

Sustainable Tourism & our responsibility as stakeholders of tourism

By **Subhash Motwani**, Founder Director, Namaste Tourism

The last 20 odd months of the pandemic has made us analyze and understand our priorities in life. On the personal front, almost every family has been impacted and as far as the environment is concerned we have shared images with friends and families of clear blue skies and pollution free environs where each of us began to appreciate the world more, especially the world around us, more so in bustling cosmopolitan cities – all coming at a standstill during lockdown. Sustainability has become a buzz word and with erratic weather patterns due to global warming, the world over followed by once in a century pandemic, the importance of responsible travel when the world slowly and gradually opens up has gained greater significance.

As stakeholders of tourism, we need to restructure our business model to inculcate the element of sustainability in the way we plan travels for our clients in the near future with the objective of increase benefits and reducing the negative impacts caused by tourism. Hereunder are three areas that we should take into consideration for future travels:

1. Off-beat and off season travel should be encouraged

In summer most tourists attractions and in turn cities are overburdened with guests. Hence, recommend guests to visit destinations in spring and autumn instead of summer to avoid crowds and this in turn also helps in reduction in over tourism in premium tourist destinations. Also recommending guests to stay close to city and yet off city limits to enjoy experiences using public transport – preferably trains or trams thus expanding the tourism base to the periphery of cities that thrive in tourism especially during peak season. This in turn creates employment as well as business opportunities in the outskirts of a city rather than burdening city centres which in peak seasons are invariably stretched beyond their limits.

2. Reduce your carbon footprints whilst travelling

Global tourism accounts for about 8% of global greenhouse gas emissions and a major component of these emissions is the aviation sector. As time is the essence especially during long haul travel, taking a direct flight and avoiding layover or several layovers should be encouraged and to set off carbon footprints even more encourage guests into buying organic, local produce from groceries and farmers' stores. In cities too, active travel using bicycle or EVs should be encouraged where the infrastructure

is created. Whilst exploring multiple destinations within a continent, encourage travel by train vis-à-vis taking domestic flights. Purchases from local businesses not only creates job for local people but also discourages illegal trade or exploitation of human (especially children) and luxury purchases should be limited to sustainable luxury produce which is not impacting the cutting of trees or purchase of wares procured from animal poaching and exploitation. Encourage guests to move outside their comfort zone – walk around, eat in local restaurants rather than moving around in coaches in cities that offer comfort guided tours which impact the environment adversely.

3. Travel responsibly – Reuse and Recycle

Adopt behaviour and practices the result in sustainability by maximizing benefits to local communities, minimizing negative social or environmental impacts, going green whilst travelling. Seek to protect tourist destinations especially Heritage Monuments by favouring businesses that conserve cultural heritage and traditional values. Discourage use of plastic in any form, carry recyclable tote bag, discourage begging and instead volunteer some of your time through local communities participation, whether be in cleaning a beach or engaging with locals as to how you would want them to educate them of how to bring a change in their behavioural pattern which in turn will positively impact the environment. Share your sustainable travel experiences across friends, family and social media channels.

Taking care of heritage sites worldwide that attract tourists should be conserved – avoid littering, graffiti or sitting on monuments to get the perfect shot especially if there is a "NO" sign as many artefacts or monuments are fragile because of their age.

Be a brand ambassador of sustainable tourism not only once, but every time. Lead by example and imbibe some of these recommendations not only whilst travelling but also make it a mission in life to be a sustainable human being which in turn will also bring a sea change in the city or location you live in. ♦

Subhash Motwani is Founder Director of Namaste Tourism and has over 35 years experience in the travel and tourism industry having started his career as a tourism trainer and chief faculty of IATA training programmes at one of India's leading and pioneering tourism institute RBCS group (Radio Bhuvan Career Supermarket, estd. 1954). Subhash has been a subject matter expert having been invited by IATA in Geneva in 1999 for Pilot testing of their new IATA programmes, an Editor of a magazine and also has worked with Consulates of Hungary and Argentina for promoting their destinations in India. Having travelled to over 50 countries, Subhash also has evolved his travel company into a sustainable tourism company by developing destination specific websites offering off beat and responsible travel experiences through www.namastetourism.com - a unique initiative to encourage discerning travellers to explore places like never before. He also offers marathon tours, luxury experiential travel with an element of sustainability and is also involved in CSR activity as President of CHCRA (Clean Heritage Colaba Residents' Association) to bring a change in the tourism hub of the city of Mumbai by engaging with local authorities.

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