ADVENTURE TRAVEL
TRADE ASSOCIATION™

Creating Sustainable Experiences in Adventure Travel

May 2023

Foreword

This report focuses on cultivating the environmental, social, and economic aspects of sustainability in adventure travel experiences. While organizations have been increasing sustainability practices for years, achieving the ever-increasing standards takes concerted intention and effort. The movement is expected to augment in future years and international and national travel organizations will be looking for sustainability guidelines to follow.

The intention here is to develop a framework for hosting sustainable experiences in the adventure travel industry. This report draws from survey results and from leaders in sustainable travel experiences to create initial guidelines for sustainable travel experiences across the adventure travel community. Leading-edge adventure travel products that are already on the market are used to highlight the great potential of sustainable services in the industry and give inspiration to other organizations. A checklist is included to provide a clear vision for blending ecological stewardship, social integrity, and economic vitality into sustainable travel experiences.

- Heather Kelly, Director of Research & Sustainability,
 Adventure Travel Trade Association

Together with the whole Swiss tourism industry, Switzerland Tourism (ST) understands and defines sustainability according to its entire and holistic spectrum: We encapsulate not only the ecological, but also the economic and social dimensions. Our programming and our Swisstainable strategy follow this comprehensive recognition, aligning with the goals of the United Nations and the ATTA.

Swisstainable experiences mean more Switzerland for our guests. It is not about sacrifice or abandonment, but rather about traveling with greater consciousness, awareness, and appreciation. This is also the foundation of our recommendations to our guests:

- Enjoy nature up close and first hand
- Experience the local culture in an authentic way
- Consume regional products
- Stay for longer and delve deeper

We hope you find the present report interesting and valuable, and that is sheds light on how to create more sustainable experiences.

- Viviane Grobet, Head of Business Development and
 Member of the Executive Board, Switzerland Tourism

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02 Sustainable adventure travel experiences involve making responsible and respectful tourism choices, such as eco-friendly accommodations, activities, and food and drink. Responsible travel habits can **minimize negative impacts on the environment, wildlife, and local communities.**

03 Adventure travelers are most interested in unique experiences authentic to the local destination, interactions with local people, locally produced food and drink, and opportunities to purchase local products. This signals **a high level of importance for ensuring experiences include plenty of focus on the local community.**

04 Adventure travel **buyers are removing some components of their products**, particularly experiences that are not authentic or truly representative of the local destination, and suppliers that do not compensate their employees fairly.

05 Adventure travel buyers are also working to **add more in that appeal to guests and make their experiences more sustainable**, particularly collaborating with local and regional people and organizations and adapting their products to be more sustainable by default.

06 Adventure travel suppliers are **eliminating non-sustainable components from their products**, especially single-use plastics, experiences that are not authentic or representative of their destination, and single-use paper items.

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Part 1:

Introduction

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Introduction

Many visitors are resuming travel after it was suspended during pandemic lockdowns and subsequent COVID-19 fears. Although the pandemic lowered tourism demand in the short term, it also inspired tourism product innovation and upgrades.[1]

Nearly two-thirds of global travelers say the pandemic inspired them to travel more sustainably. **Travelers now want to see multifaceted aspects of sustainability at the forefront of business operations.** Concurrently, tourists, tour operators, accommodations, and venues, have been rethinking and reformulating the travel experience in terms of sustainability.[2]

Organizations are aiming to maintain success from a financial perspective and increasingly also from social and ecological points of view. Members of the adventure travel community are responding to travelers' desires by marketing experiences that are sustainable and regenerative in addition to being exciting, fun, educational, and immersive.

To define a trip as adventure travel, at least two of these three factors are required: **physical activity, natural environment, and cultural engagement.**[3] In order to deliver a full and satisfactory experience throughout the whole trip, it is essential to be aware of tangible and intangible aspects of the product.

Examples of **tangible components** include infrastructure, necessary gear and equipment, means of transport, accommodation, or food. **Intangible aspects** are the experience itself, including the expertise and guidance provided by the guide, the atmosphere of the destination, the quality of service, and the memories created.

While tangible items can be measured in various ways, intangible ones are difficult to quantify due to their subjective nature.[4] When developing or adjusting a sustainable adventure travel product, recognizing the close relationship between tangible and intangible components is important. Each of these aspects are interconnected, meaning that any changes in one category simultaneously affect the other.[5]

The Impact of Experiences

Increasing the overall sustainability of experiences is one way to enhance economic prosperity and help tourism businesses recover from pandemic shutdowns. Becoming financially solvent is an obvious goal in the adventure travel industry given the stark lack of business in 2020 and 2021. Being aware of travelers' shifting behaviors is essential in maintaining fiscal vitality. For instance, visitors are increasingly aware of the detriments of travel to ecosystems[6] and they are **choosing products from environmentally conscientious businesses** over others.[7]

Even before the pandemic, sustainable product sales were on the rise, increasing by 20% from 2014-2019, and consumers became 78% more ethically conscious from 2018-2019.[8] 2018 was dubbed "The year of the influential sustainable consumer."[9] This trend accelerated due to COVID-19; post-pandemic, **consumers' interest in buying green products has increased due to personal health and safety concerns.**[10]

Sustainability also involves sound ecological and social practices. In light of social movements during recent years, including the #MeToo and #BlackLivesMatter movements, societal views are shifting toward increased **awareness of and interest in social welfare and equality.**[11] Visitors' travel choices reflect increased interest in **authentic cultural experiences** to benefit local communities.[12]

Visitors want to travel more sustainably and increasingly expect to see sustainable practices in experience and product descriptions. As travel organizations make improvements in sustainability, the public at large perceives social norm shifts.[13] **Perception is the first step toward making innovative improvements long-lasting and more broadly appealing.**

The travel industry can provide unforgettable experiences at destinations around the world while **demonstrating and encouraging sustainable environmental, social, and economic practices.** In turn, visitors bring home with them visions of nature, culture, sport, as well as sustainability, which extend outward through their social circles. The result is increasing integration of sustainability and regeneration in experiences from work to play across the planet.

In many ways, travel experiences support the **United Nations Sustainable Development Goals,**[14] a globally accepted structure for applying sustainability. For example:

- Touring for many is an expression of admiration for and interest in learning about our beautiful planet, which broadens **educational, experiential, and creative horizons,** fulfilling the goal of quality education (Goal 4).

- Travelers can support local businesses and artisans, which contributes to **local economic growth** (Goal 8) and helps achieve the goal of reducing poverty (Goal 1). Many of these businesses are also **owned by woman** (Goal 5).

- Travelers choosing to stay in eco-friendly accommodations, participate in sustainable tours and activities, use eco-friendly transportation, and offset travel emissions contribute to the goal of **protecting the environment through climate action** (Goal 13).

- Engaging with local cultures and traditions, supporting cultural heritage sites, and participating in cultural activities can **help reduce inequalities** (Goal 10).

- Travelers who participate in responsible wildlife tourism experiences support conservation initiatives and foster education about endangered species, which contributes to the goal of **protecting biodiversity and ecosystems** (Goal 15).

- Travelers can support or partake in initiatives that promote social justice and human rights, such as volunteering with local organizations, which helps **promote peace, justice, and strong institutions** (Goal 16).

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Priority on experience
Release of control
Lack of awareness
Conflict with state of le
Automated behavior

Travel Industry Efforts

Travel industry organizations are looking to maximize experiential offerings in sustainable ways, such as by highlighting social integrity and minimizing expenses and waste. **A few ways to reduce the carbon footprint and uphold social equity values, while continuing to bring in revenue include:**

- Reducing pressures of overtourism by spreading out tourism demand, lengthening shoulder seasons, and working toward all-year tourism.
- Offering and promoting elongated stays at each destination to reduce transportation expenses and increase the depth of cultural immersion.
- Encouraging visitors to go "off the beaten path" in responsible and respectful ways.
- Being respectful and considerate of local cultures and customs, being aware of local dress codes and customs and avoiding taking pictures of people without permission.
- Reducing single-use and plastic waste by offering consumables in bulk packaging and with reusable or compostable serviceware.
- Including succinct and specific sustainability practices in every product or experience description.
- Third-party international or national sustainability accreditation or stamps of approval also aid travel decision-making.

Sustainability & Experiences

The focus on sustainability is expected to continue growing,[15] and travel experiences and products are a key way to highlight the sustainability practices of an organization. Hosting or facilitating adventure travel experiences gives tour groups and organizations an opportunity to **make sustainable choices with incredible potential to educate participants' future behaviors and personal lifestyle choices.** In this way, sustainability can ripple out in all directions.

Sustainable adventure travel experiences involve making responsible and respectful tourism choices, such as eco-friendly accommodations, activities, and food and drink. **Responsible travel habits can minimize negative impacts on the environment, wildlife, and local communities.**

Awareness of environmental and climate concerns and how to engage with nature and landscape responsibly is the foundation to adventuring sustainably. Adventure activities including hiking, rafting, and wildlife viewing can have a negative impact on the environment if not done responsibly.

Adventure tourism companies that prioritize sustainability follow practices such as the **Leave No Trace** principles, using sustainable gear and equipment, learning about the natural and cultural heritage of destinations, hiring local workers, and limiting group sizes.

Responsible groups also avoid harming natural and cultural sites, i.e., littering, vandalizing, and disturbing or collecting wildlife, while also educating participants in **respectful engagement with local nature and culture.** Sustainable accommodations have sustainable practices such as relying on renewable energy, reducing waste, and conserving water.

Supporting the destination economy through local businesses, while respecting local culture and customs, is a wonderful way to engage with local populations. To support the local economy, travelers can select locally guided tours and activities, stay in locally owned accommodations, eat at locally owned restaurants, and support local artisans and vendors to facilitate sustainable community engagement. **This practice of supporting local economies helps create jobs and stimulates economic growth in and around destinations and prevents tourism leakage.**

Through their travel experience choices, travelers can reduce environmental impact, foster cultural awareness, support wildlife conservation, and promote social justice and human rights all while supporting local communities. By planning and developing adventure travel experiences with sustainability guidelines at the forefront, **our community highlights the responsible union of ecological stewardship, social integrity, and economic vitality.**

Framework & Methodology

Overall, incorporating global sustainability objectives into travel experiences contributes to a more sustainable and equitable world. To that end, we modified the sustainable tourism design concepts put forth by researchers Marcus Haid and Julia N. Albrecht in the journal *Sustainability*, to guide this report outline and focus on factors most relevant to adventure travel.[16]

This report relies on secondary research to better understand the broader sustainability movement and its impact on tourism in general. Primary research was also conducted to learn more about what our adventure travel community is doing to create and promote sustainable experiences:

- A survey was sent to members of the ATTA community in April 2023, asking inbound and outbound operators about what actions they are taking to increase sustainability in their product portfolio, and what their guests are looking for regarding sustainability.

- 103 complete survey responses were received with organization headquarters in the following regions: Europe (30), North America (22), South America / Central America / Caribbean (22), Asia (15), Africa (6), Middle East (4), Pacific (4).

- Respondents were also asked if they were willing to share further details about their sustainability efforts. Those who responded "yes" were emailed additional interview-style questions and many of their responses were incorporated in this report.

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Part 2:

Overall Sustainability Strategy

Attracting Guests: Preferences & Trends
Mobility & Transportation
Community Engagement
Digitization & Digitalization
Employee Satisfaction

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Attracting Guests: Preferences & Trends

In order to appeal to travelers, the adventure travel industry can benefit from knowing that 81% of global travelers think sustainable travel is important and **71% of travelers want to make more effort in the next year to travel more sustainably** (up 10% from 2021). 53% are more determined to make sustainable travel choices now versus in the previous year.[17]

Travelers tend to prefer services, outdoor experiences, and reception from the locals that are of **good quality.**[18] More than 80% of Chinese customers are ready to invest in "high-quality tourism products," making the search for quality products a top trend.[19]

Post-pandemic, tourists now prefer traveling in smaller groups and to more nearby destinations. **Preference for self-guided tours, self-drive tours, outdoor tours, and recreation tours has also increased.**[19] European travelers in particular are choosing to stay closer to home and are visiting less-crowded destinations.[20]

However, **an action gap exists between travelers' willingness toward more sustainable products and experiences and their behaviors and actions.**[20,] The uptake of sustainable travel products does not show the accelerated trend of travelers' intentions to travel more sustainably. Sustainable travel is still relatively young, which means a lack of data exists regarding what travelers are actually doing.[21]

65% of travelers would feel better in a **certified sustainable accommodation** and 59% filter for options with sustainable certification when booking.[22]
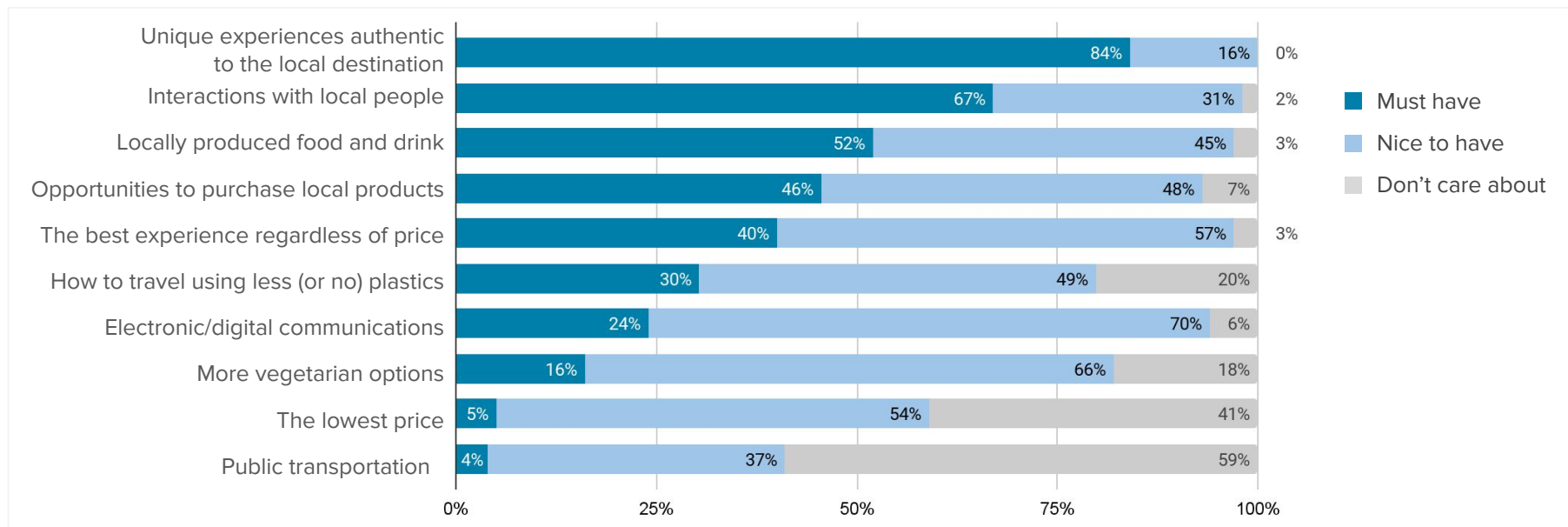
62% of tourists would like to **support local businesses** on their upcoming trips.[19]

55% of respondents to one survey said they wanted to book a **once-in-a-lifetime vacation** in 2022, particularly Millennials (67%) and Gen Zers (65%).[23]

Attracting Guests: Preferences & Trends

According to members of the ATTA community, guests are most interested in unique experiences authentic to the local destination, interactions with local people, locally produced food and drink, and opportunities to purchase local products. This signals a **high level of importance for ensuring experiences include plenty of focus on the local community.** They do not place a high level of importance on price or public transportation, although the latter may be due to a lack of safe and efficient public transportation in many parts of the world.

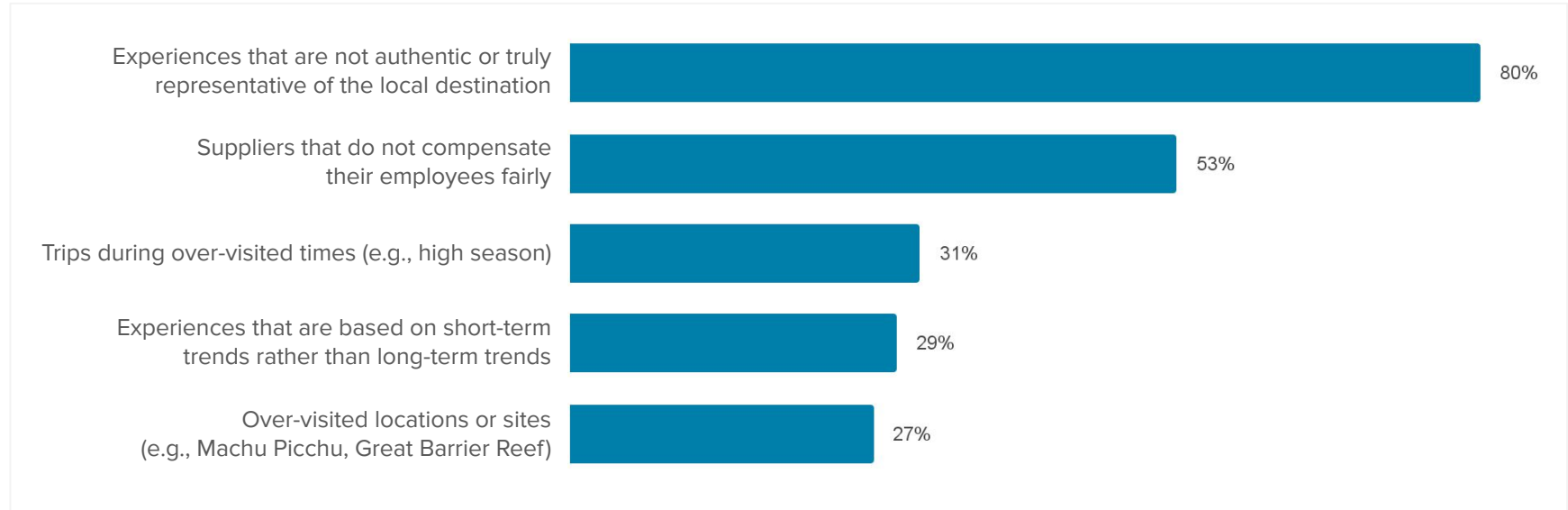| Category	Must have	Nice to have	Don't care about
Unique experiences authentic to the local destination	84%	16%	0%
Interactions with local people	67%	31%	2%
Locally produced food and drink	52%	45%	3%
Opportunities to purchase local products	46%	48%	7%
The best experience regardless of price	40%	57%	3%
How to travel using less (or no) plastics	30%	49%	20%
Electronic/digital communications	24%	70%	6%
More vegetarian options	16%	66%	18%
The lowest price	5%	54%	41%
Public transportation	4%	37%	59%

Q: In general, my guests are looking for:
Base: All respondents excluding those left blank (n=101)
Source: 2023 Sustainable Experiences Survey

Attracting Guests: Buyer Efforts

In their efforts to become more sustainable and respond to the guest needs detailed on the previous page, adventure travel buyers are **removing some components of their products**, particularly experiences that are not authentic or truly representative of the local destination, and suppliers that do not compensate their employees fairly.
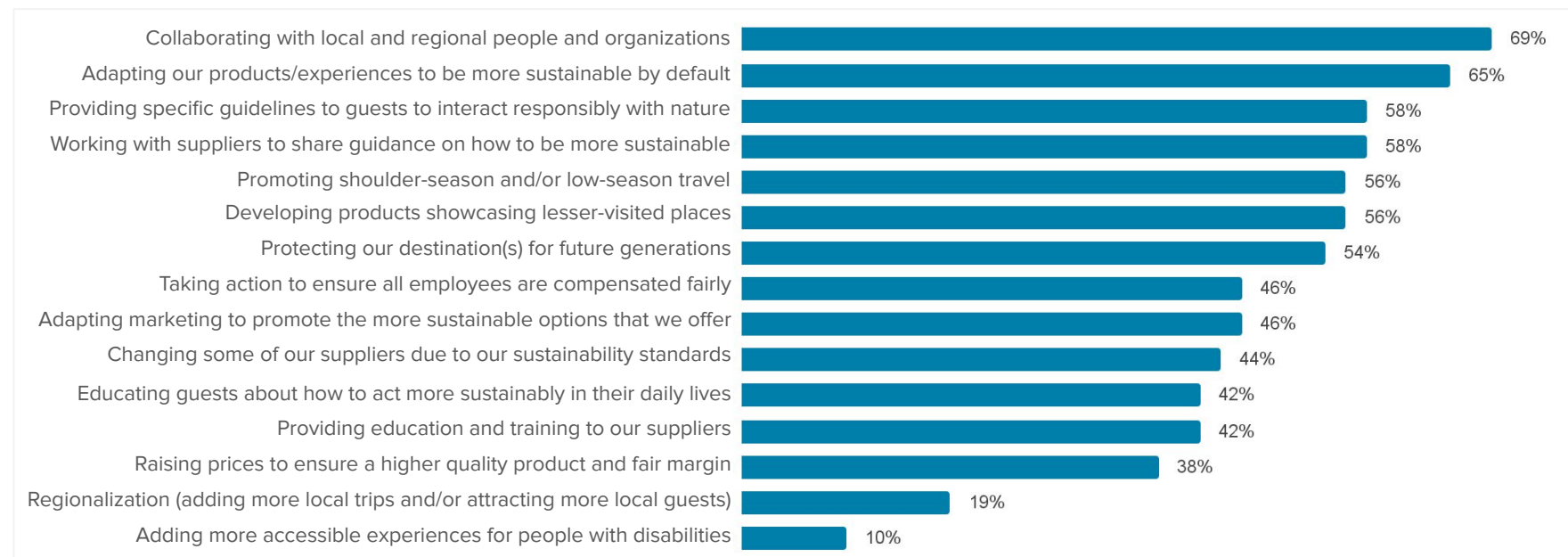
Experiences that are not authentic or truly representative of the local destination — 80%

Suppliers that do not compensate their employees fairly — 53%

Trips during over-visited times (e.g., high season) — 31%

Experiences that are based on short-term trends rather than long-term trends — 29%

Over-visited locations or sites (e.g., Machu Picchu, Great Barrier Reef) — 27%

Q: In your experience as a buyer, which of the following has your company removed (are you currently removing) from your product portfolio and/or list of suppliers? (select all that apply)

Base: All buyer respondents excluding those left blank (n=49)

Source: 2023 Sustainable Experiences Survey

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Attracting Guests: Buyer Efforts

In addition to removing some of their product components, adventure travel buyers are also **working to add more in that appeal to guests and make their experiences more sustainable**, particularly collaborating with local and regional people and organizations and adapting their products to be more sustainable by default.
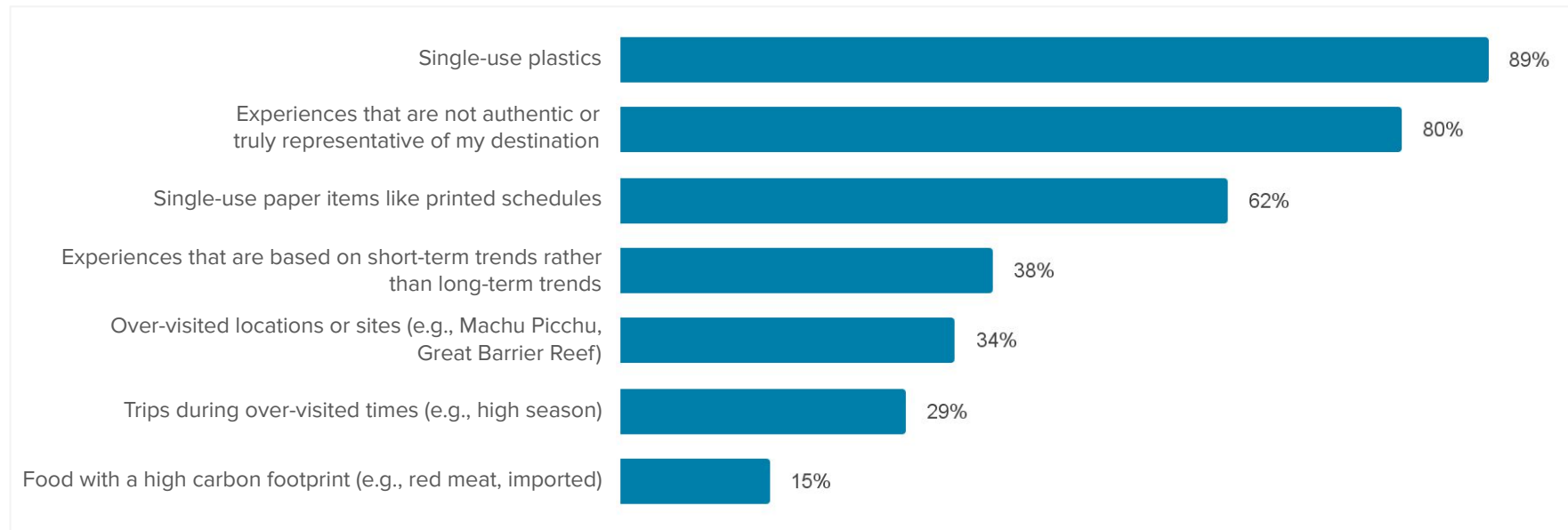
Activity	%
Collaborating with local and regional people and organizations	69%
Adapting our products/experiences to be more sustainable by default	65%
Providing specific guidelines to guests to interact responsibly with nature	58%
Working with suppliers to share guidance on how to be more sustainable	58%
Promoting shoulder-season and/or low-season travel	56%
Developing products showcasing lesser-visited places	56%
Protecting our destination(s) for future generations	54%
Taking action to ensure all employees are compensated fairly	46%
Adapting marketing to promote the more sustainable options that we offer	46%
Changing some of our suppliers due to our sustainability standards	44%
Educating guests about how to act more sustainably in their daily lives	42%
Providing education and training to our suppliers	42%
Raising prices to ensure a higher quality product and fair margin	38%
Regionalization (adding more local trips and/or attracting more local guests)	19%
Adding more accessible experiences for people with disabilities	10%

Q: As a buyer, we have done/ we are doing the following activities to make our company and product more sustainable: (select all that apply)
Base: All buyer respondents excluding those left blank (n=52)
Source: 2023 Sustainable Experiences Survey

Attracting Guests: Supplier Efforts

In return, suppliers are **eliminating non-sustainable components from their products**, especially single-use plastics, experiences that are not authentic or truly representative of their destination, and single-use paper items.
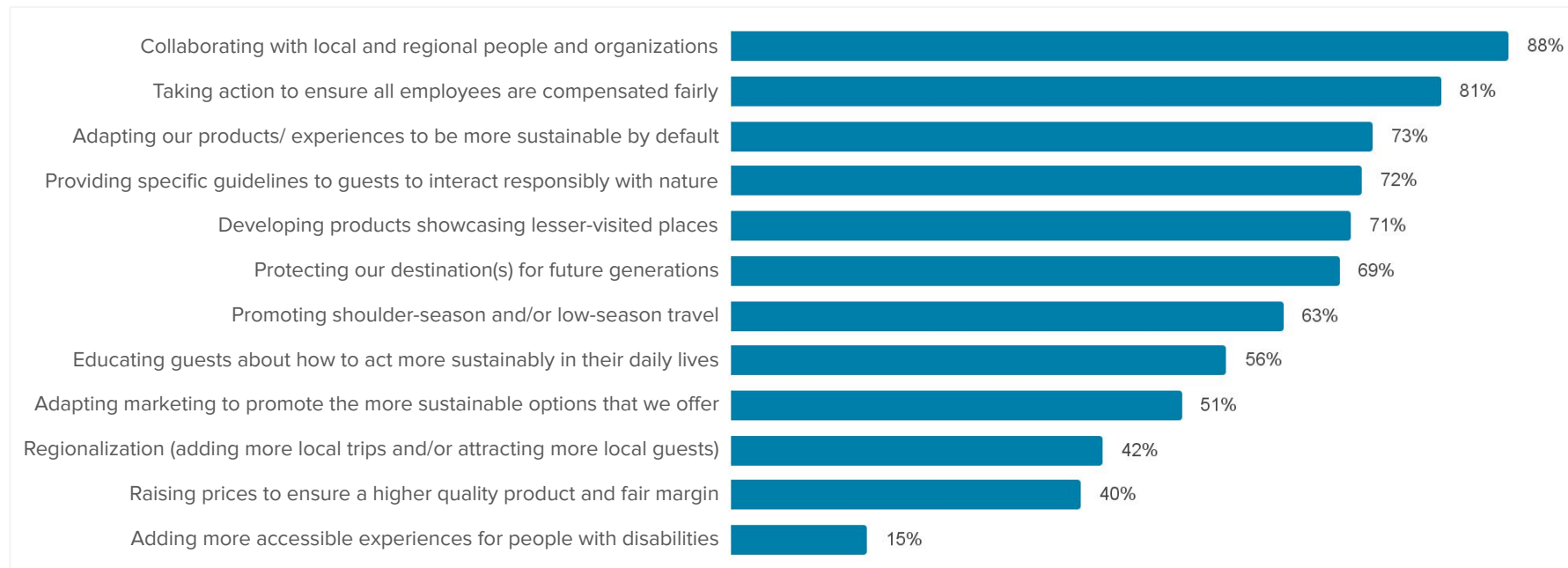
Category	Percentage
Single-use plastics	89%
Experiences that are not authentic or truly representative of my destination	80%
Single-use paper items like printed schedules	62%
Experiences that are based on short-term trends rather than long-term trends	38%
Over-visited locations or sites (e.g., Machu Picchu, Great Barrier Reef)	34%
Trips during over-visited times (e.g., high season)	29%
Food with a high carbon footprint (e.g., red meat, imported)	15%

Q: In your experience as a supplier, which of the following has your company removed (are you currently removing) from your product portfolio? (select all that apply)
Base: All supplier respondents excluding those left blank (n=79)
Source: 2023 Sustainable Experiences Survey

Attracting Guests: Supplier Efforts

Adventure travel suppliers are also **working to add more options that appeal to guests and makes their experiences more sustainable**, particularly collaborating with local and regional people and organizations and taking action to ensure all employees are compensated fairly.

Activity	Percentage
Collaborating with local and regional people and organizations	88%
Taking action to ensure all employees are compensated fairly	81%
Adapting our products/ experiences to be more sustainable by default	73%
Providing specific guidelines to guests to interact responsibly with nature	72%
Developing products showcasing lesser-visited places	71%
Protecting our destination(s) for future generations	69%
Promoting shoulder-season and/or low-season travel	63%
Educating guests about how to act more sustainably in their daily lives	56%
Adapting marketing to promote the more sustainable options that we offer	51%
Regionalization (adding more local trips and/or attracting more local guests)	42%
Raising prices to ensure a higher quality product and fair margin	40%
Adding more accessible experiences for people with disabilities	15%

Q: As a supplier, we have done/ we are doing the following activities to make our company and product more sustainable: (select all that apply)
Base: All supplier respondents excluding those left blank (n=78)
Source: 2023 Sustainable Experiences Survey

Mobility & Transportation

Currently, **travel has a large carbon footprint,**[24] yet it does not need to stay that way if appropriate decarbonization measures are taken. While one study found that 37% of frequent travelers always or almost always consider emissions associated with travel,[25] air travel is often the preferred mode of transport.

The top 2% of trips are long-haul flights, which cause the most pollution (19% of total emissions). In projecting to the future, long-haul flights are expected to quadruple their emissions by 2050 and will reach 41% of total tourism emissions if left unchecked. **Investments in innovation to develop the greenest forms of travel to aid in decarbonization, as well as incentives are necessary to maintain revenue and travel opportunities.**[26]

Because longer-haul flights are the most difficult to decarbonize, relying on carbon offsetting, technological improvements, and biofuels is not enough. Thus, **limiting long-haul flights is the challenging reality for reducing aviation emissions**. Increasing airfares on the longest flights is an uncomfortable way toward reducing the volume of long flights taken.[26]

Social inequities might become worse as a result of capping long-haul flights. For example, many destinations (e.g., island nations) that are most vulnerable to impacts of climate change (e.g., sea level rise) are also the most reliant on long-haul visitors, therefore require support. Furthermore, many countries in the global south have not yet developed their tourism economies and will not have resources to develop green infrastructure.[26]

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Mobility & Transportation: Achieving Sustainability

Sustainable transport reduces the net carbon footprint associated with travel and can be achieved through a variety of approaches:

- Becoming familiar with **destinations closer to home** minimizes travel costs and greenhouse gas emissions. 57% of travelers might consider visiting areas closer to home in the future.[27]

- **Google searches** for flights and seating now include associated carbon emissions[28] and a way to search for flights with lower emissions, directly appealing to the sustainability-minded traveler during booking. First-class and business seating are associated with more emissions because the seats take up a larger proportion of space on planes than seats in the economy class.

- Because air travel has a comparatively high carbon footprint, other modes of transport are favored, such as train, other public ground transportation, or electric car. With rising airfares and increasing interest in sustainable travel, **travelers are indeed choosing train over air travel.** One European-based report shows a 54% decrease in flights and a 20% increase in train trips between 2019 and 2023, in large part because train travel is less costly than air travel. In fact, flight prices have increased by 58% in this time frame, while train transport prices have decreased by 3%.[29]

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Mobility & Transportation: Achieving Sustainability

- Beyond flight price increases due to rising fuel prices and labor shortages, **government action is encouraging travelers to choose rail travel.** New European Union policy enforces competition in the rail sector and, in France, flights between cities that are linked by a train journey of less than 2.5 hours are set to be eliminated.[29]

- As part of tour experiences, operators can incorporate or encourage the use of public transportation, bicycles, and walking to **limit carbon emissions associated with travel.**

- Tour operators can partner with **local vendors and suppliers** to reduce transport expenditures.

- Operators can **incentivize extended experiences** and encourage extending trips before or after the experience. Lengthening trips and traveling to fewer places is a great way to lower a traveler's carbon footprint and have a deeper, more immersive experience.

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© Unsplash / Piotr Guzik

Mobility & Transportation

Spotlight: Contrasts of Switzerland

Contrasts of Switzerland is the first fully sustainable, or Swisstainable itinerary, born out of a collaboration of Tourism Switzerland and Trafalgar, an award-winning tour company and member of The Travel Corporation (TTC).

The aim of this project is to reduce the carbon footprint of travel itineraries, and to achieve that, Trafalgar decided to make the most of Switzerland's rich and reliable railway network. Over the course of eight days, tourists can savor the natural and historical gems of the country, authentic cuisine and culture, and support the local environment and economy. All the meals provided are prepared from short-distance-based ingredients and food waste is recycled or upcycled. In addition, Trafalgar's 'Be My Guest Experience' establishes a profound connection with local residents and culture.

What makes this product special, are the important changes in transport, as well as the choice and evaluation of the business partners who share the same values regarding sustainability and the protection of local communities. Moreover, TTC has added MAKE TRAVEL MATTER® activities that have a positive impact on society and the environment. The collaboration between Swisstainable and TTC aims to continue transforming their offer and creating more fully sustainable itineraries.

Mobility & Transportation: CO_2 Offsetting

Purchasing carbon offsets is a sustainable choice to make when engaging in activities that involve carbon and other greenhouse gas emission. Travel and transportation, food production, transport, catering, and consumption, and use of equipment, buildings, and infrastructure are associated with carbon emissions.

To counteract these byproducts, carbon offsets can be purchased as certificates. The certificates are linked to activities that reduce carbon dioxide emissions or remove it from the atmosphere,[30] thus **countering climate warming** associated with carbon in the atmosphere.

Some activities include reforestation, development of renewable energy, carbon-storage in agriculture or other industries, sustainable waste and landfill management, and helping low-income families to upgrade their heating and cooking equipment.

TOMORROW'S AIR™

The Adventure Travel Trade Association is incubating the world's first collective action vehicle to rally travel to support carbon dioxide removal with permanent storage: **Tomorrow's Air**. Through a carefully curated portfolio of carbon dioxide removal innovators the ATTA supports climate conscious travel education along with the scale up of carbon dioxide removal technologies.
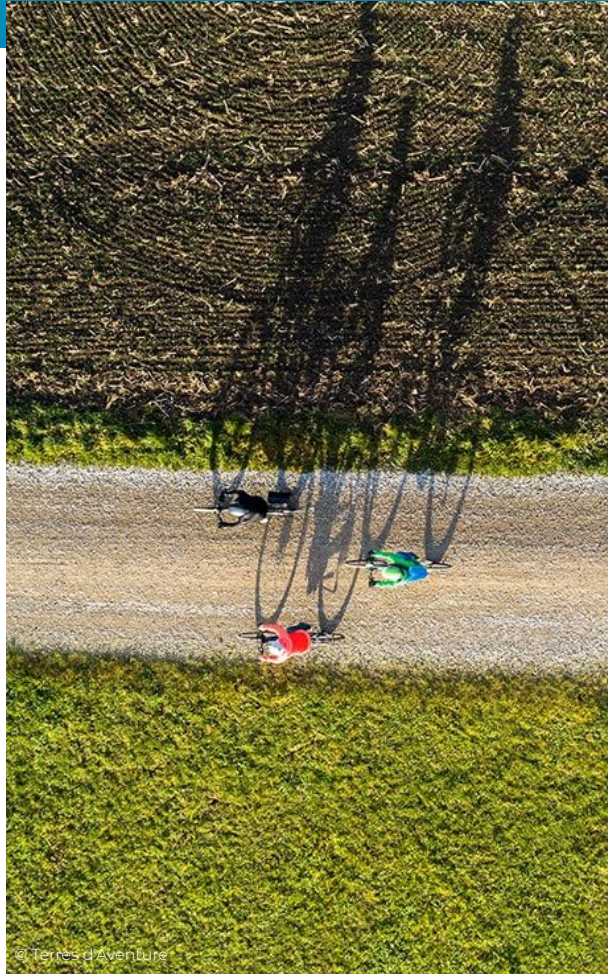
© Terres d'Aventure

CO$_2$ Offsetting

Spotlight: Terres d'Aventure

Terres d'Aventure is a French tour operator that has been offering exploration and trekking trips around the world for more than 45 years.

Sustainability has been a priority for the company since its inception. In 2000, Terres d'Aventure began implementing solutions to offset the carbon emissions of its employees and, later, also those of its customers. Today, 100% of the greenhouse gases (GHGs) generated by employees are offset and another 100% of GHGs are neutralized in all its travel.

This has been achieved in three steps. First, the official ADEME calculation methodology was adopted. Customers can see the exact number of CO$_2$ generated on its website. Secondly, the company reduces its energy production by favoring low-carbon transportation or by providing meals without disposable plastics. Finally, Terre d'Aventure invests in certified ecosystem restoration and agroforestry projects. Together with this, green transport, waste and water management, and overtourism remain in the focus of the company.

Community Engagement

Being open to learning about and understanding new cultures is a prime tenet of adventure travel and 27% of travelers actively familiarize themselves with the local cultural values and traditions of their destination in advance of their trips. 25% would be willing to pay more for travel activities to ensure they are giving back to local communities.[31]

Travelers support local communities by participating in micro-adventures led by local guides, cultural exchange programs, or volunteering opportunities. Micro-adventures or day-trips are on the rise in 2023 and many of them are guided by Indigenous and First Nation community members.[32]

Local **active engagement has been shown to be a useful tool for sustainable tourism development.** For example, in a study of the European Cultural Routes, local community involvement was shown to play a relevant role in guaranteeing genuine experiences. This can also help communities implement actions for safeguarding their local culture, heritage, and environment, especially to prevent against commodification of culture or voyeurism.[33]

Community-based tourism (CBT) as a form of engagement with local residents appears to be increasing as of 2020 and is most often practiced in developing countries.

Benefits: source of education, income, and empowerment for residents, conservation of the local environment and culture, and reduction of poverty

Challenges: accommodation often owned by non-local investors, unavailable financial resources, lack of security,[34] possibility of irresponsible commercialization of culture

© Unsplash / Lightscape

Community Engagement

Spotlight: Eternal Landscapes Mongolia

Eternal Landscapes (EL) Mongolia is an example of how small-scale travel can empower individuals and trigger societal change. Being expert on tailor-made tours in Mongolia, EL ensures all of their trips are socially ethical and aligned with the UN Sustainable Development Goals as well as their own Climate Action Plan. They believe it is essential to adapt the sustainable practices according to the destination's culture and the needs of the EL team itself.

In each community throughout the country, EL has established long-term partnerships and friendships with the local families. The small tour company promotes low-season travel throughout Mongolia. To quantify the impact of the tour operator on the community, EL measures the number of visitors staying in each host family, the location of host families, and the use of their toilets.

For over a decade, EL has been providing training for local women and, currently, the company is searching for funds to commence the construction of Chandmana Erdene, "a tourism training school for Mongolian women." The aim of this project is to address the ongoing decrease of working women in the country and provide necessary knowledge and resources to fully engage them in the society.

Digitization & Digitalization

While these two words are very similar, **digitization** is simply the conversion of analog data or objects (e.g., printed photographs and programs or handwritten notes) to digital formats, and "**digitalization** is the use of digital technologies to change a business model and provide new revenue and value-producing opportunities; it is the process of moving to a digital business."[35]

Many adventure travel companies are embracing digitization by **sharing information in digital-only formats** (like on their website or through PDF brochures), with 62% of survey respondents removing single-use paper items like printed schedules from their products. However, most have not taken the next step to more advanced digitalization.

Taking pictures/video instead of plant/animal souvenirs is more sustainable and in line with the Leave No Trace principles. In contrast, it's not considered sustainable when influencers promote a place through an image only to attract tourists who want to take the same picture as the influencer and then leave. The aspiration to get the best shot can lead to careless behavior and unsustainable attitudes (crowd stampedes, destruction of monuments, injuries or loss of life of selfie-takers as well as local residents trying to help them).[36] This **influencer culture** needs to be considered when developing new products and posting on social media.

62%

of survey respondents have removed single-use paper items like printed schedules from their products.

(April 2023 ATTA survey)

Digitization & Digitalization: Marketing

Advertising is increasingly digital, especially since the pandemic began. As a result, consumers are more influenced by social media due to pandemic-related fears.[37]

- According to the *Report on the Digital Marketing Strategy Trends in Tourism Destinations 2020*, **45% of the marketing budget is spent on digital advertising vs. only 21% is spent on print media.**[39] Much digital advertising is via social media and short explainer videos. 84% of consumers have been convinced to buy a product or service after watching a short video.[40]

- Consumers are also willing to travel virtually to support environmental sustainability.[41]

- **The rise of digitization is expected to continue** and all sectors will see increases in this realm of communication and commerce. For example, rail travel is expected to become more digitized and also integrated with bus, ferry, and plane bookings.[42]

- For sustainability and optimized consumer targeting, **promote products using digital and paper-free marketing** on social media, LCD screens, and e-communications. If materials need to be printed, for equitable accessibility for example, favor the use of FSC-certified, unlaminated, half/quarter sheet, and double-sided paper.

Since the outbreak of the pandemic, almost

90%

of travel companies have raised or maintained their digital marketing budget.[38]

Digitization & Digitalization: The Future

Adventure travel is moving in a multifunctional direction, **meeting the needs of diverse travelers in distinctive ways through advances in digitalization.** Advertisers can now target audiences based on geolocation, interests, language, and other factors, which allows for more accurate promotions and provides real-time analysis to help travel marketers optimize their campaigns.[38] Travelers can now be targeted according to a multitude of aspects to ensure the right tour is matched with the appropriate audience.

- In 2021 it was estimated that by using "Internet of Things," such as AI, **the amount of carbon emissions will be reduced globally by 15%** in order to meet the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development.[43]

- Some university researchers recommend closing over-touristed "heritage and cultural sites" and instead providing ex-situ or virtual tours.[44]

Virtual Reality (VR) tourism is an option for travelers seeking sustainable and safe travel experiences. Virtual travel greatly reduces the environmental impacts of travelers and cuts down on disease transmission, however, fewer in-person tourists would reduce tourist spending and lower economic sustainability. Thus, **if virtual travel replaced in-person travel, the economic vitality of destinations that have come to rely on tourism income could be jeopardized.** Social sustainability would also be reduced if fewer hospitality and tour organization jobs were available due to fewer destination visitors.

- **Searches for "virtual reality tours"** increased by 488% between February and March 2020.[44]

- **A great use of VR is as a decision-making tool** to understand a destination before visiting and to whet consumers' appetite for traveling in-person.[45]

Employee Satisfaction

Keeping staff engaged and content in their work is a fundamental consideration in product formulation. **The more employers can offer flexibility, the happier and more productive employees will be.**[46] For example, if some work can be done remotely, many employees appreciate having the chance to work at home, forgo commuting, and take care of family and home life needs. Especially since the pandemic, companies are rethinking effective work models. Lower turnover of employees leads to better customer service quality, customer satisfaction, and economic sustainability at destinations.[47]

- For recruiting and retaining "well-trained, local, skilled personnel," **employee satisfaction is an important component of experience design.** Workers' dissatisfaction is related to stress, tension, overworking, inordinately high expectations of younger generations, and rapid industry growth in the sustainable development work environment.[47]

- Importantly, **adequate compensation**, which is appropriate for the destination, is essential to attract and retain employees.[48] Wages need to stay on par with work in other sectors and this doesn't always happen. For example, in the US hospitality industry, compensation is rising more slowly than in other sectors.[49]

- Utilizing **performance-based compensation** is one way to engage employees in business success. This pay structure holds them accountable for poor performance and provides a boost when performance is high quality.[50] This approach helps ensure employees feel seen and valued, that they have purpose, and are being encouraged to grow.

- For some helpful remote-work tips compiled by ATTA, read **ATTA's Top 10 Tips for Virtual Organizations**.

© Amazonas Explorer

Employee Satisfaction

Spotlight: Amazonas Explorer

Amazonas Explorer specializes in slow, safe, and responsible adventures in Peru. Their goal is to present typical places in an unusual way and reveal the lesser known ones.

Since porters are important co-creators of Amazonas Explorer's journey, the company makes sure they are treated well. It does this by paying a fair wage at the end of each trip, providing adequate meals, equipment, transportation, insurance, lodging, and offering opportunities for professional development.

In addition, off-grid power supply, collaboration with suppliers, and carbon footprint calculation are among the company's ongoing initiatives.

Part 3:

Developing Experiences through an Environmental Lens

Future-Oriented
Consciously Balancing Tourism
Counteracting Overtourism
Nature & Landscape
Resource-Efficient

© ATTA / Matt Corliss

Future-Oriented: Natural Resources

Ensuring that natural resources are respectfully used and not damaged or over-exploited is an essential feature of a sustainable travel experience. This is especially important in destinations that are already protected or that are vulnerable. **Regenerative tourism, funds, pledges, impactful, and conservation projects or education are some of the options to show commitment to the next generations.**[49]

- 74% of travelers believe there is an immediate need to act in an environmentally responsible way to preserve future generations[50] and 59% want to leave the places they visit better than when they arrived.[51] Tourists support planning for the long-term to benefit the people and nature at a destination. This perspective also helps maintain sustainable tourism there.
- Beyond minimizing travel-related carbon emissions, **choosing sustainably harvested and produced resources is a key element of sustainable resource use.**
- Accommodations and venues can primarily offer plant-based foods as a way to reduce greenhouse gas emissions.[52] Plant-based diets have 50% lower carbon footprints compared to meat-based diets.[53] Plant-based meals also are associated with improved health and well-being, thus improving the chances that travelers are healthy enough to continue traveling into their future.[54] Because beef cattle have a much higher carbon footprint than other animals, **removing beef from menus substantially lowers the carbon footprint.**[55]
- Offering local foods and drinks reduces travel-related time and energy, helps to support the destination economy, and emphasizes the joys of eating seasonally. Offering foods that are eco-certified (e.g., organic, grass-fed, cage-free) is also a step toward increased sustainability by supporting sustainable, regenerative agriculture. Offering foods that require less cook-time, such as salads and raw foods, additionally reduces mealtime energy dependence.
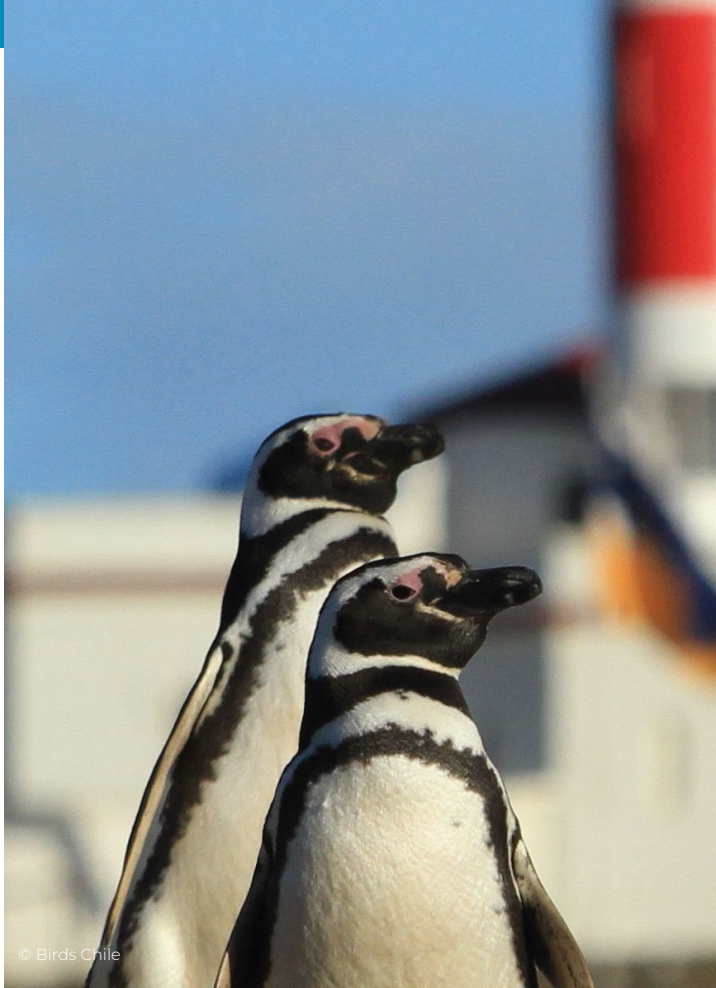
Future-Oriented

Spotlight: BirdsChile

Bird and wildlife watching, exploring local culture and communities of Chile, or rewilding activities are some of what Birds Chile offers. Having the least possible impact on the visited destination is a high-priority for the company, ensuring that their customers travel safely in small groups and local communities benefit from their visits.

In 2016, the operator was awarded as the most sustainable Tour Company of Chile and a year later scored the highest in "S" seal for Sustainability from the National Tourism Service. In their Wildlife Watcher's Code of Ethics, they set out the main rules for responsible photography, observation and conservation of the nature and animals. Other initiatives include Leave No Trace principles, carbon footprint elimination, implementation of electric vehicles and Giving Back & Rewilding program. Birds Chile's philosophy is built around the company and clients taking an active role in sustainable tourism.

© Birds Chile

Consciously Balancing Tourism

High numbers of tourists can result in **environmental, social, and economic burdens on destinations.** To make sure travel experiences are limiting such burdens, understanding the components of the problem in order to avoid it is essential. Fortunately, in a 2021 Virtuoso Poll, 82% of travelers said the pandemic has spurred them toward more responsible travel and 70% said **traveling sustainably enhances their vacation experience** (23% didn't know, emphasizing a need for education).[56] A Travel Weekly report released in 2023 suggests, **"about three-quarters of high-end travelers are ready to pay extra to make their trips more sustainable."**[57] Thus, most visitors are interested in reducing the unsustainable aspects of tourism.

"Commons" resources are tangible (e.g., nature) and intangible (e.g., culture) shared resources are used for personal and commercial benefit by residents and tourists, respectfully. However, private individuals may refuse to invest in common resources since the return of the investment is not guaranteed. This can result in overuse and inadequate care of the shared resources.[58]

Overtourism's negative impacts are well-known by many in the adventure travel community, and can include:[59]

- Higher demand of resources including fresh water and electricity
- Overcrowding and congestion leading to visual or aesthetic pollution of natural sites
- Nature experiences are commercialized and negatively impact the local environment[60]
- Stress on the local economy, which may not have the infrastructure to support a high number of visitors, and can lead to a higher cost of living for the local population
- Water, land, air, and noise pollution
- Waste management challenges
- Damage to natural sites
- Soil erosion

Counteracting Overtourism

Some ways to counteract overtourism include:

- Add product surcharges for supporting environmental rehabilitation and social welfare efforts at the destination.

- Publicize poor use of or damage to destination resources; visitors want to support and care for the destinations of their dreams, for example by helping to protect sea turtles from light pollution.[61]

- Governments are boldly stepping in to reduce excessive tourism burdens, such as Venice banning cruise ships from the city's center[62] and the European Union releasing a lengthy 2022 report outlining 27 green and digital metrics of tourism far surpassing the old metric of a simple head count. "[The report] calls for more circular and environmentally friendly services in tourism, enhancing data sharing for more innovative services, and improving accessibility of services, among others."[63] Some governments, such as in Greece, are collaborating with scientists, sustainability experts, and international tourism partners with the hope of leading the way in ethical, environmentally conscious tourism.[64]

Slow tourism focuses on a leisurely approach to travel, with an emphasis on experiencing the local culture, food, and environment, instead of just checking off tourist attractions. **Low-impact tourism** is one way to reduce pressures on local populations and environments near popular destinations. This type of travel primarily includes individual or small-group travel, such as backpacking, rural adventures, volunteer trips, pilgrimages, youth group trips, bicycling trips, etc.[65] Travel products such as sports and cycling extend a destination's high season and improve a region's sustainability.[66]

Nature & Landscape

While the topics of nature and landscape are included in almost every component mentioned in this report, **they deserve a specific focus as they are so integral to adventure travel.**

- Consumers with greater concern for the environment are more open to purchasing sustainable tourism alternatives.[67]
- Honoring and appreciating the natural landscape, including plants, animals, and scenery **encourages the strong connection of people to nature.** This connection to and appreciation of nature can proximately and ultimately improve the health of both people and Earth's systems.
- **Promote responsible interactions with nature**, including wildlife by avoiding degradation of sensitive environments, adhere to visitor guidelines, visit wildlife sanctuaries, respectfully observe animals in their natural habitats, and follow the Leave No Trace principles, including leaving what you find.[68]

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Nature and Landscape

Spotlight: Natural Habitat Adventures

While luxury may be associated with expensive tangibles for some, Natural Habitat Adventures (NatHab) believes it lies in the unforgettable experiences and visits to unspoiled places away from the crowd. Over the decades, the company has received numerous awards, including the Transformative Travel Award by PURE Life Experiences for creating the world's first Zero Waste Adventure. Besides, NatHab takes pride in being the world's first 100% carbon-neutral travel company.

Since 2003, NatHab has been a World Wildlife Fund partner. The alliance has led to the creation of the 'Conservation Travel' product and has supported donations to various WWF conservation projects. Currently, NatHab is finding a balance between existing projects and developing new ones. Recognizing that food contributes significantly to the carbon footprint, they actively search for solutions to create a greener cuisine while maintaining excellence. For NatHab, sustainability is not just about minimizing negative impacts, it also involves enhancing the positive aspects of travel and promoting awareness before, during, and after the trip.

Resource-Efficient

Carefully selecting only components of tour products that are essential for the traveler's experience helps reduce reliance on limited resources. Further, mindfully using resources by making only required purchases reduces unnecessary resource extraction and waste. For example, energy, water, materials, and land use can be thoughtfully considered and minimized when designing a sustainable adventure travel experience.

Reducing Waste from Food & Drink

- To reduce waste associated with meals, choose a food supplier or caterer who:
  - Employs reusable serviceware and cutlery
  - Repurposes and reserves unused food and/or redistributes it by collaborating with food redistribution organizations and supporting those who are food-insecure
  - Composts food scraps or is willing to collaborate with a local composting program to minimize landfill inputs

- Food waste can be reduced through a variety of approaches and travelers could be motivated to take the strategies home with them. 17% of total food waste occurs at the consumer level (in households and at restaurants).[69] This can be reduced by:
  - Ordering food based on expected attendance prevents over-ordering and minimizes waste.
  - Allowing participants to choose food quantities reduces food waste. For example, avoiding single-use packaging, pre-portioned servings, or buffet-style meals wastes less food.
  - Serving beverages in bulk versus in individual cans or bottles reduces beverage-related waste.

© KITRO

Resource-Efficient

Spotlight: KITRO

KITRO is an organization in Switzerland that has developed a state-of-the-art solution to measure and monitor food waste. KITRO provides a globally adaptable solution for food and beverage establishments, utilizing artificial intelligence at its core. By leveraging this AI technology, KITRO presents an automated system for collecting and analyzing data on food waste.

While studying at the École hôtelière de Lausanne and gaining practical experience in restaurants and hotels, the founders of KITRO were astounded by the vast quantity of edible food wasted on a daily basis within the hospitality industry. This firsthand observation served as a catalyst for their mission to develop a product that addresses this pressing global problem.

With the aid of advanced AI software, KITRO diligently identifies, quantifies, and records every discarded item. This gives users the ability to pinpoint areas of concern in their waste management process; they can then implement customized strategies to effectively reduce food waste, leading to substantial cost savings.

Resource-Efficient

Reducing Waste in Experiences

- Choose reusable or multi-use items instead of relying on single-use items (e.g., water bottles). If an item must be single-use, selecting plastic-free, compostable options are more sustainable. Purchasing in bulk is also an economic and environmentally friendly option vs buying in small quantities with extra packaging.

- Announcing how travelers can refuse, reduce, reuse, recycle, compost, or landfill items at accommodations and venues lends toward minimizing waste as well as educating participants.[70] Building managers can install well-labeled signage above waste bins to encourage recycling, limit landfill additions, and avoid cross-contamination.

- Encouraging travelers to limit resource use, including energy and water, reduces unnecessary waste. Especially at destinations in dry climates, limiting water use is important for sustaining access to clean water.

- If gifts or giveaways are used, limit waste by choosing ones that are practical, high-quality, and long-lasting (e.g., reusable water bottles), local and consumable (e.g., edible treats with limited packaging or gift certificates), or provide carbon offsetting.[71] Also, going digital reduces material waste. For instance, if photos are taken of the experience (on a rafting trip for example), give them to guests digitally vs. printing them. Offering a choice of giveaways also limits waste. Ensure any giveaways are purchased from vendors who have publicly committed to sustainability or are eco-certified (e.g., climate pledge friendly, Fair Trade).

Part 4:

Envisioning Social Equity

Ethics
Promoting Collaboration
Educating to Shift Behavior
Authenticity

© ATTA / Matt Corliss

Ethics: Social Justice

Social justice is an important aspect of a sustainable travel experience. Treating all people involved with respect and fairness, regardless of their ethnicity, gender, or socioeconomic status is fundamental for ensuring social welfare is honored. It involves promoting and demonstrating equality and social justice within the communities visited.

Travelers want their trips to be ethically sound; 39% of travelers report experiencing travel guilt after a trip that might have been unethical.[72] **It's the job of tour groups and companies, accommodations, and anyone hired as part of the tour experience to create socially-conscious and authentic travel products.**

- Creating travel experiences that are accessible to a wide range of potential travelers enhances the diversity of tourists and supports United Nations goals of social inclusivity.[73]
- Acknowledging the land used during an experience respectfully honors historic land ownership and rights.[74]
- **Hiring socially underrepresented people in companies, tour staff, and as suppliers and producers increases the social integrity aspect of sustainability and sends the message that "all are welcome."**

© ATTA / Daniel Santos

Creating Sustainable Experiences

© blindspot.ch

Social Justice & Inclusion

Spotlight: Blindspot

In the city of Bern, Switzerland, all people are welcome to enjoy a good meal or drink served by an inclusive team. Several establishments, including the barrier-free Provisorium46, Fabrique28, or Bar8, were created by the Blindspot project to promote social inclusion and provide training and job opportunities to young professionals of all backgrounds. In this way, people with and without disabilities can grow personally, develop their social skills, and be prepared for the primary labor market. The important value of the project is to raise awareness and educate about inclusion.

These businesses offer regional, seasonal, and often organic products, and their spaces are also available for meetings, watching the Football Championship, or enjoying live music. Additionally, since the summer of 2021, visitors can dine in a pop-up open-air market called Hof 17. The project won the Prix Lions prize in 2017 and continues to grow under the name "Labor Inklusion," focusing on inclusion in both living and working communities.

Ethics: Communication

The way the adventure travel industry talks about and markets travel experiences influences how visitors perceive the product. Taking the following actions can help guests better understand the impact their travel is having on the local community.

- Promote the ways that travel experiences support and advocate for diversity, equity, and inclusion increasingly appeals to the sustainably-minded traveler.
- Remove jargon like "doing a place" to focus on the specific joys of traveling and less on the accomplishment, colonialist, and extractive mindset of checking a place off of a bucket list. Reframing the conquering mentality with a framework of becoming familiar with or getting to know a place and its people is a sign of respect for the destination and its residents.[75]
- Avoid the phrase "like a local" due to its overgenerality. Instead, specify the local population and include sociopolitical context.
- Safety is an additional aspect of ethical travel and involves maintaining adventure travel activities that are conducted in a safe, non-harmful, and responsible manner. Travelers need to be well informed about the risks and safety precautions necessary for each activity, especially with literal land shifts due to climate change.[76]

© ATTA / Cory Rossnagel

Promoting Collaboration

Incorporating opportunities into travel programming that allow participants to be as immersed as possible in nearby nature and landscape and engage with local people highlights the uniqueness of the destination and local populations. For example, many of the micro-adventures and day trips that are on the rise in 2023 are led by Indigenous and First Nations guides who bring lifetimes of experience and skill to the experiences.[77] In this collaboration, everyone benefits. Tourists get to learn first-hand about local history and culture, while local communities get to support their livelihoods through sharing their heritage and educating visitors.

Collaboration around eco-certification is key for greening tours and accommodations. This can be a challenge, especially for small and medium businesses in relatively young tourism economies, for example Trinidad and Tobago, Suriname, and Curaçao. Many smaller operations first need education around sustainability practices and how to implement them especially if they're also faced with financial and labor limitations.[78] Another major challenge for greening smaller businesses in small countries is a lack of data to convince stakeholders that sustainability is economically-sound.

ATTA / Hassen Salum

Promoting Collaboration

Partnerships between smaller eco-certifiers and global certifiers could help reduce the burden on operations with fewer resources. Some ways adventure travel organizations can work together to promote collaboration among all parts of the industry include:

- Establishing partnerships among travel companies, local communities, and conservation organizations on sustainable tourism initiatives to optimize the sustainability efforts of each individual group. Sometimes scholarship opportunities are available to help small-scale tour operators, e.g., with ATTA.[79]
- Sharing gained knowledge, best practices, success stories, and results from surveys among industry stakeholders helps extend sustainability efforts throughout the adventure travel community.
- Understanding how well sustainability strategy and initiatives are received and understood by participants through surveys helps suppliers and companies plan future experiences.
- Engaging with and fostering communication with all stakeholders in the sustainable adventure travel industry, from local communities to travelers and NGOs, promotes collaboration and builds consensus around sustainability initiatives.

© ATTA / Nicolas Caram

© A2Z Portugal

Promoting Collaboration

Spotlight: A2Z Portugal

A2Z Portugal offers unique experiences for small groups who want to discover the less explored natural and historical wealth of Portugal, with a focus on cycling and hiking tours.

To increase their impact, collaboration is an essential aspect. Therefore, A2Z Portugal plans to communicate with its local suppliers and partners to jointly define a responsible tourism program and implement regional projects promoted by this initiative. In addition to its partners, A2Z Portugal will also invite its customers to participate in the program. In this way, they will create an alliance with common values and goals.

Apart from their interest in environmentally friendly transportation, they use partially recycled fabrics in their t-shirts with the intention of using these materials in all their equipment.

Educating to Shift Behavior

Educating travelers about sustainable tourism practices and the benefits and importance of minimizing negative impacts of travel on the environment and local communities is a critical component of sustainability efforts. **Encouraging visitors to support sustainable tourism initiatives** with specific reasons how and why their support matters will help preserve access to the world's amazing destinations.

- Travel experiences are opportunities to come together and explore new destinations, to share knowledge, to co-learn, and for travelers to extend the reach of gained insights by taking new knowledge and experiences home with them.
- **69% of travelers are interested to understand why specific options are recognized as more sustainable.**[80]
- Anchoring the topic of sustainability into tours is a great way to bring its components to life and to help tourists become more aware about it.[81]

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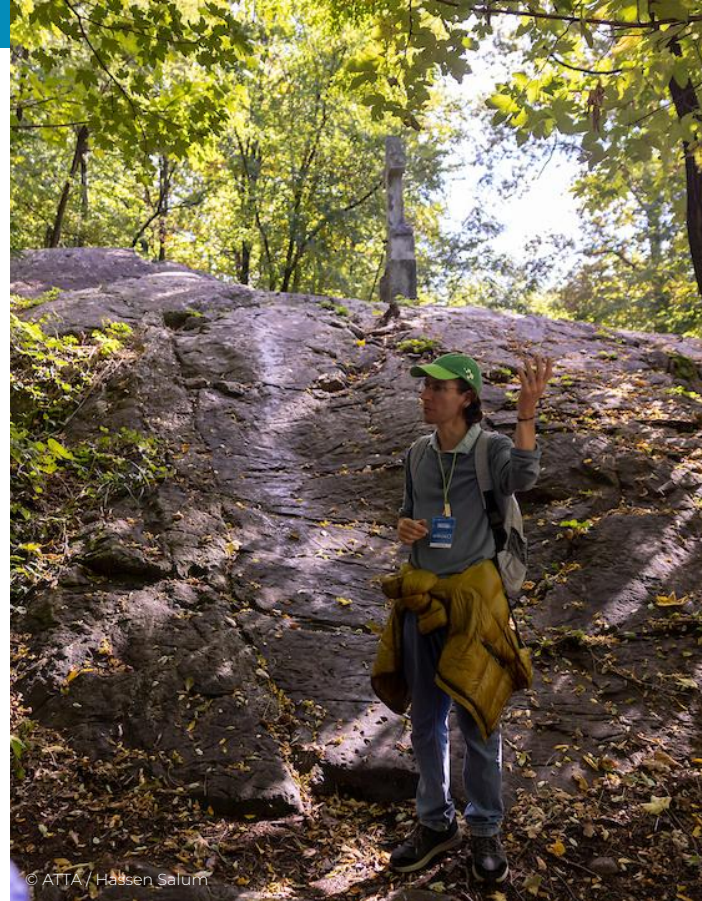
Authenticity

A majority of travelers desire to have "authentic experiences that are representative of the local culture,"[82] particularly people-led encounters with nature and wildlife, rather than luxury and seclusion.[83]

Travelers can experience authentic experiences by interacting directly with Indigenous members of destination communities. Indigenous or First-Nation led tours can give travelers a new appreciation of local culture and wildlife as well as an inside peek into how tourist dollars translate into local livelihoods.[83]

This trend toward authentic and respectful engagement with Indigenous populations arrives as part of a desire for reconciliation with painful history. For example, Pope Francis' apology to Indigenous Canadians for forced and abusive "residential schooling" during the 1800s[84] and the public concern around escalated killings of Indigenous people and environmental defenders during the pandemic[85] has increased public desire for remedying historical and recent wrongs. One way towards reconciliation is education through authentic adventure travel.
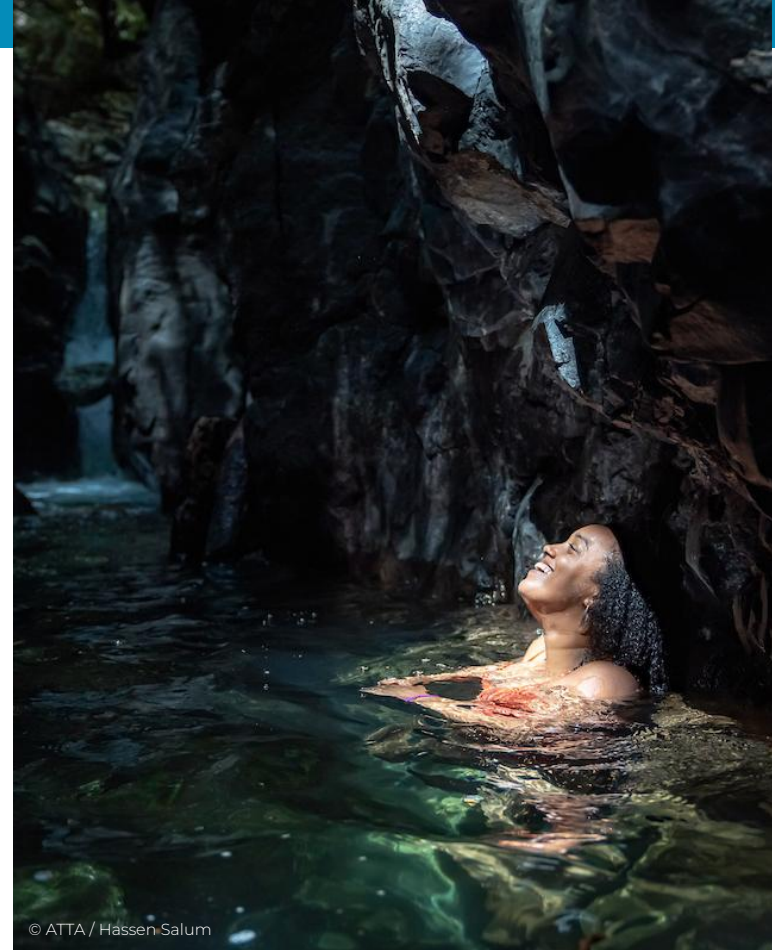
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Part 5:

Creating and Maintaining Value for the Long-term

Value
Longevity
Consciously Balancing Tourism
Counterbalancing Intense Tourism

© ATTA / Daniel Santos

Value

Visitors want to see and experience local culture and nature and the longevity of those systems in many cases depends on their support. Because survey results show that visitors increasingly value sustainable social practices, incorporating these into and promoting them in travel experiences is critical. Integrating support for local people, animal, and plant communities into tour experiences both increases the value of a travel product for the visitors as well as supports the uniqueness of a destination.

Sustainability is at the top of travelers' agenda in 2023. Three quarters of high-end travelers say they are willing to pay extra to increase the sustainability of their travel. 31% of consumers are willing to pay more for international travel this year compared to in 2022, in spite of inflation and cost-of-living crises.[86]

Many other travelers (about half) think that 'more sustainable travel' is too expensive, according to Booking.com's 2023 Sustainable Travel Report.[87] Still others think "sustainable travel" means settling for less. Creators of sustainable tours will benefit from emphasizing value to potential travelers.[88]

Designing tours with local cuisine in mind will increase their value, as culinary is found to be one of the popular types of tours in 2023, according to Arival's report.[89] The value of the Global Culinary Tourism Market is expected to increase from $1.31 to $3.46 billion USD from 2022 to 2028.[90] It's Generation Z with the most interest in culinary experiences and they desire passion-driven dining that emphasizes "more authenticity, less opulence." Tourists increasingly want layered experiences such as a beer tour combined with kayaking or hiking through vineyards as part of a wine tour.[91]

Kayak, Expedia, and Google are trying to help consumers get the most sustainability value out of their travel searches by including guidance for green travel. For example, Kayak released its 2023 City Index for Mindful Travelers, which ranks over 160 cities based on mass transit, airport carbon accreditation, air quality, local markets, and more than 20 other sustainability factors.[92]

Longevity

The effort of making tourism products more sustainable is, in itself, a way to elongate the shelf life of a travel experience. More sustainable products will be able to withstand the test of time.

A risk in entertaining travel trends is that the investment is only for short-term gains. Considering the three legs of sustainability, environment, social welfare, and economics in designing adventure travel experiences increases the likelihood of long-term product success. This goal also aligns with the perception of travelers that "Travel should support local communities and economies, travel should preserve a destination's cultural heritage, and travel should protect the planet."[93] Sustainability has the capacity to make tourism more resilient and better for communities and the natural environment and, since 2014, Sustainable Leaders United has been accumulating sustainable destination success stories that persist and inspire.

"What was quite dangerous in tourism management over many years, [was that] the only indicators that counted were overnight stays and turnover. Then it was often not profitable with a really long-term and thus sustainable development," comments a European interviewee.[94]

It's not all about heads in beds anymore. With a sustainability lens, indicators of success in tourism are now more nuanced, including both the tangible as well as the intangible. For example, in 2022, the EU released its Transition Pathway for Tourism report with 27 sustainability metrics for green and digital transition and for improving the resilience of EU tourism. The report signals the need for circular and environmentally friendly services in tourism, improved data sharing for innovative services, and increasing accessibility of services.[95]

To enhance the long-term viability of local tour options, ATTA Ambassador, educator, entrepreneur, and Alaya co-Founder Jean-Claude Razel challenged the industry, **"Don't sell what customers want. Start selling what destinations need,"** in his keynote speech at the Adventure Travel World Summit in Lugano, Switzerland in 2022.[96]

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Value & Longevity

Spotlight: MAKE TRAVEL MATTER®

MAKE TRAVEL MATTER® offers travel experiences that directly address and contribute to a selection of Sustainable Development Goals. These activities encompass various itineraries developed for The Travel Corporation (TTC) member companies with the aim of promoting traveler education, support, and engagement of local communities. This way, both sides of travel products can benefit from it. The project is part of TTC's How We Trade Right sustainability strategy. In the first year of its existence, the companies introduced 554 MTM® experiences, making up more than half of the TTC's itineraries.

By choosing these visits, clients can consciously support locals and contribute to the protection and development of the region. During the trip, tourists usually embark on an adventurous journey while contributing to local projects and gaining new knowledge at the same time. In this way, clients can experience, for instance, wildlife watching or cruising on a boat while learning about regional animal species and planting young trees. All trips are assessed by a transparent and demanding set of criteria.

Consciously Balancing Tourism

Overtourism can affect the quality of life of residents and lead to their withdrawal and desire to reduce tourism.[97] This has led to an ongoing discussion about which types of tourists are the "right ones" for a destination. A 71% majority of residents would welcome activities that are beneficial to both tourists and locals.[98] Initiatives to attract "good tourists" are effective in combating the negative impact of overtourism. "Good tourists" in this sense are considered those who are friendly, respectful, and have high purchasing power.

Local governments are important co-creators of quality tourism, for example, by controlling traffic and noise. Such efforts to affect the quantity and quality of tourists are fundamental to keeping the destination as a good place to live for residents.[99] However, despite the marked sustainability benefits of low-cost tourism, including backpacking, some governments and tourist boards label low-spending travelers like backpackers as "low-quality" tourists. They would prefer fewer, high-spending, "high-quality" tourists than many low-spending ones. Some of these groups unfairly blame low-cost travelers for spreading COVID-19, increasing drug use, abandoning vehicles, and contributing to overtourism. As a result of this, such groups are focused on reducing low-spending tourists by taking actions like limiting visa lengths.[100]

While reducing tourist numbers by favoring high-spenders could limit crowding, this effort is an antithesis of social sustainability from the perspective of the travelers and destination populations and businesses. Small and medium sized businesses assert that backpackers do spend money during their longer trips, engage in more activities, and also directly support small businesses with less financial leakage.[101] These businesses feel their voices are being silenced and fear policies and price increases (e.g., at national parks and monuments) that would limit tourists looking for adventure at lower price points. They perceive that backpackers enhance local communities and therefore want to continue business with them.

Counterbalancing Intense Tourism

Overall, attracting a variety of tourists, with their broad range of cultural and social worth, benefits the development and resilience of a wider diversity of destination businesses.[102] This more inclusive perspective helps maintain the inclusivity and democracy in tourism.[103]

- Travelers themselves support two solutions to minimize overtourism, 1) traveling to less popular and rural destinations 2) during shoulder and off-seasons.

- Even though almost half of travelers (42%) are challenged to find attractive alternatives to over-touristed destinations, 64% of travelers say they would reduce overtourism by visiting destinations during an off-peak time.[104] Helping travelers see value in less popular destinations, via short videos and virtual reality experiences for example, could spread the pressure of tourism across destinations. And for travelers who are intent on visiting a popular destination, 13% would be willing to pay more.[105]

- While most travelers still travel during peak seasons, they affirm their intention to travel outside of peak season; 40% intend to do so within the next year.[106]

- Only 33% of tourists say they traveled off-peak within the last year, so incentivizing travel during shoulder seasons remains low-hanging fruit to redistribute demand away from peak seasons and thereby increase environmental and social sustainability.

- Another way to reduce pressures on destinations is to encourage tourists to elongate and take fewer trips. Short-term rentals and cheap flights have recently been associated with extractive tourism.[107]

- Additionally, "carbon taxes, aviation fuel taxes, education funding, affordable housing, job training, public transport, labor standards, rent controls, and minimum wages" can all be considered to minimize overtourism and ameliorate the experience of residents.[108]

Part 6:

Sustainable Experiences Guidelines

Overall Sustainability Strategy
Community Engagement
Environmental Engagement
Creating & Maintaining Value

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Guidelines: Overall Sustainability Strategy

- Develop and promote authentic, high-quality activities that benefit tourists and residents
- Encourage travel to less popular, rural, and closer-to-home destinations to minimize the carbon footprint of transportation
- Encourage travel during shoulder and off-seasons to minimize burdens of overtourism
- Offer micro-adventures as tour add-ons and to attract local or nearby residents, which can reduce the carbon footprint of travel and appeal to travelers who want to explore destinations closer to home
- Create/support micro-adventures led by indigenous or First Nation guides
- Minimize group sizes to lessen impacts of overtourism and appeal to health-conscious tourists
- Offer low-impact tourism activities, e.g., backpacking and pilgrimages, volunteer, youth group, or bicycling trips, which reduce pressures on local populations and environments and extend the high season
- Offer tours that are accessible to people with disabilities
- Support and use third-party sustainability accreditation, which elevates the importance of sustainability and aids traveler decision-making
- Promote digitalization responsibly to inspire genuine traveler interest
- Keep staff satisfied by offering flexibility whenever possible, such as remote work
- Choose suppliers that compensate employees fairly
- Hire staff with underrepresented identities to send the message that "all are welcome"
- Communicate succinct & specific sustainability practices included in each product description, being respectful of the destination & its residents
- Collaborate in partnerships among travel companies, eco-certifiers, local communities, and conservation organizations on sustainable tourism initiatives to leverage sustainability efforts

Guidelines:
Community Engagement

- Offer local, educational, and community-based tour and activity opportunities
- Design cultural experiences that respect and support local heritages and that are representative of the destination
- Engage with local cultures and traditions considerately, such as with awareness of local dress codes and customs and avoiding taking pictures of people without permission
- Support cultural heritage sites and activities by including them in tours or recommending them to travelers for before or after tours
- Support slow tourism, which focuses on a leisurely approach to travel and emphasizes the experiences in local culture, food, and environment

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Guidelines: Environmental Engagement

- Inspire travelers to elongate trips and take fewer of them to reduce the carbon footprint of transportation
- Incorporate or encourage the use of public transportation, bicycles, and walking to limit carbon emissions associated with travel
- Offset travel emissions through airlines or other transportation to counteract travel-related carbon emissions
- Protect destinations, such as by preventing littering, vandalizing, and disturbing or collecting wildlife, while also educating participants in respectful engagement with nature and culture
- Encourage visitors to go "off the beaten path" in responsible and respectful ways, e.g., by using Leave No Trace principles to minimize environmental harm
- Source sustainable gear and equipment to lower the carbon footprint of tours
- Encourage responsible wildlife tourism to support conservation initiatives and foster education about endangered species and to help protect biodiversity and ecosystems
- Minimize foods with a high carbon footprint
- Primarily offer local and sustainably produced foods and beverages to highlight destination offerings and reduce transport emissions
- Hire suppliers who are committed to sustainability practices with prominent educational signage, including reducing, reusing, recycling, and composting
- Avoid single-use plastic and paper waste by using bulk packaging and reusable or compostable serviceware

Guidelines: Creating & Maintaining Value

- Increase long-term product success by incorporating the three legs of sustainability, environmental stewardship, social welfare, and economic vitality, into each travel experience

- Add product surcharges for supporting environmental rehabilitation and social welfare efforts at the destination

- Help redistribute the pressure of tourism across destinations and seasons by highlighting the value of less popular destinations and the value of traveling during non-peak seasons, for example, via short videos and virtual reality experiences

- Offer a range of product price points to attract a wide diversity of tourists as well as maintain a diversity of destination businesses

- Integrate support for local people, animal, and plant communities into tour experiences to make products valuable for both visitors and residents and to support the local economy

- Support locally-owned accommodations and eateries that demonstrate commitment to sustainability

- Choose local vendors and artisans that are socially and environmentally conscientious

- Source staff and materials locally to support local community, including people from underrepresented identities

- Focus on both tangible and intangible metrics of success, in business-to-business and traveler evaluation of product sustainability

Part 7:

Conclusions

Learning by Doing
Sustainable Experiences Checklist
References

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Learning by Doing

Adventure travel embraces sustainable experiences as a means to minimize its environmental impact and promote responsible tourism. Sustainable practices are woven into the fabric of adventure travel, helping the industry to respect and preserve natural and cultural resources. These approaches include prioritizing community engagement, also known as social sustainability, environmental conservation, and economic sustainability by creating and maintaining value for all participants.

It is clear that travelers are looking for more sustainable tourism options, and the research results presented in this report show how the adventure travel industry is responding. Buyers and suppliers are prioritizing sustainability not only in their own operations, but also in their partnerships and communications.

The guidelines in Part 6 were developed to assist adventure travel companies in all areas of the industry to develop more sustainable products and experiences, from all angles, both tangible and intangible. As a summary document, the sustainable experiences checklist linked on the following page is a compilation of these suggestions and action items in a simple, easy-to-reference PDF. The Adventure Travel Trade Association and Switzerland Tourism hope that this series of five reports delving into different components of sustainability have been interesting and helpful. If you missed any of the reports, they can be found in ATTA's Research Library.

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Sustainable Experiences Checklist

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https://bit.ly/atta-sustainable-experiences-checklist

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