Ethical Travel

Tips

1. *First, do no harm.* Tourists and the tourism industry, rather than the perspectives of receiving communities, are often the driving force for travel. Be thoughtful and intentional about personal decisions you make when travelling to avoid doing harm. Befriend and speak to locals where possible. The more you understand the local community, the more you can make decisions that don’t affect them negatively. Spend some time considering how the local community may view your presence or activities. Seek advice (from locals or local partner organizations) on how to carry out your activities to avoid causing disturbance.

2. *Understand the issues.* Some consequences of tourism can include disturbing the distribution of power, or putting a stress on local organizations or institutions, for example, if visitors take more resources than they bring.

3. *Consider the unintended consequences of good intentions.* If you are working as a volunteer of some sort, be clear on how your work will be used and be able to inform people about this in a clear and concise way, without promising unrealistic results. Make sure to hand over any activities being carried out or findings, results, general knowledge, etc. to the local community, so that activities can be continued locally.

4. *Support the local industry.* When planning guided tours, transportation or accommodation, research options that support the local economy and bring much needed wealth to communities. Pack light – and buy from local entrepreneurs if necessary.

Reflective Questions (adapted from the documentary “First, Do No Harm”)

1. Does the draw of tourism mean that students go to interesting, exotic places rather than places that can best accommodate them?

2. Does focusing on the exotic aspect of placements and projects and talking about these experiences at dinner parties, undermine their value?

3. Is there anything wrong with just wanting to “see” how things are in a foreign setting?

4. Are the required local resources to support a student’s travel worth more to the local population than to the student? How will this make you feel?

5. Are the environmental costs of travel worth short-term initiatives / travel?

6. Given the cost of travel, would that money be better used directly in the host community? How can some of the cost of travel be used to benefit local communities?

7. Has any of this made you feel uncomfortable about experiences you’ve had or plan to have?
8. How may you be received into a community you are not a part of?

9. How does your own background or privilege impact your experience of travel and how others may perceive you?

10. Think about the places you are travelling to. What impact – positive or negative – could you have?

11. On your trip, consider who cleans your toilets? Where does clean water come from? Is there better food / more of it than locals eat, and why? How and when do locals benefit from tourism?

12. What is an appropriate attitude or posture when traveling?

13. How can you avoid turning your experience into a one-way street? Is simply being a witness (e.g., to poverty) enough?

**Other Useful Resources**

Learning Service has a series of videos on ethical travel and volunteerism, covering topics such as orphanage tourism, traveling through Southeast Asia, among others. [http://learningservice.info/videos/](http://learningservice.info/videos/)

Tourism Concern is a UK-based charity that campaigns for better tourism. It outlines the impact of tourism on communities in different locations and has numerous resources on how to travel ethically. You can check out their interactive map for a better understanding of the impact of tourism on the locations you are visiting. [http://www.tourismconcern.org.uk/the-issues-explained.html](http://www.tourismconcern.org.uk/the-issues-explained.html)

The Ethics of International Engagement and Service-Learning Project at the University of British Columbia offers a number of online resources for exploring the ethics of international service learning projects. [www.ethicsofisl.ubc.ca](http://www.ethicsofisl.ubc.ca)

First, Do No Harm: A Qualitative Research Documentary by Alyson and Timothy Holland that explores the ethics of global health clinical electives and volunteer projects in developing regions. [http://vimeo.com/22008886](http://vimeo.com/22008886)