

GEOTOURISM

HOW TRAVEL CAN SAVE THE WORLD

BY JENNA VASQUEZ

If you've ever wished your hotel wouldn't give you a new towel every *single* day, or bought a souvenir from a local artisan when you really could have purchased it cheaper at Walmart, or foregone the waves of Waikiki to check out the less-crowded beaches on the North Shore, you can give yourself a pat on the back. You're a geotourist at heart.

GE·O·TOUR·ISM

noun

tourism that sustains or enhances the distinctive geographical character of a place—its environment, heritage, aesthetics, culture, and the well-being of its residents

Sounds a whole lot like saving the world to me. So, are you in? **Read on to learn why geotourism is emerging as a better way to travel and see if you're ready to make the switch.**



Yellowstone National Park, Photo by Jenna Vasquez (author)

IT'S SUSTAINABLE.

You're not alone if you think that more travel means a larger ecological footprint. Historically, it has. Typical tourism is fraught with ecological "bigfoots" (see **Figure 1** for an illustration of why this is the case). Think of a family of four on a one-week vacation in Mexico. The plane to get them there, the hot showers morning and night at the hotel, the emissions of the rental car, the list goes on...

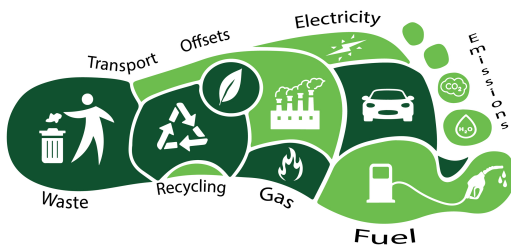


Figure 1, Source: globalcoinreport.com

Everything adds up. Fast.

Travel doesn't have to be this way. In fact, geotourism is simply a shift in mindset. [Green Global Travel](#) gives some helpful questions you can ask a hotel manager before you book a room. When it comes to hotels, cars, planes, or anything else that contributes to your overall consumption of resources, carefully choose more eco-friendly options.

Sustainable travel is **happier** travel. Geotourists find the ideal blend between enjoying the pleasures of a vacation and preserving the landscape and resources of their chosen destination.

IT'S ECONOMICAL.

The local workforce thanks you for your decision to embrace geotourism as your preferred form of travel. Next time you're ready to vacation, do a little research and figure out **where your dollars are going**.

"Tourism [is] the largest voluntary transfer of cash from the rich to the poor, the 'haves' to 'have nots,' in history."

– Lelei Lelaulu,
Counterpart International

Tourism done right is perhaps even superior to donating to a nonprofit organization. As outlined by [National Geographic](#), geotourism encompasses 13 key principles. Number 4 is **community benefit**. Geotourists encourage micro- to medium-size enterprises and direct their spending toward companies and businesses that build the local community and thus alleviate poverty at its roots.



Source: medium.com

Table 1 highlights five of the least-developed countries and their annual tourism revenue (in millions of U.S. dollars). Just think of the good these dollars (*your* dollars) could do if put straight into the hands of honest laborers, artisans, and citizens striving to make a living for themselves and promote **sound economic principles** in their respective countries.






 BANGLADESH	175
 CAMBODIA	3,523
 ETHIOPIA	2,138
 HAITI	511
 MADAGASCAR	913

Table 1, Source: *data.worldbank.org*

The beauty of geotourism is it touches numerous sectors of local markets, including agriculture, transportation, handicrafts, and other services. This span allows many opportunities for travelers to support the local residents economically and put their dollars toward **improving local quality of life**.

IT'S CULTURAL.

A geotourist is not necessarily concerned with visiting every site on [Momondo's 15 Tourist Attractions You Must See Before You Die](#) (though by all means, check out the sites wherever you are—the world offers some amazing views you don't want to miss). However, **the bigger goal is to engage with the local culture** in a meaningful way.



Source: *unsplash.com*

Next time you travel, find out if the city is hosting any local festivals or community events that you could attend during your stay. What better way to truly get to know people than to **celebrate** an important piece of their culture with them.

You can also engage with the local culture by **embracing** the aspects found

therein. In the months leading up to your trip, learn basic phrases in the language spoken by the population you will be visiting.

Research can increase your cultural awareness as well (for example, you might learn that many restaurants in Italy do not open until 6 or 7 p.m.). You'll feel much more **comfortable** in a foreign culture if you've put in the pre-trip effort to learn about it.

IT'S STRATEGIC.

The goal of a geotourist is to develop global relationships and connections. This is **networking** at its finest.

According to [Solimar International](#), the geotourism approach involves "extensive engagement with local residents in the **planning, development, and deployment of communications** products that engage people within a destination and promote travel to it." This is people helping people. Businesses promoting businesses.



Source: unsplash.com

You don't have to be a computer whiz or geography buff to be a strategic

geotourist. Simply take advantage of the fact that we are all relational beings, and next time you're visiting a new place, make a special effort to **smile** and say hi to someone new. Who knows, you might end up with a lifelong friend in Spain who gives you a reason to keep coming back (and maybe even provides insider-knowledge about the fútbol team).

IT'S AUTHENTIC.

Far from the concept of been there, done that, geotourism is **fresh**.

*"The enemy of geotourism
is sameness."*

*– Jonathan B. Tourtellot,
National Geographic Society*

We've all heard the phrase "tourist trap." Basically, anything that draws unknowing foreigners in, takes their money, and gives them a t-shirt to prove they really did see the "World's Oldest Tree Stump!"

Luckily for you geotourists, you can skip the t-shirt and the stump altogether and focus on the *place*. Geotourism is all about **enriching your destination**, rather than falling victim to its flashy (and pricey) snares.

Think of the concept of destination stewardship. We are all *responsible* for the impact our actions have on the world around us. Not much comes to mind that is more disgraceful than tourists who jet

off to another country, spend the week shamelessly using the local resources, and return home, leaving a wake of waste in their path. This is not the way of geotourism.

We all yearn to experience something **real**. Well, here it is.

CONCLUSION.

Geotourism is a better way to well, tour. It's how we reconcile the dream of traveling the world with the vision of economic stability, environmental sustainability, and genuine connectivity.

You don't have to change who you are or spend any more money to embrace geotourism. Simply follow the suggestions given in this article and let authenticity be your guide. Bon voyage!



Source: unsplash.com

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