

GREEN HORIZONS INITIATIVE | VOLUME ONE

green horizons

SUSTAINABILITY
A LOCAL'S PERSPECTIVE



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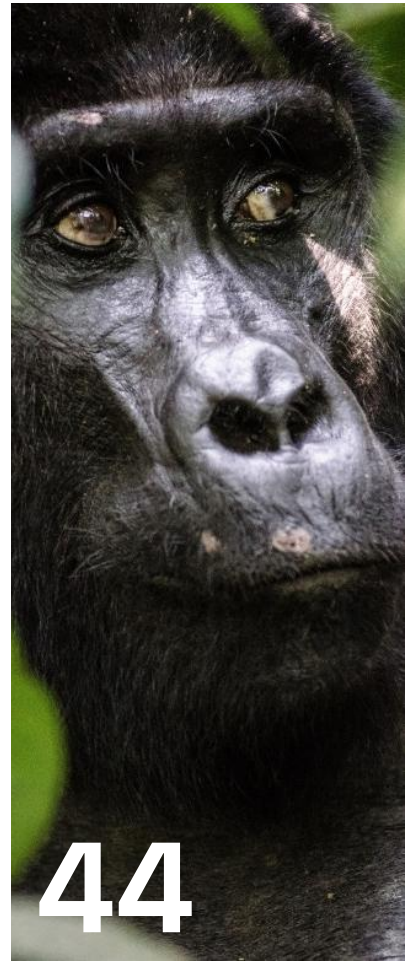


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Don't shy away from cultural experiences thinking they might be intrusive.

A WORD FROM THE CEO

As we unveil our latest issue of Green Horizons, I find myself reflecting on the stark numbers revealed in the recent Travel Foundation report: 50-80% of tourist spending leaks from local destinations. This statistic reinforces what my recent journeys through Colombia and Costa Rica have shown me – the path to truly sustainable tourism is more complex than we once thought.

The global tourism industry has long been dominated by large multinational corporations, often leaving local communities with little more than the crumbs from the table. However, by consciously directing our spending towards local businesses, we can help shift this paradigm and create a more equitable distribution of tourism's economic benefits.

One powerful way to make a positive difference is by ensuring that when we travel our funds are spent locally, directly benefiting the people who make our experiences memorable. If as travellers, we consider choosing locally owned accommodations over international hotel chains, not only are we likely to experience a more authentic experience, but we ensure that our money circulates within the local economy.

This issue explores these themes through stories of innovation and tradition. From community-led conservation to indigenous tourism initiatives, we examine how tourism can support both cultural preservation and individual aspirations. As you'll discover in our pages, sustainable tourism isn't about freezing communities in time – it's about creating platforms where traditional wisdom and modern dreams can coexist and thrive, ensuring tourism's benefits reach those who need them most.

We invite you to join us in this exploration of how tourism can be a force for positive change while respecting the evolving aspirations of the communities we visit.

by Carol Savage



Carol Savage is the founder of Not in the Guidebooks, a brand that is redefining the travel experience for the modern adventurer. Recognizing the growing demand for more authentic, immersive, and sustainable travel, Carol launched Not in the Guidebooks in 2019 with a mission to provide travelers with meaningful holiday experiences that go beyond the typical tourist offerings.



Jamie-Lee and her family, Lapland, Finland



EDITOR'S NOTE

by Jamie-Lee Abtar



Welcome to Green Horizons, a magazine born from a simple yet powerful realisation: the most authentic voices in sustainable tourism belong to those living it every day.

At Not in the Guidebooks, we've discovered that creating truly sustainable travel experiences requires more than good intentions – it demands listening to and learning from local communities. Through our work with tourism providers worldwide, we've uncovered stories that need to be shared, insights that need to be heard, and solutions that deserve attention.

That's why we created Green Horizons – not as just another travel magazine, but as a platform where local hosts can speak directly to travellers about what sustainability really means in their communities. From Ruth in the Maldives

challenging resort-centric tourism to Prateeqe in Sri Lanka promoting slower, more meaningful travel experiences, these voices offer authentic perspectives on creating positive change through tourism.

Our goal is simple: to build a community of conscious travellers armed with the knowledge and insights to make better choices. If this magazine influences even a few people to travel more responsibly, we'll consider it a success. Welcome to Green Horizons – where real stories inspire better ways to explore our world. Narratives we often tell ourselves about sustainable tourism.

Leading marketing initiatives at Not in the Guidebooks, Jamie-Lee helps connect travellers with authentic, off-the-beaten-path experiences.



CONTRIBUTORS



Jacob Wells

Jacob is our wordsmith, crafting compelling articles that inspire and inform. With a passion for sustainability, he's our go-to expert for turning complex environmental issues into digestible, actionable insights. Jacob's dedication to a greener future shines through every word he writes.

James Savage

James spent the summer conducting insightful interviews with eco-leaders and changemakers, bringing fresh perspectives to our pages. He also handles our social media presence, ensuring our community stays engaged, informed, and inspired to take action.



Alexander Woodhouse

Alex is the creative force behind the look and feel of Green Horizon. From stunning layouts to vibrant graphics, Alex's design work brings our content to life, making sustainability both accessible and visually captivating.



Photo of Not In The Guidebooks team

THE TRUTH IS

WHAT YOU NEED TO KNOW NOW

Ever wondered if your wanderlust is weighing on the world?

You're not alone! A whopping **83%** of globetrotters say sustainable travel matters to them. But what exactly is it, and how can you make your next adventure a **little greener?**

Buckle up as we explore the ins and outs of eco-friendly exploring!

WHAT'S THE BIG DEAL WITH SUSTAINABLE TRAVEL?

Imagine leaving a place better than you found it. Sounds good, right? That's the heart of sustainable travel. It's all about having amazing experiences while giving Mother Nature (and local communities) a big ol' hug.

FOR THE PLANET



Your choices can help fight climate change and protect beautiful destinations.

FOR THE LOCALS



You'll be supporting real people and preserving unique cultures.

FOR YOU



62% of travellers say they're their best selves when travelling sustainably.

THE GOOD, THE BAD, AND THE ECO-FRIENDLY

63% of travellers are willing to pay at least 2% more for tourism products with proven sustainability commitments.

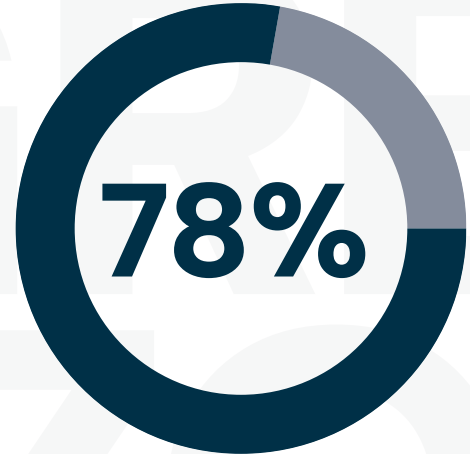
Source: Expedia Sustainable Travel Study 2023

69%

have difficulties finding sustainable travel options.



Source: Booking.com Sustainable Travel Report 2023



of tourism spending in developing countries leaks back to developed nations through foreign-owned hotels, tour operators & airlines.

Source: UNEP Green Economy Report 2021

KEEPING IT REAL: CHALLENGES AND SOLUTIONS

"Local businesses recirculate **2-3x** more revenue back into local economies compared to international chains"
International Journal of Tourism Research Study

"Economic Impacts of Local vs Chain Tourism Enterprises" 2022

"Communities with tourism businesses owned by local residents retain up to **65%** more tourism revenue than those dominated by outside ownership"

Source: World Bank Tourism Development Report 2023

65%

95%

"Community-based tourism initiatives return up to **95%** of expenditures to the local economy versus 15-20% for traditional all-inclusive resorts"

Source: UNWTO Community Tourism Report 2023



GREEN TALKING POINTS

The uncomfortable truth about sustainable tourism isn't that we're doing too little – it's that we're fundamentally misunderstanding what needs to be done. In the Maldives, Ruth, a British entrepreneur who founded a community tourism enterprise, puts it plainly – when tourists only stay in resorts, no matter how luxurious, the economic benefits largely leak away from local communities. Her solution?

Encourage visitors to split their time between resorts and local islands, enabling tourists to both relax and meaningfully connect with local communities while ensuring tourism dollars reach local businesses. In Uganda, our local host Leslie points out an equally stark reality: "The biggest challenge is actually poverty.

It's all about survival." While we in Britain debate the merits of various sustainability certifications, local communities are grappling with basic economic survival. This isn't just about environmental conservation – it's about human dignity and economic justice.

In Iceland, Helga outlines how the drive for sustainability has evolved beyond simple environmental actions. "When we first started, sustainability and responsible travel weren't the buzz words they are today," she explains. "But we definitely set out wanting to give back to local communities and protect the environment."

Her approach includes practical steps like recycling tourists' waste and providing reusable water bottles, while encouraging visitors to experience local life through authentic cultural experiences. In Norway, Tom highlights another paradox: "allemannsretten" – the freedom to roam – is clashing with the realities of mass tourism. What was once a cherished right of public access is now straining under the weight of Instagram-driven tourism, with private properties being used as "public toilets" and local communities bearing the burden of unrestricted access. These voices from the ground paint a picture far more complex than the simple narratives we often tell ourselves about sustainable tourism.

Sustainability isn't working –
but not for the reasons you think.

The Travel Foundation's latest report makes this painfully clear: tourism relies heavily on public resources, yet its benefits often reach only a handful of players while its burdens are borne by entire communities. From the Maldives to Uganda, from Iceland to Norway, the message is clear: simply building more hotels, creating more jobs, or attracting higher-spending visitors won't automatically make tourism fairer – and may even make things worse.

Valle de Arriba, Tenerife, Spain





Ko Pha-ngan, Surat Thani, Thailand



Coral Reef with Turtle, Indian Ocean



Anaga Senderos de Poesía XV, Tenerife, Spain



Prioritise Local Control

Tourism must be driven by local needs first and foremost. As Ruth demonstrates in the Maldives, this means creating opportunities for tourists to engage with local communities rather than remaining isolated in resort bubbles. The Travel Foundation's report emphasises that destination managers must invest in understanding how tourism's value is created and distributed within communities, and think critically about who enjoys the benefits and who bears the burdens.



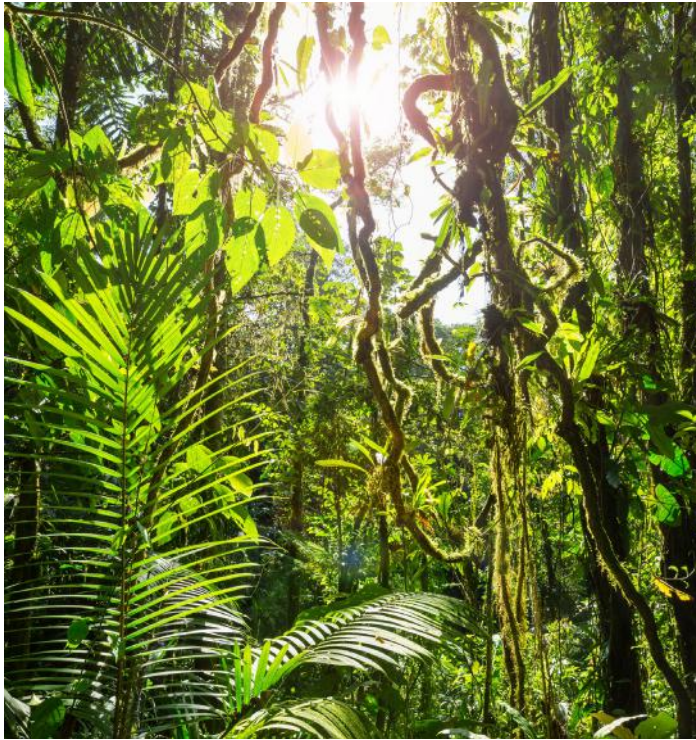
Contribute to the Public Good

Since tourism relies heavily on public resources, from beaches to cultural heritage, it must contribute meaningfully to public benefit. This means moving beyond general discussions about tourism's contributions to critically examine where the benefits are going. As Helga demonstrates with Iceland's cultural experiences, communities can blend tradition with modern tourism while maintaining control of their narrative.

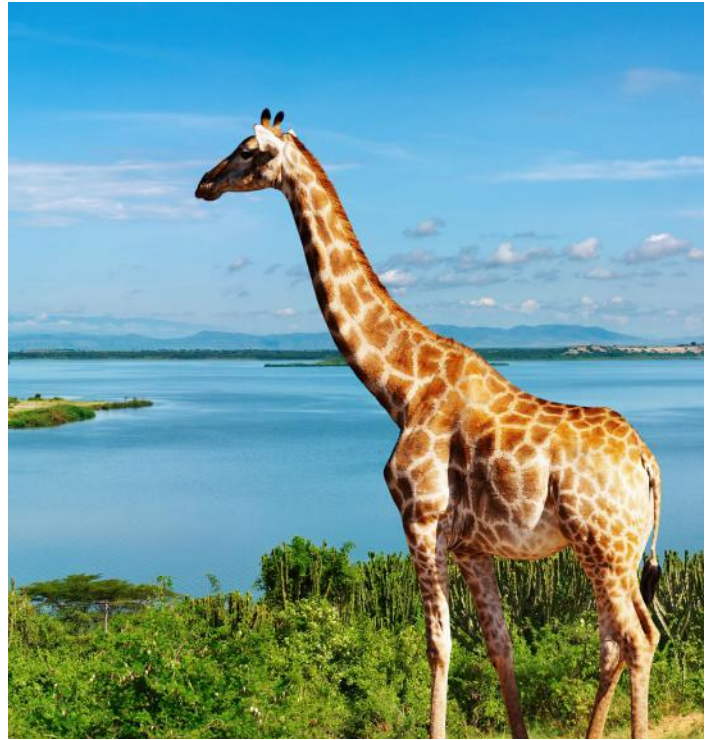


Strengthen Destination Governance

The Travel Foundation's research reveals that more equitable tourism can only come from strengthening destination governance. This means building partnerships with local agencies and ensuring meaningful participation of community groups in decision-making. Ruth's approach in the Maldives of tracking how much tourism spend stays within local communities offers a concrete example of how destinations can monitor and improve their performance.



Misty Rainforest in Costa Rica, Central America



Lake Victoria, River Nile, Uganda

The path forward isn't about perfection – it's about progress. As Helga candidly admits about their operation's use of diesel vehicles, "We decarbonize with tree planting, but that's not what we want long-term." This honesty about the challenges and contradictions in sustainable tourism is exactly what the industry needs. For too long, we've allowed the perfect to be the enemy of the good. We've focused on environmental metrics while ignoring economic inequities. We've celebrated 'authentic' experiences while overlooking the complex realities of communities in transition.

It's time for a new approach to sustainable tourism – one that acknowledges these complexities and contradictions. One that prioritises economic justice alongside environmental protection.

One that recognises that true sustainability isn't just about preserving places and cultures, but about enabling them to thrive and evolve on their own terms.

This is the conversation we need to have. This is the work we need to do. And this is exactly what Green Horizons aims to explore in the pages that follow.



"Think of sustainable travel as leaving love notes for future travelers. Small actions add up to big impacts!" -
Environmental Scientist

Flowers in Tenerife, Spain



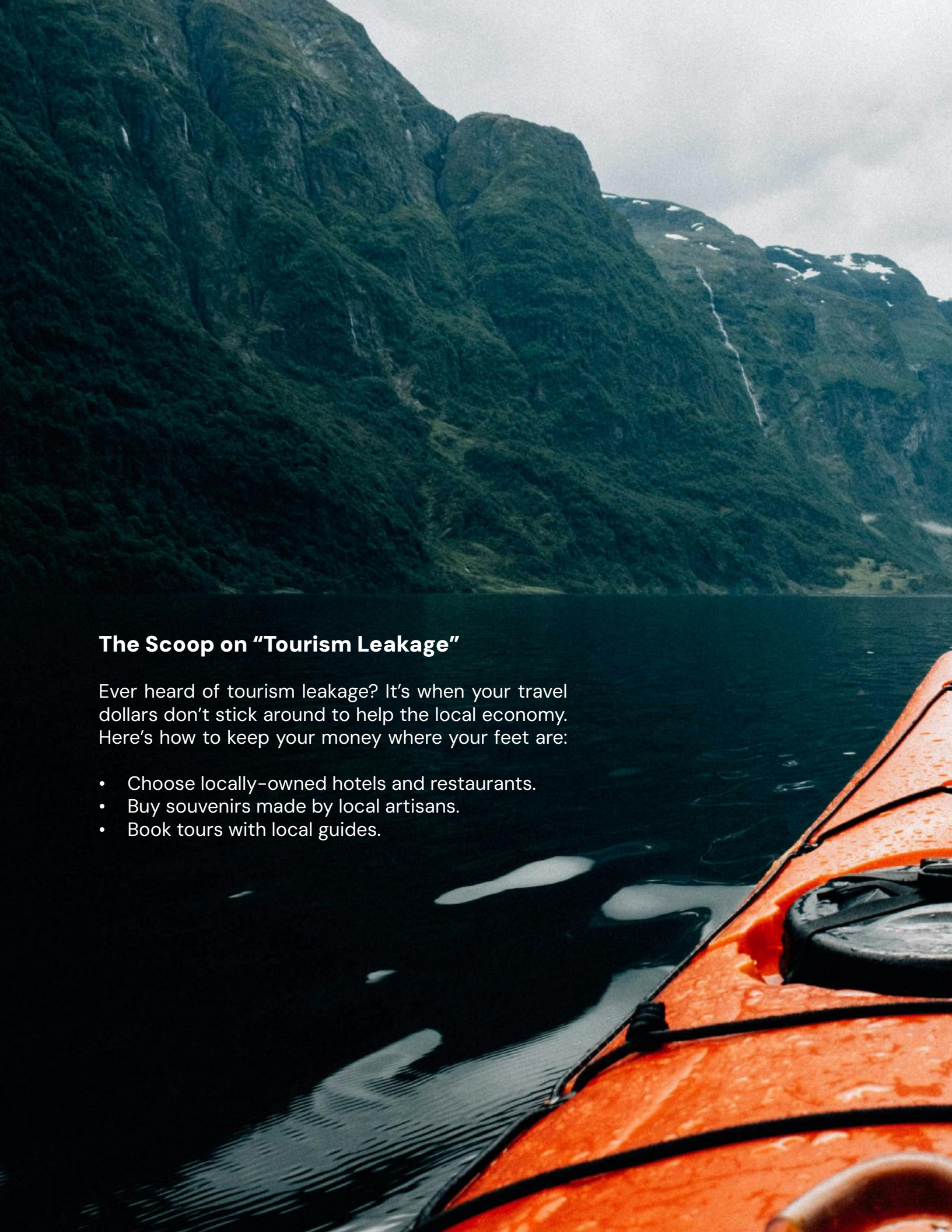
YOUR SUSTAINABLE TRAVEL TOOLBOX

Ready to make a difference? Here are some easy-peasy ways to travel greener:



- 01 Look for eco-certified hotels or try a local homestay.
- 02 Rent a bike or use public transport to explore like a local.
- 03 Support local artisans and businesses. Souvenirs with soul!
- 04 Learn a few phrases and follow local customs.
- 05 Pack a reusable water bottle and say no to single-use plastics.
- 06 Join a beach clean-up or support a local conservation project.
- 07 Think about travel off-season to avoid overwhelming popular spots.
- 08 Slow travel reduces your footprint & creates deeper local connections.



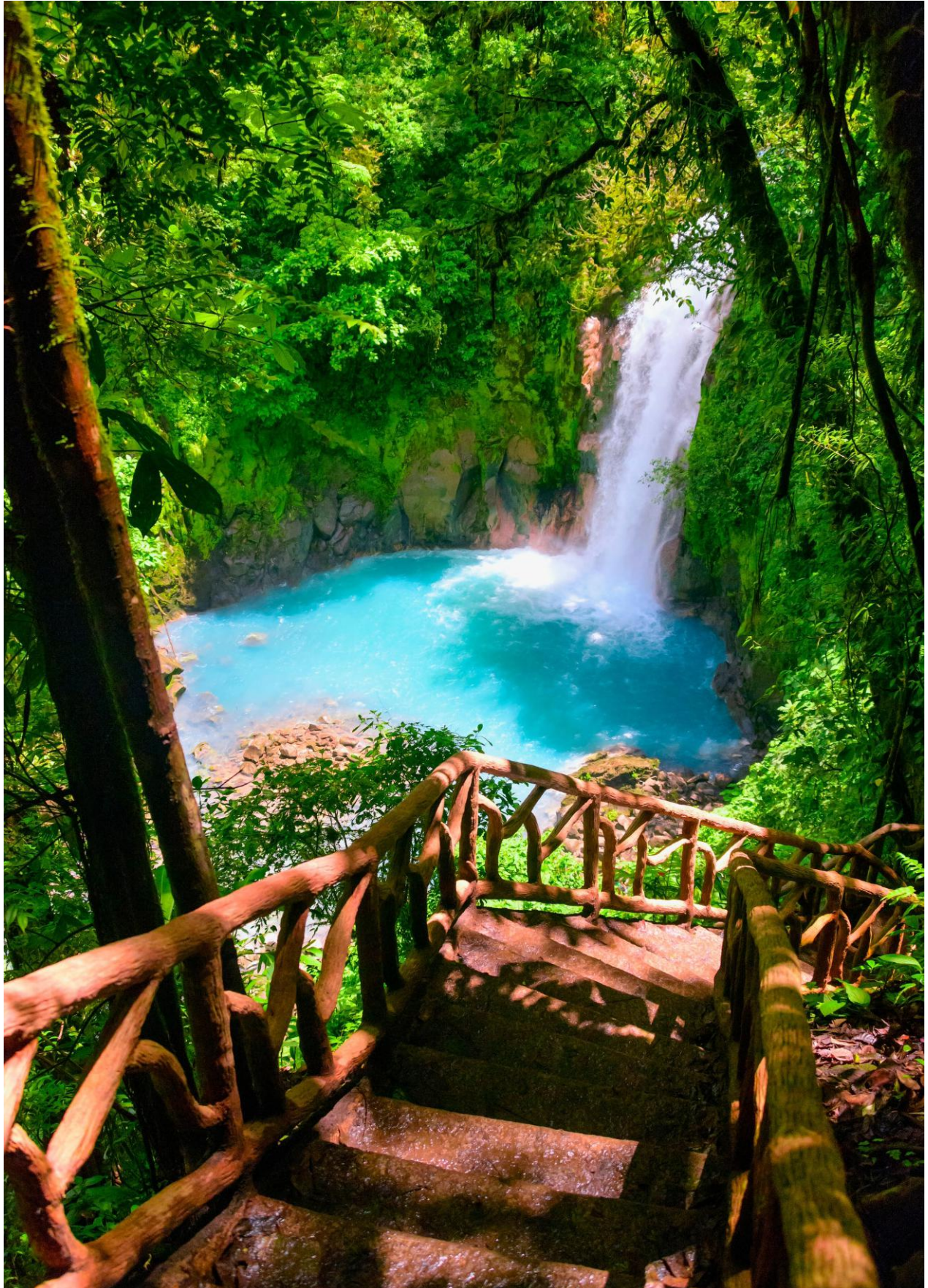


The Scoop on “Tourism Leakage”

Ever heard of tourism leakage? It’s when your travel dollars don’t stick around to help the local economy. Here’s how to keep your money where your feet are:

- Choose locally-owned hotels and restaurants.
- Buy souvenirs made by local artisans.
- Book tours with local guides.





Parque Nacional Volcán Tenorio, Costa Rica, Central America



COSTA RICA

Green Season & The Benefits of Off-Peak

Costa Rica is a versatile, multifaceted country. The diversity of wildlife, people and ecosystems make it a real treasure for explorers and tourists of any kind. Costa Rica, like many other countries, has two major seasons, the dry season and the green season – and as you could probably guess by the names, one is a little less rainy than the other. When we say a little, we mean it, with rain only lasting a few hours a day in the green season. Which is part of the reason the green season is a bit of a secret in the tourism industry – the perks of visiting in this time deeply outweigh the dry season.

What is the green season?

So, as we've already mentioned, the green season is a little rainier and it typically runs from May to November. But, don't be put off by the word 'rain'! In this season the country bursts into life, the plants, trees, and all other flora really thrive in this season. Not only the flora but the fauna too, they become way more active as this is a great time for them to start eating. But, it's not just

the landscape and wildlife that make this time great for travel.

Fewer Crowds, More Fun.

It doesn't get much more invigorating than ziplining through a wild cloud forest and feeling the wind in your hair – although, there is one way to make it more special. Imagine there were no queues or just any other people in sight, that is what it's like in the green season. The vast amount of tourists visit in the dry season, so you can miss those crowds and have more fun.

Budget-Friendly Bliss

When it comes to money we are all looking for the best deal. Travelling during the green season often means lower prices on everything from flights to accommodations. The locals will also be glad to have tourism running year round so it's not only your money that you're showing support. The more responsible traveller will always choose off-peak travel times as it follows a more sustainable model of tourism, one which we at Not in the Guidebooks fully support.

Nature is booming

Costa Rica's biodiversity is off the charts year-round, but the green season shifts it up a gear. With just a few hours of rain comes so many more animals and wildlife. From frogs to sea turtles, this is their time to really shine, and if you're hoping to see some animals, this is the time for you.

Perfect Surfing Conditions

If you're the kind of surfer who loves bigger swells and more consistent waves, then Costa Rica's green season is definitely the time for you. Whether you're a pro or a beginner, there's never been a better time to hang ten on Costa Rica's famous beaches. Not only the waves but all the waterfalls and rapids are so much more active at this time of year, truly sights to behold.

Sustainable Travel: Why it Matters

At its heart the green season is perfect for sustainable travel. Visiting during the green season can better support local communities and the environment. When you visit during the quieter months, you're providing crucial support to local businesses and communities

that might struggle during the low season. Your visit helps create year-round employment and a more stable economy. Fewer visitors means less strain on natural resources and popular attractions. It's a chance for ecosystems to breathe and regenerate.

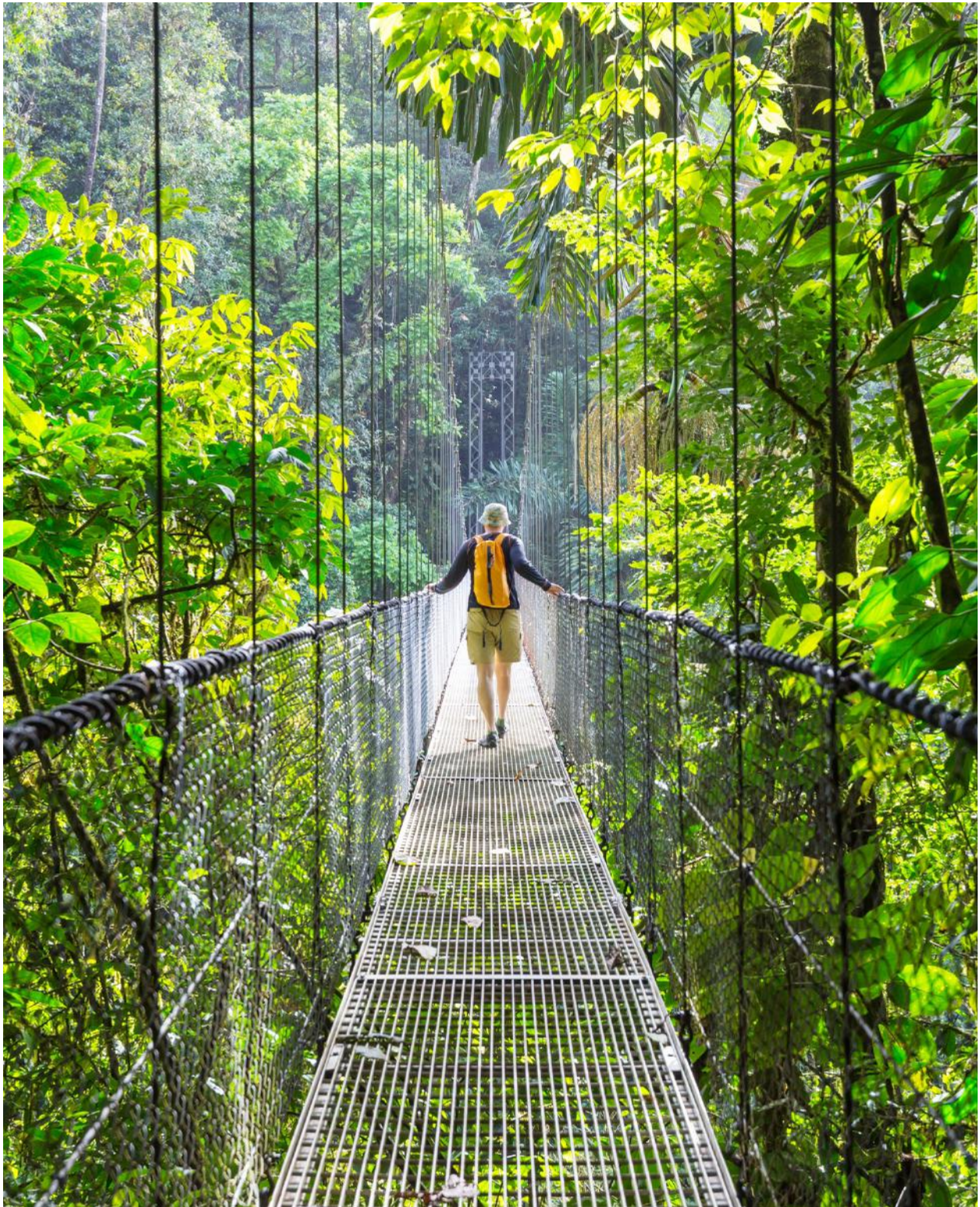
Plus, with smaller crowds, tour operators can often provide more personalised, low-impact experiences. Also, the green season allows for more meaningful interactions with locals. Without the hustle and bustle of peak season, you'll have the chance to really immerse yourself in the 'pura vida' lifestyle and connect with the heart of Costa Rica.



Embrace the afternoon showers as a chance to siesta or enjoy a good book.

Be flexible with your plans – sometimes the best adventures happen when you least expect them.

Support eco-friendly accommodations and tour operators who prioritise sustainability.



Arenal Hanging Bridges, Costa Rica, Central America

Remember, when you choose to travel during the green season, you're not just treating yourself to an unforgettable adventure – you're also making a positive impact on the local communities and ecosystems. Now that's what I call a win-win situation!



SRI LANKA

A Paradise of Sustainability in the Making



Golden Temple of Dambulla, Matale District, Sri Lanka

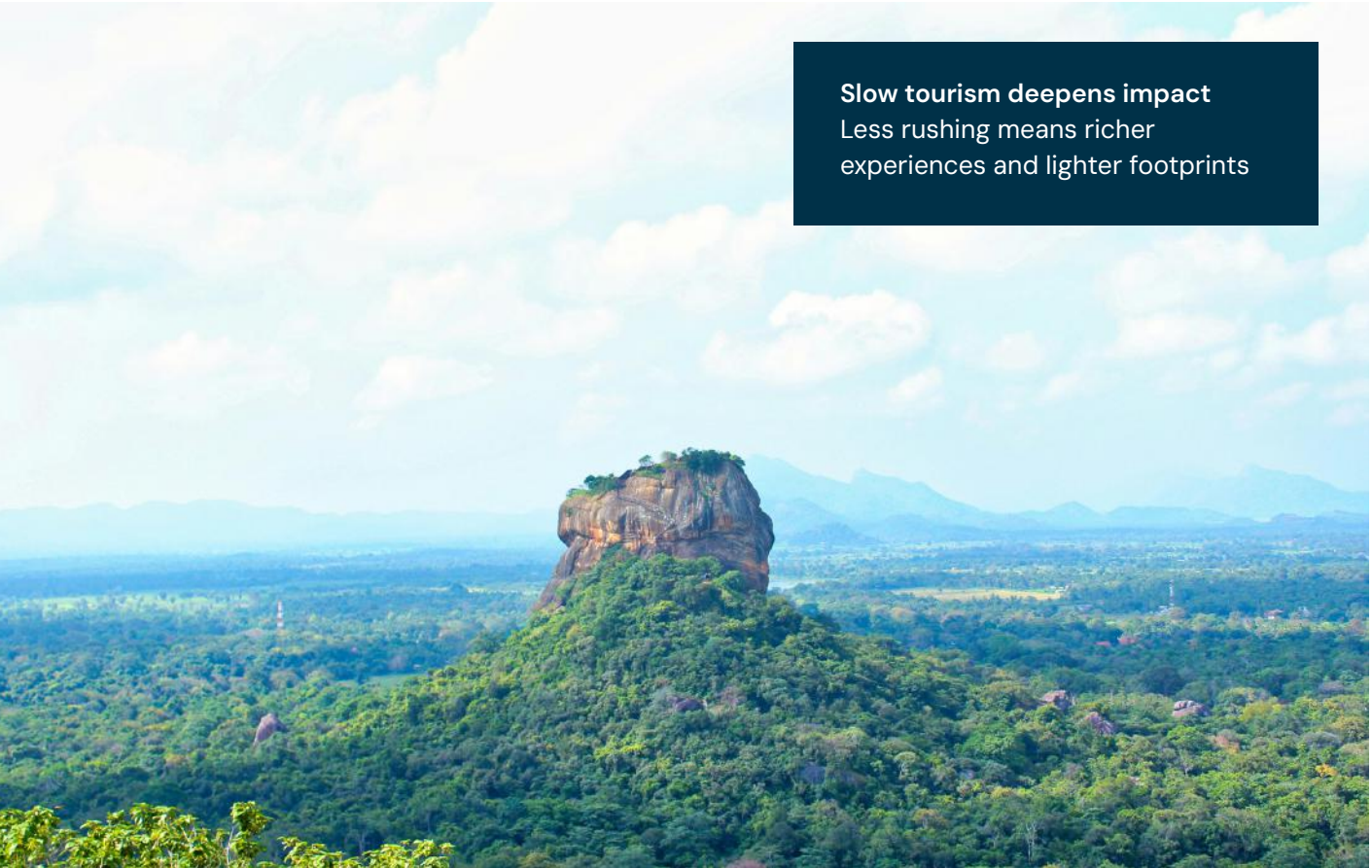
As I listen to Prateeqe talk about his work in Sri Lanka's tourism industry, it becomes clear that this small island is a microcosm of beauty, resilience, and transformation. While famous for its tropical beaches and abundant wildlife, Sri Lanka is also becoming a symbol of sustainable tourism. But what does sustainability truly mean for a country that has weathered crises ranging from colonisation to civil unrest, economic challenges, and a pandemic? Prateeqe's insights paint a hopeful picture that sustainability is more than just a buzzword—it's a way of life here.

Not in the Guidebooks talks to our local host in Sri Lanka **Prateequ** about slowing down, community connections, and redefining growth in Sri Lankan tourism.

Beyond the Surface: A Deeper Meaning of Sustainability

When Prateequ talks about sustainability, When Prateequ talks about sustainability, he acknowledges the evolving nature of the discourse in his community. Initially concerns were focused on the surface—recycling, reducing plastic, and minimising waste. However, over time, particularly as Sri Lanka endured a pandemic that decimated tourism, sustainability took on a more profound meaning. It's no longer just about conservation but about cultivating meaningful, long-lasting relationships with local communities and protecting their resources.

In a world where constant growth is often hailed as the ultimate goal, Prateequ's company took a different approach: they slowed down. They nurtured partnerships with local farmers, craftsmen, and hosts, ensuring that everyone involved in their tours shares the same values. This shift has not only built resilience into their business model but also created a tourism experience that is inherently more sustainable. It's about growing



Slow tourism deepens impact
Less rushing means richer
experiences and lighter footprints



The Human Element: Community-Centered Tourism

Tourism should complement, not replace
Supporting existing livelihoods creates authentic experiences

One of the most striking aspects of tourism in Sri Lanka, as Prateeqe describes it, is its commitment to community-centred experiences. This is not just sightseeing—it's about immersing visitors in the life of the locals. Take, for instance, the village cycling tours through rural Sri Lanka, where tourists aren't just passive observers. They meet farmers like Indika, who proudly shares his community's way of life. Guests cycle through his village, visit neighbours, pick fresh produce, and

eventually cook meals with him and his wife. These aren't staged experiences for tourists; they're authentic moments of interaction where visitors support the livelihoods of the people they meet. The farmers aren't growing crops to "show off" to tourists—they're growing food to sustain themselves, with the added benefit of tourism supplementing their income. It's a win-win for both tourists, who gain unique experiences, and the local communities, who retain control over their livelihoods.

Sustainable Tourism: A Matter of Scale

One of Prateeque's key messages to visitors is: *don't try to do it all*. Sri Lanka may be a small country, but it's rich in diversity—from the surf beaches of Arugam Bay to the wildlife in the less-trodden East. Tourism should be about quality, not quantity. Travellers are encouraged to slow down, explore fewer places in greater depth, and truly engage with the people and the environment. This mindful approach to travel not only reduces the strain on popular tourist spots but also fosters a deeper connection with the country's culture and landscape.



Kids on stairs in Sri Lanka

Challenges & Hidden Gems

The challenge, of course, lies in reorienting tourism away from the well-worn paths. The island's traditional tourist circuit, with destinations like Colombo, Kandy, and Galle, is beloved but overburdened. Shifting focus to hidden gems, such as the pristine beaches of the East Coast, is crucial to alleviating the pressure on these hotspots.

Prateeque's personal favourite is the lesser-known East Coast, particularly areas like Kumana, where visitors can experience stunning beaches and rich wildlife. It's an untouched paradise where elephants roam freely and birds thrive in wetlands. For tourists seeking authentic and sustainable experiences, these off-the-beaten-path destinations are perfect. They not only offer unspoiled beauty but also distribute tourism income more evenly across the island.

The Power of Hospitality

One of the defining characteristics of Sri Lanka is its hospitality. Prateeq is quick to point out that guests in Sri Lanka are revered—something that transcends tourism and is deeply embedded in the culture. Sri Lankans take immense pride in making visitors feel welcome, and this cultural trait ensures that travellers experience an authentic warmth and generosity that is difficult to replicate. Tourists are not just passing through—they are woven into the fabric of local life, welcomed with genuine smiles, and often leave with memories of meals, conversations, and experiences that transcend typical travel stories.



A Sustainable Future

Sri Lanka's tourism industry is at a crossroads. The lessons of the past few years have forced a reconsideration of what sustainability truly means, and the answers seem clear: slow down, engage deeply, and always prioritise the well-being of the community and environment. Sri Lanka may be a small island, but its approach to sustainability could serve as a model for the rest of the world. For visitors, the takeaway is simple: when you visit Sri Lanka, don't rush. Choose experiences that support local communities, venture off the beaten path, and leave with more than just photographs. Leave with a deeper understanding of a country that is navigating its way to a more sustainable future, one smile at a time.



Spread the wealth

Promoting lesser-known regions prevents over-tourism and distributes benefits



SUSTAINABLE SHEPHERDING

Redefining Farm Tourism in Scotland's Highlands

Local hosts and Scottish farmer **Beccy** reveals how her circular farm system is revolutionising eco-tourism.



Beccy and her superstar sheep, Finn

In Scotland's stunning national park, Beccy Routledge has created something truly special: a sustainable retreat where wellness, environmental consciousness, and some surprisingly therapeutic sheep come together. Under her care, guests don't just experience a typical farm stay – they discover a holistic approach to sustainable living that nourishes both the planet and the soul. With garden-to-table meals and meditation with woolly companions, Beccy's retreat demonstrates how sustainability living can intertwine seamlessly with mental wellbeing. Here, sustainability isn't just about solar panels and organic farming – it's about fostering

a deeper connection with nature and finding peace in life's simpler moments.

Q: Your retreat takes a unique approach to sustainability. Can you tell us about your core principles?

A: "Sustainability here is about working in harmony with the land and creating closed-loop systems," Beccy explains. "Being in a national park means we have a responsibility to preserve and enhance the natural environment. We practise regenerative farming – our sheep graze the land naturally, their manure fertilises our organic gardens, and those gardens provide fresh food for our guests."

True sustainability is circular
Sheep graze land, fertilise gardens,
create experiences – everything
serves multiple purposes in their
closed-loop system

Q: How does your location influence your sustainability practices?

A: "Being so rural shapes everything we do," Beccy reflects. "We've had to develop robust self-sufficiency systems. Our remote location means every trip to town has an environmental cost, so we've created extensive food storage systems and plan meticulously to minimise travel. We grow year-round in our polytunnel, maintain orchards, and preserve food when it's abundant. It's about thinking seasonally and working with nature's cycles."



Sound Therapy with Beccy, her team and Finn



Fun Fact:

The retreat's commitment to sustainability extends to rehabilitation – they work with local conservation groups to provide a haven for rescued sheep, integrating animal welfare into their sustainable tourism model.

Remote tourism drives innovation
Geographic isolation forced creative solutions for self-sufficiency and waste reduction



Q: How do you incorporate sustainability into the guest experience?

A: "Education through experience is key," Beccy shares. "Guests participate in our farm-to-table journey – they see how the sheep maintain the land, help harvest from our organic gardens, and enjoy meals made from ingredients they've picked themselves. We also teach traditional skills like making firelighters from used tea bags and demonstrate how our composting systems work. It's about showing that sustainable living can be both practical and enjoyable."

Q: What sustainable initiatives are you particularly proud of?

A: "Our zero-waste approach to farming has been really successful. The sheep maintain our grasslands without machinery, their wool is used in local crafting, and their manure feeds our gardens. We've also created wildlife corridors and planted native species to support biodiversity. Even our mindfulness activities, like 'tea with naughty sheep,' help guests understand the importance of slowing down and connecting with nature."

Q: How do you measure your environmental impact?

A: "We track everything from water usage to food waste," Beccy notes. "Being off-grid means we're very conscious of our energy consumption. We use solar power where possible and have implemented grey water systems. We also monitor our soil health and biodiversity indicators. The sheep are excellent indicators of pasture health – their behaviour tells us when we need to rotate grazing areas."

Q: Any advice for others looking to create sustainable tourism experiences?

A: "Start with what's authentic to your location," Beccy advises. "Our sheep aren't just an attraction – they're integral to our land management and sustainability practices. Look for those natural connections in your own environment. And remember that sustainability isn't just about the environment – it's about creating experiences that support both the land and the local community."

This approach has proven that sustainable tourism can be both educational and entertaining. As Beccy says, "When guests leave, they take with them not just memories of cuddly sheep, but a deeper understanding of sustainable farming and living. That's what makes this work meaningful."

Beccy's retreat embodies the future of sustainable tourism, where environmentalism meets personal transformation. Her approach creates a complete ecosystem: sheep provide manure for the vegetable garden, which produces organic meals for guests, while these same sheep offer unexpected therapeutic benefits. In an age where both ecological awareness and mental health are increasingly crucial, her sanctuary demonstrates how thoughtful tourism can nurture both the planet and its people.

Hands-on sustainability sticks
By participating in farm activities, guests learn eco-practices they can actually use at home



Photo of Superstar sheep Finn

Fun Fact: Beccy's commitment to sustainability extends to the smallest details. "My tea bags are organic and fair trade. We've just learned that we can make tea bags into firelighters, for example," she adds, showcasing how even the tiniest items can be repurposed.



NORWAY

Embracing Slow Travel and Local Culture

Q: What does sustainability mean to you personally?

A: "To me, it means reducing the negative impacts and enhancing the positive impacts of our travels," Tom explains. "For example, travelling by train, checking into a local hotel instead of renting an Airbnb, and always respecting the local conditions, culture, and nature wherever we go."

Q: How do you ensure sustainable experiences?

A: "We promote alternative destinations instead of the most visited ones," Tom shares. "We use accommodations with local attachments and promote softer activities that create less noise and pollution."

Fun Fact: Norway has a unique concept called "allemannsretten" or "every person's right to nature." This means you can practically go wherever you want because nature is supposed to be free!





Local hosts **Tom**, navigates the delicate balance between tradition and modern tourism.



Traditional rights need modern management
"Freedom to roam" requires new guidelines for mass tourism



Local lodging matters
Hotels rooted in community
keep benefits local



Sommarøy Arctic Hotel, Sommarøy, Norway

Fun Fact: Did you know that Norway has the second-longest coastline in the world? Tom reveals, "It's because of all our islands along the coast. On one of the islands in the north called Træna, they've found remains of fishing settlements from 8,000 years ago!"

Q: What's the biggest sustainability challenge facing Norway?

A: Tom points out that Norway's popularity as a destination, combined with allemannsretten, can lead to challenges. "In some places, we see the effects of mass tourism. People's properties are being used as public toilets, litter is left behind, and cars and campervans are parked in people's fields."

Q: What advice would you give to someone visiting Norway to be more responsible and sustainable?

A: "Travel slow," Tom emphasises. "Instead of jumping from place to place, try to go a little slower and experience the places you're visiting, rather than just rushing through everything."

Q: Tell us about local food experiences in Norway.

A: "There's a growing trend among restaurants and food providers to serve more locally produced food, especially in the smaller, local places we promote to our travellers," Tom says.

Q: Any hidden gems you'd recommend?

A: Tom suggests exploring the rivers that run from outside Oslo down to the coastline.

"They provide a really good nature experience, and you get a lot of history when you walk along them. You slowly get into urban development, so even in a cosmopolitan city like Oslo, you can still find natural experiences."

Q: What about wildlife experiences?

A: "Along the coastline, we have really extensive bird life. For those who are into birdwatching, it's kind of like a paradise,"

Tom shares. "We also have whales, which can be a bit controversial, but for some, it's exotic."

Q: How can visitors responsibly enjoy wildlife?

A: Tom recommends going with a local guide whenever possible. "They know about the local traditions, habitats, and how to behave - and more importantly, what not to do."

Q: What's your favourite thing about Norwegian culture?

A: "What I really like about Norway is that we have a big trust in each other," Tom says proudly.

"We have many places with small self-service shops where you can pick up whatever you want – a beverage, a snack, a flower – and you just leave the money behind. It's really like an ultra-trust system."



Q: When's the best time to visit Norway?

A: "Around September is a really good time," Tom suggests. "You get many places to yourself, the weather is usually very nice, the air is getting more crisp and clear, and you get more of the autumn colours."

From exploring hidden urban rivers to experiencing the trust-based culture, Norway offers a unique blend of natural beauty and sustainable travel opportunities.

So pack your hiking boots, brush up on your "takk" (thank you), and get ready for a slow-paced, eco-friendly Norwegian adventure.

Norway champions sustainable tourism through slow travel, local experiences, and respect for nature, while grappling with mass tourism's impact on its unique "allemannsretten" tradition of free access to wilderness.



Dog sledding in Adventdalen, Norway

Address poverty first
Conservation succeeds
when communities thrive

BEYOND THE GORILLAS

Uganda's Community-First Tourism



Q: After 25 years in Uganda's tourism sector, how do you approach sustainability?

A: "I keep it simple with three pillars: people, planet, and profit. Having worked in development since 1996, I bring that perspective to tourism. We focus on community development while ensuring business viability. It's about spreading wealth through local employment and creating meaningful experiences."

Q: How do you integrate local communities into tourism experiences?

A: "We create authentic interactions where visitors can engage with local farmers, traditional cattle keepers, and artisans. Visitors can learn how bark cloth is made from fig trees – a process that sustains for 100 years – or participate in making banana gin."

In the northeast, away from typical tourist circuits, we offer truly authentic experiences with the Karamojong people, learning about their cattle-keeping traditions and medicinal plants."

Q: What's Uganda's biggest environmental challenge?

A: "Climate change significantly affects our farming communities. Unpredictable weather patterns impact crop yields – sometimes the rain doesn't come, other times floods wash away plantings. We're addressing this through tree planting initiatives and wetland restoration projects. However, it's important to understand that poverty remains the underlying challenge. Every environmental initiative must consider basic survival needs."

Q: What advice do you have for responsible travellers?

A: "Come with an open mind and think about what you can give as well as what you get. Interact with local people – Ugandans are incredibly welcoming and love sharing their culture. Don't shy away from cultural experiences thinking they might be intrusive – they're natural and respectful. Even your park fees make a difference, with a percentage supporting local community projects."



Uganda Local host **Leslie** talks to Not in the Guidebooks about how Uganda's tourism industry is putting community needs at the heart of conservation efforts.



THE MALDIVES

The Future of Sustainable Tourism: A Path We Must All Walk

by Ruth, Local Host, Maldives

The Maldives is known for its pristine beaches, turquoise waters, and luxurious resorts that cater to travellers from around the globe. But there is a side of the Maldives that remains hidden from the glossy brochures—a side that showcases its rich culture, resilient communities, and the urgent need for sustainability. As someone who has made the Maldives my home for over a decade, I have witnessed first-hand the pressing challenges this paradise faces and the role tourism can play in either sustaining or harming it. The Maldives is 99% ocean, and its delicate ecosystem is at the mercy of climate change, pollution, and unregulated tourism. The country's over-reliance on luxury resorts means most visitors never set foot outside these enclaves, and while that model has brought immense economic benefits, it has also created significant environmental and social pressures. Tourism, as it stands, has a lot of room to evolve. We are at a tipping point where we must ask ourselves: are we here to just consume paradise or help protect it?

At Secret Paradise, sustainability was not initially our selling point—it was simply the only way we knew how to operate. When we launched in 2012, "responsible travel" and "sustainable tourism" weren't buzzwords, but we knew that the

Maldives needed a different kind of tourism—a tourism that benefitted local communities and took responsibility for the environment. Over time, sustainability has become a central pillar of our business, and I truly believe it's the only way forward for the Maldives and its future.

Protecting Our Oceans

If you ask me what I'm most passionate about, it's protecting the ocean. The Maldives' marine life is world-renowned, but it is also under constant threat from overfishing, pollution, and unsustainable tourism practices. Guests often tell me their dream is to snorkel with whale sharks or manta rays, and I get it—these creatures are majestic. But these dreams should not come at the expense of their survival.

Educating visitors about responsible marine tourism is one way we can protect these ecosystems. By understanding simple principles—like keeping a safe distance from marine life, not touching the coral, and adhering to guidelines such as the Green Fins code of conduct—tourists can minimise their impact. We also encourage participation in citizen science programs, where guests can contribute to research on manta rays or whale sharks by submitting data and photos. These small actions can have a long-term impact on conservation efforts.

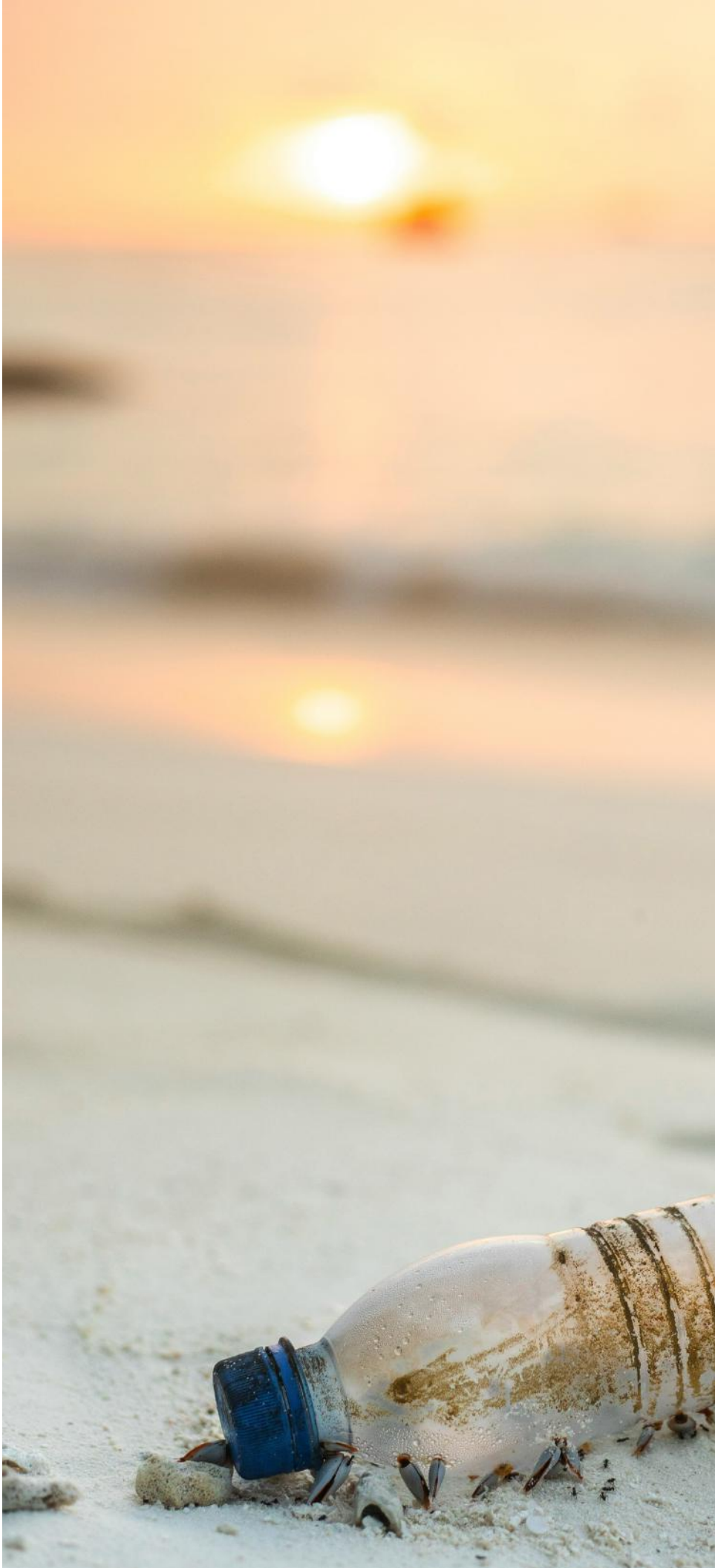


Ruth, Not in the Guidebooks Maldives hosts challenges the resort model with a bold vision for local island tourism.



Overwater Bungalow in Maldives

Resorts leak wealth
Local islands keep tourism benefits in communities



Every choice counts
From tours to meals, decisions
impact local sustainability



Clear guidelines protect nature
Simple rules help preserve marine ecosystems

Secret Paradise team in forest, Maldives



Secret Paradise team in sunset, Maldives

The Power of Choice

Sustainability in tourism isn't just a business responsibility—it's a choice every traveller has the power to make. Whether you're selecting a tour operator, booking accommodation, or even ordering a meal, every decision counts. I urge travellers to ask the right questions: How does this tour benefit the local community? Does this operator follow ethical wildlife practices? Is the food locally sourced? These might seem like small details, but together they help shape the future of travel in the Maldives and beyond.

A Collective Effort

Ultimately, sustainability is about more than just ticking a box—it's a mindset, a journey. For us at Secret Paradise, sustainability has been a learning curve, one

that involves constantly assessing how we can reduce our footprint and increase our positive impact. It's about engaging with local communities, forming partnerships with environmental organisations, and always pushing to do better. But it's not something we can do alone. It requires a collective effort from tourists, tour operators, and the government.

The Maldives is a small nation facing big challenges. If tourism is to continue thriving here, it must evolve. It must become less about opulence and more about coexistence—between humans and nature, between the global and the local.

To everyone who dreams of visiting this paradise, I ask you: come with open eyes and an open heart. Take home more than just memories—leave behind something that lasts.



TOP PICKS

As Chosen by Our Sustainability Committee



Jacob – [Costa Rica](#)

“Roberto is an excellent host whose passion for sustainability shines through. Starting in San Jose, you’ll experience authentic culture before traveling to Tortuguero on the east coast and westward to Nosara. The wildlife and activities are incredible, and you’ll see how community tourism makes a real difference. This East to West tour showed me Costa Rica’s heart.”

Hannah – [Norway](#)

“Linda’s enthusiasm for Norway was contagious. Visiting in April helped avoid crowds and created a more authentic experience. From majestic glaciers to stunning fjords, I’ve never seen landscapes so beautiful and diverse. The focus on sustainable tourism and local communities made this trip special. It’s an adventure I’m already planning to repeat.”

Jamie-Lee – [Lapland](#)

“Taking my kids to Lapland created memories we’ll cherish forever. There’s nothing like watching the Northern Lights dance overhead or gliding through snow with huskies. The local guides taught us about preserving the Arctic environment and indigenous culture. It’s sustainable family tourism at its best – my children are already asking to return.”

Lydia – [Sri Lanka](#)

“Prateque’s passion for sharing his country was infectious. From watching wild elephants to cooking with local families, every experience felt authentic and respectful. This responsible tourism approach let me truly immerse in Sri Lanka’s culture while supporting local communities. It exceeded all my expectations – I can’t recommend it enough.”

Claire – [Maldives](#)

“Our Maldives trip perfectly balanced luxury with sustainability. The Paradise team’s knowledge of marine conservation and local environment was impressive. We learned about coral protection while enjoying pristine beaches and crystal waters. This responsible approach to island tourism showed us how holiday paradise can coexist with environmental protection.”



Photo of Not In The Guidebooks sales team in Lapland, Finland

The planet is facing an urgent climate crisis, and at Not In The Guidebooks, we acknowledge our responsibility to address this. Our vision is to protect the environment for future generations through responsible tourism. Although tourism accounts for 8% of global emissions, it also generates nearly 10% of global GDP and sustains millions of livelihoods. That's why our mission is to balance economic benefits with responsible environmental practices, ensuring our adventures support both local communities and the planet.

Our sustainability committee has carefully selected these products and experiences to reflect our commitment to eco-friendly, responsible travel. Each pick showcases our dedication to reducing carbon footprints, supporting local communities, and protecting natural and cultural heritage.

NITGB Fact: Supporting local businesses means more money stays in the community – local guides, family-run accommodations, and neighbourhood restaurants typically reinvest their earnings back into their area, creating a positive ripple effect.



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