



IVS Principles of Responsible Travel

Our programs are grounded in principles of responsible and ethical travel. For our programs to be successful and have a long-term positive impact, it requires a commitment of all participants to uphold these principles. Before departure, we will cover general guidelines and expectations, as well as the responsibilities we carry as global travelers. Our goal is to develop an ethic of care, where our decisions as travelers are made with the welfare of the local community and the integrity of the environment we visit at its core.

We believe that responsible travel is an ongoing learning process and encourage program participants to share their questions, perspectives, and insights throughout the trip. Through this collaborative learning, we aspire as a group to improve upon the practices of our programs.

Principles of Responsible Travel

1. ***Cultural Sensitivity*** – Responsible travel starts from a place of respect for cultural differences and a healthy dose of humility. While we do not believe we need to leave our values behind, we do think one of the greatest joys of travel is learning about the many different ways of being human. During our programs, we provide background on the history, religion, and cultures of the places we visit, including guidance on culturally appropriate behavior. Often when traveling there is the inevitable tension between personal desires and needs vs. sensitive behavior, such as wearing long-sleeves in 100-degree heat or eating rice and dal for the 10th meal in a row. Our view is that these are small sacrifices for the privilege and opportunity of connecting with different cultures around the world.
2. ***Learning from and Valuing Indigenous Knowledge*** – We believe many insights are to be gained from cultures that have existed for centuries or millennia. Whether it is the role of community or cultural and environmental adaptation, we have much to learn from their unique perspectives and knowledge. We aim to form genuine reciprocal relationships with the communities we visit, where through the exchange of ideas and practices, both sides have gained deeper knowledge and wisdom.
3. ***Leaving a Small Footprint*** – We are conscious of the resources we use in other communities, particularly in areas where they are limited, such as with water in the alpine deserts of Ladakh. We also try to limit our waste from consumption, specifically with plastic bottles. In many locations we travel to, there is no waste management system or recycling and much of the trash we create will end up polluting the environment. We advise all of our trip participants to reduce consumption of non-biodegradable products, as well as bring their own water bottles and purification systems. We also advise participants to unpackage items that are wrapped in plastic at home so we do not bring unnecessary trash along.
4. ***Developing Long-Term Relationships*** – We travel to communities with the goal of building long-term relationships based on mutual trust and friendship. Rather than pursue one-off visits, we prefer to cultivate connections over time by continuing to return to the same communities.

We also do not lead trips to new communities, unless we have already begun to develop a relationship and are *invited* to visit with a larger group.

5. ***Participating Rather than Observing*** – While we emphasize culturally appropriate behavior, we have found this can sometimes paralyze travelers from participating out of fear of making mistakes. Most local communities do not expect Westerners to know all of the nuances of their culture and are very accepting when we inevitably screw up. As long as it comes from a place of respect and willingness to learn, get out and get involved – this is the space where genuine cross-cultural connections are made.
6. ***Mindful Photography*** – One of the pleasures of travel is capturing the memories and stories in photographs. With this, however, comes a responsibility to the people and places that are the subjects of the pictures. We ask our trip participants to be mindful of the barrier created by a lens, as well the wishes and feelings of the people who are on the other side of the photo. At the very least permission should always be given, and when possible being able to share prints of the pictures with people from the local community is a good form of reciprocity.
7. ***Supporting Local Economies*** – We want to ensure that the resources we spend on our trips go towards enhancing the incomes and livelihoods of the local communities we visit rather than transferred out to businesses in the big cities or abroad. To the extent that is possible, we try to support locally-owned guesthouses and restaurants and can direct you to shops and markets where local artisans sell their products.
8. ***Supporting Community Projects*** – An integral part of our programs is working with local communities on development projects. Our philosophy is that projects are most successful when they are initiated and led by local communities or grassroots organizations. They are the experts in what their priorities are and in how to best accomplish them. We simply ask in what ways we can be a resource.
9. ***Civic Engagement*** – Our hope is that travel leads to more conscious and engaged global citizens. Spending time abroad can often be a highly transformative experience. To build upon this experience, we highly encourage all travelers to maintain connections with the people or projects from the trip or to get involved with existing organizations in your home communities. We have found that meaningful engagement upon returning home helps cement the insights we gained abroad, rather than become a fading memory.