

Geo-Tourism and Southwest Odyssey Tours



Geo-Tourism: *Tourism that sustains or enhances the geographical character of a place—its environment, culture, aesthetics, heritage, and the well-being of its residents.*

Geo-Tourism incorporates the concept of Sustainable Tourism—that destinations should remain unspoiled for future generations—while allowing for ways to protect a place's character. Geo-Tourism also takes a principle from its ecotourism cousin,—that tourism revenue should promote conservation—and extends it to culture and history as well, that is, all distinctive assets of a *place* need to be respected and protected.

The Geo-Tourism Charter: Governments and allied organizations that sign this statement of principles take a first step in adopting a Geotourism strategy. [Download the Geotourism Charter \(PDF\)](#). After committing to a Geotourism strategy, signatories then work with local communities to determine their Geotourism goals.

What Is Sustainable Tourism? Sustainable tourism, like a doctor's code of ethics, means "First, do no harm." It is the foundation for destination stewardship.

Sustainable tourism protects its product—the destination. It avoids the "loved to death" syndrome by anticipating development pressures and applying limits and management techniques that preserve natural habitats, heritage sites, scenic appeal, and local culture.

It conserves resources. Environmentally aware travelers patronize businesses that reduce pollution, waste, energy consumption, water usage, landscaping chemicals, and excessive nighttime lighting.

It respects local culture and tradition. Foreign visitors learn local etiquette, including at least a few courtesy words in the local language. Residents learn how to deal with foreign expectations that may differ from their own.

It aims for quality, not quantity. Destinations measure tourism success not just by numbers of visitors, but by length of stay, how they spend their money, and the quality of their experience.

What Is Geotourism? Geotourism *adds* to sustainability principles by building on a destination's geographical character, its "sense of place," to emphasize the distinctiveness of its locale and can benefit visitor and resident alike.

Geotourism is synergistic: All the elements of geographical character work together to create a tourist experience that is richer than the sum of its parts, appealing to visitors with diverse interests.

It involves the community. Local businesses and civic groups join to provide a distinctive, authentic visitor experience.

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It informs both visitors and hosts. Residents discover their own heritage by learning that things they take for granted may be interesting to outsiders. As local people develop pride and skill in showing off their locale, tourists get more out of their visit.

It benefits residents economically. Travel businesses hire local workers, and use local services, products, and supplies. When community members understand the benefits of Geotourism, they take responsibility for destination stewardship.

It supports integrity of place. Destination-savvy travelers seek out businesses that emphasize the character of the locale. In return, local stakeholders who receive economic benefits appreciate and protect the value of those assets.

It means great trips. Enthusiastic visitors bring home new knowledge. Their stories encourage friends and relatives to experience the same thing, which brings continuing business for the destination.

Programs for Places - The Center for Sustainable Destinations (CSD) seeks to help individual places to use the geotourism approach to improve stewardship and attract the most beneficial and least disruptive forms of tourism.

What We Do, Networking: In this [Resource Directory for Communities](#) CSD provides links that could help you build alliances for better destination stewardship.

Geo-Tourism Charter - Governments and partner organizations can sign [this statement of principles \(PDF\)](#) as a first step in adopting a geotourism strategy.

Geotourism Strategy - CSD can provide information to help destination stakeholders develop a [strategy \(PDF\)](#) that 1) identifies, 2) sustains, 3) develops, and 4) markets the geotourism assets unique to the locale.

Geotourism MapGuides - CSD affiliates and National Geographic representatives will work with a community-based local geotourism alliance to create a co-branded National Geographic map that highlights the natural, historic, and cultural assets unique to a destination. Read "[How to develop a Geotourism MapGuide \(PDF\)](#)."

Where: Arizona/Sonora - In an alliance with the Sonoran Institute, CSD has helped the region's communities to create the first transborder Geotourism MapGuide, for southern Arizona, U.S.A., and northern Sonora, Mexico. [View MapGuide in English \(PDF\)](#) , [View MapGuide in Spanish \(PDF\)](#) Visit: www.sonorandesertgeotourism.org, www.sonoraturismo.gob.mx/natgeo/, www.arizonaguide.com

Four Corners Region of NM, AZ, UT, CO - This collaborative partnership of four states, tribes, the Forest Service, BLM (U.S. Bureau of Land Management), Scenic Byways, Preserve America, individuals, and state and local tourism offices launched in July 2010. The first of four phases for this area of the American Southwest involves public meetings in local communities. In these geo-tourism forums, people can nominate historical events, traditions, distinctive businesses, and natural sites. A project advocate, Susan Thomas, coordinator of the Colorado portion of the Trail of the Ancients Scenic Byway, says that having a local resident's perspective will give visitors a unique experience.

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California's Redwood Coast - A community-based nomination process captured the highlights in coastal living and the rugged beauty of the North California Coast to create a National Geographic Geotourism MapGuide for the region. Stretching from West Marin to Del Norte counties, the area includes both private and public lands. Read the [press release for the March 11, 2010 for the project rollout \(PDF\)](#). Visit: www.visitredwoodcoast.com

Sierra Nevada - National Geographic Society has partnered with the Sierra Nevada Conservancy and Sierra Business Council to capture the history and nature of the Sierra Nevada Region in order to create an interactive Web site and print map. Lassen National Park, Lake Tahoe, Yosemite National Park, and Sequoia and Kings Canyon National Parks are jewels in this 400-mile-long region. The project Web site collects worthy nominations by locals to be included in the mapguide. Read the [Press Release \(PDF\)](#). Visit: www.sierranevadageotourism.org

Central Cascades - The Central Cascades Stewardship Council partnered with CSD to create a MapGuide capturing the spectacular beauty and abundant recreational opportunities of the Central Cascades. These world-class natural attractions span Oregon and Washington states. Read the [Press Release \(PDF\)](#). Visit: thecentralcascades.com

Appalachian Geotourism MapGuide - CSD partnered with the Appalachian Regional Commission and the people of Appalachia to create the first Geotourism MapGuide, published in the April 2005 National Geographic Traveler magazine. NGS also produced an [online version](#).

Rhode Island - Governor Donald Carcieri signed the Geotourism Charter in May 2007, demonstrating the state's commitment to exemplary destination stewardship. The Rhode Island Geotourism Collaborative, a new multi-sector task force, will hold a statewide series of workshops. Read the [Press Release](#). Visit: www.visitrhodeisland.com

Baja California - Partnering with Lindblad Expeditions, Fondo Mexicano Para la Conservacion de la Naturaleza, and local communities, CSD has completed a MapGuide for the Mexican states of Baja California and Baja California Sur. [View MapGuide \(PDF\)](#)

Crown of the Continent - Alberta and British Columbia, Canada, have teamed up with Montana, U.S.A., to launch a transboundary geotourism program for the region centered on the Waterton-Glacier International Peace Park. Read the [Press Release \(PDF\)](#) [View MapGuide \(PDF\)](#) Visit: www.crownofthecontinent.net

Greater Yellowstone - National Geographic and the Greater Yellowstone community have created a new Geotourism MapGuide on which local citizens and experts showcase the region's natural, historic, and cultural assets. Visit: www.yellowstonegeotourism.net

Vermont - CSD and the Northeast Kingdom Geotourism Alliance have completed a MapGuide of the most rural and, some say, authentic corner of Vermont. View ["Geotourism Grows in Vermont" \(PDF\)](#). [View MapGuide \(PDF\)](#) Visit: www.travelthekingdom.com/geotourism

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Central America - Honduras: In the world's *first* country to sign the [Geotourism Charter \(PDF\)](#), CSD is supplying a *Geotourism for Communities* booklet in [Spanish \(PDF\)](#). [Read News](#). Read *Traveler Magazine's Geotourism Opportunities in Honduras*

Guatemala: In a ceremony presided by President Oscar Berger, Guatemala signed the Geotourism Charter in April 2007, launching a program to create a community-based national Geotourism Stewardship Council, a Geotourism MapGuide, and other elements. Read the [Press Release \(PDF\)](#). Visit: , [www.visitguatemala.com](#) , [www.geoturismoguatemala.com](#)

GEO-TOURISM For Tourism Professionals: Explore these links if you work in the travel industry, academia, government, or for nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) involved with tourism management. The following sections link to sites with practical, sustainable-tourism assistance for entrepreneurs, lodging managers, economic development workers, etc.:

- [General How-To](#)
- [Ecotourism How-To](#)
- [Culture and Heritage How-To](#)
- [Academic Sites—universities, research groups, institutes.](#)

If you work in community development, or are concerned about [Destination Appeal](#), look also at the hyperlinks page for [Communities](#).

International Policy Organizations: [UNESCO World Heritage Center](#) , [Convention on Biological Diversity \(CBD\)](#)[International Union for Conservation of Nature](#) , [World Travel and Tourism Council \(WTTC\)](#) , [Green Travel](#) , [International Tourism Partnership](#) , [Business Enterprises for Sustainable Travel \(BEST\)](#) , [Cultures on the Edge](#) , [NativeWeb](#) , [Planeta.com](#) , [Sustainable Tourism CRC](#) , [WWF](#) , [Task Force on Tourism and Protected Areas](#) , [Tourism Concern](#)

Multipurpose Sustainable Tourism Sites: [Audubon Cooperative Sanctuary Program for Golf](#) , ["Green" Hotels Association](#) , [Green Seal](#) , [Hotel Benchmarking Tool](#) , [Institute for Policy Studies: Center on Ecotourism and Sustainable Development](#) , [National Geographic Conservation Trust](#) , [Partners in Responsible Tourism](#) , [Sustainable Architecture Building and Culture](#) , [Sustainable Sources](#) , [Tour Operators' Initiative for Sustainable Tourism Development](#) , [Tourism Research Links](#) , [U.S. Green Building Council](#)

Sustainable-Tourism Assistance—Ecotourism How-To: [Conservation International \(CI\)](#) , [Ecoclub](#) , [The International Ecotourism Society](#) , [The Nature Conservancy](#) , [RARE Center for Tropical Conservation](#)

Sustainable-Tourism Assistance—Culture and Heritage How-To: [Alliance for Tribal Tourism Advocates](#) , [International Council on Monuments and Sites \(ICOMOS\)](#) , [National Trust for Historic Preservation](#) , [National Trust for Historic Preservation Library](#), [University of Maryland](#) , [Partners in Tourism: Culture and Commerce](#) , [Slow Food](#) , [World Monuments Fund \(WMF\)](#)

Academic Sites—Universities, Research Groups, etc. - [Commission on the Geography of Tourism, Leisure and Global Change](#) , [Earthprint](#) , [Earthwatch Institute](#) , [The George Washington University, Washington, DC: Department of Tourism and Hospitality Management](#) , [Journal of Sustainable Tourism](#) , [Griffith University \(Australia\)](#), [International Centre for Ecotourism Research](#) , [International Geographical Union \(IGU\)](#) , [The](#)

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