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ITG Responsible Tourism Policy



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1 Introduction

1.1 Purpose

This policy document is intended to be a central reference point for ITG's approach to Responsible Tourism, what we communicate to our customers, and what we expect of our tour leaders and guides.

Our mission at ITG is *"To create happy clients, be a place to work that our staff recommend, and to have a positive impact on our destinations and local communities."* In order to both create happy clients and have a positive impact in the places that we travel to, we need to have a clear approach to travel that ensures this. In other words, *how* we travel is just as important as where we go and what we see.

It is structured around the three key impact areas of sustainability: Planet, People and Profit.

The policy is separate to our Sustainability Policy which covers a broader range of topics, only one of which is Responsible Travel.

1.2 Scope

This policy applies to all ITG employees however not all sections will apply to all employees. It outlines the approach we take to our trips, what we recommend to our customers, as well as providing specific guidance for our tour leaders and guides.

For each section in this policy, we outline:

1. **ITG Policy:** What ITG's stance is with regards to the topic area, and what we are doing as a company to address it.
2. **Customer tips:** What we recommend our customers do, to ensure they have a positive impact during their trip.
3. **Guidance for tour leaders and guides:** What we ask of our tour leaders and guides to ensure our trips have the best possible impact.

1.3 Responsibilities

Global Head of Sustainability

- To inform and encourage staff to follow the policies.
- To inform the Sustainability Team of the policies so they can be point of contacts for their branches.

Sustainability Team

- To be knowledgeable about the policies and be a liaison with staff members within their branch.

Field Operations Management Team

- To inform our full-time and freelance tour leaders and guides of the guidance for tour leaders and guides outlined in the sections below.

Tour leaders and guides

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- To read and follow the policies relevant for their role.

Marketing Team

- To read and understand ITG's Policy and customer tips for each impact area, and consider them when communicating with our customers

Product Team

- To read and understand ITG's Policy for each impact area, and consider them when developing and approving product

1.4 Review

The policy will be reviewed annually by the Global Head of Sustainability (HoS) and any updates will be approved by the Board.

This policy will be made available on the [InsideJapan Tours](#) (IJT) and [InsideAsia Tours](#) (IAT) websites.

1.5 Training

We will provide specific training on our Responsible Travel policy to our full-time tour leaders (Insiders) through:

- Including the guidance for tour leaders and guides (outlined in each section below) in our online Insider Training Modules
- Providing in-person training sessions as part of ongoing training and development

With regards to our freelance tour leaders, we will:

- Include the guidance for tour leaders and guides (outlined in each section below) in the Freelance Group Tours Handbook

With regards to our freelance guides, we will:

- Include the guidance for tour leaders and guides (outlined in each section below) in the Freelance Guide Handbook

2 Planet

2.1 Carbon

2.1.1 ITG Policy

We have a comprehensive carbon action plan to take concrete steps in addressing our carbon emissions that includes:

- Measuring our emissions (including every trip)
- Setting a 50% reduction target by 2030
- Targeting key decarbonisation areas (e.g. flights, accommodation, transportation)
- Implementing energy and water conservation policies in our offices, running on renewable energy where possible.
- Offsetting every trip, including flights, ground arrangements and the operational emissions that go into making them happen.

[For more information please refer to our Sustainability Policy and Climate Action Plan](#)

2.1.2 Customer Tips

To reduce our environmental impact and lower our carbon footprint while travelling, we recommend the following:

- Use public transport, hire a bike or walk where convenient, for the most authentic, enjoyable and green way to explore.
- Eat seasonal and local. Do try local dishes and find out what produce is in season. Eat in small, family-run restaurants where you can to reduce 'food miles' and put your money into the local economy. Eating plant-based where possible will reduce your impact even further.
- Reuse towels and bedding to save on water and energy, turn off lights, heaters and A/C while you're out for the day, and think about whether you need to use hotel amenities (soap, shampoo etc.). These are often thrown away after your stay — even if you've only used them once. Be conscious of how much water you use during your stay, and use curtains and drapes as your friend to keep the sun out when it's hot; keep them open when it's cool.

2.1.3 Guidance for tour leaders and guides

- Remind customers to turn off lights, a/c, and heating when they go out for the day.
- Explain hotel policies on towel/sheets changing and assist customers who want to reuse them.
- Use public transport or low carbon transport where possible and convenient.
- Suggest local dishes and seasonal produce.
- Book and recommend independent, locally or family-run restaurants to reduce 'food miles' and put money into the local economy.

2.2 Waste

2.2.1 ITG Policy

As part of our Sustainability Policy we:

- Follow a reduce, reuse, recycle policy in our offices,
- Have a purchasing policy to reduce waste and support local businesses,
- Educate staff on the efficient use of promotional materials,
- Ask accommodation about the steps they are taking to reduce waste and sharing best practices,
- Encourage our customers to reduce waste,
- Train our tour leaders and guides on how to reduce waste.

[For more information see our Sustainability policy](#)

2.2.2 Customer Tips

To reduce waste while travelling, we recommend the following:

- Try to use alternatives to single-use plastics, or other disposables, like chopsticks.
- Please make sure your litter finds its way to an appropriate bin or recycling box either out and about or back at your hotel.

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- Carry a reusable shopping bag, to do your bit by refusing plastic bags in shops.
- Carry a refillable water bottle. In destinations where it's not safe to drink the tap water, most hotels and some restaurants will refill your bottles with safe, filtered drinking water so please just ask.

2.2.3 Guidance for tour leaders and guides

- Recommend reusable chopsticks and refillable water bottles, remind people to bring them out each day, and show people that you use yours.
- In destinations where the tap water is safe to drink, inform customers of this. Plan refill stops into your day, using the MyMizu app or politely ask café or restaurant staff to refill water bottles at lunchtime
- Carry a couple of spare reusable shopping bags in case customers want to use them.
- Refuse items you don't need – plastic bags, cutlery, hand wipes, even if it's free or it seems impolite. If necessary, please explain that you're trying to reduce plastic use.
- Pass around a bottle of hand sanitiser, or encourage customers to wash their hands in the restaurant bathroom instead of using hand wipes (oshibori) (this is also more hygienic).
- Let customers know where and how they can recycle items and factor in a rubbish-stop, or collect rubbish at the end of the day and dispose of it yourself.
- Encourage your group to dine in a sit-down cafe instead of buying food on the go (think plastic containers). Plan in time for lunch and break stops when possible.
- Vending machines are an interesting part of Japanese culture, but try not to factor these into a trip too much and instead encourage customers to try drinks at dine-in local restaurants or cafes.

2.3 Nature and animals

2.3.1 ITG Policy

ITG follows the ABTA Animal Welfare Guidelines (2019) - based on international criteria and legislation, these have been written through a multi-stakeholder consultation process involving international industry experts, scientists, zoologist organisations, associations, and non-government organisations. In line with these guidelines:

- We will not book or promote facilities that include 'unacceptable practices', according to the ABTA Animal Welfare Guidelines.
- We do not promote souvenirs which contain threatened flora and fauna species as indicated in the CITES treaty and the IUCN 'Red List'.
- Our full-time Field Operations Team are trained on illegal and sustainable souvenirs based on these criteria and destination-specific information.

We are also developing a Nature Positive Policy and support Nature Positive Projects in our destinations.

[See our Sustainability Policy and Animal Welfare Policy for more information](#)

2.3.2 Customer Tips

To reduce our impact on nature, we recommend the following:

- Take only photos and memories, leave only footprints.
- Please avoid animal experiences where you can hold, touch, or ride a wild animal.
- Please respect national park rules, keep quiet, avoid feeding wild animals, don't remove plants and keep to the pathways.
- When snorkelling or diving, do not disturb the coral. Please do not touch limestone cave formations.
- Don't buy animals (dead or alive) or any goods made from endangered species. Look for reputable eco-labels on goods if you are unsure.

2.3.3 Guidance for Tour leaders and guides

- Familiarise yourself with our Animal Welfare Policy and [training module](#).
- Avoid animal experiences which include any unacceptable practices (e.g. animal cafes, aquariums which keep cetaceans (dolphins, whales, whale sharks), any feeding of wild animals, etc.)
- Check the animal viewing guidelines in the Small Group Tour Trip Notes for any animal experiences included in your tour.
- Avoid eating in restaurants or visiting local shows, markets or zoos that promote cruelty, or exploitation of endangered species.
- Avoid anything made from protected or endangered animals, such as snakeskin, turtle shells, coral and seashells, ivory, or any medicine derived from animal products.
- Report on any incidents or concerns to the Sustainability team.

3 People

3.1 Respecting local people and culture

3.1.1 ITG Policy

At ITG we promote and facilitate positive and meaningful interactions between us, our travellers and the people and places we visit, by:

- Respecting different cultures in all the destinations we travel to.
- Respecting local customs, etiquette, and religions (and their associated sites and rituals)
- Providing our customers with destination-specific information on local customs, etiquette, and language tips for every country they travel to.
- Encouraging and facilitating local interaction and understanding of the local way of life through our guides and the information we provide our customers.
- Asking permission before taking photos.

3.1.2 Customer Tips

- Try to learn some language and social etiquette tips – there is a language guide and tips in our General Information booklets.
- Always ask permission before taking photos of individuals - it's a good excuse to strike up a conversation too!

3.1.3 Guidance for tour leaders and guides

- Explain about the language, religion and culture, the local rules and values of the destination.
- Provide your customers with some useful phrases in the local language. These can be handed out in paper form, but it is always a good idea to follow-up and reinforce simple phrases to get customers more comfortable having a go at speaking.
- Explain appropriate behaviour, and body language for the destination.
- Explain when customers will need to dress respectfully, e.g. at religious sites or activities.
- Photos are a great way for customers to remember their trips, and the act of taking them can be enjoyable too. However, it is important to remind customers to ask permission if they want to take their photo. They should check with children's guardians (parents or teachers) if they want to take a photo of them, and if they aren't present, then they should avoid taking the photo. With group photos, or people appearing in the background of photos it is usually fine not to ask for permission. Suggest customers offer to send back copies of photos to individuals to help make it a two-way exchange.
- Make sure customers have as many opportunities as possible to meaningfully interact with local people, and try to make sure they are meaningful for both sides. Ask local people about their lives, experiences, and views.

3.2 Supporting local businesses and economies

3.2.1 ITG Policy

- We actively include excursions that support local communities (by purchasing services or goods, traditional crafts and local foods and visiting social projects).
- We also give preference to and promote excursions that have recognised sustainability standards.
- We offer no activities that harm humans, animals, plants or which are socially or culturally unacceptable.

[For more information see our Sustainability Policy](#)

3.2.2 Customer Tips

- Buying from local gift shops, artisan sellers and markets is a great way to meet different people and ensure your money directly benefits the local community.
- Please avoid anything made from protected or endangered animals.

3.2.3 Guidance for Tour leaders and guides

- Support locally owned businesses, hotels, restaurants and other services with your tour budget and itinerary choices. Eat local food and drink local brands and brews.
- Encourage customers to buy from local gift shops, artisan sellers and markets. Explain it is a great way to meet different people and ensure your money directly benefits the local community. Include stops at these (where relevant) as part of your itinerary.
- Invest time and effort into getting to know suppliers, their stories and why they do what they do (see [Appendix 1](#) for tips on building relationships with suppliers).

3.3 Protecting vulnerable people

3.3.1 ITG Policy

At ITG we are committed to tackling modern human slavery. We are taking steps to address these risks in our own operations and supply chains.

As a leading tour operator in the industry, we are fully aware of our responsibility to keep children safe and ensure that our practices and policies are comply with our statutory responsibilities and best practice.

[For more information see our Sustainability Policy, Child Safeguarding Policy, and Modern Human Slavery statement.](#)

3.3.2 Customer Tips

- Please always ask permission from parents or guardians before taking photos of children, and be aware of how you use and share these photographs once you're back home.
- Rather than giving gifts or money to individual children, using local impact businesses or donating to organisations like Second Harvest (Japan's first foodbank) are better ways to support children and youth.
- Do not buy goods or use services offered by children. While many children are just helping out their parents after school, there is a chance they might be being exploited. If you think

that a business is employing underage children illegally then you can contact our Customer Experience team.

- Sexual exploitation of children is a devastating reality and can still happen in some hotels, bars and restaurants. If you see it, don't put yourself at risk — contact our Customer Experience team. If the situation requires immediate action to protect a child from harm, call the police.
- Please refer to the full set of ChildSafe tips provided in your General Information guide.

3.3.3 Guidance for tour leaders and guides

- Familiarise yourself with our Safeguarding Policy and ITG Insiders and Guides Safeguarding Guidelines.
- Treat all vulnerable people (including children) equally and without discrimination on the basis of age, gender, disability, faith, sexuality etc.
- Communicate with children and young people in a manner that is respectful, transparent and visible to other people in the area
- Explain clearly and honestly what you intend to do at the start of any experience that involves being in contact with vulnerable people (including children or young people)
- Share the correct ways to interact with children and/or other vulnerable people and take corrective action if you witness inappropriate behaviour. This includes behaviour relating to cultural sensitivities and photographing and videoing.
- Avoid individual money or gift-giving – suggest how customers can make a donation to charities and organisations instead.
- Avoid experiences with unemployed minors.
- Report on incidents or concerns to the Safeguarding Officer.

3.4 Overtourism

3.4.1 ITG Policy

- We regularly send customers to rural destinations you won't find in the guidebooks (we were the first travel company to take a tour group to the Oki Islands, for example).
- Even in bigger cities, our Destination Guides offer plenty of lesser-known sites to help you avoid the crowds and ease the burden on major hotspots.
- *We are working on a more comprehensive Overtourism Action Plan in 2024*

3.4.2 Customer Tips

- Use our Destination Guides to find lesser-known and less-visited sites and avoid the crowds.
- Try to travel on public transport outside of rush hour.
- Consider forwarding your luggage ahead of you if travelling on public transport (where appropriate).
- Visit busier tourist sites early in the morning or later in the evening.
- Try walking or hiring a bicycle to travel around local areas.
- Follow our responsible travel tips to mitigate any negative impacts of your visit.

3.4.3 Guidance for Tour leaders and guides

- Look for alternative sites to over-touristed areas (where appropriate).
- Explain local customs and expectations.

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- Remind customers about photo etiquette.
- Recommend travelling on public transport outside of rush hour.
- Encourage customers to forward their luggage ahead of them if travelling on public transport (where appropriate).
- Recommend less-visited areas within typically over-touristed locations during free time.
- Visit busier tourist sites early in the morning or later in the evening.
- Recommend walking or hiring a bicycle to travel around local areas.

4 3. Profit

4.1 Giving back

4.1.1 ITG Policy

- As part of our Giving Back programme we partner with 5 charities worldwide which help families that need it most to get a break. We have an annually renewed board commitment to give back 5% of profit before tax to these charities.
- We are proud to support Second Harvest through our IC transport card donation scheme in Japan. Since 2018, our customers have donated over £24,000 by donating the remaining credit on their IC cards.

4.1.2 Customer Tips

- At the end of your trip, use the freepost envelope we provide to send your transport card to Second Harvest, who will receive your remaining credit as a donation (InsideJapan customers only).
- After returning home consider how you can support programs and organisations (like some of the amazing ones Inside Travel Group work with) that are working to protect the people and places you've been lucky enough to visit.

4.1.3 Guidance for tour leaders and guides

- While it may be rare to see people begging in places like Japan, if customers ask how to help, please remind them that giving money is a very short-term solution which often does not contribute to solving the fundamental problem. Direct them to charities who we partner with like Second Harvest Japan who do excellent work with some of Tokyo's most disadvantaged residents at a community level.
- Explain to customers that gift-giving in Japan often comes with a great sense of indebtedness and obligation to the recipient, so as a traveller it is unlikely you will be expected to give a gift to someone, unless in exceptional circumstances. Try and avoid giving individual gifts to children, and instead suggest customers make a donation to a charity, as above.
- Ask customers to donate their IC cards at the end of their trip, and provide those with post-tour arrangements with a pre-paid envelope so they can do so themselves.
- Recommend local social and environmental organisations and projects that you think would be good partners for ITG to the Sustainability Team.