



Carpet making, Khotan, China

What is RESPONSIBLE TRAVEL?

Emma Skelton, our Responsible Travel Co-ordinator, attempts to pin down this term that, although now widely used in the travel industry, remains relatively undefined.



Topas Ecolodge, Sapa, Vietnam

I was asked the other day whether responsible travel was a myth. What surprised me most about this was not the question itself, but the fact that it took me nearly half an hour to answer the question and to explain the intricacies of what responsible travel is.

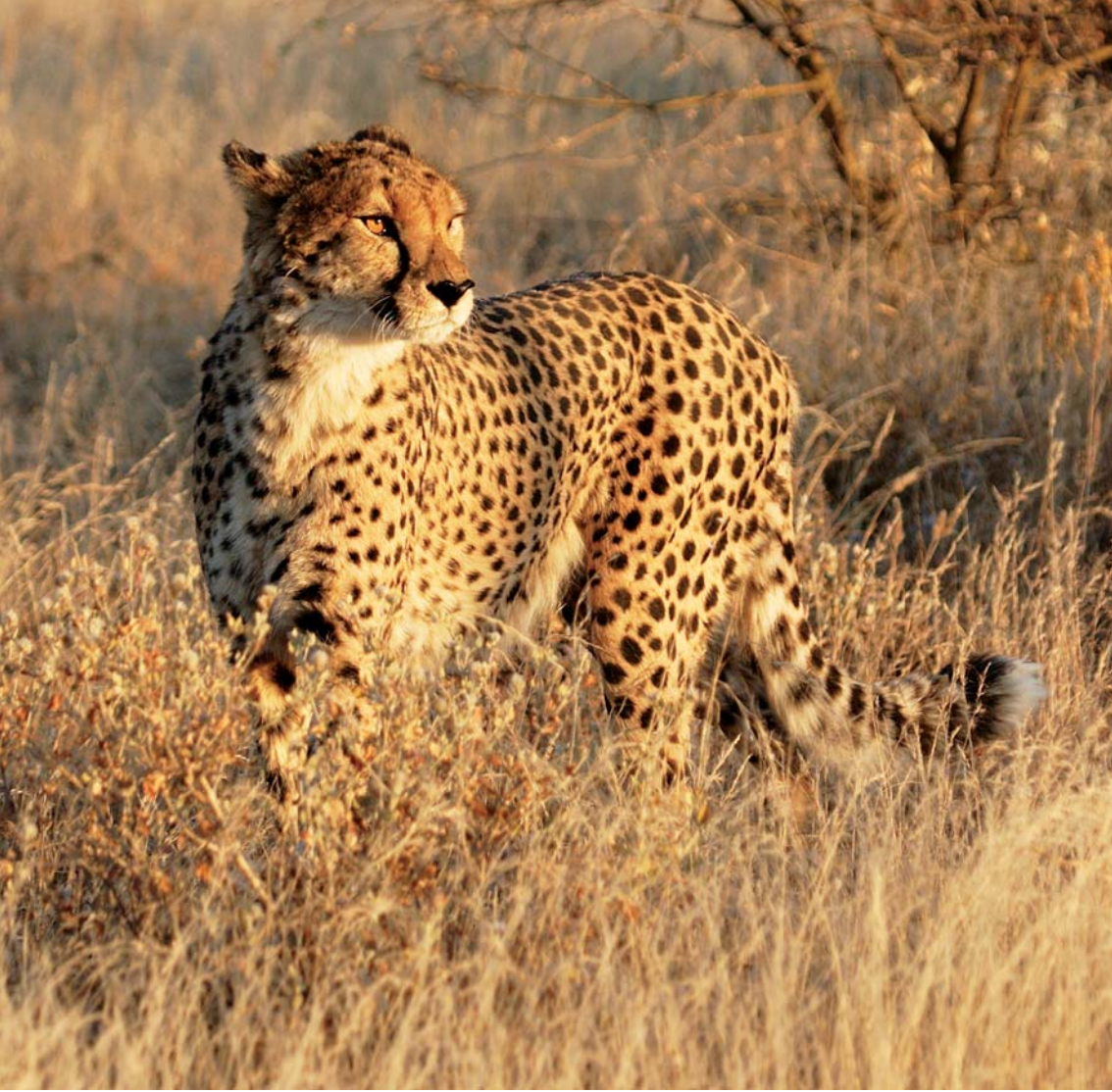
It is too simple to see the negative effects of some forms of tourism without recognising that travel can have a positive influence if it is managed appropriately. On a grass roots level, it all depends how the travel is undertaken and who eventually benefits. Visitors can bring a remote region a new form of revenue, but all too often it is not the people on the ground who actually benefit. Travelling responsibly is about redressing this imbalance and creating a positive impact rather than a negative one. The advantages of this are twofold. Firstly, the community or area benefits, and secondly the traveller has a better experience because they know their enjoyment isn't to the detriment of the local people or environment.

There are several elements to responsible travel. It is important to consider the way in which travel affects the environment, how it influences the social aspect of the country, as well as how it contributes to the local economy.

Environmental

The environment is obviously of prime concern when travelling. Many beautiful places have been ruined by the sheer volume of visitors and the associated buildings and roads, witness Spain's Costas, and the very thing that people have come to see can be lost. There are different ways to travel, however, and many small changes can be made to avoid this. One important factor is to ensure that hotels and guides put measures in place to reduce their impact: for example, minimising waste and water usage, sourcing local suppliers and ensuring all equipment is energy efficient. Education is also an extremely important factor and the fact that tour operators such as Audley are raising awareness amongst their clients and encouraging better practice from their suppliers is a powerful force.

Travelling responsibly means minimizing the negative impact of travel, but it also means that, by choosing to visit a particular area, resources are put back into the region to conserve it. National Parks, which often depend on tourism for their existence, have been established around the world to preserve wildlife areas thereby providing a safe environment for animals and halting the deforestation or erosion that was occurring due to other forms of commerce. India's national parks and the preservation of the tiger are prime examples of this.



Cheetah, Etosha National Park, Namibia

We cannot forget the fact that our journeys to these fantastic destinations create carbon dioxide and we encourage all our clients to carbon offset the cost of their flight. This can be done through Friends of Conservation and there is a section on their website where you can do this. Simply visit www.foc-uk.org. At Audley we offset all of our employees' research trips abroad.

Social

Many of the most memorable travel adventures involve real interaction with local communities. These encounters must always be undertaken with respect. Local cultures, dress codes and traditions should be considered before visiting a country and sensitivity should always be used. Always remember that you are a guest and should not only respect, but cherish the differences between our cultures. For more advice please see our Traveller's Code on the Responsible Travel section of our website: www.audleytravel.com/rt

There are also very positive ways in which travellers can benefit a community. Visitors can form the basis for preserving local cultures or artistic techniques as they offer an outlet for the community to use the skills that they have developed over centuries. This can be in the form of purchasing local handicrafts, using local guides or supporting local projects. This means that instead of migrating to towns and cities to find work, a new generation can use their culture as a means to generate wealth.

Economic

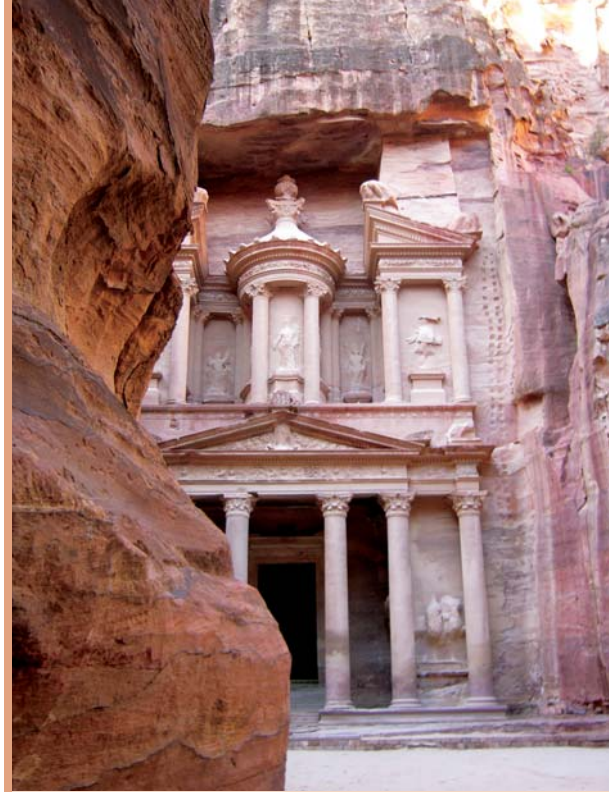
Tourism can create jobs and revenue throughout a region. Travelling responsibly means ensuring that locally owned companies benefit from this money and it is also channelled back into projects that help protect the country and environment.

Responsible travel is not just about minimising the impact of our travel experiences, it is also about creating a positive benefit. Fair trade, and the awareness of travellers while in the country, helps to ensure that money spent while visiting a region stays within the country. Supporting community lodges, local handicraft markets and any business that provides local people with employment can have a positive effect as long as individuals are paid appropriately and working conditions are maintained. Here at Audley the impact of our operations on local communities overseas is paramount in everything that we do.

Throughout this edition of Audley Traveller you will find examples of responsible travel which hopefully illustrate that travelling 'responsibly' is all about more personal and authentic experiences.

Emma Skelton

Responsible Travel Co-ordinator



The Treasury, Petra

Charity trek to Petra

We are delighted to invite you to join us on our second charity fundraising trip. This five-day trek through Jordan's wilderness to Petra, starting in Gregra village at the mouth of Wadi Feynan, is a wonderful opportunity to explore this beautiful country crossing dune deserts and navigating mountain paths that culminate in spectacular vistas, before arriving at the unique and legendary city of Petra.

The money that is raised by this trip will be donated to Friends of Conservation and the Al-Hussein Society. We are currently raising funds for Friends of Conservation's work in the Masai Mara National Reserve in Kenya, where they run programmes that support communities living in the Greater Mara Ecosystem (GME) adjacent to the reserve. We have chosen to be involved with a project that is aiming to reduce the levels of atmospheric carbon by introducing sources of renewable energy such as bio-gas.

We were also keen to link this trek through Jordan with a Jordanian charity, and our agents in Jordan work very closely with the Al-Hussein Society. The Society focuses most of its activity on physically handicapped children and aims to integrate them fully into society. This takes a number of forms from physical rehabilitation through to ensuring the children have access to education.

The trip departs on the 18th October 2008 and will be seven nights in total, with four of these spent camping during our trekking days. The cost of this trip is £1,295 per person based on two sharing, including flights, taxes, transfers, accommodation, trek facilities and most meals. If you are interested in joining us, please contact Mark Patterson on 01993 838 407.