

Nature-Based Tourism – Information Handout

What is Ecotourism?

Ecotourism represents a sustainable version of nature-based tourism involving responsible action on the part of tourists and the tourism industry. Ecotourism activities should attempt to educate visitors while minimizing modification or degradation of natural resources and broadly benefit the social and natural environments by involving the participation of local communities. Revenue generated by these activities can enhance economic opportunities for local residents, support environmental education and cultural heritage, and facilitate conservation of biodiversity.

Risks of Ecotourism

Ecotourists travelling to remote regions are at risk of accidents, altitude sickness, and a number of infectious diseases. The following have been reported from those travelling for nature-based tourism:

- Rabies
- Histoplasmosis
- Brucellosis
- Melioidosis
- Malaria
- Dengue
- Chikungunya
- Japanese encephalitis
- Yellow fever
- African tick bite fever
- Tularaemia
- Q fever
- Crimean-Congo hemorrhagic fever

In addition to habitat degradation, ecotourism could contribute to the spread of pathogens to the destination community members as well as wildlife. In the case of the latter, wild primates are particularly susceptible to a number of human infections.

Roles of Ecotourists

As a species, it is our ethical responsibility to do minimal harm to the people, environment, and wildlife we travel to view and interact with. The ultimate respect for wildlife we can give is to take only photographs, not support organizations that utilize wildlife for direct-interaction entertainment (e.g., elephant riding, lion cub petting, etc.), and avoid purchasing products made from animals unsustainably harvested. We must keep wildlife wild, and the best way to do that is to: (see reverse)

STOP TOUCHING WILD ANIMALS



Roles of Travel Health Professionals

The 2012 ISTM Member Survey on Sustainable Tourism (a previous online survey with 311 ISTM member respondents) revealed that:

- Only 51% occasionally advise travellers on preventing the spread of pathogens (mainly sexually transmitted infections) to host inhabitants in destination communities. Only 10% do so on every consult.
- Most pre-travel consults do NOT involve advising travellers on how to minimize risks of disease transmission to wildlife.
- 82% do advise about limiting contact with wildlife, but primarily in reference to preventing rabies.

Travel health professionals should continue to provide advice about healthy travelling as well as prepare travellers for potential lack of in-country healthcare.

Importantly, travel health professionals could also communicate more frequently the risks that ecotourists might pose to the destination communities, habitat, and wildlife they are visiting, and how to better mitigate those risks.

For Further Information

Ceballos-Lascurain H. 1996. Tourism, ecotourism, and protected areas: The state of nature-based tourism around the world and guidelines for its development. Gland, Switzerland: World Conservation Union.

Muehlenbein MP, Ancrenaz M. 2009. Minimizing pathogen transmission at primate ecotourism destinations: The need for input from travel medicine. *Journal of Travel Medicine* 16:229-232.

Regarding the ISTM Member Survey on Sustainable Tourism, please contact Prof. Michael Muehlenbein (mpm1@indiana.edu) or Dr. Garth Brink (gkb@brink.za.net).