

Code of ethics for responsible tour operators

Criterion 1: Respect the planet, others, and living things in all their forms

To this end, the tour operator commits to:

- Offer trips that respect the **9 planetary boundaries** and their overshoot status in 2022:

1. Climate change;
2. Biodiversity loss;
3. Land-use change;
4. Freshwater use;
5. Disruption of the nitrogen and phosphorus biochemical cycles;
6. Ocean acidification;
7. Atmospheric aerosols;
8. Ozone layer depletion;
9. Chemical pollution.

Note: tour operators and travellers have the greatest influence over the first two boundaries as well as the fourth.

- Train in the preservation of fauna, flora and all the ecosystems present in the territories covered by its offers.
- Respect every human being, both in the sending country and in the destination — their culture, traditions, religion and social practices — and not compromise the balance of host societies.
- Manage its own waste and that of its clients efficiently, and adapt this management to the destination.

Criterion 2: Offer trips consistent with responsible tourism

To this end, the tour operator commits to:

- Comply with the legislation in force, both in France and in the destination.
- Minimise its ecological footprint through its practices, the activities offered and by raising client awareness.
- Offer human-scale groups so as not to encourage mass tourism, adapting the number of participants to the type of trip. *Example: a maximum of 12 people per trip, with the following special cases when meeting local residents: 4 with a doctor, 6 with monks or religious figures, 8 with a family or for exceptional, committed trips.*
- Limit departure frequency so as to guarantee the quality of the encounters planned in the programme: no more than 5 tourists per resident per year.
- Include a significant, quantified share of cultural authenticity in its offer.
- Factor into its offer the degree of fragility of the place, its fauna, its flora and its inhabitants.
- Offer alternative destinations to those regarded as “must-sees”.
- Contribute to an immersive discovery of the territories (natural environment, local production, know-how, heritage).
- Encourage, where appropriate, the purchase of authentically local craft souvenirs, discouraging the purchase of mass-produced items from countries that do not respect human and social rights.
- Proportion the length of trips to their distance, with long-haul flights reserved for exceptional trips with a social or solidarity purpose, or linked to biodiversity protection. *Example: at a ratio of 1,000 km per 1.5 days of stay, a tour of Vietnam (14,000 km round trip) should last at least 21 days.*
- Market a programme consistent with the objectives of responsible travel, in line with the UN's 17 Sustainable Development Goals.
- Co-create its trips, not subcontract “packages” designed by others, and not build partnerships with organisations that do not meet the criteria of this code of ethics.
- Offer travellers an optional vegetarian diet.

- Offer optional local initiatives (short and one-off) that travellers can contribute to.
Example: kayaking to collect litter, helping with grape harvests, crop harvests, etc.
- Not communicate in a way that amounts to greenwashing, and refrain from: 1. diverting communication away from the real problems; 2. using fallacious arguments to justify its own economic choices; 3. spotlighting actions that remain marginal.

Criterion 3: Use the least polluting mobility possible, drawing on carbon-footprint resources — and reduce it effectively by encouraging travellers to calculate their footprint on the ADEME website

To this end, the tour operator commits to:

- Design programmes that genuinely and concretely reduce and limit travel that emits greenhouse gases (GHG), verifying that each mode of mobility used produces as little carbon dioxide as possible.
- Ensure that the chosen modes of travel respect all forms of life.
- Encourage clients to use public transport (train, coach, car-sharing) to reach the trip location whenever possible.
- Eliminate plastic consumption on-site: water bottles, wipes, straws, cutlery, etc.
- Eat local, seasonal food and avoid the food waste generated by all-you-can-eat buffets.

Criterion 4: Offer trips with positive social and solidarity-based impacts

To this end, the tour operator commits to:

- Train its travellers to respect local populations, guides, residents, etc.
- Inform its travellers about local particularities.
- Develop lasting, balanced relationships with its partners.
- Not offers promoting fun encounters or shows.

- Inform its clients of the rules to observe before any visit to a place of worship.

Criterion 5: Have trips led by qualified, certified guides

To this end, the tour operator commits to:

- Inform its clients about the quality of its guides: references, qualifications, skills, and even their names (no interchangeable guides without informing clients).
- Provide keys to understanding through mediation by specialised guides.
- Use the services of guides trained in responsible tourism, working directly with the agency selling the trip or the local receptive agency.
- Use the services of certified, insured guides where the activity requires it: mountains, heritage, sports activities, etc.
- Require guides to be present at local markets in order to inform travellers about residents' real standard of living and thus prevent price inflation.
- Rule out "independent" trips where mediation is important, as well as self-drive tours.

Criterion 6: Use responsible accommodation

To this end, the tour operator commits to:

- Favour buildings that are integrated into local life (territorial roots), human-scale, and in harmony with their environment (natural materials: wood, hemp, etc., native plantings, etc.).
- Favour accommodation centres that use renewable energy or have taken measures to limit energy consumption.
- Choose accommodation with socially responsible governance.

Criterion 7: Respect animal welfare

To this end, the tour operator commits to:

- Ensure its discovery activities do not disturb wildlife.
- Reduce its impact on wildlife and the environment.
- Support species and habitat conservation programmes.

- Rule out any activity harmful to animals (Annex 1).
- Refuse the services of providers that do not respect animal welfare and biodiversity in general (disturbance, trophy hunting, etc.).
- Do not promote abusive practices (proximity, petting), except to denounce them.
- Be attentive to the respect of each animal whenever a project involves wildlife

Criterion 8: Special cases

- **Respect the desert:** for any trip taking place in a desert environment, commit to respecting the Ethical Charter for a Clean Desert (Annex 2).
- **Land safaris:** commit to respecting the Ethical Charter for Land Safaris (Annex 3).
- **Diving:** commit to respecting the marine environment by following the recommendations of the Ethical Diving Charter (Annex 4).
- **Wildlife photography:** commit to ensuring participants respect the Ethical Charter for Wildlife Photography (Annex 5).
- **Eco volunteering:** commit to respecting the Ethical Charter of Eco volunteering.
- **Participatory trips:** commit to ensuring participants respect the Eco volunteer Charter.

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- Not schedule trips of 8 days' duration outside France and neighbouring countries accessible overland, in Europe, North Africa and beyond.
- Not schedule trips shorter than 15 days for medium- and long-haul destinations (and preferably 21 days for the latter).
- Not offer trips for more than 12 people.
- Not offer the same trips on a weekly frequency.

This code of ethics was created at the initiative of the Média du voyage durable. It was drawn up in a participatory manner, respecting the views expressed by the 16 representative figures from across the responsible tourism sector who committed to this process.

Annex 1: Animal welfare and non-disturbance

The concept of animal welfare:

- freedom from hunger and thirst,
- freedom from discomfort,
- freedom from pain, injury and disease,
- freedom to express the natural behaviours of the species,
- freedom from fear and distress.

For more information: contact the PACT for Wildlife association.

Annex 2: Charter for a clean desert

Based on the points developed by Daniel Popp, founder of Terres d'Aventure, in 2002.

Updated in 2023 by the Média du voyage durable.

The tour operator commits to:

- Build waste treatment and disposal rules into its logistical organisation. Pursue a flow-distribution policy through the following measures: no charter arrivals concentrating all adventure agencies in a confined space; longer trip durations to avoid the concentration of groups in small pockets of the desert; and a minimum distance from other agencies' bivouac areas.
- Abolish uncontrolled off-road driving in order to protect fragile areas, preserve Neolithic pottery, surface workshops and surviving vegetation, and avoid disfiguring the landscape with scattered tyre tracks and marks.
- Set up bivouacs away from the most beautiful "spots" (to leave them in their original pristine state), reserving them for less polluting walks on foot.
- Organise and manage toilets in the form of light canvas shelters reinstalled at each bivouac. Remove all traces of pollution from the charcoal of fires lit at the bivouac site. Train its staff (tour leaders, drivers, local guides, cooks) and persuade them to apply and enforce these necessary rules.
- Require guides and camel drivers to respect the designed programme, in particular the planned breaks, especially the midday picnic stop.
- Not use packaged, non-local cereal bars, and favour dates instead.
- Keep packaging and non-reusable plastic to an absolute minimum.
- Withdraw from the destination if the presence of its clients compromises local people's access to water. Communicate the rules established above to clients, in brochures and in the field.

Annex 3: Ethical charter for land safaris

The wildlife-respecting guide or agency commits to:

- Always put animal welfare and the preservation of biodiversity before their own interests
- Follow and enforce safety rules (distance, behaviour, etc.)
- Limit their presence around animals as much as possible (disturbance, number of people/vehicles)
- Not drive off-road in national parks
- Not interact with wildlife
- Never guarantee sightings (tracking, sparing use of walkie-talkies, hides, refusal of feeding, etc.)
- Not offer safaris “on the back of a wild animal”
- Avoid overcrowded areas and periods
- Respect wild animals’ natural conditions (context): suitable habitat, rest cycles, etc.
- Raise awareness and share their knowledge with travellers
- Leave no trace of their passage: reduce and manage waste
- Favour local, seasonal and preferably vegetarian food to minimise impact (beware of local specialities that may feature endangered species)
- Contribute to the country's local economy (local partnerships)
- Take part in educating and training local populations: waste, conservation, animal welfare, etc.
- Help conserve species, and not enter collaborations or hold subsidiaries that harm biodiversity

Annex 4: Ethical diving charter

The wildlife-respecting dive centre commits to:

- Always put animal welfare and the preservation of biodiversity before its own interests.
- Follow and enforce the rules (safety, distance, behaviour, etc.).
- Share its knowledge with divers (ecosystem, wildlife, etc.).
- Respect wild animals' natural cycles (context): rest, birthing, etc.
- Limit interaction with wildlife and favour passive observation — no touching (disturbance, number of people).
- Not interact with wildlife and take nothing from the environment.
- Never guarantee sightings (no drones, no feeding, no chasing, etc.).
- Assess divers' skills — For safety reasons and to avoid causing further harm to the environment, everyone has a responsibility to maintain their knowledge and skills through regular training (buoyancy).
- Stay away from overcrowded areas.
- Provide diving equipment appropriate to the type of dive and the location (currents), and secure the equipment carried to avoid any damage to the environment (secure spare regulators, no hooks).
- When on a boat, never anchor in seagrass beds, algae or coral (use mooring buoys).
- Manage natural resources (fresh water) as effectively as possible; collect data to better understand the dynamics of local ecosystems, with divers taking part in citizen/participatory science programmes by sharing their data and other information.
- Reduce and manage pollution of all kinds (waste, sunscreen, wastewater, equipment, etc.).
- Support local organisations working for the conservation of species, their habitats and coexistence with wildlife.
- Not enter collaborations that harm biodiversity.

Annex 5: Ethical charter for wildlife photography

The wildlife-respecting photographer commits to:

- Always put animal welfare and the preservation of biodiversity before their own interests
- Follow and enforce safety rules (distance, behaviour, etc.)
- Limit their presence around animals as much as possible (disturbance, number of people)
- Respect wild animals' natural conditions (context): suitable habitat, rest cycles, etc.
- Not drive off-road in national parks
- Not interact with wildlife
- Not feed animals or take part in activities involving feeding
- Avoid overcrowded areas and periods
- Favour animal tracking and use walkie-talkies sparingly
- Favour hides
- Leave no trace of their passage: reduce and manage waste
- Favour local, seasonal and preferably vegetarian food to minimise impact (beware of local specialities that may feature endangered species)
- Contribute to the country's local economy (local providers)
- Support local organisations working for the conservation of species, their habitats and coexistence with wildlife
- Not enter into collaborations that harm biodiversity

Sightings are never guaranteed!

Other charters

- Eco-responsible tour operator charter: 10 points
- Eco-responsible traveller charter: 80 points (2007)

Impacts of tourism on ecosystems:

- Pollution (waste, chemicals and gases)
- Human activities
- Invasive species
- Trampling
- Water management

Harmful effects of tourism on wildlife:

- Trophy / canned hunting
- Mistreatment
- Shows / fights
- Unsuitable modes of transport, or transport tied to overly dense programmes
- Chasing / harassment
- Noise and light pollution
- Disturbance
- Mass tourism / over-interaction / proximity
- Feeding
- Purchases that condone the death or mistreatment of animals
- Misleading food practices or food involving animal mistreatment