



## WWF International Arctic Programme

# Code of Conduct for Tour Operators in the Arctic

## 1. Make Tourism and Conservation Compatible

- **Support conservation.** Ways you can support conservation include:
  - Develop a positive relationship with organisations and people that play a role in conservation, particularly in the areas that you will visit with your clients.
  - Encourage your clients to become members in conservation organisations.
  - Use personal contacts and letters to educate others and encourage governments and businesses to support projects such as new nature reserves.
  - Contribute time and money to conservation organisations and projects.
- **Plan tourism so that it does not conflict with conservation efforts.** Obtain permission before visiting nature reserves or other areas where access is restricted. When visiting these areas, be sure that your activities comply with the rules of the park or reserve.
- **Know the laws and regulations that apply to the import and export of products made from wildlife, and make sure that your clients understand and follow these laws.** Encourage your clients to buy products made from wildlife by local people, so long as these products are not made from endangered species and their purchase does not violate the law.
- **Develop an environmental plan for your daily operations.** If you are an operator employing more than 20 people, have a written environmental plan that states your company's commitment to conservation, to using resources sustainably and to the principles in this Code of Conduct. Include specific procedures that your company uses in its daily operations to prevent and minimise detrimental environmental impacts. Make the plan available to your clients.
- **Use post-trip evaluations to confirm that your tour was environmentally sound.** Use feedback from clients as a good way to find out if your tour met client environmental expectations. In your post-trip evaluations ask whether in your clients view, the tour avoided unnecessary negative environmental impacts, and whether the tour operator demonstrated consideration of the natural and cultural environments. As a rule, use written post-trip evaluation forms although oral evaluations are acceptable, especially for smaller operations.

## 2. Support the Preservation of Wilderness and Biodiversity

- **Promote maintenance of large, undeveloped areas of the Arctic.** The undeveloped regions of the Arctic have a unique value, and are one of the primary reasons why tourists come to the Arctic. This will be undermined by roads, pipelines and other kinds of unsightly large-scale development that fragments the environment.

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- **Support wildlife conservation programmes and projects.** Make your clients aware of wildlife conservation programmes and projects and ensure that they do not hunt or fish protected or threatened species, go into sensitive wildlife habitat, or buy products made from protected species.

### 3. Use Natural Resources in a Sustainable Way

- **Where laws permit hunting and fishing, follow all rules and take only what you require.** Ensure that your clients obey the laws and regulations and fish and hunt in a way that does not deplete local stocks of wildlife. Cooperate with community and indigenous hunters' associations.
- **Make sure that your clients use only appropriate and well-maintained hunting equipment, and that they know how to operate the equipment they will use.**
- **Consider the nature and any special vulnerability of the site you will visit when determining how many clients will go with you.** In wilderness areas take the nature of the site (wildlife, nesting birds, fragile vegetation, etc.) into account when determining how many clients will be in the area at any given time. Inform other operators in the region of your plans in order to avoid over visitation of a site. If you are a ship-based tour operator, as a general rule, limit the number of passengers ashore in wilderness areas to 100.
- **Use established trails and campsites where they exist and avoid creating new ones.**
- **Avoid disturbing wildlife. Instruct your clients on local wildlife and its behaviour, especially polar bears, and make sure that they view it from an appropriate distance.**

### 4. Minimise Consumption, Waste and Pollution

- **Your choice of products and how much you and your clients consume makes a difference.**
  - Whether you bring supplies with you or buy them in the Arctic, choose biodegradable or recyclable products with minimal packaging.
  - Compress garbage and take it with you.
  - Recycle where possible and encourage the communities that you visit to develop recycling programmes if they do not have them already. If feasible, provide financial support to encourage the development of these programmes, and show your commitment to the communities you and your clients visit.
  - Limit energy use, including your use of heat and warm water. Keep records of your water and energy consumption, recycling efforts, and efforts to reduce waste.
- **The transportation you choose for your clients makes a difference - choose the means of transport that has the least environmental impact.** Minimise the use of fossil fuels and try to use non-motorised transport whenever possible. Where motorised transport is necessary, choose the technology that causes the least environmental damage and minimal noise (four stroke instead of two stroke engines, for example). Do not use motorised transport such as snowmobiles and helicopters unnecessarily; these should only be ways of getting from one area to another or seeing specific sites.

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- **Choose accommodations compatible with local traditions and that minimise negative environmental impacts.** Choose lodging that has effective waste treatment systems, recycles, and disposes non-recyclable garbage appropriately.
  - **Support efforts to clean up waste and polluted areas.** Find out about these efforts and support them by, for example, providing money, lobbying governments and businesses, contributing your time and that of your staff, and by encouraging tour clients to support them.
  - **Ensure that no evidence of your visit remains behind.**
    - Follow responsible practices for camping and tours, including those that concern waste disposal.
    - If you are a shipborne tour operator, follow Annex 5 of the MARPOL Agreement. Retain all plastic for proper disposal on the mainland and compact all wood products, glass, and metal for return to a mainland disposal facility. Ensure that any incinerators you use function properly.
  - **Dispose of bilge and treated sewage properly.** If you are a shipborne tour operator, do not dump bilge or treated sewage within 12 nautical miles from land or ice shelves or in the vicinity of communities or scientific stations.

## 5. Respect Local Cultures

- **Coordinate with the communities that you will visit so that your visit is welcome, expected, and not disruptive.**
  - Arrange visits to communities well in advance, and avoid visits or landings that are not pre-arranged.
  - Reconfirm your visit, preferably 24 hours in advance, and be prepared to pay the community for costs associated with cancelled visits.
  - Arrange with the community what you and your clients will do while there.
  - Find out what size of group the community prefers for the planned activities. Be sure you have permission to visit or land and to undertake the activities you have planned.
  - Keep away from sites where people are working, including hunting and fishing sites, unless you have specific agreements with locals.
- **Be aware of the laws and regulations in the area or waters in which you are operating, and obtain the necessary permits.**
- **Respect the culture and customs of the people whose communities you visit, and make sure that your clients do so as well.**
  - Give all visitors a thorough cultural briefing before visiting local communities. Where possible, hire local lecturers to conduct these briefings. Include information on local customs and traditions, and on appropriate behaviour for tourists in the area. Use local "Codes for Visitors" if available.
  - Ask permission to photograph or videotape.
  - Ensure that your clients respect religious grounds, churches, cemeteries, and other sites with religious or cultural significance, and that they do not remove any artifacts.

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## 6. Respect Historic and Scientific Sites

- **Respect historic sites and markers, and make sure that your clients do not remove any artifacts.** If access to historic or archaeological sites is restricted, get permission before visiting. Ensure that your clients behave respectfully particularly if a site has religious significance.
- **Respect the work of scientists.** Do not go to scientific installations or work sites without arranging your visit beforehand. Do not disturb scientists while they are working, and do not disturb their work sites.

## 7. Arctic Communities Should Benefit from Tourism

- **Whenever possible, hire local staff and contract with local businesses.** Train and hire local people for your operations whenever possible. Where local people lack the training you require, provide it. Use locally-owned businesses as subcontractors. Develop long-term partnerships with local operators, businesses, and suppliers. A local connection most often means a better tourism experience.
- **Operate in ways that benefit the communities you visit, particularly with respect to supplies.** If feasible buy supplies and services locally. Ask communities what supplies you should bring with you so that your visit and use of supplies does not cause hardship to local people. Encourage your clients to buy locally-made handicrafts and products.
- **Where possible, choose accommodations owned, built, and staffed by local people.**

## 8. Educate Staff

- **Hire a professional team.**
  - Hire only knowledgeable, environmentally and culturally aware staff, or train your existing staff in these areas. Provide training in how to avoid negative environmental impacts, in safety, and in providing service. Evaluate the performance of your staff, including their compliance with this Code, at least annually.
  - If you are a ship-based tour operator, hire lecturers and conservation-oriented naturalists who will not only talk about wildlife, environmental protection, history, geology, and local cultures, but who can guide passengers ashore and are familiar with safety and local conservation requirements.
- **Hire staff that are familiar with the Arctic.** In the high Arctic, at least one member of the staff must hold a current remote location first aid and survival qualification. A majority of the staff should have previous experience in the Arctic and should be familiar with Arctic conditions.
- **Educate and brief the staff on this Code and the Code of Conduct for Arctic Tourists.** Provide all staff with copies of the Principles, this Code, and the Code of Conduct for Arctic Tourists, and be sure that they are familiar with the contents. Include

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information about specific local requirements. Do not allow unsupervised crew to go ashore.

- **Have a proper staff-client ratio.** For land-based tourism, the recommended ratio is 8 - 15 clients to one staff member; for ship-based tourism the recommended ratio is one staff member to 15-20 passengers.
- **Make sure that your subcontractors also comply with this Code of Conduct.** Provide a copy of the Principles, this Code, and the Code of Conduct for Arctic Visitors to all of your subcontractors. Include a clause in all subcontracts that requires your subcontractors to comply with this Code of Conduct and explain this requirement verbally.

## 9. Make Your Trip an Opportunity to Learn About the Arctic

- **Provide your clients with information about the Arctic environment and Arctic conservation.** Provide lectures and written materials about the Arctic environment, its special characteristics, and its global significance. Include information about Arctic conservation in general, specific conservation efforts in the areas that you will visit, and specific ways - financial and otherwise - that your clients can support these conservation efforts.
- **Provide your clients with specific information about the regions you will visit.** Include information about climate, species, and habitats, as well as appropriate behaviour for these areas.
- **Ensure that your clients follow the Code of Conduct for Arctic Tourists.** Enforce the Code in a consistent way. Make sure that clients understand the responsibilities outlined in the Code. Be prepared to use stricter rules when necessary (e.g. when safety is an issue).

## 10. Follow Safety Rules

- **Provide local authorities with your itinerary.** This is both for safety reasons and to be sure you are complying with local regulations.
- **Brief all clients and staff on the dangers of wildlife encounters, particularly encounters with bears.**
- **Have at least one staff member who is responsible for co-ordinating safety and avoiding dangerous encounters with wildlife.**

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