

5 tips on how to become an eco-tourist in 2023

As a result of concerns about over-tourism and the cost of travel on the environment and local communities, travellers have been looking for more sustainable ways to travel and eco-destinations to visit in order to reduce their carbon footprint and make a positive impact on the environment and surrounding communities.



Image source: [Gallo/Getty](#)

Here are some ways in which you can become a local eco-tourist in 2023.

1. Choose wisely when it comes to location

As the first step, choose a location where you will have a small environmental impact, but make a big difference. Nature-rich areas such as the Waterberg area of South Africa, for example, are an excellent choice as there are many experiences and things to do that contribute or encourage nature conservation, while also benefiting the immediate communities.



Airbnb and partners to grow inclusive tourism in the Waterberg

13 Jun 2022



Just recently Airbnb, for example, announced the expansion – and graduation – of the Airbnb Entrepreneurship Academy in the Waterberg region in support of the President's District Development Model (DDM) – a pilot project designed to bring together government and private partners to tackle poverty, inequality and unemployment at the district municipality level.

Through this and local partnerships with the Waterberg District Municipality, The Biosphere Reserve, and the Lapalala Wilderness School, the company aims to promote the region to help build the local tourism economy, develop skills for local families to open their homes and benefit from tourism growth and the biodiversity economy, and help to grow tourism in a sustainable way all while protecting the environment.

Velma Corcoran, regional lead for Middle East Africa at Airbnb, said: "As the cost of living increases, it's imperative that public and private organisations continue to work together to lower barriers to entry and unlock economic opportunities for everyday South Africans. We're incredibly proud of our continued commitment, with our partners, to create a more inclusive tourism economy that benefits everyone."

When deciding where to stay or explore, look for regions where there are big efforts being made to ensure a sustainable future for all.

2. Participate environmentally friendly activities

Seeing wildlife or ocean animals is a wonderful thing and looks great on social media. But often, the way in which travellers participate in these experiences can be bad for the environment. Corcoran suggests finding a different way of engaging with nature if you wish to be an eco-tourist. For example, hiking and cycling are low-impact activities that get you into nature without doing much - or any - damage. Be sure to stick to approved routes though.

If you wish to see animals, says Corcoran, consider wildlife safaris where you see animals in their natural environment rather than close-up interaction activities that allow guests to pet wild animals. If you want to see ocean wildlife, snorkeling with a proven supplier is a good bet or you could paddle or kayak out onto the ocean with a company that offers this rather than taking a motorised boat.

3. Support local and visit local

Many destinations across the world have trinkets and mementos that were not actually produced in that particular country. Purchasing these items is not only bad for the environment in that it uses a lot of fuel just to get to the destination, but it's also not contributing much to the local economy. So, give careful consideration to the items you purchase to take back home.

Visit local communities and explore nearby craft markets, says Corcoran. There will be many vendors offering truly unique items. These have been supplied by local craftspeople and the money you spend directly contributes to the regional economy.

4. Be aware of your waste

Reduce your carbon footprint when travelling by being more aware of your waste. Instead of buying a new coffee cup every time you get that cup of java, says Corcoran, buy a reusable one and take it with you wherever you go. Additionally, you can use a canvas shopper bag for all your shopping trips instead of asking for a new, often plastic, bag every time you head to the shops.

Another suggestion is to refill a reusable water bottle before you leave your accommodation every day. This way, you won't need to keep buying smaller, plastic bottles when you are out and about.

5. Respect local cultures and traditions

This is an often overlooked one, says Corcoran. "When you have a plan to travel somewhere that is quite different from your own community, be sure to do some research on the region that you intend to visit. Look up what their customs and beliefs are so that you know how to be respectful of them. For example, you might want to visit an attraction that requires you to remove your shoes or wear a scarf. This is something that you should ideally know ahead of time."

Additionally, tourists can research how different cultures greet, and what the accepted norms are, and then make an effort to respect this. "Don't forget to see read up on the tipping culture, as not all countries have a system of tipping those in the service industry," adds Corcoran.

Corcoran concludes: "As the seasons become more extreme in many parts of the world, it's important for everyone to play their part. These might seem like small changes, but over time, these can make a big difference."

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