourism.

## **GREENHOUSE GASES**

Gases are creating a layer in the atmosphere that's wrapping the planet in a blanket, causing it to warm up. Many think of carbon dioxide (CO<sub>2</sub>) but greenhouse gases also include water vapour (H<sub>2</sub>O), methane (CH<sub>4</sub>), nitrous oxide (N<sub>2</sub>), and ozone (O<sub>3</sub>).



# THE GLOSSARY

## GREENWASHING

Exaggerating environmental credentials or sustainability practices. Activities intended to fool the consumer into believing that a company is doing more for the environment than it is.

## HOMESTAY

An accommodation that invites travellers to stay in the home of a local person/family. This is an authentic and immersive experience that has direct economic benefit to the host and others in the local community

## INDIGENOUS PEOPLE

This refers to the original people of a place. There are more than 370 million Indigenous people around the world with their own culture and heritage.

## MASS TOURISM

A large number of tourists all going to the same place at the same time. Mass tourism can lead to **overtourism**.

## NON-GOVERNMENT ORGANISATION

A non-profit organization that operates independently of any government, typically one whose purpose is to address a social, environmental or political issue...

...Examples of well-known NGOs include Greenpeace, World Wildlife Fund (WWF) and Doctors without Borders.

## OVERTOURISM

Excessive and unchecked growth of visitors in a destination that negatively and permanently impacts residents. **Mass tourism** can lead to overtourism. Think Bali, Machu Picchu or Venice.

## REGENERATIVE TOURISM

Creating the conditions for a destination to renew itself and flourish through tourism. Essentially leaving a place better than how it is found. Different to **sustainable tourism**, which simply aims to leave a place as you found it.

## RENEWABLE ENERGY

Energy generated from solar, wind, biomass, geothermal, hydropower or ocean resources. The energy doesn't release **greenhouse gases** when used and will never run out.

# THE GLOSSARY

## RESPONSIBLE TOURISM

Any form of tourism that has a focus on individual people and destinations. Responsible, conscious or mindful tourism involves making conscious decisions to leave a positive impact on your destination. This term is synonymous with **ethical tourism**. It is often used interchangeably with **sustainable tourism**, but there is a difference. Responsible tourism is about taking meaningful action to make tourism sustainable.

## RESTORATION

Returning a natural habitat or historical site to its original state. This can be done through repairing environmental damage, replanting native species and re-introducing native wildlife

## SINGLE-USE PLASTICS

Plastic products designed to be used once and then disposed of right away. These include bottles, straws, bags, and wrappers. Single-use plastics are also known as **disposable plastics**.

## Slow travel

Slow travel is a mindset and interest in more intimately getting to know a destination. It emphasizes experiencing the local culture, spending more time in a single area...

... and more thoughtfully slowing down the travel process. Slow travel can help to combat overtourism and positively impact local communities.

## SOCIAL ENTERPRISE

Organisations that put people and the planet ahead of profit. Social enterprises aim to answer the world's problems, like wildlife trafficking or lack of access to clean water. They often reinvest or donate profits to create positive and lasting social change.

## SUSTAINABILITY

The ability for something to be maintained at a certain rate or level. Sustainability means meeting our own needs without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs, for example, by using up our natural resources at a rate that can be maintained.

## SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT

Development carried out in a way that meets the needs of the present without compromising on the ability of future generations to meet their needs.

# THE GLOSSARY

## **SUSTAINABLE TRAVEL**

A huge concept that considers the current and future economic, social, and environmental impacts of travel and tourism. Also known as sustainable tourism, this method of travelling aims to provide a positive experience for the tourist whilst having a positive impact on communities and the environment.

## **TOURISM LEAKAGE**

Often, tourism revenue doesn't remain in the local economy or benefit local communities. Tourism leakage usually happens when travellers stay in or spend money at large international corporations. That's why shopping locally is so important!

## **TRAIL TOURISM**

A form of slow travel where people walk or hike trails as part of exploring a destination. This is great as it has a minimum environmental impact but can spread tourism revenue across the country.

## **UNDERTOURISM**

Deliberately heading to off-the-beaten-path destinations that benefit immensely from your tourism money.

## **VOLUNTOURISM**

A form of travel where people volunteer on projects that give back to a community. These projects often do more harm than good for local communities so care should be taken when looking to volunteer abroad.

## **WILDLIFE TOURISM**

Trips to destinations where the primary focus is on observing and interacting with local animals in their natural environments.

## **ZERO WASTE**

A philosophy to minimise waste. Being zero-waste means making every effort to reduce and reuse products, packaging, and materials so nothing is disposed of in landfills or the ocean.

# NEXT STEPS

Where do you go from here? Understanding what words and phrases mean and using them correctly is so important when discussing sustainability, whether that's in tourism or elsewhere! So go forth. Have conversations. Keep listening, keep learning, and keep pushing for better.

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This glossary was brought to you by

# Discovery

Discovery is a travel blog combining the importance of sustainable travel with awesome travel anecdotes and carefully crafted resources.

Our aim is to inspire you to get out there and see the world in all its glory. Our planet is beautiful, but it'll only stay beautiful if we take good care of it. Minimise your impact and maximise your fun.

