

PRINCIPLES OF GEOTOURISM – NATIONAL GEOGRAPHIC SOCIETY

NATIONAL GEOGRAPHIC works to protect the world's distinctive places through wisely managed tourism and enlightened destination stewardship. Here are its 13 geotourism principles for governments and tourism operators.

1. Integrity of a Place

Enhance the geographical character of the destination by developing and improving it in ways distinctive to the locale. Encourage market differentiation and cultural pride in ways that are reflective of natural and cultural heritage.

2. International Codes

Adhere to the principles embodied in the World Tourism Organization's Global Code of Ethics for Tourism and the principles of the Cultural Tourism Charter established by the International Council on Monuments and Sites (ICOMOS).

3. Community Involvement

Base tourism on community resources to the extent possible, encouraging local small businesses and civic groups to build partnerships to promote and provide a distinctive, honest visitor experience and market their locales effectively. Help businesses develop approaches to tourism that build on the area's nature, history, and culture, including food and drink, artisanship, performance arts, and the like.

4. Community Benefit

Encourage micro- to medium-size enterprises and tourism business strategies that emphasise economic and social benefits to involved communities, especially poverty alleviation, with clear communication of the destination stewardship policies required to maintain those benefits.

5. Tourist Satisfaction

Ensure that satisfied, excited geotourists bring new vacation stories home and send friends off to experience the same thing, thus providing continuing demand for the destination.

6. Conservation of Resources

Encourage businesses to minimize water pollution, solid waste, energy consumption, water usage, landscaping chemicals, and overly bright night-time lighting. Advertise these measures in a way that attracts the large, environmentally sympathetic tourist market.

7. Protection and Enhancement of Destination Appeal

Encourage the destination to sustain natural habitats, heritage sites, aesthetic appeal, and local culture. Prevent degradation by keeping the volume of tourists within maximum acceptable limits. Seek business models that can operate profitably within those limits. Use persuasion, incentives, and legal enforcement as needed.

8. Planning

Recognise and respect immediate economic need without sacrificing long-term character and the geotourism potential of the destination. Where tourism attracts in-migration of workers, develop new communities that themselves constitute a destination enhancement. Strive to diversify the economy and limit population influx to sustainable levels. Adopt public strategies for mitigating practices that are incompatible with geotourism and damaging to the image of the destination.

9. Land Use

Anticipate development pressures and apply techniques to prevent undesired overdevelopment and degradation. Contain resort and vacation-home sprawl, especially on coasts and islands, so as to retain a diversity of natural and scenic environments and ensure continued resident access to waterfronts. Encourage major self-contained tourism attractions, such as large-scale theme parks and convention centres unrelated to character of place, to be sited in needier locations with no significant ecological, scenic, or cultural assets.

10. Market Diversity

Encourage a full range of appropriate food and lodging facilities, so as to appeal to the entire demographic spectrum of the geotourism market and so maximise economic resiliency over both the short and long term.

11. Interactive Interpretation

Engage both visitors and hosts in learning about the place. Encourage residents to show off the natural and cultural heritage of their communities, so that tourists gain a richer experience and residents develop pride in their locales.

12. Market Selectivity

Encourage growth in tourism market segments most likely to appreciate, respect, and disseminate information about the distinctive assets of the locale.

13. Evaluation

Establish an evaluation process to be conducted on a regular basis by an independent panel representing all stakeholders' interests, and to publicise evaluation results.

Note: In the USA, the National Geographic Society has been promoting a broader 'geographic' view of geotourism that embraces a broader remit and includes a range of niche forms of tourism such as cultural tourism and ecotourism. It states that 'geotourism is defined as tourism that sustains or enhances the geographical character of a place - its environment, culture, aesthetics, heritage, and the well-being of its residents. Here the term environment is taken to include geology, although this was not explicitly stated. The National Geographic definition incorporates the concept of sustainable tourism and, in a similar vein to ecotourism, asserts that tourism revenue should promote conservation, and be extended to include culture and history as well, that is, all distinctive assets of a place.

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