

## Fair Trade Tourism

Sustainable tourism, eco-tourism, community tourism... you may have heard these terms being thrown about in the past several years, but figuring out what they actually mean is a whole different story. Well, these days, a new one is being thrown into the mix -- it's called fair trade in tourism, and many feel that it's becoming an important factor in traveling responsibly.

Fair trade tourism, a subsection of sustainable tourism, attempts to maximize the benefits of tourism for the local destination. This usually means hiring local employees, providing fair wages and benefits to those employees, providing training for career advancement, using locally produced resources such as food and textiles, and putting the money earned through local tourism back into the community. It sounds simple enough, however, fair trade tourism can be difficult to execute. Lodge operators, tour guides and expedition operators must find a way to engage in fair trade, while still turning enough profit to sustain their business.

For less developed countries, it can be difficult to promote tourism as a viable resource without exploiting their local people, land and culture. According to Tourism Concern, a London-based organization that is campaigning for ethical and fairly traded tourism, several nations are under scrutiny for the mistreatment of their tourism employees for the sake of promoting the industry. The "Sun, Sea, Sand and Sweatshops" campaign is raising awareness of the appalling working conditions in various highly-visited destinations; in resort areas like Cancun and the Maya Riviera, average salaries rarely go above \$4 a day, while apartment rental for a local worker can cost \$150 a month. In the Maldives, Tourism Concern has launched a "Lost in Paradise Campaign," where the idyllic environment belies the fact that nearly half of the population is living on just over \$1 a day, while amenities like fresh fruit and vegetables go directly to the tourist destinations (a recent study found that more than 30 percent of Maldivian children under five are suffering from malnutrition).

And these injustices aren't just taking place in tropical resorts. While it may be inspiring to hear those triumphant stories of people conquering the Himalayas, we forget about the porters who have also have to scale the mountains... while carrying all the equipment. Those hardy climbers aren't immune to conditions like frostbite and altitude sickness; even in the Himalayas, the traditional "sherpa" is usually from a high-altitude area, but many porters are farmers from lowland areas, and are unaccustomed to mountain conditions.

So how can you be assured that your destination is engaging in fair trade practices? It's not always easy. With feel-good phrases like "eco-friendly" and "responsible" being thrown about so frequently, it's hard to gauge which businesses are simply using these terms as marketing ploys. In 1999 Tourism Concern launched the International Network on Fair Trade in Tourism, which

focused mainly on research, advocacy, and information sharing. In response to outreach programs such as these, more and more countries are taking notice. In June 2002, South Africa initiated Fair Trade in Tourism South Africa (FTTSA), the very first “trademark” in the fair trade movement. Various South African tourism establishments, including game parks, lodges and adventure tours, have since been accredited with the FTTSA stamp, meaning that that these places fulfill the criteria of fair wages and working conditions (i.e., hiring local workers, using local resources, safe working conditions and practices, protecting young workers, conserving the environment and establishing reliable services to visitors). For responsible travelers, this can make it easier to identify those businesses that practice fair trade tourism.

And now that the FTTSA has taken a stand, the word is spreading to make it even easier for travelers to plan their fair trade tour. The North Carolina-based Hills of Africa is a small, family-owned tour operator and one of the first in the U.S. to associate solely with FTTSA-accredited institutions. They develop itineraries all over southern Africa, including Zambia, Zimbabwe, Mozambique, Namibia and Botswana. “What’s so great about traveling on an FTTSA itinerary is that you get a really good feel for the culture,” says Meredith Hill, who co-owns the business with her Zimbabwean sister-in-law, Sandy Salle. “The locals who work there are happy with their jobs and are willing to talk to you about their lives. There tends to be low turnover in these places, which helps to develop a loyal customer following.”

Hill gives the example of Klippe Rivier Country House in South Africa as a practitioner of fair trade in tourism. Not only do they hire locals to work in the guesthouse, but they give every employee an interest-free loan to purchase a home -- while working out individualized payment plans on those loans. “They accomplish this simply by choosing to not make as much money,” explains Hill. “Travelers are paying rates that are based upon a first-world travel experience, but business’ operation costs are third world. Employees are making what is considered a fair wage there, but it’s not at first-world standards -- so the guesthouse absorbs the difference on these loans. Fair trade is about making the benefits of tourism equally attainable, so it’s not just about the rich getting richer and the poor getting poorer. Everyone gets an equal chance of improvement.”

For a complete list of FTTSA-approved business, visit their website at [www.fairtourismza.org.za](http://www.fairtourismza.org.za).

### **Hills of Africa**

North Carolina

877-845-4802

[www.hillsofafrica.com](http://www.hillsofafrica.com)

There are also several abroad:

### **Tribes Travel**

[www.tribes.co.uk](http://www.tribes.co.uk)

The British tour company was announced Best Tour Operator in the First Choice Responsible Tourism Awards 2005 at the World Travel Market for its efforts in promoting adventure tourism with fair trade practices. The company works in cooperation with local communities as much as possible; they encourage participation in local cultures (as opposed to watching staged productions of rituals and dance by native inhabitants), work with local conservationists in the destination company, and hire local and indigenous guides. Trips include a five-day walk through Botswana, exploring the Andes and the Pacific coast of Ecuador, and visiting the wildlife preserves of India.

### **Responsible Travel**

[ResponsibleTravel.com](http://ResponsibleTravel.com)

This company, based in Brighton, England, has waged a campaign against "mass tourism," those large-scale packaged tours that tend to leave locals out of the picture. For example, in an all-inclusive holiday, most of your money will go toward the tour operator in your home country, the air carrier, insurance and commissions, leaving very little for the hotel, and even less for the hotel staff. Through this site, you can contact the operators of pre-screened holidays that operate in a responsible manner that work closely with local operators and employees, including adventure tours, budget travel, safaris and volunteer vacations.

### **The Mountain Company**

[www.themountaincompany.co.uk](http://www.themountaincompany.co.uk)

**Founded by mountaineer Roland Hunter, this company offers climbing and trekking expeditions in the Himalayas and Kilimanjaro. The Mountain Company works closely with the International Porter Protection Group to ensure that all porters have access to adequate clothing, boots, shelter and food (appropriate to the altitude and weather), medical care and insurance.**

**Finally, if it's not the right time to plan a trip abroad, you can still support local communities by shopping in American stores that sell fair trade products. These shops purchase items like chocolate, coffee and tea, crafts and clothing from mostly indigenous people from more than 40 countries including Indonesia, South Africa, Nepal, Thailand, and even the United States.**

**You can find a list of fair trade companies at Global Exchange ([www.globalexchange.com](http://www.globalexchange.com)). The organization also has their own Fair Trade Stores in the following locations:**

**4018 24th Street  
San Francisco, CA  
415-648-8068**

**2840 College Avenue  
Berkeley, CA  
510-548-0370**

**3508 SE Hawthorne Street  
Portland, OR  
503-234-4049**

**Online Store  
110 Capp Street, Second Floor  
San Francisco, CA  
800-505-4410  
[storemaster@globalexchange.org](mailto:storemaster@globalexchange.org)**