

MAKE IT COUNT

A guide for **outbound tour operators** and their ground agents on how to scale up the sales of **sustainable tourism products**





ABOUT US

The Travel Foundation is an independent charity that works with the world's leading tourism organisations to improve the impacts of tourism in destinations. It has now delivered innovative and impactful sustainable tourism initiatives in more than 25 countries.

It seeks to meet its charitable mission by introducing sustainable ways of working, improving knowledge and skills, supporting the development of new standards and policies and fostering co-operation at a local, national and international level.

This guide has been developed using funds donated by the Travel Foundation's travel industry partners and their customers.

If you would like to find out more about the work of the Travel Foundation and how you can support its vision, please visit:
www.thetravelfoundation.org.uk



This guide was researched and written by Peter Richards in collaboration with the International Centre for Research in Events, Tourism and Hospitality at Leeds Beckett University. Peter has 15 years of experience working at the crossroads of responsible tourism and community development. Peter has worked in the private and NGO sectors, with government, tour operators and associations, tour guides, local communities, hotels, and restaurants. Core skills include sustainable tourism project management, marketing, participatory training, partnership facilitation between local communities and the private sector, and sustainable tourism standards development.



HOW TO USE THIS GUIDE

The **'Make it Count'** guide shares proven, recommended actions, which UK outbound tour operators and their ground agents take to source and sell more sustainable tourism, for mutual benefit.

Although the research focused on UK outbound tour operators, lessons learned and recommendations will be useful for tour operators from other outbound markets.

Lessons are presented through case studies, which show how tour operators put specific recommendations into practice. These cases come from the UK, and destinations as diverse as Brazil, Cyprus, Costa Rica, India, South Africa, Thailand and Nepal.

Recommended actions are grouped into three chapters. At the end of each chapter, action points are summarised, to help tour operators and their ground agents to forward plan.

This guide is not intended to tell you how to do your job, but to share good practice examples that are already being used to scale up the sales of sustainable tourism products. Some of these actions may be things which you are already doing, but hopefully you'll find some new ideas and inspiration too.

THE MAKE IT COUNT GUIDE IS ORGANISED INTO A SHORT INTRODUCTORY SECTION AND THREE CHAPTERS

| | |
|---|------------------------|
| INTRODUCTION: KEY MESSAGES What you need to remember. | 6 |
| MEET THE CONTRIBUTORS Tour operators who shared best practices and experience. | 10 |
| CHAPTER 1: INSIDE TOUR OPERATORS AND GROUND AGENTS How to motivate staff to buy and sell more sustainable tourism, inside your company | 12 |
| CHAPTER 2: BETWEEN TOUR OPERATORS AND THEIR GROUND AGENTS How outbound tour operators and ground agents can cooperate to scale up sales of sustainable tourism Part 1: Top tips for Tour Operators Part 2: Top tips for Ground Agents | 23 32 |
| CHAPTER 3: TO MARKET How to develop, communicate and add market value to sustainable tourism experiences | 44 |
| ADDITIONAL RESOURCES AND NEXT STEPS What will you do after reading this toolkit? | 53 |

WHY MAKE IT COUNT?

Tourism which is enjoyable for visitors, profitable for businesses, kinder to the environment and benefits local people in destinations is no longer a niche.

Around the world, thousands of hotels, restaurants, excursions, attractions and other tourism products have been developed to meet demand for better, greener, more inspiring holidays and experiences.

Despite this, 'sustainability' remains a token effort for many companies, based more on good will than good business.

THIS IS A WASTED OPPORTUNITY.

The *Make It Count* guide aims to scale up the sales of sustainable tourism products. The guide is written for UK outbound tour operators and their ground agents in destinations.

Make It Count showcases how some UK outbound tour operators are working with their ground agents to buy and sell more sustainable, better experiences to customers.

The guide draws upon in-depth interviews, with UK outbound tour operators and ground agents. Contributors include some of the world's largest tour operators; established leaders in small group travel; and smaller, highly expert, niche operators.

Make It Count shares their good practices, success stories and challenges: sourcing and selling sustainable tourism products.

TERMINOLOGY

UK outbound tour operators

– travel companies based in the UK developing and selling holidays to overseas destinations.

Ground Agents

– travel companies based in an overseas destination(s) selling accommodation, excursions, transport and attractions to tour operators. N.B. May also be referred to as 'ground operators', 'ground handlers' and 'destination management companies'. For simplicity we refer to all of the above as 'ground agents' in this guide.

Responsible tourism? Sustainable tourism?

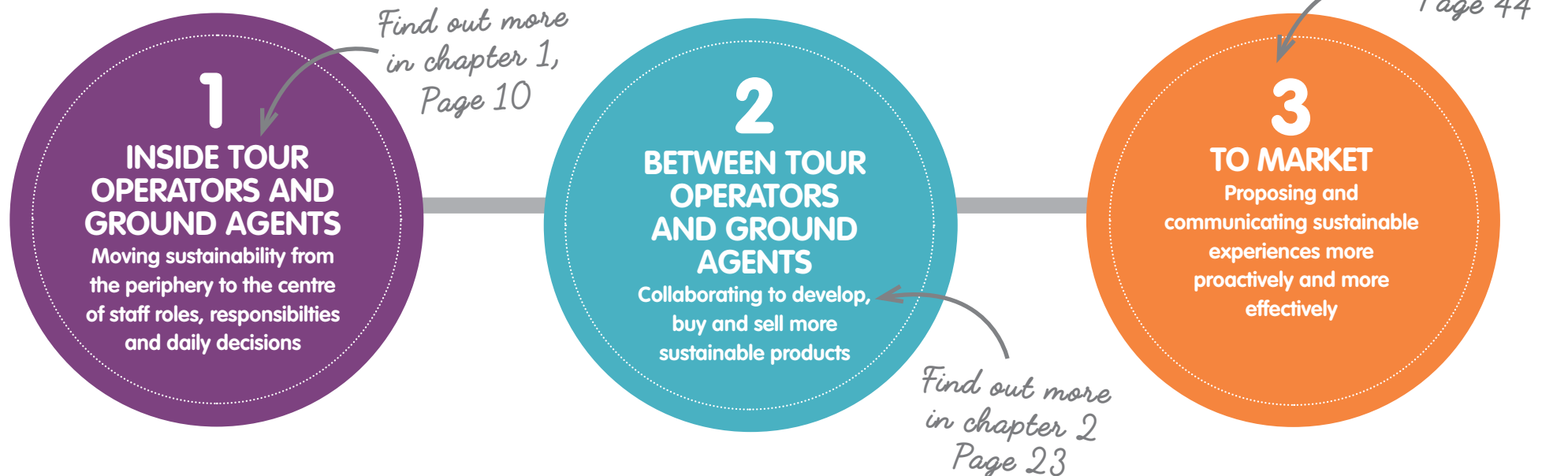
– for the purposes of clarity, the terms 'sustainable' and 'responsible' tourism are interchangeable in this guide. See UNWTO definition on page 8.

Selling more sustainable tourism products requires harnessing the experiential elements of sustainability and producing inspiring stories of people and places to create and communicate much better experiences.

Success begins with a systematic approach inside tour operator businesses. This includes effort and action by staff, and collaboration between departments.

Success also requires active collaboration between tour operators, ground agents and suppliers. Partners and suppliers can be motivated by sharing cost savings and other benefits along supply chains.

Successful scaling up sales of **sustainable tourism products** is based on three, simple, replicable, sets of actions:



SUSTAINABLE TOURISM MAKES BUSINESS SENSE

The good news is that, from mainstream tour operators to tourism specialists, sustainable tourism experiences are meeting customer expectations and making good business sense.



For example, in 2015:

- Sales of Thomas Cook's 'Local Label Excursions' grew by as much as 400%.
- Sales of 'TUI Collection' sustainable excursions grew by as much as 250%.
- Specialists like the Beyond Tourism Company and Rickshaw Travel have added value to their brands, by investing in more sustainable products.

These successes are the result of smart, systematic support for enjoyable, sustainable products.

“It was massive... Some programmes we had sold for 10 years. And, in one season, some of them jumped up 400%... I'd sit by the pool and hear people say 'that was the best day I ever had'... Now, that's real feedback”

JO HENDRICKX, FORMER GROUP SUSTAINABLE DESTINATIONS MANAGER, *Thomas Cook*
CURRENT PARTNER at *Global Spirit*

“People are looking for a personal touch. With a little more attention to detail and explanation of what we are doing, customers are getting sustainable awareness of treating our environment correctly and also enjoying themselves.”

THEO BALMADAKIS, HEAD OF SALES DEVELOPMENT
East Mediterranean, TUI



“We work with many UK tour operators. Years ago, people would watch. Now, people want to experience and participate. Clients want to feel they are doing something special and get in touch with the country, and the locals get something out of it”

BEAT BRUNSCHWILER, CO-DIRECTOR, *Via Ventura, Latin America*



SUSTAINABLE TOURISM?

The UNWTO defines sustainable tourism as:

“Tourism that takes full account of its current and future economic, social and environmental impacts, addressing the needs of visitors, the industry, the environment and host communities.”

In practice, making tourism more sustainable covers a large spectrum of actions. Some aspects of sustainable tourism can be experienced by tourists. Other actions take place ‘behind the scenes’, such as managing waste, or buying water and energy efficient equipment.

In this guide, the scope of ‘sustainable tourism’ is framed by the good practice examples which contributors proposed.

These included;

- Local and community-based village excursions;
- Certified, ‘green’ accommodations;
- Local, healthy, organic food and restaurants;
- Responsible wildlife experiences;
- Responsible volunteer experiences.

The guide does not focus on ‘back office’ sustainability, outside the guest experience.



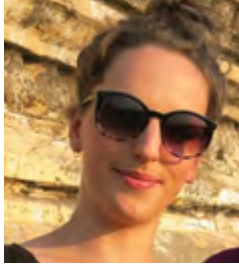


MEET THE CONTRIBUTORS

TOUR OPERATORS



THEA BELLHOUSE,
CONTRACTS MANAGER FOR
AFRICA, LATIN AMERICA AND
THE MIDDLE EAST,
STA Travel



MEGAN DEVENISH,
SOUTH EAST ASIA
PRODUCT MANAGER,
Exodus



SIMON FORSTER,
DIRECTOR,
Beyond Tourism Company



**THOMAS HOLDO
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Mekong Experiences



JO HENDRICKX,
FORMER GROUP SUSTAINABILITY
MANAGER, *Thomas Cook, UK.*
CURRENT, PARTNER
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SALLIE GRAYSON,
PROGRAMME DIRECTOR,
People and Places



CAROLINE KING,
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DAVID VILLE,
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FELIPE ZALAMEA,
DIRECTOR,
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MEET THE CONTRIBUTORS

GROUND AGENTS



THEO BALMADAKIS,
HEAD OF SALES
DEVELOPMENT
East Mediterranean, TUI



BEAT BRUNSCHWILER,
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THIERRY JOUBERT,
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CHRISTINE JACQUEMIN
EXO FOUNDATION
DIRECTOR &
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at EXO Travel, Asia



PAUL MIEDEMA,
DIRECTOR,
*Calabash Tours,
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CARL NEEDHAM,
GENERAL MANAGER OF
Peak DMC, Thailand



WILLEM NIEMEIJER,
CEO, *Khiri Travel,
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GEORGES ORPHANOU,
SERVICE AND SALES
SUPPORT MANAGER,
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GOPINATH PARAYIL,
FOUNDER,
The Blue Yonder, India



CHIWAN SUWANNAPAK,
THAILAND AND LAOS
OPERATIONS MANAGER,
Peak DMC, Thailand



GUIDO VAN ES,
OWNER,
*Responsible Tourism
Peru*



XENIOS XENOP HONTOS,
INLAND TOURS MANAGER,
Aelos, Cyprus



INSIDE TOUR OPERATOR AND GROUND AGENT BUSINESSES

Scaling up sustainable tourism sales requires a systematic approach, which can only begin inside your company.

Use sustainability criteria to identify better experiences
Page 16

Motivate staff with concrete goals
Page 14

Develop a staff engagement programme with training, games and fun activities
Page 18

Embed **sustainability** in your **company culture** and staff's daily work
Page 13

Encourage cooperation between departments
Page 20

Monitor and reward staff sustainability performance
Page 22

EMBED SUSTAINABILITY IN YOUR COMPANY CULTURE AND STAFF'S DAILY WORK

Introducing...

CARL NEEDHAM,
GENERAL MANAGER
Peak DMC, Thailand



“Responsibility
is part of our
company DNA”

WHY?

Staff are motivated to source and sell more sustainable products, when they know that sustainable tourism is a valued part of their company culture and daily work.

OUR STORY...

Peak DMC inspires our staff to care about sustainable tourism, by integrating our core values into every decision we make.

HOW WE DID IT...

Peak's core values include responsibility and integrity.

Our website and public communications stress our core

values, and responsible tourism. This helps us to attract staff, who are committed to benefiting local people and the environment.

We always explain our core values and discuss responsible tourism with candidates during job interviews. Most Peak staff have sustainability tasks in their job descriptions. Every year,

specific goals are set according to staff roles. We also set a company-wide goal, related to sustainable tourism. This could be a cause such as climate change; or a project, such as establishing an eco-lodge in Myanmar. Our core values help us to retain high-quality, motivated staff.



MOTIVATE STAFF WITH CONCRETE GOALS

Introducing...

CAROLINE KING,
PRODUCT SPECIALIST,
Rickshaw Travel, UK



“Everyone, at every level is working towards something to do with **sustainability**”

WHY?

Setting goals for sourcing or selling more sustainable tourism products shows staff that their company is serious; and gives them a concrete target to aim for.

OUR STORY...

Our team earned **Rickshaw Travel** a global sustainability certification, by working to ensure that over 20% of our products were sustainable.

HOW WE DID IT...

Rickshaw Travel's core value is 'People First.' Sustainability is already at the heart of our company's mission. However, when Rickshaw Travel joined the

Travelife Sustainability program, our team became responsible to ensure that at least 20% of our products were sustainable.

As a product specialist, I analysed our products by destination. I checked if the hotels we stayed in were locally owned, made sure that we used local guides, and removed elephant riding. Rickshaw align ourselves with ground

agents who share our values. I informed our ground agent, Khiri Travel that we wanted to offer more sustainable products.

We conferred over what kinds of products could be considered 'sustainable' and held a monthly SKYPE call to check progress. Now, both of our companies have been certified by Travelife!





Rickshaw Travel's team of 'Meaningful Travel Warriors' celebrate being awarded a Travelife, Better Places award.

USE SUSTAINABILITY CRITERIA TO IDENTIFY BETTER EXPERIENCES

Introducing...

JO HENDRICKX,
FORMER GROUP SUSTAINABLE
DESTINATIONS MANAGER,
Thomas Cook, UK
CURRENT PARTNER at
Global Spirit



“The process was really strict. Out of **100** applications, only **60** got through”

WHY?

To sell more sustainable tourism, identifying and preferring more sustainable products needs to be at the heart of decision making.

OUR STORY...

At Thomas Cook we used the Travel Foundation’s Greener Excursions Criteria to assess our excursion programs across 80 global destinations. We identified which suppliers were only sourcing and employing locally, celebrating local culture and not engaged in wasteful practices. The most sustainable were promoted as “Local Label Excursions.”

HOW WE DID IT...

First, we adapted the Travel Foundation criteria, for each type of excursion. Next, our ground agents and resort staff helped us to identify a shortlist of potential excursions. These were assessed by a judging committee. If improvements were needed, suppliers were supported to understand the benefits of improving performance, and how to make

changes. We explained why they hadn’t passed and worked with them to improve.

Suppliers really wanted the local label. Our overseas reps stood at the front of the welcome introduction, promoting what the label meant to customers’ enjoyment; and why the excursions were good for local people and the environment. Sales increased up to 400%!





Izmir Craft Market, Turkey, one of Thomas Cook's most successful Local Label Excursions.

DEVELOP A STAFF ENGAGEMENT PROGRAMME WITH TRAINING, GAMES AND FUN ACTIVITIES

Introducing...

CHRISTINE JACQUEMIN
EXO FOUNDATION DIRECTOR &
SUSTAINABILITY ADVISOR
EXO Travel, Asia



“Staff can learn and demonstrate their **commitment to our values**, in a fun game”

WHY?

It is a challenge to motivate staff with sustainability policies and guidelines. A staff engagement programme can motivate staff by encouraging them to look a bit deeper into complex issues.

OUR STORY...

At EXO Travel, we engage staff across five countries through information, training and challenging their knowledge of sustainability and responsible tourism. By participating in monthly quizzes and missions, staff can win prizes and recognition as an EXO top responsible employee!

HOW WE DID IT...

Every month, we choose a theme such as climate change or benefits to local communities. We invite staff to participate in quizzes or missions, which test understanding of sustainable tourism, certification criteria, and important documents on our website, such as our RT policy. Answers can easily be found on our websites. Activities include taking a picture of

oneself saving energy or water, reducing waste or buying responsibly. To make it even more fun, we replace points with coconuts and mangoes (10 coconuts = 1 mango). The best answers and most creative ideas win a small prize, illustrating sustainability. 20% of staff play regularly, and over 50% in Laos!



Han, playing the EXO Travel sustainability game. Staff compete to show how they put sustainability into practice!



ENCOURAGE COOPERATION BETWEEN DEPARTMENTS

Introducing...

CAROLINE KING,
PRODUCT SPECIALIST,
Rickshaw Travel, UK



“Now the sales teams have **real confidence** and believe in what they are selling”

WHY?

Through cooperation between departments, experiences can be fine-tuned to meet customers’ needs; and marketers can access information and stories which add value to sustainable tourism.

OUR STORY...

Rickshaw Travel have established a team of ‘meaningful travel warriors,’ drawn from every department: marketing, sales, travel specialists, and product. This team cooperates to get more sustainable tourism to market.

HOW WE DID IT...

We organize inter-departmental meetings every three months

and deliver regular training to increase staff knowledge and cooperation on sustainability.

We run ‘destination and sales workshops’ to introduce sustainable tourism across our destinations, and to explain clearly how products are sustainable. We also send our travel specialists on FAM trips to our destinations when possible.

This training has increased the success of our sales teams. They now have more confidence, and better information to tell more attractive stories. Cooperation has also enabled our product teams to better understand the needs of Rickshaw’s customers.



MONITOR AND REWARD STAFF SUSTAINABILITY PERFORMANCE

Introducing...

CHIWAN SUWANNAPAK,
THAILAND AND LAOS
OPERATIONS MANAGER,
Peak DMC, Thailand



“Feedback motivates guides to tell us how trips could be operated more sustainably”

WHY?

Rewards and incentives are excellent motivators. Despite this UK outbound tour operators and ground agents rarely reward staff for their achievements promoting sustainable tourism products.

OUR STORY...

Our tour leaders are rated by customers on their Responsible Tourism (RT) performance; and rewarded for good feedback through their annual bonuses.

HOW WE DID IT...

Customers write a ‘feedback form’ at the end of each trip. Guides are rated from ‘1’ to ‘5’, on a range of issues, including

‘Responsible Tourism.’ Good feedback earns tour leaders’ better annual bonuses. This motivates them to take RT seriously, give guests better information about local people, culture and environment, suggest local restaurants and shops, etc.

As operations manager, I am responsible for the overall

performance of Peak’s tour guides. Every six months, I look through the ‘RT’ feedback to identify which issues to prioritise for guide training. Therefore, this system also motivates me to provide top quality sustainability training to our tour leaders.





IN SUMMARY

Concrete actions which you can take to motivate your staff to buy and sell more sustainable tourism products include:

- Consider reviewing your policies, so they clearly reflect the importance of sustainable tourism to your company; and show that you intend to source and sell more sustainable tourism products;
- Highlight the importance of sustainability to your company in your website, brochures, and other communications to staff, partners and customers;
- Discuss sustainable tourism with candidates during job interviews, and include sustainability-related tasks in staff job descriptions and contracts;
- Set a company-wide goal or campaign, related to sustainable tourism. Get staff actively involved;
- Set concrete, sustainability related goals for staff. E.g., to increase the percentage of sustainable products which are sourced or sold;
- Consult resources such as the Travel Foundation's Greener Excursions Criteria to develop checklists for identifying and selecting more sustainable products;
- Develop a staff engagement programme, with fun games and quizzes, to increase staffs' knowledge about your company's sustainable tourism policies and initiatives;
- Organise interdepartmental, trainings and workshops, so that staff can share knowledge and pool skills to get more sustainable tourism to market;
- Monitor staff work and achievements, supporting sustainable tourism in your company; and reward performance, eg, offer a bonus, or opportunities to join interesting trainings, conferences and events.

BETWEEN TOUR OPERATORS AND GROUND AGENTS

Team work between tour operators, ground agents and suppliers is essential, to scale up sustainable tourism sales.

Sustainability is about working as a team to craft better experiences, for visitors, destinations and tourism businesses.

Top tips for tour operators

Request sustainable tourism proactively from ground agents
Page 26

Make sure that sustainability is on the agenda with Ground Agents
Page 24

Help suppliers to understand and improve health and safety performance
Page 28

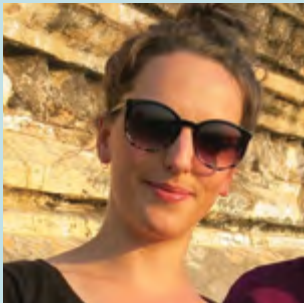
Work as a team with ground agents to develop better experiences
Page 30

Be proactive marketing and selling sustainable products
Page 32

MAKE SURE THAT SUSTAINABILITY IS ON THE AGENDA WITH GROUND AGENTS

Introducing...

MEGAN DEVENISH, SOUTH EAST ASIA
PRODUCT MANAGER, *Exodus*



“Trying to improve responsible tourism across **90 countries** is a challenge. We work with trusted ground agents and prioritise.”

WHY?

UK outbound tour operators and their ground agents work in a busy and competitive environment. It's easy for sustainability to slide down the priority list.

OUR STORY...

To get the most benefit from our ground agents' local knowledge, I schedule time to ask what makes their trips responsible; and to discuss how trips could be improved to deliver more unique, responsible **'Exodus Moments.'**

HOW WE DID IT...

We actively search for ground agents, which we trust to deliver local benefits through unique

experiences. We make sure that sustainability is on the agenda when we call our partners, and meet them at tourism fairs.

Our trips are reviewed throughout the year. However, we are often pushed for time, re sourcing new trip inclusions that could contribute further towards sustainability. So, we need to prioritise. A solution is to focus on our top selling trips each year, and invest the time

to really pull them apart and put them back together more responsibly.

For example, in Sri Lanka we removed elephant riding and replaced it with a responsible elephant safari. We included extra meals with local families, which ensured the contribution of tourism spread even further throughout the community.



Following consultation with their ground agents, Exodus replaced elephant riding with a responsible safari in Sri Lanka



REQUEST SUSTAINABLE TOURISM PROACTIVELY FROM GROUND AGENTS

Introducing...

WILLEM NIEMEIJER,
CEO, Khiri Travel, Asia



“When tour operators ask for a quote, if they stated that they would like more **sustainable alternatives**, that would really make a huge difference”

WHY?

Requesting more sustainable alternatives gives ground agents the confidence to propose new ideas to outbound partners.

OUR STORY...

Khiri Travel were one of the first ground agents in South East Asia to develop a Responsible Tourism policy. Twenty years on, we have earned international awards and recognition for our achievements.

HOW WE DID IT...

Some tour operators are asking us for sustainable tourism. But, there is also resistance to change.

Product managers of outbound tour operators are very busy. They have a million things to do. Every change means changing brochures, changing pictures, training for sales people, etc.

Simply by tour operators asking their ground agent to propose sustainable alternatives make it easier for ground agents to provide this. Competition between DMC's is fierce. Our sales teams learn from

experience that the best way to make a sale is to respond as closely as possible to the specific request made by the outbound tour operator. Requests also put the onus onto other tour operators who are less interested in sustainability, to think: “wow, our competitors are asking for this. We had better get our act together!”



Travellers with Khiri Travel enjoy a hands-on cooking experience with locals in Khao Sok, Thailand.



HELP SUPPLIERS TO UNDERSTAND AND IMPROVE HEALTH AND SAFETY PERFORMANCE

Introducing...

EMMA SNIPP,
GLOBAL SAFETY AND RESPONSIBLE
TRAVEL MANAGER,
STA Travel



“A lot of suppliers are very small. Quite often they grade poorly. But, we’re working with them, helping them to **improve their systems**”

WHY?

Complying with UK health and safety criteria is crucial to be able to work with UK tour operators.

OUR STORY...

We provide our suppliers with resources and advice, which help them to develop professional health and safety systems.

HOW WE DID IT...

My job is to audit STA’s products around the world. First, I contact the suppliers and ask them to complete a self-assessment.

This is based on a traffic light system: green, amber and red. Some of the most important criteria include trained staff, briefings for customers, insurance and emergency crisis procedures.

Where suppliers are not complying with our criteria, we help them. For example, we send examples of a good safety

policy, emergency procedures, etc. These were adapted from The Association of British Travel Agents (ABTA) standards.


Sometimes, language can be complex and difficult to understand. I am always available on the phone, and visit as many suppliers as possible.



STA's Emma Snipp spends weeks in the field, delivering health and safety and responsible tourism training to local suppliers.



COMMUNITY OUTREACH AND ENGAGEMENT



- We ensure our suppliers have the resources and training to meet our standards
- We encourage our suppliers to invest in their communities and to support local initiatives
- We ensure our suppliers have the resources and training to meet our standards

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WORK AS A TEAM WITH GROUND AGENTS TO DEVELOP BETTER EXPERIENCES

Introducing...

SALLIE GRAYSON,
PROGRAMME
DIRECTOR,
People and Places



PAUL MIEDEMA,
DIRECTOR,
Calabash Tours,
South Africa



“We work as a team to **prepare volunteers** for cross cultural differences; and help them to **minimise any negative impacts**, while getting the most out of volunteering”

WHY?

Tour operators often delegate so much responsibility to ground agents for product development that they miss opportunities to co-create better experiences.

OUR STORY...

People and Places work side by side with our ground agents, sharing ideas and knowledge, to develop outstanding, needs-based volunteer programmes.

HOW WE DID IT...

Initially, we look for ground agents who are already working with a project and have the ability to be a bridge between our clients and the beneficiaries.

They must be able to care for the safety of our customers and the local people.

We have strict standards for our partners. Volunteers must not replace local workers, or create a financial burden for projects or dependency on volunteers. Projects must be transparent, and able to prove their claims. Our agents, **Calabash**, help us to identify exactly how

volunteers can support the project, and the skills needed to achieve this. We help our ground agents to improve risk assessment, H&S and emergency procedures. Together, we make a Project Development Plan. This defines what work is needed, and clarifies exactly what is expected of our volunteers.





People and Places volunteers build teachers' IT skills at AVBukani School, Addo, Eastern Cape, South Africa.

BE PROACTIVE MARKETING AND SELLING SUSTAINABLE PRODUCTS

Introducing...

DAVID VILLE,
GROUP SUSTAINABILITY
MANAGER, Thomas Cook



“Existing excursions that gained a ‘local label’ achieved an **18%** increase in pre-tax profit, compared to a **1.5% increase** in pre-tax profits for non-labelled excursions”

WHY?

Special time and effort to develop more sustainable experiences must be matched by time and effort to market them.

OUR STORY...

When marketing ‘Local Label’ excursions, we harnessed a range of marketing tools to communicate the added value benefits of more sustainable excursions to our customers.

HOW WE DID IT...

Our marketing campaign was not designed to promote a

‘sustainable excursion’, but one which sought to bring about benefits for local communities, economies and environments. We emphasised that the experiences would be special for customers.

We created training packages, PowerPoint presentations and supporting documentation for overseas agents, managers and

representatives. We engaged the sales reps to write marketing content about Local Label excursions for resort guides, focusing on features and benefits to customers. We also sent sales reps on familiarisation trips. This made them enthusiastic to sell the trips.





Coffee trail in Peru



SUPPORT LOCAL COMMUNITIES AND SUPPLIERS TO UNDERSTAND TOURISM AND DEVELOP SKILLS

Introducing...

THIERRY JOUBERT,
MANAGING PARTNER,
Green Visions, Bosnia and Herzegovina



“We advised a local householder to offer the food which she eats herself. Initially, she felt shy. But, now she is proud to provide our customers with over **600 meals** per year”

WHY?

Local community members often have little experience of tourism. Extra help is needed to build the skills needed to welcome guests.

OUR STORY...

Green Visions has worked in the field for over 15 years, supporting rural communities in Bosnia and Herzegovina to develop fair and respectful, cultural exchange and outdoor adventure experiences.

HOW WE DID IT...

It's important to take the time to talk to the people, and explain

why tourists want to visit: why do they want to walk around the village for a few hours, have a meal and then go home?

Over the years, we have provided training to improve hygiene, and develop skills of local tour guides.

Sometimes people want the business so much that they

sell too cheap. I know, in the long run, they are going to cut corners and it will be a quality issue. So, I sit with them and help them to set a fair price for their services, even if it is more expensive.



SUPPORT LOCAL COMMUNITIES AND SUPPLIERS TO OFFER MORE SUSTAINABLE EXPERIENCES

Introducing...

GOPINATH PARAYIL,
FOUNDER,
The Blue Yonder, India



“The artisans mention **The Blue Yonder** every single day when guests come in, earning referrals for us”

WHY?

Sustaining traditional lifestyles, culture and arts relies on business opportunities and engaging with the younger generation to remain viable.

OUR STORY...

We donated 5000 EUR of Lifetime Achievement Awards and scholarships to local artisans; to create recognition and stimulate youth to learn ancient skills. This has led to hundreds of referrals.

HOW WE DID IT...

Killimangalam is famous for its' traditional, local, woven mats. Unfortunately, a combination of high materials costs and low

pay meant few young people were interested in continuing this trade. Shops began closing.

The Blue Yonder intervened, asked artisans to re-open, and started taking our guests for hands-on workshops, where they could see mats being made and buy souvenirs. Demand was so high that limited production became a challenge. We gave

scholarships to six women, one boy and two master craftsmen. 90% of our Kerala tours visit this region. Direct purchase of souvenirs by our guests now averages \$80 to \$100 USD per person. The crafts workshops are one of our most popular experiences, welcoming over 1000 guests in 2015.

The Blue  Yonder

UNDERSTAND THE ROLES AND PRIORITIES OF THE DIFFERENT STAFF, WHO INFLUENCE THE DECISION TO SAY “YES” OR “NO” TO YOUR PROPOSAL.

WHY?

For a product to be sourced and sold by UK tour operators, it must meet the criteria of four types of staff, with different roles and responsibilities.

Usually, staff are based in the UK. Very big tour operators (e.g. Thomas Cook and TUI) may have a local office, and employ a Destination Manager and Sales or Overseas Representatives. They work with local Ground Agents to develop products, and offer them to UK tourists in the destination.

Product and contracting

These staff identify and select new products. They request information about excursions, hotels, etc from ground agents. They are often responsible for preparing contracts with ground agents

Some of their most important priorities include:

- Trustworthy, professional partners;
- Suitable experiences for target markets;
- Price and margins;
- Value adding experiences, including authentic, meaningful experiences with character;
- Service quality;
- Location and availability;
- Sustainability;
- Health, safety, insurance.

Health and safety

Staff with this role must ensure that ground agents have public liability insurance; and that any hotels, excursions, etc which are offered to UK tourists comply with UK legal standards.

Priorities include:

- Ground agent and suppliers’ staff are insured;
 - Suppliers have passed an H&S audit and are trained in Health and Safety;
 - Customers are briefed about health and safety;
 - Emergency crisis processes are in place.
- If you cannot comply with UK health and safety laws, you will be unable to sell your products to most UK tour operators.

Sales & Marketing...

These staff are responsible for marketing / selling the products. Their success is usually measured by the number of sales, increases in sales and client satisfaction. Commission systems mean that sales staff are often motivated by more profitable products, which allow them to earn more money.

Priorities include:

- Suitable experiences for target markets;
 - Price and margins;
 - Health, safety and insurance.
- Note: Being able to manage large groups of tourists is essential to work with large tour operators.*



“We take **stuff off sale** all the time, if something comes up with H&S.”

THEA BELLHOUSE, *STA Travel*

Managers

In smaller UK tour operators, managers may be the key decision makers, sourcing products and contracting with ground agents. In larger companies, managers are usually only asked to make a decision about potentially controversial products. E.g.: excursions which involve animals, volunteering or contact with young people.

...How about CSR managers?

CSR Managers provide training, raise awareness and increase commitment to sustainability across departments. However, they do not usually influence the inclusion, exclusion or promotion of products on a day to day basis.



HELP SUPPLIERS TO MEET SPECIFIC UK TOUR OPERATOR CRITERIA

Introducing...

XENIOS XENOPHONTOS,
INLAND TOURS MANAGER,
Aeolos, Cyprus.



“**TUI clients** don’t want to be in a village which is **300 years old** and sit on **plastic chairs**”

WHY?

Ground agents can add great value, by working with local suppliers to understand and meet the specific needs of UK tour operators for safety, service and quality of experience.

OUR STORY...

Picturesque Tries Ellies village was almost deserted. Aeolos invested 5000 EUR to enable local community suppliers to meet the criteria for TUI’s sustainable excursions, and helped to breathe new life into the community.

HOW WE DID IT...

Our guests enjoy an authentic, Cyprus breakfast of fresh,

locally grown olives, tomatoes, cucumber, seasonal fruits and herbal teas. To prepare this, we joined up with a local kafeneon owner, thus ensuring the authenticity of the offer. We coached him to obtain public liability insurance, conduct staff health checks, improve hygiene procedures and request food safety checks from government standards organisations.

TUI’s expectations for the quality of experience were also crucial. All food should be tasty, fresh and locally grown. This was more expensive for suppliers than buying from the supermarket. To get local suppliers on board, we explained how many customers we could send to the village. We even helped the restaurant owner to replace plastic chairs with beautiful, recycled furniture.



**Enjoying Tries Ellies village
on a TUI Collection excursion
organised by Aeolos, Cyprus**



OFFER SUSTAINABLE PRODUCTS MORE PROACTIVELY TO UK TOUR OPERATORS

Introducing...

AMANDA MARKS,
MANAGING DIRECTOR,
Tribes Travel.



“Give me the ammunition to say why this is helping and why **someone should care enough to book it**”

WHY?

Many UK tour operators want their ground agents to send more information about good quality, sustainable tourism experiences.

OUR STORY...

Many factors are important to us, when we decide whether or not to include a new product in our brochure. We're looking for a good itinerary, reasonable price, variety and flexibility. Our ground agents need to be professional, with public liability insurance.

Alongside these requirements, sustainability is very important

to Tribes. We explain this to all of our ground agents. However, to be honest, this does not often lead to a lot more information, from day to day. If operational staff were more proactive, proposing sustainable experiences, and explaining why they are better, there could be a bigger impact.

HOW WE DID IT...

Most customers are influenced

by price. It is very helpful when our ground agents explain why a more sustainable hotel or excursion is more expensive. For example, if the price contributes to wildlife conservation or a community project. We promote hotels and excursions which benefit people and wildlife as 'Holidays with Heart'. When our clients hear a story, the product becomes much more meaningful and attractive.





“We established Sumak Travel to support community based tourism across South America. The reason that we exist is to make it easy for tourists to access programmes created, managed and operated by local communities across the continent.”

FELIPE ZALAMEA,
DIRECTOR, *Sumak Travel*



“We need to be sure that every detail is being operated the way it has been informed to the client. We help local communities to understand clients’ expectations. I have spent weeks in the field, training local people. Going the extra mile for sustainable tourism”

GUIDO VAN ES, OWNER,
Responsible Tourism Peru



“We assist partners in Cambodia to develop responsible tourism. On World Responsible Tourism Day, we organised an event in Siem Reap for local hotels to meet local suppliers of organic rice and cotton.”

THOMAS HOLDO HANSEN,
DIRECTOR, *Mekong Experiences*

IN SUMMARY

UK Tour operators:

- Explain to your ground agents why sustainability is important to your company; and make sure that sustainability is on the agenda when you discuss product development, by phone, Skype or face to face (e.g., at tourism fairs).
- Ideally, provide training for your ground agents on sustainable / responsible tourism. As a minimum, focus on at least two or three programs per year, and work closely with your ground agents to identify how they could be made more sustainable;
- Motivate your ground agents by asking them to propose 'more sustainable' alternatives, when you request a quote;
- Provide information and help to coach your ground agents / suppliers to improve their health and safety performance;
- Work as a team with your ground agents, sharing your expertise to

create better experiences;

- Provide your marketing / sales teams with training / attractive media to market sustainable excursions.
- Collect client feedback and monitor sales so that you can follow the success of sustainable products.

Ground agents:

- Understand UK tour operator priorities;
- Consult with your UK tour operator partner carefully over legal, insurance and health and safety requirements. Help to build the capacity of sustainable suppliers (e.g. local communities) to meet these requirements.
- Invest time building trust and raising suppliers awareness about tourism and sustainability issues, including viable good value pricing;
- Provide detailed information to your UK tour operator partners on sustainable options, and how these tours make a difference to people and planet.





TO MARKET

Special efforts and investments to develop sustainable products need to be matched by special efforts to communicate why they are better experiences



Drive sales by creating products which offer sustainability for everyone
Page 47

Harness marketable sustainable features to create much better experiences
Page 46

Use inspiring stories to excite your customers
Page 48

Make sure that **sustainable products** are right for our customers at the **right price**
Page 45

Motivate sales teams to drive sales of sustainable experiences
Page 50

Look for a workable compromise, when price is an obstacle
Page 51

MAKE SURE THAT SUSTAINABLE PRODUCTS ARE RIGHT FOR YOUR CUSTOMERS, AT THE RIGHT PRICE

Introducing...

THEO BALMADAKIS,
HEAD OF SALES DEVELOPMENT
East Mediterranean, TUI



“Excursions must be **right for our customers** at the right price, with sustainable elements our clients will value”

WHY?

We want to deliver unique and sustainable experiences in our destinations, reaching millions of guests, while retaining a personal touch.

OUR STORY...

Even mainstream travellers are now seeking more authentic experiences. The TUI collection of sustainable excursions is a range of differentiated experiences with clear added values and consistent standards, exclusive to TUI group.

HOW WE DID IT...

We want to build sustainable elements into successful

excursions. Requests to our ground agents include clear specifications: inclusions, price range and profit expectations, environmental protection and benefits to local communities.

In Turkey, one of our suppliers uses an electric boat, which is more peaceful and more environmentally friendly. On a cruise in the Dominican Republic, we only offer tasty, high quality, locally produced

food and drinks. Our guides also give a fascinating and engaging talk about starfish, explaining why touching them can be fatal for the fish. We regularly split customers into smaller groups, or half-day tours, for a more intimate experience. In some of our collection experiences, we donate part of our income to local NGO's.



HARNESS MARKETABLE, SUSTAINABLE FEATURES TO CREATE MUCH BETTER EXPERIENCES

Introducing...

RAJ GYAWALI, DIRECTOR,
Social Tours Nepal.



“The feeling of a **hand-pulled cup handle**, that melds with the shape of one’s fingers, gives a subtle **feeling of delight** to whomever uses the pot”

WHY?

When developing new products, it is essential to consider which sustainable elements can be harnessed to create a better experience for your guests.

OUR STORY...

Our clients’ top priorities are an experience, a product and a price. By choosing to partner with Fair Trade suppliers, Social Tours do deliver a better experience. Fair Trade crafts are more authentic, less commercial, and better quality. Fair Trade artisans are happier and more motivated to interact with our guests.

HOW WE DID IT...

Social Tours’ purchasing policy favours Fair Trade. This helps us to identify potential suppliers. However, Fair Trade isn’t enough. We are looking for a ‘full on’ experience, and we need to work with our suppliers to build this ourselves. For example in our ‘throw your own souvenir’ tour, you meet a master craftsman, who shares the history of Thimi ceramics, explains how ancient

techniques are being adapted to modern aesthetics, and teaches you how to make your own pottery creation. After this, you enjoy lunch at an organic farm. Guests can also explore the farm.

These activities have proven so popular, that we have now developed a new, ‘Weave Your Own Souvenir’ excursion.



DRIVE SALES BY CREATING PRODUCTS WHICH OFFER SUSTAINABILITY FOR EVERYONE

Introducing...

SIMON FORSTER, DIRECTOR,
Beyond Tourism Company



“We only include **sustainable elements** which the client will want to do”

WHY?

Scaling up sustainable tourism requires crafting experiences to attract a broad range of visitors.

OUR STORY...

We believe that sustainable products can offer a great experience for everyone. We look for opportunities to suggest sustainable experiences which fit with customer requests, and diverse types of tourists.

HOW WE DID IT...

Firstly, we always give our client what they are asking for. We don't put in activities purely

because they are sustainable. We put them in because they add value, as an experience.

In Peru, there is huge demand for hiking the Inca trail. We offer an alternative way to get to Machu Picchu, staying with a local family, which is possible by hiking or cycling. The trip has more variety and flexibility than a regular four day trek, and you still arrive in Machu Picchu.

People who prefer a bit more comfort enjoy these options.

In Cruz del Condor, Peru, travellers hope to see condors. We explain that staying with a local community allows you to see condors for longer. You will get the chance to spend time away from other tourists, and experience local culture.



USE INSPIRING STORIES TO EXCITE YOUR CUSTOMERS

Introducing...

THEA BELLHOUSE,
CONTRACTS MANAGER FOR AFRICA,
LATIN AMERICA AND THE MIDDLE EAST,
STA Travel



“This trip will totally transform the **way you think about animals**”

WHY?

Great stories, well packaged information and visitor education add huge value to experiences.

OUR STORY...

Responsible shark cage diving with **Marine Dynamics** is our best -selling day tour in South Africa. Sales are up 15% on last year.

HOW WE DID IT...

Born Free have audited and rated all of STA's products, which involve animals. Products which don't comply are not sold.

In Cape Town, shark diving is a 'must do' experience. With Marine Dynamics, the whole emphasis is on education. There is a marine biologist on board, who is keen to remove negative connotations about sharks. I know our customers will have a better time, compared to trips where you don't learn anything. You can get much cheaper products, but we decided to

go with the more expensive one, because we think it offers a better experience. They don't use chumming, which fits with our animal welfare policies. Marine Dynamics also make it easy for us, by offering guaranteed availability. Our clients will always have a spot on the boat.



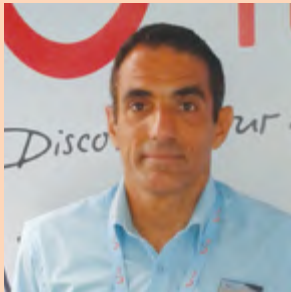
Responsible shark watching organised
in partnership between STA Travel and
Marine Dynamics, Cape Town



MOTIVATE SALES TEAMS TO DRIVE SALES OF SUSTAINABLE EXPERIENCES

Introducing...

GEORGES ORPHANOU,
SERVICE AND SALES
SUPPORT MANAGER,
Aeolos, Cyprus



“You need to be able to **thrill customers** before they even go”

WHY?

Inspiring and motivating sales teams to promote sustainable experiences is a key to success.

OUR STORY...

In 2015, my sales team pushed up sales of the Treis Elies, **TUI collection Cyprus Eco village** excursion by over 250%.

HOW WE DID IT...

My team is responsible for hitting targets for all of our excursions. Profitability and satisfaction are key success

criteria. Excursions must be sustainable in ways that can actually interest clients. The 'TUI Collection' of sustainable excursions is popular. It has not been difficult to motivate reps.

The knowledge of the sales person or rep, who is going to sell the excursion is essential.

Your team have to know the product really well. So, they need to experience it themselves. The first thing I do is to send reps on the excursion. They need to be able to answer clients' questions, and present at least 5 or 6 trip highlights. Sales teams also need good photos and well-designed materials.



LOOK FOR A WORKABLE COMPROMISE, WHEN PRICE IS AN OBSTACLE

Many of the successful case studies included in this guide involved an initial, financial investment by one or more partners to develop more sustainable experiences.

Sometimes, more sustainable activities saved money. However, sometimes the more sustainable options were more expensive.

In several cases, tour operators and ground agents agreed to reduce their margins, over the short-term, in order to test new products and give them a chance.



“Be well organised, come up with a plan, and show us how it will work. If it’s a great experience, and we will profit in the long run, we can agree with our partners to take less margin and give the product a chance.”

CARL NEEDHAM,
GENERAL MANAGER
of Peak DMC, Thailand



“We would look at a sustainable product with more generous eyes than a regular product. We would accept a lower commission on a fully sustainable product. Show us – explain to us why it is sustainable.”

THEA BELLHOUSE,
CONTRACTS MANAGER,
STA Travel



IN SUMMARY

Concrete actions which will help make your sustainable tours more marketable include:

- Make sure that products are tailored to the needs of your target group, and proposed at a realistic price. Tour operators may reduce margins for a genuinely sustainable product, which is a great experience. However, if the price is not good value for money, it won't sell;
- Focus product development and marketing on sustainable aspects, which can be tailored into great experiences;
- Develop products which can be adapted to meet the needs of a variety of different markets: people of different ages, different fitness levels, etc. For example, offer a variety of lengths of trek, or choices of modes of transport;
- Motivate sales reps with FAM trips. Make sure they have excellent product knowledge of your sustainable products;
- Don't try to sell 'sustainability'. Lead your promotion with inspiring stories, which show the visitor experience, and communicate how it will benefit local people, environment, wildlife, etc.

Excite, inspire, educate, raise awareness and tell your customers what they are supporting.

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES AND NEXT STEPS

This section directs you to useful websites and other resources, which can help your company to improve sustainability performance; and source and sell more sustainable tourism.

It is most effective to approach sustainability as a step by step journey. Many tools are available to help tour operators and ground agents to systematically increase your sustainability performance.

A systematic approach to sustainability generally includes the following actions:

- Identifying responsible and enthusiastic staff to lead company sustainability activities;
- Conducting an analysis to identify current strengths and priorities for improvement;
- Making a concrete plan to improve sustainability performance, by department / role;
- Taking action. Implementing specific, measurable, achievable, relevant, timed projects;
- Measuring progress, and communicating your results to staff, customers and suppliers.

PARTICULARLY USEFUL RESOURCES ARE:

The Travel Foundation Green Business Tools

The Travel Foundation website includes a collection of tools to help tour operators to take effective action on sustainable tourism. Tour operators can find out how to make changes to your business that will reduce costs, improve customer satisfaction, benefit local people and the environment in destinations, as well as benefiting your business by protecting the resources on which it depends. For more information: http://www.thetravelfoundation.org.uk/green_business_tools

Travelife for Tour Operators and Travel Agents

Travelife is a leading training, management and certification initiative for tourism companies committed to reach sustainability. Travelife helps tour operators and travel agencies to manage and improve social and environmental impacts by complying with sustainability criteria. Ultimately, when a company meets the requirements, it will receive a Travelife award. for more information:

<http://www.travelife.info/>

Toolkits for developing and marketing sustainable tourism

Several, excellent toolkits have been developed for developing and marketing sustainable tourism. For example:

Keep it real

https://d1myqg1v1ynzrd.cloudfront.net/sites/default/files/vb-corporate/Documents-Library/documents/England-documents/keep_it_real.pdf

How to sell excursions to UK tour operators

http://www.thetravelfoundation.org.uk/green_business_tools/greener_excursions/micro_excursions/

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES AND NEXT STEPS CONT

What are the most important factors for a UK tour operator, when considering choosing an agent?*

- Reputation and trustworthiness;
- Excellent organisation and reliability;
- Honesty to admit and help to solve problems;
- Operational and financial capacity;
- Timely and accurate information;
- Ability to handle last minute bookings.

**Research conducted by Leeds Beckett University, 2015*



Pottery making with Social Tours



Tips on improving animal welfare in tourism...

The increasing importance of animal health and welfare to UK travellers, makes animal issues fundamental to your reputation and long term business success.

1 Get a copy of ABTA's Global Welfare Guidance for Animals in Tourism. These manuals are the first of their kind. They make excellent reference tools. Using them is a great step towards improving animal welfare in tourism.

2 Understand how Animal Welfare issues apply to your Business. Wild and captive animals feature heavily in tourism activity programmes. You need to learn how animal issues relate to your business.

3 Train your Staff. Build the knowledge, skills and teamwork which your company needs to successfully balance animal welfare alongside great experiences and services.

4 Create an Animal Footprint Action Plan. The process begins with excursion and supplier assessment; followed by action, auditing your results, and communicating your progress.

For additional help visit: www.globalspirit.biz



**The EXO Travel Sustainability Team,
nurturing sustainability across departments**



