

A Travel Advisor's Guide: Sustainable Travel

How to Talk to Your Clients About Choosing
Travel That's Good for the Planet



Use this guide in conjunction with the client-facing
"Sustainable Travel: 6 Questions to Ask Your Travel Company"

Anyone Can Talk About Sustainable Travel!

We all know there's a lot of "green talk" these days. But what does it all mean? How can you know which travel companies are walking the walk when it comes to the environment, and which are "greenwashing" actions that only scratch the surface—and therefore, how can you advise your clients? That's where this guide can help!

You don't have to be an eco-warrior to care about the planet, and you don't need to be an expert in sustainability to talk to your clients about travel that makes a positive difference. This guide will introduce you to **six topics at the heart of sustainable travel**, and will give you the tools and basic knowledge to talk to your clients about sustainable travel options with confidence. And when paired with *Sustainable Travel: 6 Questions to Ask Your Travel Company* for your clients, you'll be well on your way to making sales that are good for you, good for your client, and good for the planet.

“Sustainability is essential to our industry’s longevity and ongoing success. Since making sustainable travel my focus, my business has transformed in remarkable ways. My relationships with clients and industry partners alike have grown deeper, richer, and more fulfilling.”



– ROSE O'CONNOR

Award-winning luxury travel advisor
& sustainable tourism advocate



**OUR TRAVELER-FACING
COMPANION PIECE WILL
SUPPORT YOUR EFFORTS!**

Please share the client-facing piece, *Sustainable Travel: 6 Questions to Ask Your Travel Company*, with your clients! **Look for the book icon throughout this guide** to direct you to the companion piece's corresponding topics and their page numbers.

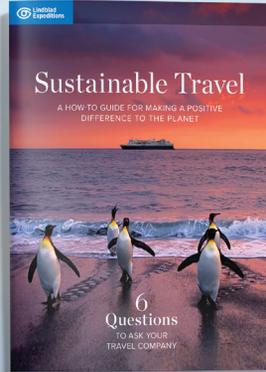


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How to Use This Guide

This guide is an instructional tool for travel advisors like you and a companion piece to the client-facing, *Sustainable Travel: 6 Questions to Ask Your Travel Company*. Reading it will take you behind the scenes and empower you with questions to ask travel companies and strategies to help you feel comfortable talking to your clients about sustainable travel. **So, where should you start?**

Step 1: Add a question about sustainable travel to your client discovery interviews.

In the course of your usual getting-to-know-you conversation with your clients where you identify their travel goals, bake in at least one big-picture question related to sustainable travel to help you determine your client's potential concern—or savvy—for environmental topics. For example:

- “How much do you care about knowing your travel experience is going to be leaving the place you're visiting better than when you found it?”

Step 2: Show your clients The Green Scale on page 6 and ask them to self-identify.

Keep in mind: your client may identify as different shades of green on different topics (e.g. dark green on nature but lighter green on climate), which you can determine along the way.

Step 3: Identify which sustainability topic might resonate with each client the most and start there.

Are your clients wildlife lovers? Culture-seekers? Foodies? You can use their travel goals to help you pinpoint which of the six topics in this guide might serve as an effective starting point to introduce them to the concept of sustainable travel. Keep in mind, you don't have to talk about all six topics! Start with one, and tailor each conversation from there.

Step 4: Use the prompts, facts, and questions on the topic pages to foster discussion, connect with your clients, and suggest sustainable travel experiences that meet their needs.

Once you've identified roughly where your client falls on The Green Scale and which topic might resonate with them the most, find the topic in this guide and do the following:

- Start with the "Ask Your Client" discussion prompt. This will help you understand where your client falls on the green scale for this particular topic.
- Next, look at the "What Else Can You Tell Your Clients?" section for suggested facts and information you can share with them based on their level of knowledge or interest in this topic (e.g. light green facts may resonate with clients who fall on the lighter end of the green scale; dark green facts may appeal to those who are already knowledgeable or passionate).

As you read this guide, feel free to use what works for you and your clients, ignore what doesn't, and don't forget to utilize the "Ask Travel Companies About" questions provided in the topic pages when researching options for your clients. Remember: at the end of the day, talking sustainability is more of an art than a science. And any conversation that includes sustainable travel is a good conversation!

WHAT ABOUT POLITICS?

We know that sometimes conversations about sustainability can be difficult—political divisions run deep these days, and some people may view certain sustainability topics through a political lens. **That's why this guide focuses on universal issues we can all agree on.** Issues like clean air, clean water, healthy habitats for wildlife, dignity and respect for all people, and a planet future generations can enjoy. And by bringing these universal themes into discussions with your clients and meeting them where they are, judgment-free, you can help them choose a travel experience they will love—and one that helps achieve a cleaner, healthier planet for all.





WHAT MAKES A TRAVEL COMPANY “SUSTAINABLE?”

There’s not one universally agreed-upon definition, which can make identifying truly sustainable travel companies tricky (that’s where this guide can help!). Broadly speaking though, sustainable travel companies protect nature, support local communities, preserve culture, and adopt green business practices at every level of their operations.

WHAT IS “GREENWASHING?”

Greenwashing happens when companies publicly tout actions that make them appear more environmentally-conscious than they really are. They use a few seemingly eco-friendly examples to paint a “green facade” over their operations, obscuring an otherwise minimal commitment to sustainability.

LUXURY OR SUSTAINABILITY? YOUR CLIENTS DON’T HAVE TO CHOOSE!

High-quality, luxurious travel and sustainable travel isn’t an either-or. By default, sustainable travel necessitates a smaller, more intimate scale to be eco-friendly, which means more opportunities for guests to learn directly from experts, encounter wildlife up close and personal, and enjoy comfortable, quality accommodations in beautiful natural settings. While that type of quality comes at a premium, if your clients invest in sustainable travel, they’re guaranteed a high return on their investment: personally, in terms of an extraordinary experience, and environmentally, for the future of the planet.

The Green Scale

How often do you think about environmental topics? Are you passionate about certain issues—like plastic pollution or the conservation of nature—more than others, or are you new to this arena? Does a company’s environmental stance impact your choice of whether to patronize that company?

To help your travel advisor guide you toward sustainable travel options that are a good match for you, read the statements below and indicate which one(s) describe you best.

When it Comes to Environmental Issues:



- I’m still learning about them.
- I don’t think about environmental issues too often.
- They don’t usually influence my decision-making.



- I know a little about them.
- I care about some environmental issues more than others.
- Sometimes they influence my decision-making.



- I know a lot about them.
- I care deeply about most environmental issues.
- They often influence my decision-making.



- I consider myself very knowledgeable.
- I’m passionate about environmental issues.
- They always influence my decision-making.

ALL SHADES OF GREEN ARE BEAUTIFUL!

Light green or dark green, any level of interest in sustainability is wonderful! The fact that you’re having these conversations with your travel advisor at all is what’s most important.





Single-Use Plastic

Ask Your Client:

“How do you feel about traveling with a company that uses single-use plastics?”

Why is plastic pollution the first topic in this guide? Because wherever your client falls on the green scale, chances are they already know there's too much plastic in the world, which makes this an easily-accessible place to kickstart discussion.

For clients who fall on the lighter end of the green scale, you may be able to open their eyes to the extent of the problem and inform them that they can make a positive difference through their choice of travel providers. For example, you can pose the following hypothetical: **“Imagine a garbage truck pulling up to a beach and dumping 15 tons of plastic into the ocean every minute for an entire year—that’s how much plastic ends up in the ocean each year (roughly 8 millions tons¹).”**

That’s a lot of plastic, right? To help, encourage your clients to prioritize traveling with companies that are actively taking steps to limit single-use plastics.

BUT, WAIT!

“If my client chooses sustainable travel, are they giving up straws, napkins, and other conveniences?” Not at all! Sustainable travel companies should have eco-friendly straws available for guests who want or need them, and otherwise provide the same level of quality and comfort your clients expect. Saying “yes” to sustainable travel doesn’t mean saying “no” to comfort or quality.

What else can you tell your clients?

 “Marine plastic pollution hurts ocean wildlife. Who wants to see a sea turtle choking on plastic or a sea lion with plastic tangled around its neck? Sustainable travel companies don’t, which is why they’ve kicked single-use plastics to the curb wherever possible, and why you should consider traveling with them as well.”

 “Did you know that plastic pollution doesn’t just harm wildlife, it hurts people as well? Larger plastics break down into microplastics that enter the food chain and eventually reach people. If you’re bothered by the fact that seafood you eat might regularly include microplastics, support companies that also take the problem seriously and are spreading awareness.”

 “There are many reusable, eco-friendly options for packaging that companies and individuals can choose instead of plastic. Don’t you want to know that your travel company is conscientiously choosing alternatives to plastic wherever possible?”

 “You say no to plastic straws, use reusable tote bags at the grocery store, and otherwise do your part for the planet. Choosing sustainable travel means sharing an experience with others who align with your values.”



Lindblad Expeditions has provided reusable water bottles in all cabins aboard their ships since 2007 (image taken on Sand Dollar Beach, Baja California, Mexico).



A close-up view of paper straws, which are biodegradable and better for the environment than plastic.



Ask Travel Companies About: Single-Use Plastic

Sustainable travel providers have eliminated single-use plastics company-wide wherever possible. To determine whether they have, or if they might be “greenwashing” (see page 5 in this guide for more information), ask travel companies these questions:

Food and beverage service:

- “Do you provide single-use plastic water bottles to your guests?”
- “Do you use disposable utensils, cups, and food containers, or do you offer reusable options?”

Amenities for travelers:

- “Are your toiletries provided in single-use containers?”
- “Are guest amenities like chocolates, soap, and cups wrapped in plastic?”

Shopping opportunities:

- “Does your gift shop sell plastic-wrapped goods?”
- “Do you provide plastic shopping bags to customers?”

Suppliers:

- “Have you eliminated plastic packaging wherever possible?”
- “Have you worked with your vendors to help them eliminate and reduce single-use plastic packaging in the supply chain?”

Behind-the-scenes:

- “Have you reduced or eliminated single-use plastics in your offices as well as your public-facing operations?”

As an advisor, specifically asking about these topics will empower you to identify which companies are taking the plastic problem seriously and recommend them to your clients.



Sustainable Food

Ask Your Client:

“How important is food to your overall travel experience?”

Not every traveler is a foodie, but everyone wants to fuel up on tasty meals when they travel. Something your clients might not think about, however, is how their culinary choices can deliver a more authentic, enjoyable travel experience and help the environment and local community at the same time.

You can even play a little game of “**Would You Rather**” with your clients in the spirit of fun information-sharing. For example:

- “*Would you rather eat food that’s been freshly harvested, and locally grown, or food that’s been frozen and shipped from hundreds or thousands of miles away?*”
- “*Would you rather support small, local producers or big corporations?*”
- “*Would you rather the food you eat reflect the region you’re exploring or eat what you’re already familiar with?*”

Then there’s the matter of food waste. For “greener” clients, you can point out that an estimated $\frac{1}{3}$ of the food produced worldwide each year—1.3 billion tons—is lost, spoiled, thrown away, or otherwise uneaten.² Now, think about all the food that’s wasted in buffets, for example. There are better options for food service (like plated meals, or placing your order ahead of time so precise dishes can be prepared), so why not counsel your clients to choose travel providers that have adopted programs to reduce food waste?

What else can you tell your clients?

 “Everyone can agree that “fresh is best,” and what better way to experience a region than through local ingredients brimming with flavor? Choosing local food means better-tasting meals for you, jobs for locals, and a reduced carbon footprint overall (since food doesn’t need to be shipped from afar). A win-win-win!”

 “We all know waste is bad, and when it comes to meal service, buffets are the biggest wasters of all. To cut down on waste, choose a travel provider that favors appropriately-portioned, plated meals and other waste-limiting food services instead of buffets.”

 “Truly sustainable travel companies should facilitate sustainable seafood options. Seafood is sustainable when 1) the species has healthy population numbers (i.e., it’s not overfished), 2) it was caught responsibly and preferably locally, and 3) the method of catching the seafood didn’t harm other species, or the ocean, in the process.”

 “In the U.S. alone, the production of food that’s ultimately lost or wasted creates the same amount of greenhouse gas emissions as more than 32 million cars.³ So it’s not only good for your taste buds but good for the environment to choose travel providers who strive for zero-waste in their food programs.”



Hydroponic farm in Guachipelin National Park, Costa Rica.



Large school of bigeye trevally in deep water near Cabo Pulmo, Baja California Sur, Mexico.



Ask Travel Companies About: Sustainable Food

What makes a travel provider's food program responsible and sustainable? Here are some questions you can ask to understand how thoughtfully curated the menu options will be for your clients:

Locally sourced:

- "Is the food you serve locally sourced?"
- "Do you offer wines and other beverages from local producers in the regions you travel?"

Sustainable:

- "Are your food options sustainable?"
- "Do you know where the seafood you serve comes from and how it was caught?"
- "Do you serve plant-based options?"

Limiting food waste:

- "Does your food program strive for zero waste?"
- "Do you serve meals buffet-style?"
- "Do you build menus that maximize ingredients to limit waste?"

Travel providers with responsible food programs are serious about sustainability from farm to table, ocean to plate, and everywhere in between. And what tastes better than the sweet knowledge that you're helping your clients make conscious choices about fueling themselves in a way that also energizes the planet?

WHAT IS "SUSTAINABLE FOOD?"

Food is sustainable when its production, growth, and/or harvest doesn't have a negative impact on the environment or wildlife.

USING INGREDIENTS TO THE MAX

Sustainable travel companies take innovative approaches to limiting waste, maximizing every ingredient they use. For example, Lindblad Expeditions uses each ingredient to the fullest: meat bones make stock, banana peels make vegan bacon, potato peels make chips, and more!



Climate Action

Ask Your Client:

“How important is it to you to travel with a company that’s carbon neutral?”

Of all the topics included in this guide, climate action may be the one that involves the most sensitivities—the topic most closely tied to politics. So how can you safely talk about climate, politics-free? Here are our suggestions:

- **Meet people where they are.** Rather than starting off by citing facts about climate change, it can be helpful to ask people an open-ended question like the prompt above. When they answer, listen carefully, then respond.
- **Make it personal.** Sharing facts is a good thing, but building personal connections can be even more effective at reaching people. Have you ever seen a highly endangered species and wondered if it will still be around in thirty years? If you’re an industry veteran, maybe you’ve seen itineraries change over time due to rapidly shifting environmental conditions? Sharing anecdotes and heartfelt stories in addition to facts can help reach people on a more personal level.
- **Return to universal themes everyone can agree on.** Everyone needs clean air to breathe and a healthy ocean for the planet to thrive. No one wants to see communities destroyed by natural disasters, and no one wants to see wildlife suffer. We can all agree: we need a habitable, healthy planet for ourselves and future generations. And reducing greenhouse gas emissions will help us achieve that end.
- **Maintain a judgment-free zone.** Nobody likes feeling judged, and clients who are unconcerned with, or doubt, climate change are unlikely to change their viewpoint overnight. By staying positive and judgment-free, anchoring the conversation in universal concepts like clean air and a healthy planet, and by giving clients sustainable travel options to consider, you’re planting seeds that may grow over time.

Remember: you don’t need to get political or be an expert in the intricacies of carbon neutrality to have these important conversations. Simply offering your clients information and options can serve as a catalyst for change.

What else can you tell your clients?

 “If you like clean air, you should consider traveling with companies that take climate action seriously.”

 “Do you enjoy underwater marine life like tropical fish, coral, whales, and dolphins? Changes in our climate are impacting the health of the ocean. Rising temperatures cause coral reef bleaching and changes in marine ecosystems that harm sea life.” ⁴

 “We’re already feeling the effects of climate change: more intense storms, droughts, unpredictable weather, etc. The time for action is now so our children and their grandchildren don’t suffer from even worse climate disasters. One action you can take today is choosing to travel with a climate-conscious company.”

 “Sustainable travel companies that offset their carbon emissions adhere to rigorous accountability standards. The projects they fund to offset emissions have measurable, permanent impacts and are verified by trustworthy, independent third parties to ensure they are adhering to the highest possible standards.”



Antarctica.



Glacier Bay National Park, Southeast Alaska.



Ask Travel Companies About: Climate Action

Sustainable travel companies eliminate or reduce their carbon emissions wherever possible and offset the emissions that can't be eliminated. Here are some questions you can ask about climate actions they've taken:

Carbon Footprint:

- “Do you calculate your carbon footprint? If so, what aspects of your business are included?”
- “What steps have you taken to reduce your carbon footprint?”

Offsetting Carbon Emissions:

- “Are you carbon neutral?”
- “If not, do you offset any portion of your business? Which part(s)?”
- “If you offset, how do you select the projects in your carbon offset portfolio, and how do you measure their impact?”

Energy Efficiency:

- “Have you adopted energy efficient policies/practices wherever possible?”

DID YOU KNOW?

Some travel companies claim to be sustainable based on limited climate action. For example, they may claim they're sustainable because of the engines they use or the way they offset their office's carbon footprint. By digging deeper, however, you may learn that their electric engines are turned on for as little as 30 minutes a day before reverting to heavy diesel, or that the emissions from their office account for less than 5% of their overall carbon footprint. Don't be afraid to ask travel companies how extensive their climate actions are, and how often their green technology is deployed. Their answers may surprise you.

WHAT DOES “CARBON NEUTRAL” MEAN?

Still not sure how carbon offsets work or what it means to be carbon neutral? Watch this three-minute video from South Pole, the world's leading developer of international emission reduction projects, for a quick, accessible overview.



THE COST OF CARBON OFFSETTING:

It costs the average American adult less than \$200 to offset their carbon emissions for a year—that's it!⁵ For roughly the same cost as an annual Netflix subscription, you can neutralize your impact on the environment.



Protecting Nature

Ask Your Client:

“Do you want the company you’re traveling with to actively protect wildlife in the places you explore?”

Travelers consistently rank “ecotourism” and “nature” among the top five criteria for selecting vacations,⁶ so it’s likely many of your clients come to you seeking recommendations for travel where they can authentically explore pristine environments and view iconic wildlife. For these clients, this is the perfect opportunity to tap into their love of nature and encourage them to choose sustainable travel providers.

For example, you can pose this question: **“Do you want iconic species like polar bears, blue whales, emperor penguins, giant tortoises, etc., to exist in the wild 30, 50, 100 years from now?”** For clients with children or grandchildren, this can be a particularly powerful illustration of why traveling with companies that actively preserve the places they explore—rather than exploit them—is so important.

Tourism, as an industry, has historically had a negative impact on the environment, and even contributed to habitat destruction and decreases in biodiversity.⁷ But many travel companies are doing their best to preserve the natural world and all the wildlife habitat it holds. For your nature-loving clients, these companies are a good fit.

What else can you tell your clients?

 “Did you know that feeding wildlife or getting too close can actually harm animals? Traveling with companies that abide by wildlife viewing regulations ensures that animals aren’t exploited.”

 “Effectively protecting nature requires a lot of people working together: governments, nonprofits, educational institutions, and individuals. And you can join those efforts as a sustainable traveler!”

 “Ocean conservation is just as crucial to the health of the planet as terrestrial conservation. Sustainable travel providers, particularly those that explore marine and coastal areas, are invested in supporting the creation of Marine Protected Areas: areas of ocean where human activities like fishing are restricted in order to protect sea life.”

 “Did you know that invasive species can destroy entire ecosystems, wreaking havoc on native species? Travel companies serious about sustainability follow all necessary biosecurity measures to prevent the accidental spread of invasive species, and ensure their guests do the same.”



Corals, Laughing Bird Caye, Belize.



*Scene at Rancho el Manzanillo on Santa Cruz Island
in the Galápagos Islands of Ecuador.*



Ask Travel Companies About: Protecting Nature

It can be tricky identifying which travel companies are genuinely doing their part to protect nature, versus those that talk a big game while taking only meager action. To determine which is which, ask the following questions:

- “How do you contribute to direct conservation action?”
- “Do you follow or exceed all rules and regulations for wildlife viewing?”
- “Do you strictly follow all biosecurity regulations in regions that have them, and ensure your guests do the same?”
- “Do you support or partner with local, regional, and/or international organizations working to conserve the natural world?”
- “Do you educate your guests about the importance of conservation and give them opportunities to witness conservation in action during their travels?”

If your clients are seeking wanderlust and wildlife, encouraging them to book with a travel company that actively protects the places they explore is a no-brainer. People have big hearts for wildlife and generally want to see the places they love preserved for the future, and you, as a travel advisor, are perfectly situated to gently steer them in the right direction.

FLIP THE SCRIPT ON “EXTINCTION TOURISM”

You’ve probably had clients tell you they want to travel to places like the Arctic or Antarctica to see endangered species “before they’re gone.” This is the perfect opportunity to lead them a step further down the sustainable travel path! For example: *“Seeing emperor penguins firsthand is wonderful, but wouldn’t it be even better to travel with a company that’s actively trying to make sure penguins don’t go extinct, so future generations can enjoy them as well?”* Take that nugget of caring to expand your client’s view of what’s possible.

THE VALUE OF A LIVING SHARK VS. A DEAD SHARK

Conservation doesn’t only help wildlife, it’s good for the economy, too. For example, in the Galápagos Islands, where swimming and diving with sharks is an extremely popular tourist activity, each shark is worth more than \$360,000 to the tourism industry every year and roughly \$5,000,000 over the course of its lifetime. Compare that to the value of a shark caught, killed, and sold in mainland Ecuador: \$158.⁸ The economic advantage is clear: conservation wins.



Culture & Community

Ask Your Client:

“Is experiencing local culture while you travel important to you?”

For travelers who want to immerse themselves in cultures other than their own, there are myriad options in the travel sphere. But how respectfully are travel companies engaging with residents—particularly native and indigenous cultures? Are local communities involved with the tour provider’s decision-making, using their rich cultural knowledge to suggest meaningful interactions with travelers?

Rooting conversations with your clients in the universal concept of treating everyone they encounter with dignity and respect is an easy sell, and a good place to start. You can ask them: **“Would you rather engage with cultures in an authentic, respectful way, or experience a surface-level, 'fast-food version' of a cultural experience?”**

Culture seekers want authenticity, and responsible travel companies are invested in partnering with local communities and ensuring cultural interactions are both authentic and respectful. Guiding your clients toward travel providers that have built solid bridges between their company and the local people creates cross-cultural understanding and a positive travel experience for all.

What else can you tell your clients?

 “You live by the Golden Rule—treating others the way you want to be treated, right? Travel companies that live by the Golden Rule respect diverse cultures and people, and honor the perspectives they have to share.”

 “Sustainable travel companies have fostered deep ties in the communities they visit—even through multiple generations. What better way to authentically experience a culture than with a travel provider that has developed long-lasting, meaningful connections with local people?”

 “As a traveler, you have purchasing power. Rather than buying mass-produced souvenirs, consider purchasing artisanal goods with environmental and social value. Artisan handcraft development is the second highest income generator in the developing world behind agriculture,⁹ so buying from a local artisan means you’re not only acquiring a thing of quality and beauty, but providing an income for a local family as well.”

 “Did you know tourism dollars help local economies—and conservation? Sustainable tourism often prompts local residents to protect natural resources, especially when the economic benefits of such actions are clear.”



*Traditional dancer in full regalia in
Petropavlovsk, Kamchatka, Russia.*



Close-up of a beaded necklace made with recycled paper, crafted by artisan Sara Fiallos in the Galápagos Islands, Ecuador.

Ask Travel Companies About: Culture & Community

Sustainable travel companies are committed to preserving culture and supporting local communities. The tourism dollars they bring remain within the communities they visit, empowering families and benefiting the local economy. It's not just about the travel provider's bottom line: it's about recognizing and respecting the inherent dignity of every person; fostering meaningful, lasting connections; and supporting locally-led solutions to environmental, educational, and economic challenges.

The following questions will help you determine whether travel companies operate with cultural sensitivity and community mindedness:

Respecting Local Communities:

- "How deep are your ties to the communities you visit?"
- "Do you work closely with local communities to ensure their customs, culture, and people are treated with respect and dignity?"
- "Are your cultural interactions authentic, or presented as a "spectacle" meant to entertain?"
- "Do you provide guidance to your staff and guests about how to interact appropriately with local people based on their cultural norms and customs?"
- "Do the tourism dollars you bring to the community stay in the community?"

Preserving Culture:

- "Do you actively support efforts to preserve culture, particularly native and indigenous cultures?"
- "What projects have you supported to help preserve endangered cultural art forms or traditions?"

Supporting Community Needs:

- "Do your itineraries take into account how your operations might enhance—or burden—local communities' resources?"
- "How do you support locally-driven, environmental, educational, and/or economic initiatives in the communities you visit?"

SHOPPING: THE ARTISAN EFFECT

Travel suppliers with on-site shopping have a choice when it comes to what kind of goods they sell. Do they stock mostly mass-produced products with little or no environmental or social value, shipped in from another country? Or do they sell quality, handcrafted goods made by local artisans? Choosing to support local artisans and producers is another marker of a truly sustainable travel company. Watch *The Artisan Effect* video to learn more.





Green Operations

Ask Your Client:

“Do you expect your travel provider to make environmentally-conscious decisions, even when no one is looking?”

We can all agree: **actions speak louder than words**. The true measure of a company isn't necessarily what's printed in their marketing materials. Rather, it's the day-to-day actions they take and the operational decisions they make—in public *and* behind the scenes. A lot of companies claim to be “green” these days, but the depth of their actions might tell a different story.

So, how can you talk to your clients about truly responsible operations? To start with, you can acknowledge that the “green industry” is ever-changing, so understanding which companies are tried and true and which engage in “greenwashing” is part of your job as a travel advisor: you're there to ask the tough questions! And since you have ongoing relationships with many different companies, you have a unique vantage point into those that are legitimately greening their operations based on sound science—versus what might sound flashy or exciting on paper to a less experienced audience.

People want companies to deliver on their promises, including travel companies. Sustainable travel companies that have greened their operations wherever possible—top to bottom, inside and out—are situated to deliver on their promise of offering travel that's good for the planet.

What else can you tell your clients?

 “Companies have choices, and so do travelers...so why not choose to travel with a company that can provide you with an incredible experience while doing good for the planet at the same time?”

 “By choosing to travel with a provider that bakes sustainability into every aspect of its operations, both public-facing and behind-the-scenes, you're showing the travel industry that every choice matters.”

 “A lot can be recycled: paper, plastic, batteries, electronics, lightbulbs, and even water! Prioritize travel providers who have adopted innovative approaches to the 3 R's (reduce, reuse, recycle) to ensure they align with your desire for a cleaner, healthier earth.”

 “Truly sustainable travel providers care about accountability. Book travel with companies that have adopted transparent reporting practices, evidence-based standards, and routine assessments to ensure their operations are as environmentally-friendly as they can possibly be.”



Paddleboarding at Fatu Hiva, Marquesas Archipelago, Pacific Ocean, French Polynesia.



Lindblad Expeditions' Leave No Trace policy ensures the wild places they visit with guests, like Neko Harbor, Antarctica (pictured), remain pristine.



Ask Travel Companies About: Green Operations

More and more travel companies are talking “green” these days, touting their eco-friendly status as a way to attract conscientious travelers. But if you dig a little deeper, you may find that some of these companies aren’t as green as they seem: some “green companies” are only green on the surface. Here are some probing questions you can ask:

- “What actions have you taken to green your offices in addition to your public-facing operations?”
- “Do you have a sustainability department, and does that department touch on every other department as an integral part of company operations?”
- “Do you actively engage your staff and employees with sustainability by offering training, a forum for staff to make green improvement suggestions, etc.?”
- “Do you choose eco-friendly and energy efficient products and supplies wherever possible?”
- “Do you reduce, reuse, and recycle?”
- “Have you leveraged your position in the industry to influence your suppliers and other partners to green their operations?”

Why counsel your clients to choose a travel company that’s embraced green operations all the way through? Because you’re ensuring your clients will be satisfied with how the company delivers on their sustainability promises while feeling good about their travel choices.

OUR TIP: DIG DEEPER

Don’t be afraid to dig deeper into claims made by your travel suppliers! Ask the hard questions: is this claim true, is it backed by evidence, and is it actually as positive as it seems on the surface? For example, while the idea of taking a private helicopter flight over Antarctica sounds thrilling, the impact of noise pollution on wildlife *and* travelers may lead you to ask: is this offering sustainable, and is it something my clients would actually enjoy, knowing the downsides?

LOOK FOR GREEN OPERATIONS IN PLACES YOU MIGHT NOT EXPECT

Companies serious about sustainability factor it into even the smallest or most routine decisions. Sustainable cruise operators, for example, choose drag-reducing paint for hulls, opt for innovative ship design in new builds to increase fuel efficiency, and treat ships with environmentally-safe exterior coatings to prevent barnacle growth (again, increasing fuel efficiency), and more!

Quick-Access Checklists

Here, you'll find all the 'Ask Your Client' Prompts and Questions to 'Ask Travel Companies About' Questions mentioned in this guide — in one convenient place. Save these pages and use them as checklists as you research sustainable travel companies and discuss options with your clients.

'ASK YOUR CLIENT' DISCUSSION PROMPTS

Big Picture:

“How much do you care about knowing that your travel experience is going to be leaving the place you're visiting better than when you found it?”

Topical:

Single-Use Plastic

- ✓ “How do you feel about traveling with a company that uses single-use plastics?”

Sustainable Food

- ✓ “How important is food to your overall travel experience?”

Climate Action

- ✓ “How important is it to you to travel with a company that's carbon neutral?”

Protecting Nature

- ✓ “Do you want the company you're traveling with to actively protect wildlife in the places you explore?”

Culture & Community

- ✓ “Is experiencing local culture while you travel important to you?”

Green Operations

- ✓ “Do you expect your travel provider to make environmentally conscious decisions, even when no one is watching?”

'ASK TRAVEL COMPANIES ABOUT' QUESTIONS

Plastics:

Suppliers

- ✓ “Have you eliminated plastic packaging wherever possible?”
- ✓ “Have you worked with your vendors to help them eliminate and reduce single-use plastic packaging in the supply chain?”

Behind-the-scenes

- ✓ “Have you reduced or eliminated single-use plastics in your offices as well as your public facing operations?”

Shopping opportunities

- ✓ “Does your gift shop sell plastic-wrapped goods?”
- ✓ “Do you provide plastic shopping bags to customers?”

Food and beverage service

- ✓ “Do you provide single-use plastic water bottles to your guests?”
- ✓ “Do you use disposable utensils, cups, and food containers, or do you offer reusable options?”

Resources

Amenities for travelers

- ✓ “Are your toiletries provided in single-use containers?”
- ✓ “Are guest amenities like chocolates, soap, and cups wrapped in plastic?”

Food:

Locally-Sourced

- ✓ “Is the food you serve locally-sourced?”
- ✓ “Do you offer wines and other beverages from local producers in the regions you travel?”

Sustainable

- ✓ “Are your food options sustainable?”
- ✓ “Do you know where the seafood you serve comes from and how it was caught?”
- ✓ “Do you serve plant-based options?”

Limiting Food Waste

- ✓ “Does your food program strive for zero waste?”
- ✓ “Do you serve meals buffet-style?”
- ✓ “Do you build menus that take into account maximizing ingredients to limit waste?”

Climate:

Carbon Footprint

- ✓ “Do you calculate your carbon footprint? If so, what aspects of your business are included?”
- ✓ “What steps have you taken to reduce your carbon footprint?”

Offsetting Carbon Emissions

- ✓ “Are you carbon neutral?”
- ✓ “If not, do you offset any portion of your business? Which part(s)”
- ✓ “If you offset, how do you select the projects in your carbon offset portfolio, and how do you measure their impact?”

Energy Efficiency

- ✓ “Have you adopted energy efficient policies/practices wherever possible?”

Nature:

- ✓ “How do you contribute to direct conservation action?”
- ✓ “Do you follow or exceed all rules and regulations for wildlife viewing?”
- ✓ “Do you strictly follow all biosecurity regulations in regions that have them, and ensure your guests do the same?”
- ✓ “Do you support or partner with local, regional, and/or international organizations working to conserve the natural world?”
- ✓ “Do you educate your guests about the importance of conservation and give them opportunities to witness conservation in action during their travels?”

Culture:

Respecting Local Communities

- ✓ “How deep are your ties to the communities you visit?”
- ✓ “Do you work closely with local communities to ensure their customs, culture, and people are treated with respect and dignity?”
- ✓ “Are your cultural interactions authentic, or presented as a “spectacle” meant to entertain?”
- ✓ “Do you provide guidance to your staff and guests about how to interact appropriately with local people based on their cultural norms and customs?”
- ✓ “Do the tourism dollars you bring to the community stay in the community?”

Preserving Culture

- ✓ “Do you actively support efforts to preserve culture, particularly native and indigenous cultures?”
- ✓ “What projects have you supported to help preserve endangered cultural art forms or traditions?”

Resources

Supporting Community Needs

- ✓ “Do your itineraries take into account how your operations might enhance—or burden—local communities’ resources?”
- ✓ “How do you support locally-driven, environmental, educational, and/or economic initiatives in the communities you visit?”

Operations:

- ✓ “What actions have you taken to green your offices in addition to your public-facing operations?”
- ✓ “Do you have a sustainability department, and does that department touch on every

other department as an integral part of company operations?”

- ✓ “Do you actively engage your staff and employees with sustainability by offering training, a forum for staff to make green improvement suggestions, etc.?”
- ✓ “Do you choose eco-friendly and energy efficient products and supplies wherever possible?”
- ✓ “Do you reduce, reuse, and recycle?”
- ✓ “Have you leveraged your position in the industry to influence your suppliers and other partners to green their operations?”

Ideas for “Greening” Your Space

Since you’re talking to your clients about sustainability, why not consider “greening” your office space, too? Here are a few ideas:

Eliminate Single-Use Plastics

- Replace single-use plastic water bottles with reusable cups
- Replace individually-wrapped snacks with bulk snack options
- Replace plastic mailers with recyclable mailers

Save Paper

- Opt for electronic brochures or communications vs. print whenever possible
- Print double-sided vs. single-sided
- Reuse and/or recycle paper waste

Green Your Operations

- Replace fluorescent lightbulbs with LEDs
- Recycle batteries
- Offset the carbon footprint of your office and all business travel

Accessorize Sustainably

- Choose eco-friendly decor made by local artists vs. mass-produced artwork
- Install a bird feeder outside your window
- Add a low-maintenance houseplant to your desk

You Are Now Part of a Much Bigger Movement!

We're so excited you're interested in learning about sustainability. When travelers are inspired by something they see on vacation, they often return to their own communities and make differences personally or professionally, widening the scope of impact through a multiplier effect. And that journey may all start by you having a conversation with your client about any of the six topics featured in this guide. Thank you for being a voice for sustainable travel!

“Perfect” is the Enemy of “Good”

You don't have to be the perfect paragon of sustainability or know all the answers to every sustainable travel question by heart. Every conversation, every step, and every action, no matter how small, can make a positive difference—especially if enough people join in. Focus on the good you can do with each small step rather than worrying about achieving perfection.

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