



▲▲▲ RESPONSIBLE  
**TRAVEL**



# TIPPING THE SCALES

Our Impact Report: 2021-2023

CARBON • NATURE • PEOPLE



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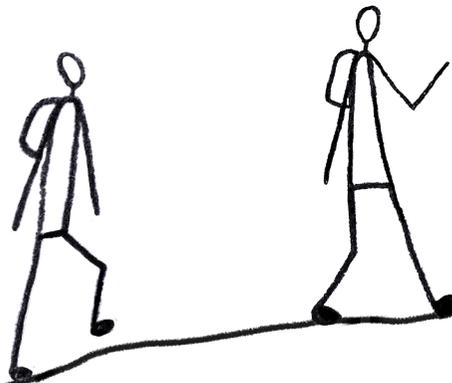
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## OUR PARTNERS

### ESKINDER HAILU

Highway Tours, Ethiopia

Eskinder Hailu is the founder and managing director of Highway Tours, our local partner offering some of our most popular tailor-made holidays to Ethiopia.

*"In a world where the competition is tough, Responsible Travel's support in marketing Ethiopia as a tourist destination is an immense help. It has helped many individuals and families out of poverty, created jobs, and helped improve lives of local people.*

*Responsible Travel's policies have also helped us focus on and bring about positive impact on the places we go. We evaluate our performance based on not only the income generated, but also on significant contributions we made to the local economy, families, culture, and the environment."*

## OVERVIEW

# A NOTE FROM OUR CEO

After decades in this industry, I still find boundless joy in travel. If you're reading this, doubtless you do too. I hope, like me, you're also still inspired by its power to do good.

Through more than 470 global tour operator and accommodation partners, we help people explore Earth's most precious natural and cultural sites. It's a fantastic privilege. And it comes with a responsibility to protect, and benefit, these places, and the communities that call them home.

But most of us will agree that much of our industry often does as much harm as good.

Our own history is one of trying to tip the scales in favour of the latter. This report examines our work on that and progress to date. It also looks at the challenges we've encountered, goals we've yet to reach, our learning – and our limitations.

It highlights that significant carbon reduction across our industry remains imperative. Key to this – alongside efforts to cut emissions and support nature throughout our supply chains – is aviation system change.

Tourism can (and for its own longevity should) be part of the solution – joining scientists and NGOs in lobbying for policies designed to curb flight demand, incentivise decarbonisation and improve sustainable transport options.

They're issues we've campaigned on for years. But the breakthrough we need requires a concerted industry voice.

Which isn't to say we can't also make a difference individually.

Every day our partners do exactly that, for communities and nature. It's exciting to be part of supporting them. A handful of their stories are threaded through this report. There are hundreds more.

At a time of justified climate anxiety, it's easy to sink into fatalism. But the future isn't yet fixed. These stories show what people, and our industry, are capable of.

What's more, at Responsible Travel, we've only scratched the surface of what's possible if we can find a way to support and activate our entire supply chain – which includes, for example, no fewer than 10,000 accommodation options.

It fills me with no small degree of optimism. We need that: hope inspires action. And if we act together – if we're altogether more activist – there's certainly hope.

Please do get in touch with any thoughts, or ideas for collaboration.

*Justin Francis*

Justin Francis

Responsible Travel Co-Founder & CEO



## OVERVIEW

# A BIT ABOUT US

*“The Responsible Travel business model overturned conventional travel thinking. Instead of intervening between the travel enterprise and the tourist, as most agents do, Francis urges them to talk directly.”*

– [Simon Calder](#), travel journalist and broadcaster

We’re an activist travel company and publisher, offering trips from 479 specialist tour operators and accommodation providers around the world, for whom we act as a vital distribution platform.

We screen each of these potential partners, and every trip, against our responsible tourism criteria and policies (you can read about our process on pages [14-19](#)).

Many of them are micro, small or medium-sized independent businesses which rely on our support in marketing their product.

To help our partners’ cash flow, we only take our commission once they’ve received full payment from the customer. We operate this on an honesty-based system. Because we put our customers directly in touch with our partners, we rely on our partners to tell us about the bookings that follow. We like to think of it as the world’s biggest\* honesty box.

We’re also a travel community. We offer advice and support for our partners, and guidance for travellers. We publish extensively and campaign for positive industry change.

### We’re an independent company

Responsible Travel was founded in 2001 by Justin Francis and Professor Harold Goodwin. In July 2017, the company’s directors bought out its minority private equity investors, and it remains an [independent business](#).

\*Probably.



Parichamon Srivichai (known as Mint) and her mother run the Suan Din Di Restaurant in Mae Wang, Chiang Mai, Thailand where Responsible Travel customers booking holidays through our partner The Tuk Tuk Club will eat during their trip.

*“The constant income from The Tuk Tuk Club goes a long way to supporting our restaurant and family, making sure we can look after not only our mother and father but also my children and my sister’s children.”*

OVERVIEW

# HOW WE WORK

**1.** A traveller searches for a holiday

**2.** They find our site and contact our travel team

**3.** We match the traveller with a holiday from one of our tour or accommodation partners

**4.** We introduce the traveller to our partner

**5.** The traveller books direct with our partner, who will organise the trip for them

**6.** Our partner confirms the booking to us on a honesty basis and, once they've been paid, they pay us a commission

## OVERVIEW

# IN NUMBERS

479 tour operator and accommodation partners

5,958 trips in 184 countries

More than 10,000 accommodation options globally

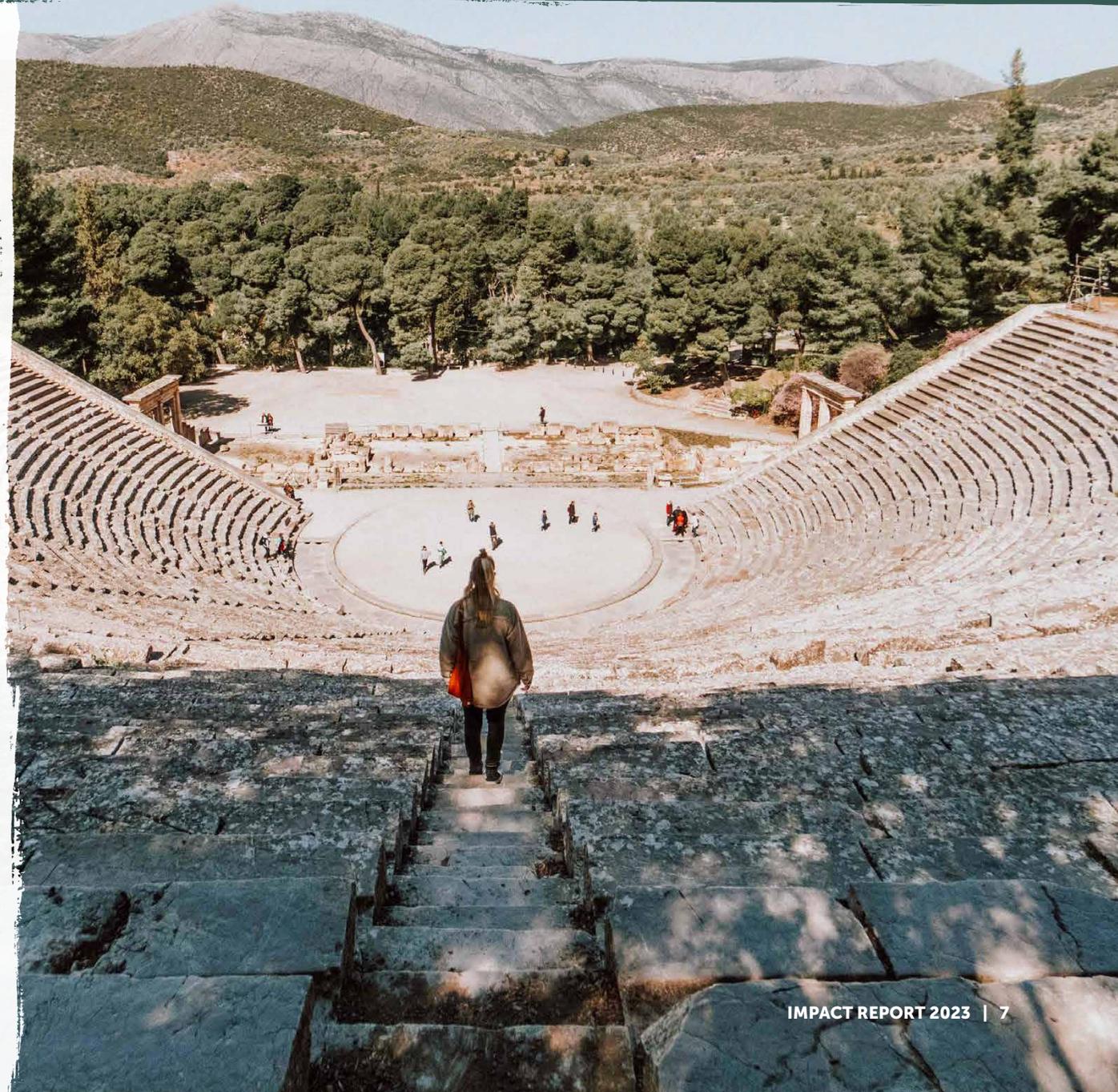
Visits to more than 1,000 National Parks and World Heritage Sites, across 160 countries

Over £200m in holiday sales (excluding flights) since 2001

200,000 customers since 2001

17.5m page views of our travel guides

56m site visitors since 2006



OVERVIEW

# WHAT WE DO

## HOLIDAYS

Screening  
5,958 holidays  
184 countries  
37 activity types  
  
Over 10,000 accommodation options in our supply chain



## CUSTOMER SERVICE

200,000 customers  
  
142,000 customer database  
  
Global reach



## PARTNER SERVICES

Trip screening  
  
Marketing  
  
Advice & ongoing support



## TRAVEL GUIDES

748 guides to destinations, activities, issues and responsible travel advice



## TRIP FOR A TRIP

5,500 day trips for disadvantaged children in 14 countries



## ACTIVISM

Aviation regulation: Green Flying Duty  
  
Advocacy for more 'nature positive' actions and ambitions in tourism  
  
Anti greenwashing, including abuse of voluntary carbon offsets



## OVERVIEW

# OUR TRAVEL WRITING

Our writing is an integral part of who we are.

You won't find click-bait listicles on our site, instead we pride ourselves on our insightful, honest, travel content.

Our award-winning writers love to promote genuinely incredible experiences – but aren't afraid to call out the ones they think are irresponsible, unethical or just too packed with tourists to be enjoyable.

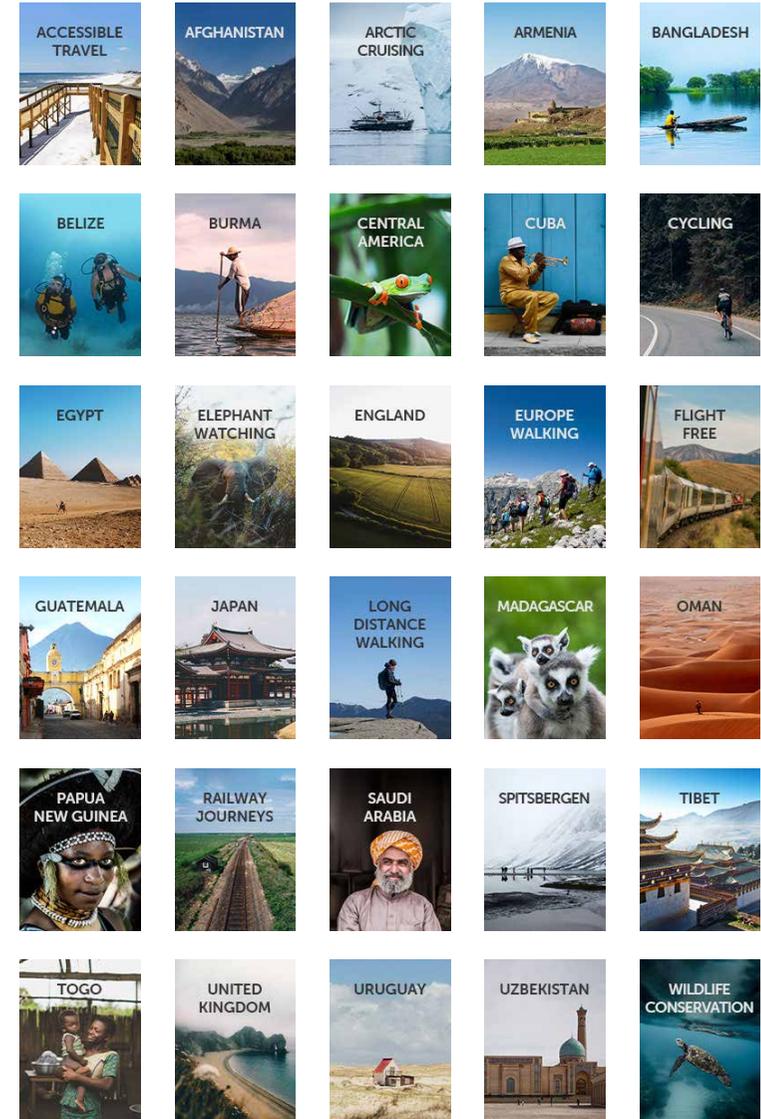
Our writing is another branch of our campaigning; recent articles have included a series about how climate change will affect holidays, how tourism can help save the Amazon, and the Congo rainforest's perilous balancing act.

Our team has written for publications including National Geographic Traveller, The Guardian, The Independent, The Times, New Zealand Herald, ipaper and Coast, and contributed to Lonely Planet, Rough Guides and Bradt.

### In numbers:

Our **748 travel guides** explore destinations, activities and responsible tourism issues around the world.

They've generated more than **17.5m page views**, and contain **6,414 total articles**.





## LOCAL IMPACT

### PHIANGJAI PANALAIICHEWIN

Accommodation owner, Thailand

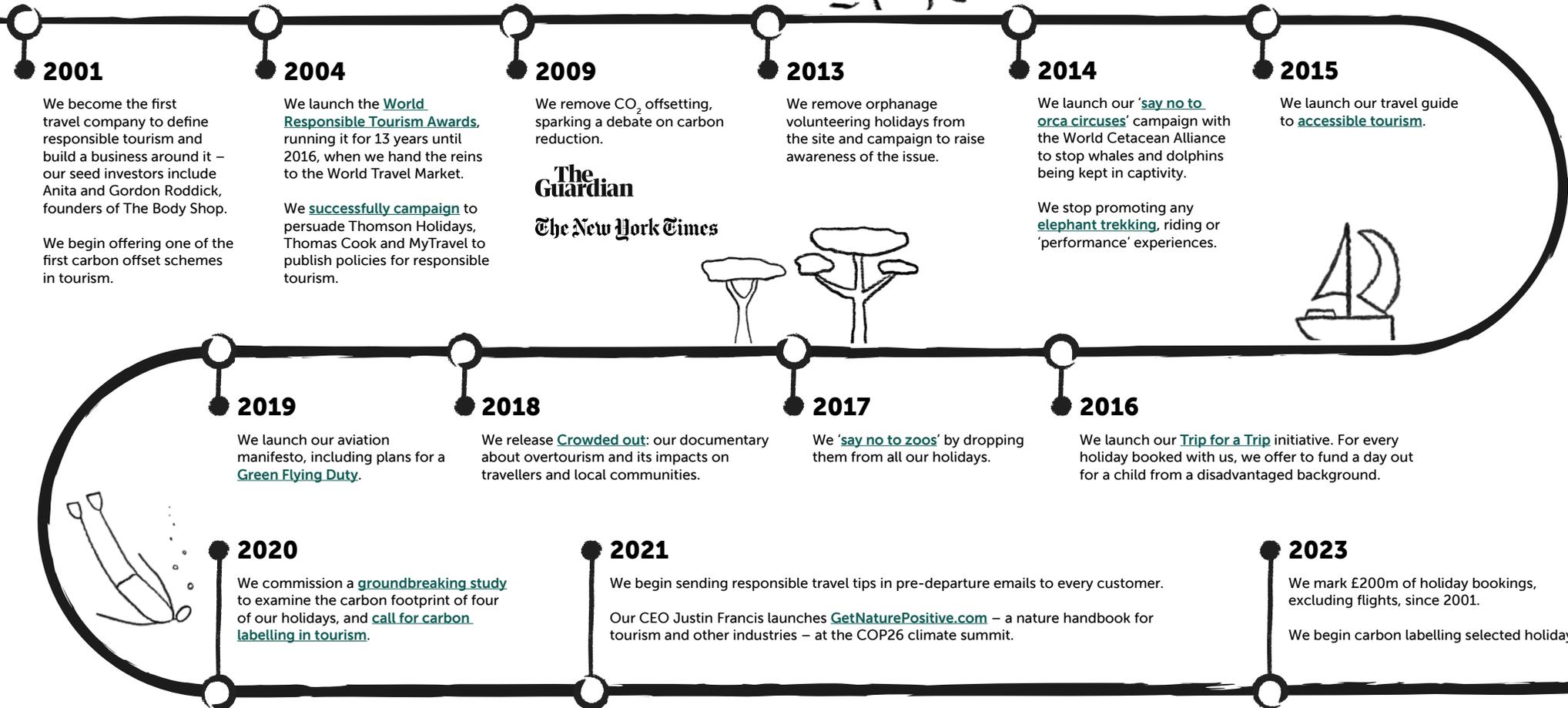
Phiangjai Panalaicheewin (known as Ple) and her family, run a homestay style accommodation used by our member tour operator, The Tuk Tuk Club, in the Karen community of Mae Klang Luang in the Doi Inthanon National Park, northern Thailand.

*"A lot of our business is very seasonal, but The Tuk Tuk Club travel all year round and this gives us a very welcome constant income helping support our family here in the mountains. Their customers always eat in our restaurant and we really enjoy cooking a range of different traditional dishes for them to try and love to see their adventurous nature.*

*Before The Tuk Tuk Club started including us in their trips we didn't have many foreign visitors to our rooms but we've really enjoyed working with them...It feels like we are part of The Tuk Tuk Club and I know they feel like they are part of our community too."*

OVERVIEW

# OUR IMPACT HISTORY



## OVERVIEW

# A NEW DIRECTION OF TRAVEL



### The impacts of Covid

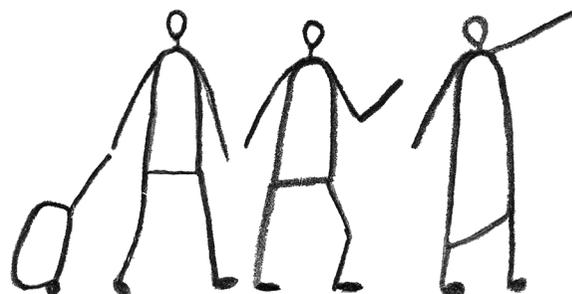
The pandemic had a profound impact on our business, as it did so many.

We're grateful to have weathered the storm to see sales thrive again.

Our recovery rate meant we were able to repay our Coronavirus Business Interruption Loans by July 2023, years ahead of schedule, returning our business to a debt-free entity.

Nonetheless, Covid-19's effects – most particularly a reduction in the number of our wonderful team – loom large in this report, which covers the period of 2021-2023. The pandemic gave us space to set our goals, but hindered our ability to progress on them as much as we hoped.

We extended various support to our partners during this time, and our core priority since has been on recovery: our own, our partners' and all the livelihoods and essential community and conservation projects they support.



### Streamlining our focus

During this period, we recognised a need to streamline our focus. For over 20 years, our purpose was multifaceted. Initially we'd set out to establish a new category of tourism, with 'responsible' holidays that aimed to minimise negative impacts and maximise the good.

On top of our groundbreaking advocacy around carbon and nature, we campaigned for positive industry change on issues from child protection and accessible travel to animal welfare and overtourism.

We care deeply about these issues still, which remain integral to our policies.

**But moving forward, we believe there are two challenges that matter above all: reducing carbon emissions and protecting and restoring nature.**

Unless we can address these fully – and through a lens of diversity, inclusivity and a just and fair transition to a low carbon, nature positive future – we can't hope to deliver on any of the Sustainable Development Goals.

Quite simply, all else fails.

So for the first time in our history, we've changed our purpose...



## Our purpose today

To inspire travellers to discover our beautiful and fragile planet;  
act urgently to restore nature and reduce carbon whilst being  
honest about our limitations and our need to be more inclusive.

OVERVIEW

# HOLIDAY SCREENING - OUR NEW CRITERIA

## IN NUMBERS:

Since 2001...

We've screened **1,295** tour operator travel policies and a total of **22,665** trips

We've provided responsible tourism policy advice to more than **5,000** potential partners

We screen each one of our own potential tour operator partners, and every trip – so when customers choose any holiday on our site, they know it's passed our responsible tourism criteria and policies.

## OUR PROCESS

**Our screening model creates a transparent and continuous process for addressing and improving both supply chain and traveller impacts.**

It involves our own internal review, as well as customer engagement and feedback.

1. We screen every potential partner's responsible tourism policies. Sometimes, those who approach us also need advice or support in getting started. So we've guided many small businesses through the process of reviewing their operations and creating their own responsible tourism policies.
2. We screen every trip against our own Responsible Travel criteria.
3. For those that pass both processes, we publish the information on how a trip has met our criteria on the holiday page for customers to read.
4. It isn't only tour operators and accommodation that create impacts. Tourists do too. We send them responsible travel tips before they depart, and attempt to influence conversation through our writing and campaigning.
5. We ask customers to feed back on the impacts of their holiday as part of their review, which we publish in full on the holiday page. This feedback also helps us know if a trip is living up to its responsible tourism statements.
6. If a customer finds that a trip isn't delivering against its responsible tourism statements, we first discuss this with our partner, and may remove holidays, or even revoke membership.
7. To ensure that our partners receive regular feedback on the impacts of each trip, we send every customer's feedback on this to them.

## OVERVIEW

# OUR RESPONSIBLE TOURISM CRITERIA

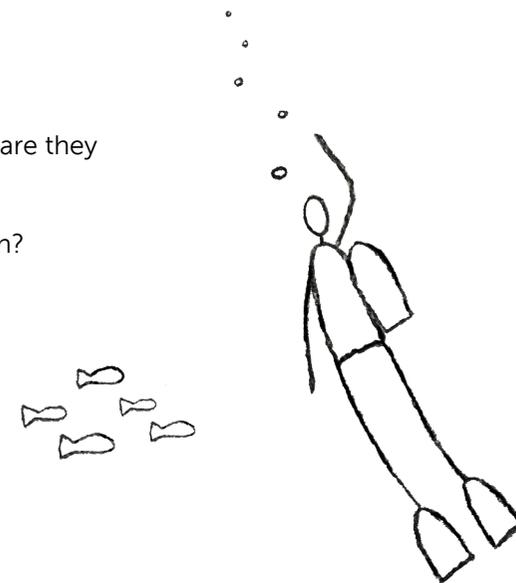
In 2023, we updated our screening criteria – strengthening its focus on reducing carbon, protecting and restoring nature, and improving inclusivity. You can read about our approach in more detail [here](#).

As part of our screening process, partners must answer all applicable points, and a minimum of two each, from the following ‘carbon reduction,’ ‘environment and wildlife’ and ‘people’ sections.

## OUR CRITERIA: PLANET

### CARBON REDUCTION

1. Have efforts been made to **reduce flying** – rail options or reduction in avoidable internal flights? If so, describe.
2. Does the **accommodation** on the trip use renewable energy? If possible: state how many and where. If not, what else are they doing to reduce their carbon footprint?
3. Is shared **local transport** (buses or trains that effectively reduce CO2 per person) part of the trip? Which type and when?
4. Is **human powered transport** (walking, cycling, kayaking etc.) part of the trip? How many days?
5. Do you advise customers on how to **reduce the carbon impacts** of their holiday?
  - See our [film](#) with several specific suggestions.
  - Google flights and Skyscanner show emissions by flight.
  - Paying to increase the percentage of sustainable aviation fuel used in order to reduce CO2 emissions while flying? More information from [KLM](#) and [BA](#).
6. Are **electric cars** or other forms of transport used? Describe which and when.
7. Is **vegetarian and vegan food** available on each day? Describe.
8. How much food is **local-sourced and seasonal**? Added bonus: do you check accommodations’ food waste plans and their policies to reduce (or switch to certified) palm oil, soy and forestry products (wood, paper)?
9. Are you able to measure Scope 1, 2 or 3 **carbon emissions** of this trip? If so, let your Account Manager know.



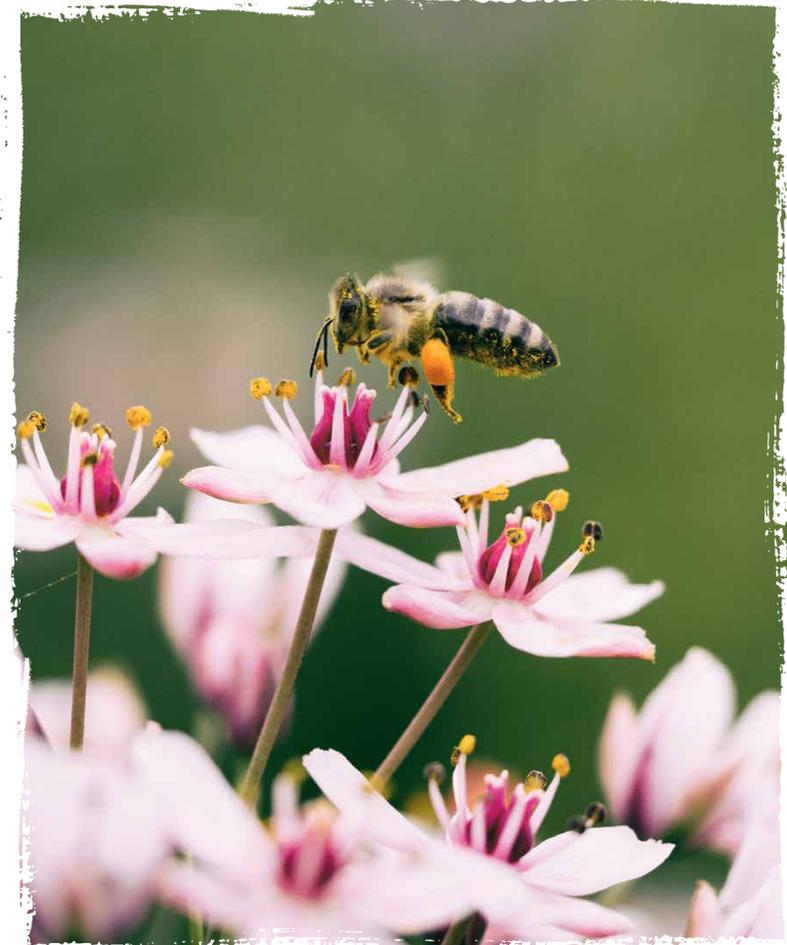
## OVERVIEW

# OUR RESPONSIBLE TOURISM CRITERIA

## ENVIRONMENT & WILDLIFE

For information about animal welfare see our [wildlife](#) and [captive animals](#) information.

1. Do you check the policies of how accommodation on this trip **reduce their environmental impacts**? For example, pollution (solid, noise, air), water reduction and rainwater harvesting, building materials, plastic reduction, recycling and renewable energy. How? Any notable examples?
2. Does the trip include accommodation that is **restoring nature** in and around their property – which can include simple things like bird or bat boxes, roof top plants for pollinators in urban or wild areas – or bigger landscape projects.
3. Does the trip include entry fees to parks or protected areas? If so, which ones and how much?
4. Does the trip include or contribute in any way (e.g. entrance fees, using local guides, donations, gathering data) to **nature recovery/rewilding projects**? If so, describe them.
5. Which, if any, **environmental or wildlife NGOs** operating in this country do you donate to? Bonus: do any relate to threatened or endangered species? Have you considered adding an opt out conservation fee to each trip for named NGOs?
6. Do you provide customers with information about **reducing their impacts** on nature ([our film](#) as an example) and if so what?
7. Do you provide **expert nature guides**? Are they from the local community and how are they qualified?
8. What threats do **invasive species** pose in this destination, and how are you addressing them/reducing spread?



OVERVIEW

# OUR RESPONSIBLE TOURISM CRITERIA

## OUR CRITERIA: PEOPLE

### LOCAL ECONOMY

1. Is the accommodation in this trip **locally owned** (vs international chains)? Are any particularly notable – for example home stays?
2. How do you maximize other **local economic opportunities** – do you employ local guides, visit craft or cooperative markets, village visits? Which ones?



### EMPLOYMENT, INCLUSIVITY AND DIVERSITY

1. What percentage of the people that you or your operating partners employ in this country are **from the country**? How many from the local community?
2. Do you employ or create income generating opportunities for people who are often **excluded or marginalized** – for example in extreme poverty, those with a disability, indigenous people, women. Who, where and how many?
3. Do you, and if applicable your ground operating partners, pay staff at least the **minimum wage** in this destination?
4. Do you have a workplace **diversity strategy** – to nurture equal employment without regard to race, gender, sexual orientation or nationality?
5. Is this trip **LGBTQI+** friendly? If so, please let us know how.
6. Is this trip suitable for people with **limited mobility, vision or hearing, or cognitive issues**? If so, please let us know.
7. Are you operating a **Trip for a Trip scheme** or something similar, providing day trips for disadvantaged local children? If so, provide details. [Our scheme](#).

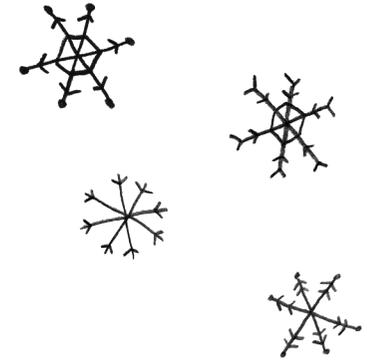
## OVERVIEW

# WHAT WE DON'T PROMOTE AND WHY

As well as **screening** the trips we *do* promote, there are types of holiday and experience that we *don't* offer.

Some activities – such as captive dolphin shows – we've never promoted. Others we've removed from our site following discussions with partners and NGOs. And some – **golf** and **downhill skiing** – we promote only under certain circumstances.

You can read more about our views on various tourism issues [here](#).



### Large group sizes & mass tourism

We believe small group sizes are more enjoyable for travellers, and more beneficial for local communities and nature. So we typically don't promote group tours with more than 25 people.

Neither do we promote tour operators or trips that encourage 'tourism leakage' – where most traveller money leaves a destination. Instead, we promote those that focus on local economic benefit through use of local guides, accommodation, activities, and food.

### Large cruise ships (250+ passengers)

There are many reasons we don't promote large cruise ships. As well as being bad for the

environment and nature, we believe they're also often bad for local communities – contributing to overtourism problems while giving very little back. You can read more [here](#).

### Snow cannons

Climate change is shortening snow seasons and making them less predictable. To cope, many resorts now use snow cannons to guarantee powder throughout the holidays. But this is environmentally damaging and water intensive.

We prefer to sell tours when and where snowfall is most likely, and to focus on alternative winter activities that take place in natural environments, with real snow and minimal environmental impact. We only promote resorts with

snow cannons if they can offer other activities in the absence of natural snow. You can read more [here](#).

### Orphanage tourism

Children must never be used as tourist attractions. Their safety and wellbeing must be paramount. There are many issues with orphanage tourism – you can read more about it, and our decision not to promote such trips, [here](#). Some of our holiday itineraries include a day or short visit to an orphanage, children's home, community, youth or family setting – however we only promote these if children are **not** present or involved in the visit.

## OVERVIEW

# WHAT WE DON'T PROMOTE AND WHY

### Captive animal facilities

Our guidelines on captive wildlife facilities are endorsed by the Born Free Foundation. We don't promote zoos or animal parks where the main function is as a tourist attraction. We don't promote anywhere which breeds non-endangered species, which captures animals from the wild, or which buys or trades animals from other zoos, and we don't promote anywhere which offers animal performances, or rides (with the exception of domesticated animals).

We do promote genuine wildlife sanctuaries, rescue centres and rehabilitation/release facilities, and places which breed species classified as endangered. Our trips may also visit aquariums which do not contain large species such as sea turtles, penguins, sea lions, sharks and cetaceans.

You can read more about what we do and don't promote where captive animal facilities are concerned, [here](#).

### Elephant riding, performances & some sanctuaries

In 2014, we removed elephant rides from our site. We also don't promote any [sanctuaries or camps](#) where elephants are made to perform. You can read more about which elephant sanctuaries we do and don't support [here](#).

### Captive orcas & dolphins

We don't promote captive orca and dolphin facilities, and have [campaigned](#) against them.

### Walking with lions & interacting with lion or tiger cubs

We don't promote feeding, cuddling or playing with lion and tiger cubs. The activities are usually a ploy of the [canned hunting industry](#) – where the animals are sold to facilities where they can be shot by trophy hunters for a high fee.

### Sea turtle hatcheries with tanks

Sea turtle hatcheries can play an important conservation role. However, [we don't promote any which use tanks](#), because we believe these can harm the turtles and are often used as a draw for paying tourists to handle and take photos with them.

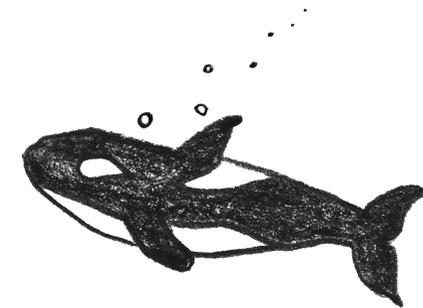
### Other activities that we do not promote

Ostrich riding

[Rodeos & stampedes](#)

### Animal welfare and wildlife tourism

You can read more about wildlife issues in tourism, and our views and policies on them [here](#).





## LOCAL IMPACT

# SUNG A TONG

Local guide, Vietnam

Sung A Tong is a Hmong local guide in Ha Giang, Vietnam. Responsible Travel customers join Sung A Tong on tours when they book holidays through our local Vietnamese partner, Haivenu.

*"Being a local guide of a tour company, I was trained and learned so much to be ready to take care of tourists. In return, we get money to help our families. The more important thing is the chance to learn English. Chatting with foreign travellers is a great way to not only exchange our cultures but to also open my mind and improve my English, which in the remote schools here there is little opportunity to do. Now I not only can help my family with money but I can also help by educating my younger brothers and sisters. I'm proud of myself."*

OVERVIEW

# OUR GOALS

## Our goals and impact strategy: an overview

The absence of complete measurement of nature and carbon impacts cannot be a reason to delay action today.

Nature and carbon are two sides of the same coin. We can't tackle the climate crisis without improving nature's ability to sequester carbon – and climate change is one of the five greatest threats to nature.

Our goals are ambitious and in line with international agreements.

### CARBON

We will deliver a measurable 50 percent reduction in scope 1 and 2 emissions by 2030 versus a 2023 baseline. We will contribute to a 50 percent scope 3 emissions reduction by 2030

### NATURE

We aim to contribute to a nature positive world by 2030

## How will we achieve them?

Our business includes four core areas of work.

1. **Screening holidays** to ensure they align with our criteria, policies and purpose.
2. **Working with our supply chain** – our tour operator partners – on actions to reduce carbon, protect and restore nature and increase local economic benefits and inclusivity of the holidays on our site.
3. **Educating travellers** about their impacts on the places and people they visit.
4. **Working for system change.** Alone, the above three actions are insufficient to the scale of change necessary on climate and nature. So we commit significant resource to a fourth area of work – creating policy advice and lobbying for industry change.



Our CEO, Justin Francis and Al Gore at the business leader's nature event at COP26 in Glasgow, co-hosted by Justin.

## OVERVIEW

# WHAT ABOUT MEASUREMENT?

### Carbon:

The first step towards reduction is understanding our emissions.

We want to measure all of our [scope 1, 2 and 3 carbon emissions](#).

As of August 2023, we're able to capture approximate scope 1 and 2 destination impacts for selected trips, and are sharing this data with customers through holiday carbon labels.

This tool will enable us to report the scope 1 and 2 emissions for a growing number of trips – we expect more than 500 by the end of 2023 – and track how they change over time.

Our goal therefore is to deliver a measurable 50 percent reduction in scope 1 and 2 emissions by 2030 versus 2023 – in line with the Science Based Targets initiative (SBTi) aimed at delivering on the COP21 Paris agreement to limit global warming to well below 2 percent – using a sample measurement (our carbon labelled trips).

We'll also continue working hard to cut scope 3 – aviation – emissions. We detail our efforts around this in the coming chapter. However, we can't measure these impacts. Our customers – from all over the world – book their own flights and transport, and we don't know the origin or duration of flights or if one was taken.

### Nature:

The [Science-Based Targets for Nature](#) and [Task force of Nature Related Financial Disclosures](#) are relatively new, impressively detailed tools for setting and reporting on goals for nature. However, they're not designed for small businesses and are realistically too onerous for most of those in our supply chain. We aim to create a simplified tool, using key methodologies from them, to enable our partners to measure and improve their impacts.



OVERVIEW

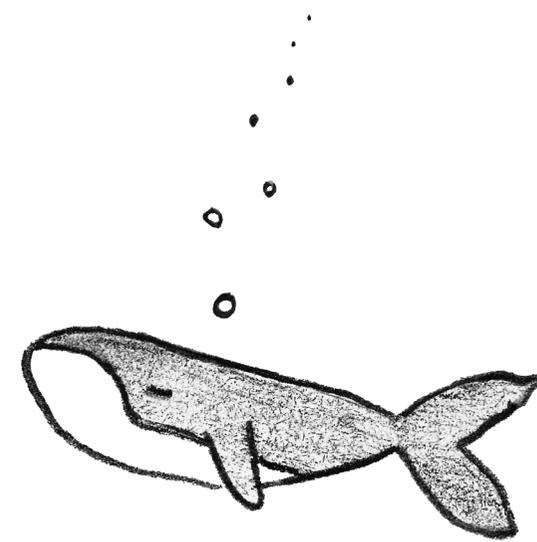
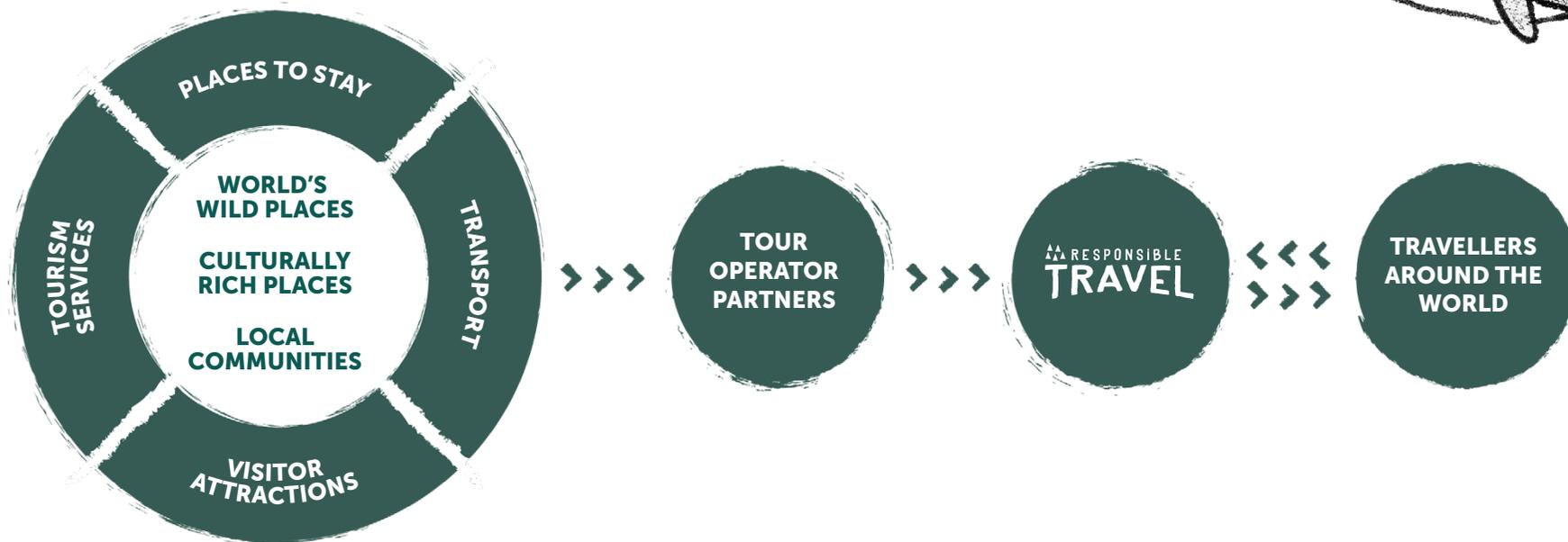
# UNDERSTANDING OUR SUPPLY CHAIN

With almost 6,000 partner-run trips and more than 10,000 accommodation sites spanning over 180 countries, the scale of our supply chain presents challenges, and opportunities, in delivering change.

We set minimum standards for partners and trips, but lack control of their supply chains to demand further ambitious change. Instead, we work to influence such change among our partners.

Progress can be slow, but the potential is great. In vast supply chains even modest changes can gather the momentum to result in significant impacts.

## Responsible Travel's presence in the global supply chain



OVERVIEW

# UNDERSTANDING OUR SUPPLY CHAIN

## Responsible Travel's supply chain

### TOURISM INFRASTRUCTURE

Roads, docks, ports, airports, ski lifts, visitor centres and their staff etc.

### ACCOMMODATION

Hotels, camping, home stays etc.  
Land, building, materials, waste, water, energy, staff, food and beverage etc.

### VISITOR ATTRACTIONS

National parks, beaches, mountains, forests, deserts, museums, villages, cities, conservation projects, craft markets etc.

### TOURISM SERVICES

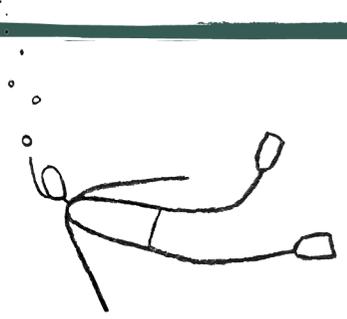
Restaurants, food producers, tourist guides, bike hire, laundry etc.

### TRANSPORT

Buses, taxis, boats, trains, internal flights, international flights, ferries, food miles etc.

### TOUR OPERATORS

Tour operators based in source markets and in destination; ground handling services.





## OUR PARTNERS

### JESS BROOKS

Eternal Landscapes, Mongolia

Jess Brooks is the founder of Eternal Landscapes, our local partner running small group and tailor-made adventures in Mongolia.

*"Our membership with Responsible Travel gives us access to a wider spectrum of clients that we would struggle to find independently. We see it as a partnership that has allowed us to develop and strengthen as a company without having to compete solely on price with our larger competitors.*

*Our membership also allows us to access Responsible Travel's continuing research on responsible tourism policies and keeps us ahead of the curve. We can adapt and implement the policies for the work we do in Mongolia making sure that our impact as a company is as positive as it can be."*



# CARBON



## CARBON GOALS

### Our topline goals:

We will deliver a measurable 50 percent reduction in scope 1 and 2 emissions by 2030 versus a 2023 baseline.

We will contribute to a 50 percent scope 3 emissions reduction by 2030.

### The bottom Line

Each traveller on a Responsible Travel holiday emits carbon. This carbon accumulates from the moment they leave their door and includes transport to and from the destination, transfers, accommodation, food they consume, and activities they take part in.

We don't book flights or run holidays, but they are our business and we shoulder a responsibility for these and all emissions produced by the holidays we sell.

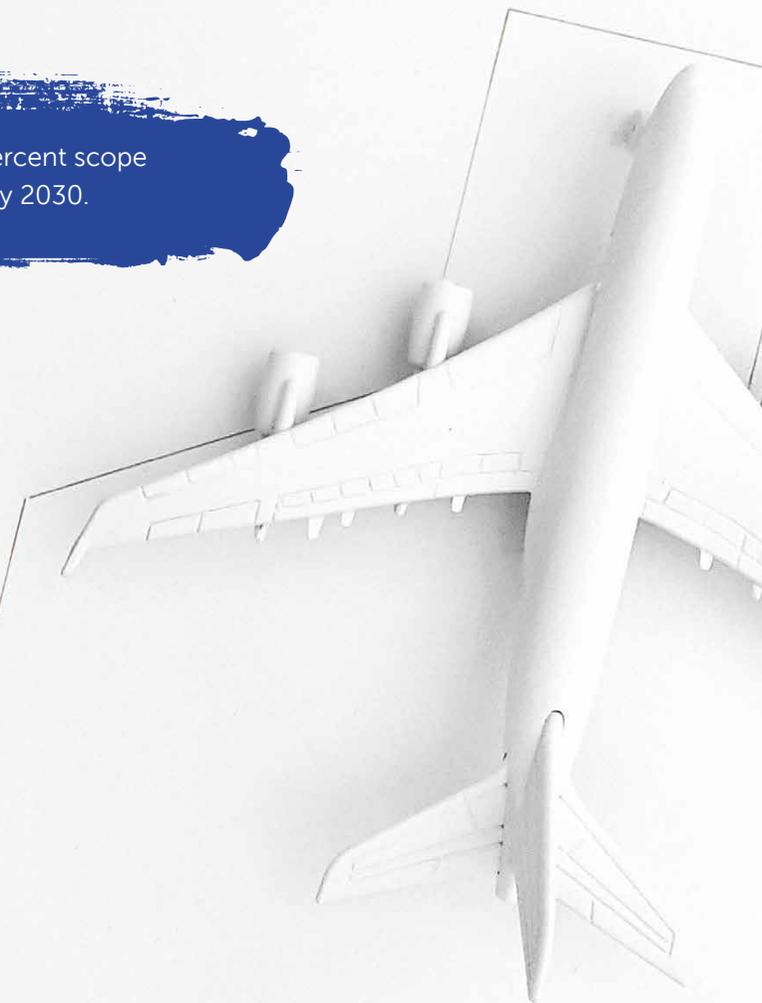
#### **We stopped supporting offset schemes almost 15 years ago.**

Real reductions to total carbon emissions are crucial. Carbon offsets don't reduce the amount of carbon emitted – the impacts of which are immediate and long-lasting. Such schemes also detract attention and resources from the work of cutting carbon.

#### **Until aviation can be decarbonised, we have to fly less.**

We advise travellers to do just this – encouraging them instead to stay in destination longer, pick trips that maximise benefits for nature and communities and, where possible, opt for lower-carbon journeys.

The following chapter explores how we're working to reduce carbon emissions throughout our supply chain.



## CARBON OUR SUPPLY CHAIN

### Understanding our supply chain emissions

In 2020, we published a [small but detailed study](#) we'd commissioned measuring the CO<sub>2</sub> emissions of a selection of our holidays.

Flight emissions were estimated from a variety of sources including ICAO's [Carbon Emissions Calculator](#) and are typically the largest source of emissions.

But we wanted to better understand the types and scale of other contributors.

The substantial carbon emissions resulting from food and energy, as well as the marked differences per passenger km in transport emissions (illustrated in the table to the right) helped inform our carbon reduction strategy. However, the detailed methodology was impossible for us to scale and apply across our operators to create a system for measuring carbon impacts.

### Per person, total holiday emissions over seven days

Holidays	Location	Food	Accommodation	Lower CO <sub>2</sub> transport	Higher CO <sub>2</sub> transport	Lower CO <sub>2</sub> return transport	Higher CO <sub>2</sub> return transport
Holiday 1 All-inclusive guest house	Western France	55	26.5	51	102	Train, Owner's car	Flight, Taxi, Train, Owner's car
Holiday 2 Farmstay self catering cottages	North Devon, UK	n/a	19.5	20	37	Train, Owner's car	Car
Holiday 3 Shared house	Croatian island of Vis	14	23	119	243	Train, Ferry, Owner's car	Flight, Bus, Ferry, Owner's car
Holiday 4 Sports hotel	Cataluña, Spain	n/a	29	75	169	Train, Owner's car	Flight, Bus, Owner's car

Click [here](#) for full details and methodology





## OUR PARTNERS

### DEREK SUFFLING

El Geco Verde, Spain

Derek Suffling and Ilaria Grieco own El Geco Verde, an off-grid eco hotel in the Altiplano de Granada, Spain, popular with Responsible Travel customers looking for relaxing, active holidays in Europe.

*"We've been working with Responsible Travel for more than 12 years. Not only does Responsible Travel bring us the right kind of clients but they also take a personal interest in our business and we feel they really care about us. Responsible Travel clients usually understand what we are trying to do in relation to sustainability and appreciate our impact on the local economy, which is threatened by depopulation and the overdependence on agriculture."*

CARBON

# CARBON-LABELLING OUR TRIPS

In 2023 we began offering carbon-labelled holidays. The aim is two-fold: to help customers better understand the impacts of their trip and make informed choices, and to encourage our partners to further reduce carbon emissions across their products.

We're grateful to our partner Explore Worldwide for sharing their method with us, and for allowing us to share it among all of our global partners.

The labels will appear on selected holiday pages and provide approximate carbon emissions. They do not include flight impacts – which is made clear to travellers with accompanying text.

Our hope is that, in time, all of our partners will opt in to carbon labelling their trips on our site.

## OUTER HEBRIDES MOUNTAIN BIKING TOUR

PRICE : €2545

DURATION: 7 days

TYPE: Small group ⓘ

GROUP SIZE: 3-8 people

CO<sub>2</sub>: 147kg ⓘ

LAST  
MINUTE:

Late availability on these dates: 09 Sep

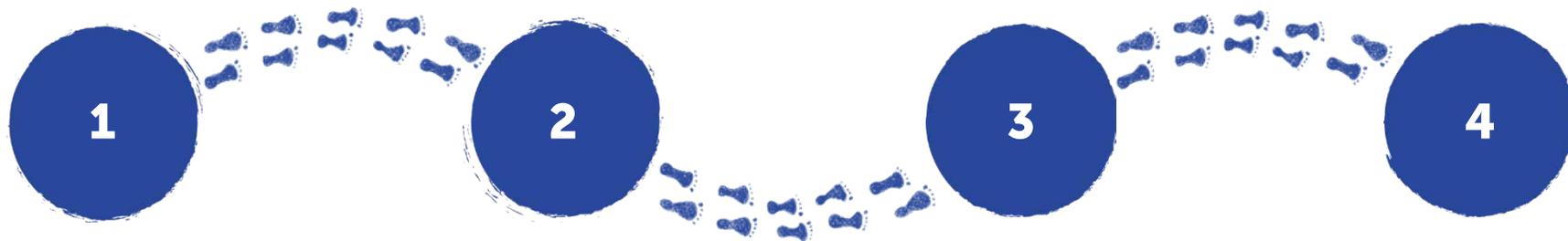
Examples of our labelling

ENQUIRE OR BOOK



## CARBON GOALS & IMPACT STRATEGY

Our carbon reduction goals are woven into each of our four core areas of work.



### SCREENING

In screening potential new partners and holidays, we apply minimum standards on carbon reduction efforts. You can read our screening criteria [here](#). We've recently updated this criteria and will continue to monitor its effectiveness. We **don't promote** carbon offsetting.

### SUPPLY CHAIN WORK

Working with our partners we advise on and encourage specific actions – detailed on the following 'actions and results' pages – to reduce carbon within the supply chain.

### EDUCATION & ADVICE

Through our travel guides, customer communications, short films and [global media work](#), we aim to educate travellers about holiday carbon impacts, and ways they can reduce theirs. All customers are also sent two short pre-departure films on how to lower carbon and help nature on holiday. You can view some of our content in our [values hub](#).

### SYSTEM CHANGE

We commit significant time and resource to creating policy advice and lobbying for system change on carbon reduction, particularly on aviation, some of which is detailed in the following pages.

## CARBON ACTIONS & RESULTS

### Reduce total flights

Impact unknown, as customers book their own flights and transport. 5,716 visits to our carbon reduction tips page and carbon hub, and 46,118 views of our [Curb Your Carbon](#) film.

### Increase flight-free offer

#### 2021 baseline:

155 overseas holidays from the UK.

#### 2023 result:

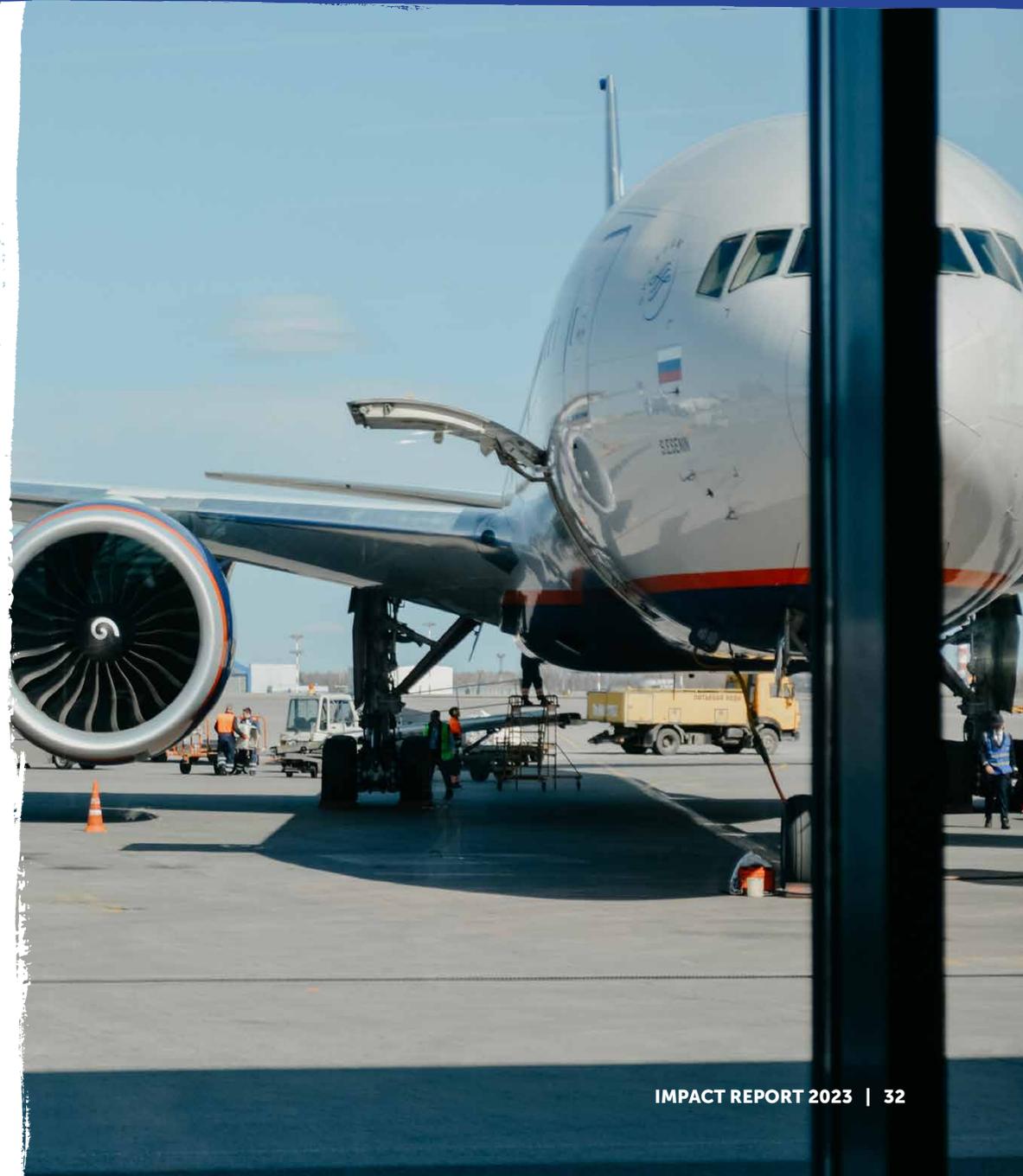
122 overseas holidays from the UK.

#### Reasons for decline:

We removed some holidays that had no outbound flight but included a return flight, and lost Trans-Siberian rail holidays due to Russia's invasion of Ukraine, our boycott and trips taken offline after Covid (including by container ship).

#### Note:

We don't book transport, so cannot track how many of our customers, who live all over the world, travel to their destination without flying.



## CARBON ACTIONS & RESULTS

### Increase electric transport trips

#### 2021 baseline:

Zero 100 percent electric transport trips.

#### 2023 result:

Two entirely electric trips, and 10 electric vehicle safaris. We're broadening our goal to include partial electrification – snow mobiles, tuk-tuks, boats.

#### Progress:

Few destinations yet have the necessary infrastructure to make 100 percent electric car itineraries practical. Moreover, in some destinations, fossil fuels are used to create electrical energy. Consultation with our partners and further research revealed considerable obstacles in many destinations to scaling up at present. We will continue our work on this – and expect to see progress – but it requires additional learning and research, including on how electric energy is created by destinations.

### WILD DRIVES

A member of Responsible Travel since 2023,  
Wild Drives runs electric campervan holidays from Brighton, UK

Image: © Wild Drives / Mi Elfverson & Claire Waddell



## CARBON ACTIONS & RESULTS

### Increase use of accommodation with renewable energy

**Objective:**

Measure what percentage of accommodation use renewables so that we can track and encourage change. In progress.

### Remove internal flights

**Objective:**

Remove all internal jet flights of less than an hour.

**Result:**

Two flights (out of 30) removed so far.

**Progress:**

Please see our 'progress, learning and limitations' chapter below.

### WHEATLAND FARM

Member of Responsible Travel since 2006, Wheatland Farm offers renewably-powered accommodation on a 21 acre farm turned nature reserve.

Image: © Wheatland Farm



## CARBON ACTIONS & RESULTS

### Increase our vegan and vegetarian holiday section

Number of holidays in section offering vegan and vegetarian food:

<b>2021 baseline:</b>	114 holidays
<b>2022 goal:</b>	500 holidays
<b>2023 result:</b>	1,570 holidays



## CARBON ACTIONS & RESULTS

### Lobbying for system change

#### Reducing demand, funding renewable aviation

Proposal of a [Green Flying Duty](#) to curb aviation demand and increase funding for renewable aviation technology and lower carbon alternatives.

- Submitted to the UK Transport Secretary as part of its Aviation Review.
- Presented at UK and Norwegian tourism industry events.
- Significant UK and global media work to raise awareness and debate.

Our CEO also contributed to a paper, created with the [Council for Sustainable Business](#), arguing for stronger UK Government support for renewable aviation. This was presented to ministers and helped lead to the creation of the [Jet Zero Council](#).

#### Campaigning against the abuse of the voluntary carbon offset market

- Significant [media work](#) on the issue from 2009 – present.



## CARBON ACTIONS & RESULTS

### Traveller and partner advice and education

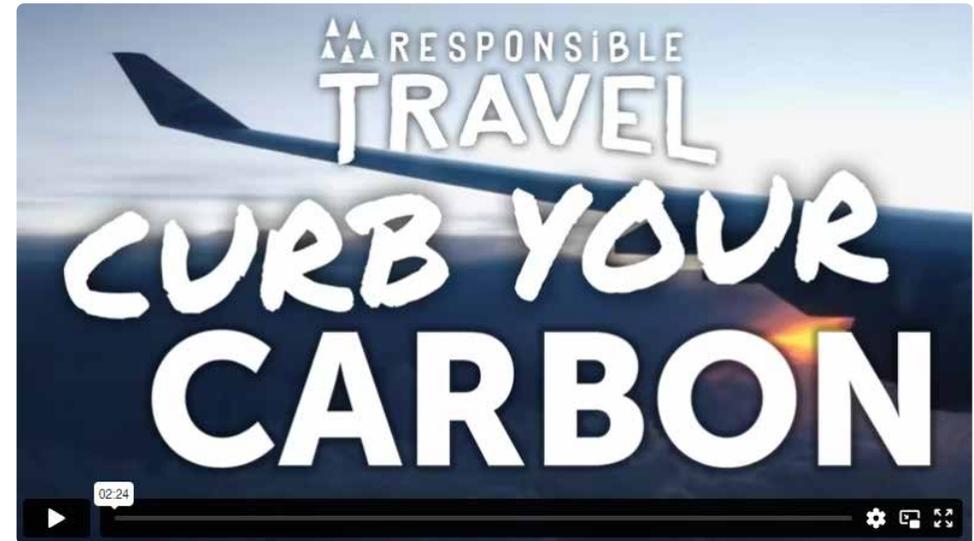
#### Carbon-labelling holidays

Begun in August 2023. Our goal for 2023 is to have at least 500 of our holidays carbon labelled, with the ambition that all of our partners will eventually opt-in to labelling their holidays.

#### Traveller advice and education

Our CEO and writers have written extensively across media, and our own platform, on carbon reduction and the need to fly less. We send every customer a pre-departure video on how to [reduce carbon](#) and [support nature](#) on their trip (as well as at home). Travellers can also find our tips, campaigns and articles in our [climate hub](#) and our new [student library](#).

Through our direct communications, surveys and annual Open House we continue working with our partners to inform, and encourage progress on, carbon-reduction actions and goals.



## ON THE GROUND

# FEYNAN ECOLODGE, JORDAN

A [stay at the Feynan Ecolodge](#), on the site of a former copper mining research camp, is a highlight of visits to Jordan's prestigious Dana Biosphere Reserve.

It is also a standout example of how thoroughly hotels can approach carbon reduction measures.

In 2011, the lodge was highly commended at the World Responsible Tourism Awards for its poverty reduction initiatives, while in 2019 it won gold for its [efforts to reduce carbon emissions](#). It sits at one end of the Wadi Dana Trail, one of the best hiking routes in Dana Reserve, and since it was opened in 2005 by Jordan's Royal Society for the Conservation of Nature (RSCN) has provided a masterclass in developing sustainable tourism.

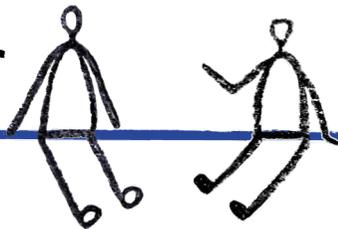
Through six tailor-made tours featuring Feynan Ecolodge, Responsible Travel has generated approximately 128 bookings at the hotel.

By continuously monitoring carbon emissions from multiple sources across the business, including food, waste, laundry, hot water, and other energy requirements, Feynan estimates it has saved 106.7 tonnes of CO<sub>2</sub> from entering the atmosphere each year.

Completely off-grid, Feynan generates all its power through a PV system that powers the kitchen, bathrooms, and essential appliances. Hot water comes from solar heaters, it serves a completely vegetarian menu, PET bottles have been eliminated in favour of reusable bottles, and a decentralized wastewater management system converts leftover food, kitchen waste, and toilet waste into biogas for cooking. Treated water is used to keep the lodge's native plants in good shape.

Nothing at Feynan is wasted. Even jift – a by-product of the olive-pressing process – powers space heaters in the lodge's fireplaces. This sustainable fuel, gathered directly from the lodge's olive trees, saves an estimated four tonnes of trees from becoming firewood every year.





## CARBON

# PROGRESS, LEARNING & LIMITATIONS

The climate crisis demands ambitious and creative solutions. It's something many of our partners do so well. You can read about some of their efforts to curb emissions below.

The process of reducing all of our supply chain emissions has been far more complex and challenging than we'd anticipated.

We're delighted to have surpassed our goal of increasing the number of labelled vegan and vegetarian options available on our site, making it easier for customers to book based on diet and with the knowledge that it will help reduce the carbon emissions of their holiday.

Other areas have proved more difficult. Our decision to remove all domestic jet flights of under an hour is a good example.

In hindsight, we should have appraised the issues more carefully, and consulted our partners more fully beforehand. Many had already removed any such flights in favour of lower-carbon transfers. And, having reviewed our data, we found that most remaining flights had remained for a reason – for safety; to avoid penalising small, often poor,

island states highly dependent on tourism; or because there were no alternatives. Over half were lower carbon turboprop flights.

From here, we'll be sharing advice among partners from those who've been able to remove internal flights, and creating a set of principles and practical guidance for our partners to follow to avoid unnecessary internal flights.

### Recognising limitations

We've decided to concentrate our efforts in areas where we have most control.

Decarbonising tourism in real terms (without offsets) is incredibly difficult.

Areas we can move the dial on – like food options – tend to be smaller with regards to total emissions.

Our reliance on aviation means the scope 3 carbon reductions we can make are limited.

We've no simple answer to this.

Removing all of our holidays with flights would achieve little. While our trips are global, so are our

customers. Long-haul for one is a short train ride for another.

We could close entirely. But that won't stop people flying. Instead of booking through us, they can simply book with a less responsible company.

And there's a reason we began this company: we deeply believe in the value of travel. We're not anti-flying. But we do want to see urgent reforms that will curb demand, penalise private jet use and incentivise lower carbon travel.

### Looking ahead

System change is crucial for everyone's sake. We'll continue working to influence what we can – campaigning for change in the way aviation is taxed, renewably powered aviation is funded and to level up the playing field between rail and flights.

We'll also focus greater resource on areas over which we have greatest control – working with partners to minimise harmful supply chain impacts, maximise the good, and deliver on our ambitious carbon reduction goals.



## ON THE GROUND **CYCLING FOR SOFTIES**

Member of Responsible Travel since 2019

Not only do Cycling for Softies focus on low-carbon pedal power to explore the destinations in which they operate, they've also chosen to market their tours in Europe as a package including return transport by train rather than a flight.

By booking international train travel and making it part of the package (rather than leaving it up to the guest to arrange it independently) Cycling for Softies have made it much easier for their customers to choose a more planet-friendly holiday.

Over 30 percent of their clients now choose this option when booking a Cycling for Softies trip.

Image: © Cycling for Softies

## ON THE GROUND **WHEATLAND FARM**

Member of Responsible Travel since 2006

A farmstay holiday with a difference, set on 21 acres of farmland managed not for agriculture but as a wildlife reserve.

Here, wooden ecolodges run 100 percent on renewable energy, mostly generated by the on site 11kW wind turbine, solar PV panels, and biomass boiler (that runs on wood from around the farm). It's pioneering low-carbon construction too. The Balebarn eco lodge was constructed using straw bales gathered from the farm, lime plaster made in Devon, local wood for the cladding, and lots of other recycled materials.

Stays here – 248 bookings via Responsible Travel since 2006 – also directly fund the ongoing rewilding work to turn the previously degraded farmland back into wild habitats.

Image: © Wheatland Farm



# NATURE



## NATURE GOALS

### Our topline goal:

Biodiversity: We'll contribute to a nature positive world by 2030.

We set an early goal of becoming 'nature positive' by 2030.

Our efforts and objectives around this haven't changed. However, our understanding has. Just as no holiday with a flight is carbon neutral, no holidays with a flight can be 'nature positive.' So in line with guidance from Business for Nature and The Science Based Targets Network 'nature positive' becomes an aim and not a goal that businesses should set.

### The bottom Line

Tourism depends on nature, in many varied ways. For one thing, it's why many people travel. But while our industry is a major cause of its depletion, we want our holidays to protect it.

Nature and climate are inextricably linked. Healthy biodiversity is our life support system and one of our greatest assets in fighting climate change, absorbing **50 percent** of man-made carbon emissions each year.

Protecting and restoring it – while also reducing the carbon we emit – is vital in limiting the worst impacts of global heating.

The [Global Biodiversity Framework](#) calls for 30 percent of the earth's land and sea to be protected for nature by 2030.

We believe tourism can help.

We've identified the greatest threats to nature and how our supply chain contributes to these. The following chapter explores these and how we aim to reduce these threats and maximise potential benefits to nature.



## ON THE GROUND

# ON TRACK SAFARIS

Member of Responsible Travel since 2007

Carol and Will Fox established On Track Safaris with one purpose in mind – to generate funds for wildlife conservation.

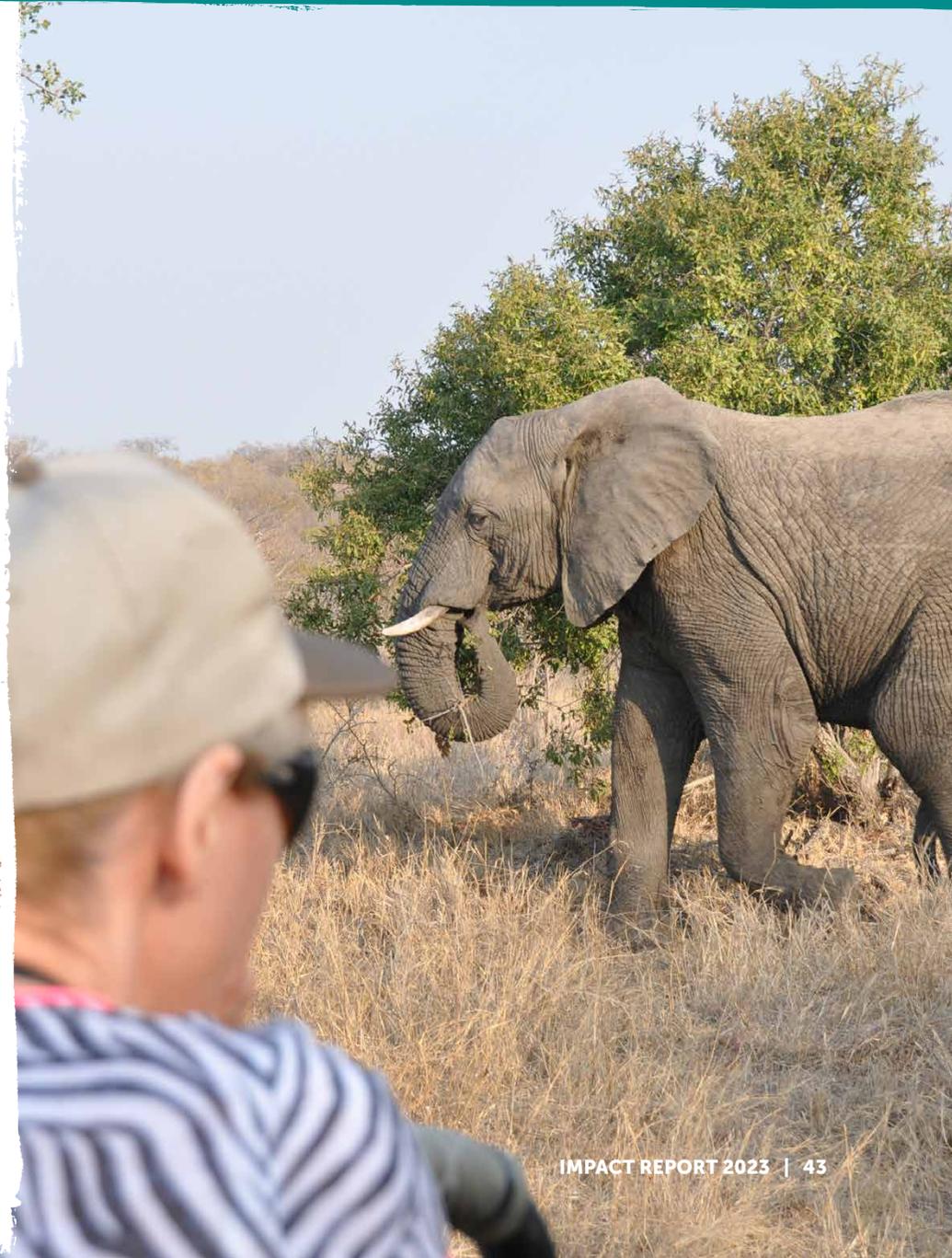
Leopard populations in South Africa are in decline. Outside of protected areas, leopards are increasingly threatened by conflict with humans and illegal hunting. Yet, research on leopard densities outside protected areas lacks quantifiable data. Data that is needed to ensure hunting quotas in South Africa – backed by a vociferous hunting lobby – don't decimate the population further.

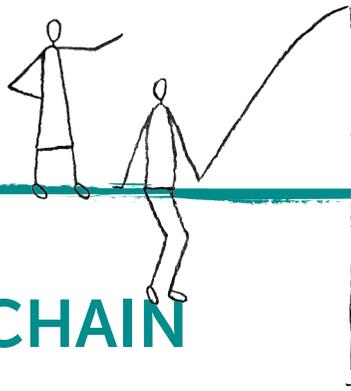
Since 2007, 221 holidays have been booked with On Track Safaris via Responsible Travel.

All net profits from On Track Safaris holidays go directly to The On Track Foundation, which supports small-scale leopard research projects (which might otherwise miss out on support from larger conservation organisations) across South Africa through grants and provision of equipment and expertise, as well as related community education projects. Research from the On Track Foundation contributed to a temporary ban on leopard hunting in South Africa in 2016 and 2017.

Its most recent research initiative is a citizen science programme, where safari guests, lodge owners, and the public can upload leopard sightings to an app the Foundation has developed. Landowners covering 200,000ha have so far signed up to the programme and universities in the UK and South Africa are involved in the project.

The On Track Foundation hopes the app will be a major step forward in gathering data for South African authorities to use in large predator management policies.





## NATURE OUR SUPPLY CHAIN

### Understanding our supply chain impacts on nature

We've committed to following Business for Nature's [High Level Actions](#) for nature (Assess, Commit, Transform, Disclose).

We first examined our supply chain impacts on nature across four of the five greatest threats to the natural world, according to the Intergovernmental Science-Policy Platform on Biodiversity and Ecosystem Services ([IPBES](#)) - the fifth being climate change.

#### Overconsumption

Tourism and its associated infrastructure uses natural resources.

Overuse of water and other natural resources, and demand for energy to sustain resorts, can have direct impacts on precious local resources like groundwater.

Food waste – particularly through all-you-can-eat buffets.

Overconsumption of damaging materials including plastics.

Overtourism that damages natural spaces, leading to loss of flora/fauna or behavioural changes in wildlife.

#### Invasive species

The abundance of non-native species is significantly higher in places where tourism activities take place.

Activities such as hiking, mountain biking, and off-road driving can disturb habitats, potentially facilitating species invasion.

Invasive species can be spread through tourism and recreational activities, such as through the transport of ballast water, hull fouling of both cruise ships and recreational vessels, outboard motors, water lines, fishing gear, and debris.

The congregation of large numbers of people, vehicles, and vessels from geographically diverse areas provide a regular supply of non-native species.



## NATURE OUR SUPPLY CHAIN



### Changes and land & sea use

We love visiting nature, but many areas are fragile and even a small number of visitors will need tourism infrastructure like paths, roads and cycle tracks, which can all damage habitats. Even ecotourism can have a negative impact on the environment.

Development or modification of land for accommodation; tourism infrastructure and the **seven deadly commodities** used by tourists and the industry, can threaten biodiversity in tourist destinations.

Loss of habitat and roadkill create isolated wildlife populations in areas that are often encircled by development including hotels, because of little or no regulation.

The rapid and unplanned building of infrastructure can lead to deforestation, drainage of wetlands, and the destruction of natural ecosystems.

Reliance on seven commodities including intensively produced beef, leather, cocoa, palm oil, pulp and paper, rubber, soy, and timber can fuel the destruction of natural habitats around the world. When sustainably sourced and certified, this destruction can be mitigated.

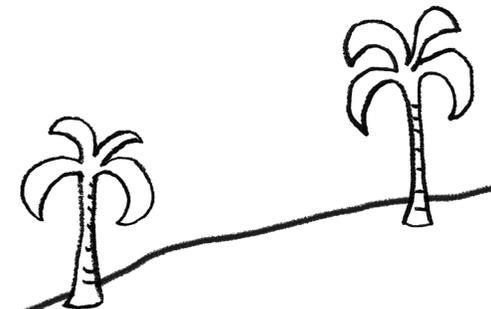
### Pollution

Solid waste pollution (including plastic) from tourist facilities including accommodation and visitor attractions; boats and cruises; tourist littering and infrastructure development (including construction).

Noise and light pollution from built-up marinas and hotel resorts can affect reproduction cycles by forcing native species from their natural habitats.

Water pollution from some hotel resorts can affect the natural balance in fresh-water sources and surrounding marine ecosystems.

Sewage waste from hotels, resorts, visitor attractions and more can suffocate fish, shellfish, coral reefs, and other marine life because it causes surplus nitrogen and phosphorous, which promotes excess algae, reducing oxygen levels in the water.



ON THE GROUND

# TRAVEL CARPATHIA, ROMANIA

Member of Responsible Travel since 2004

Travel Carpathia runs wildlife tours to the Carpathian Mountains, Romania with all profits going directly to the largest rewilding project in eastern Europe – the Foundation Conservation Carpathia.

The Carpathian Mountains are home to some of the largest areas of contiguous forest in Europe and hold the highest percentage of virgin woodland. They are also home to the largest population of European carnivores – including wolves, bears, and lynx. But, this land is threatened. In 2005, Romania’s nationalised forests were handed back to private ownership, triggering significant deforestation.

The Foundation Conservation Carpathia is one of the largest private conservation projects in Europe – over 250,000ha – with the aim to create a world-class wilderness reserve in the Fagaras Mountains. It does it by acquiring and protecting land and restoring degraded habitats – including rewilding over 840ha of clear-cut forest, diversifying 450ha of spruce monoculture, and restoring vegetation along watercourses.

It is also trying to create a new, non-destructive economy in the Fagaras Mountains, which works in harmony with nature and benefits local communities. This is where Travel Carpathia comes in.

Despite being a tiny tour operator running just three specialist holidays on our site, 41 holidays have been booked with Travel Carpathia via Responsible Travel.

Image: © Travel Carpathia



NATURE

# GOALS & IMPACT STRATEGY

## Biodiversity: We'll contribute to a nature positive world by 2030.

As with carbon reduction, our goal to help protect biodiversity is woven into each of our four core areas of work.



### SCREENING

Our screening of potential new partners and holidays applies minimum standards around nature and biodiversity.

You can read our [new criteria here](#). It's been recently updated, and we'll continue to monitor its effectiveness.

### SUPPLY CHAIN WORK

Working with our partners we advise and encourage specific actions – detailed in the following 'actions and progress' section – to minimise negative impacts, as well as help protect and restore nature through the trips we sell.

### EDUCATION & ADVICE

Through our writing and customer communications, short films and [global media work](#), we aim to educate consumers around changes they can make to help protect and restore nature at home and on holiday, as well as about the wider system changes we need to advocate for.

You can view some of our online content in our [values hub](#).

### SYSTEM CHANGE

We commit significant time and resource to creating policy advice and lobbying for positive system change around biodiversity in tourism, particularly around nature goals.

ON THE GROUND

# EXODUS TRAVELS

Member of Responsible Travel since 2002

One of our biggest and longest-standing tour operator partners.

Through a partnership with Rewilding Europe, they are committed to funding the rewilding of 100sqm of land in Italy's Appenines or Croatia's Velebit Mountains for every traveller who joins one of their trips – a total of 410 bookings via Responsible Travel in 2022 alone.

These projects are rewilding habitats, protecting old-growth forests and creating wildlife corridors for bears, wolves, lynx, and more, while supporting local communities by developing 'nature-based' economies through tourism.



## NATURE ACTIONS & PROGRESS

### Increase conservation funding

This now forms a part of our screening process and we recently surveyed our subscribers to gauge public appetite for a nature tourism levy (see page [55](#))

### Create an offer of rewilding holidays

**2021 baseline:**

Two holidays

**Result:**

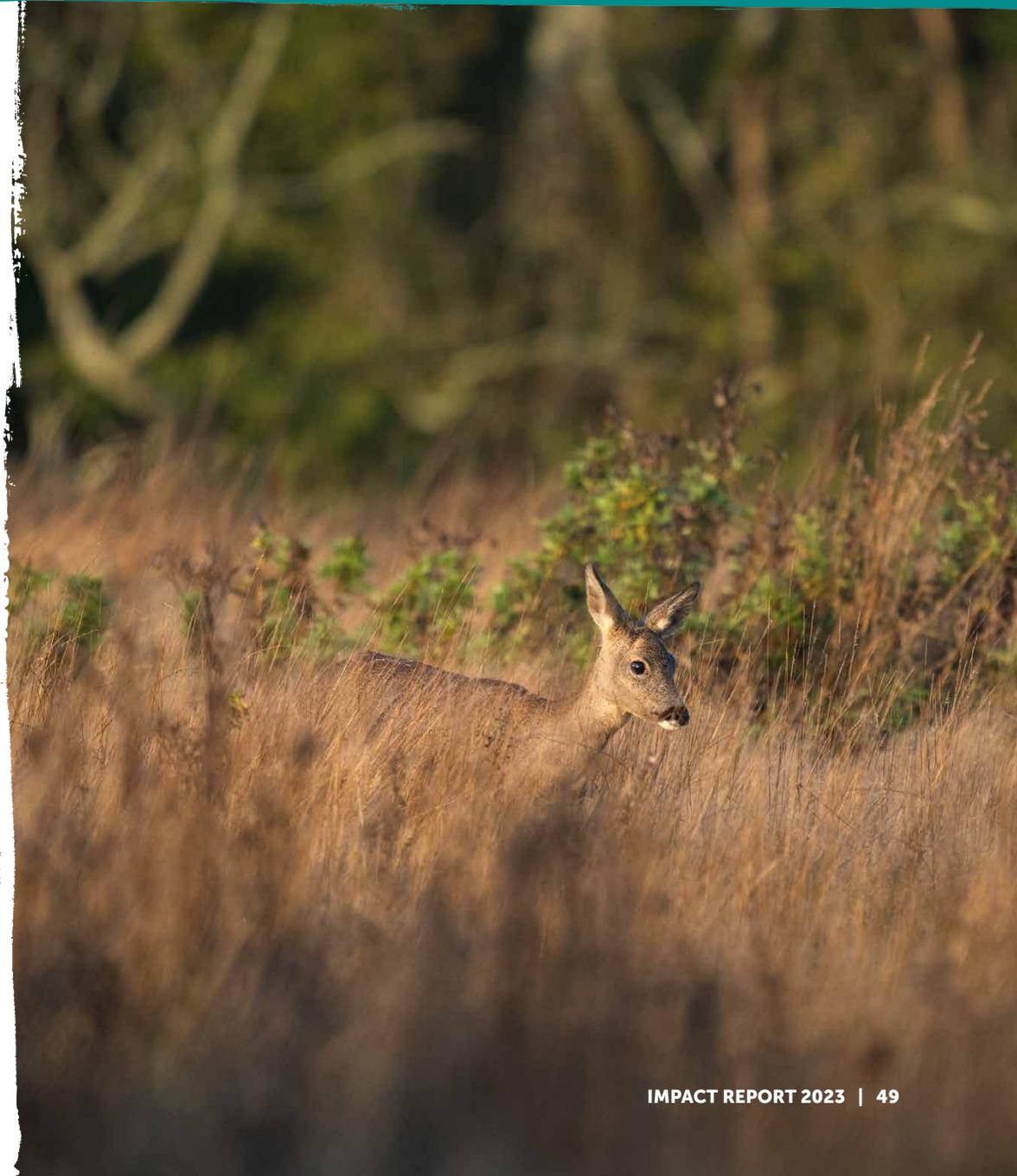
Work paused pending definition, but 11 holidays on the site.

**Progress:**

We are working towards a definition of a 'rewilding holiday'. This definition will include trips which help to fund nature restoration.

Further discussion is needed, both in respect of customer experience (is it part or all of a trip), and whether it involves practical nature restoration by the traveller (under expert guidance). We also need to understand whether this a separate category to citizen science and conservation holidays.

A full definition will be published in the coming months.



## NATURE ACTIONS & PROGRESS

### Increase our vegan and vegetarian holiday section

Number of holidays in section offering vegan and vegetarian food:

**2021 baseline:** 114 holidays

**2022 goal:** 500 holidays

**2023 result:** 1,570 holidays

### Reduce plastic use

No single-use-plastic holidays

**2021 baseline:** 59 holidays

**2022 goal:** 100 holidays

**2023 result:** 60 holidays

### Progress:

See 'progress and learning' [page \(55\)](#).

### Customer education about protecting nature

Through our extensive media work, travel guides and direct customer communications, we aim to inform travellers about tourism's impacts on nature, and the ways they can help protect nature – at home and on holiday. We send every customer a pre-departure video on how to [support nature](#) while away, and have also created an online [nature hub](#) and [student library](#).



## NATURE ACTIONS & PROGRESS

### Partner advice on protecting nature

Through our direct communications, surveys, annual Open House event and a free zoom event led by our CEO, we continue working with our partners to inform, and encourage progress on, positive nature-based actions and goals.

### Conservation volunteering

#### 2021 baseline:

78 holidays

#### 2023 result:

65 conservation volunteering holidays plus 20 citizen science holidays.

#### Progress:

Further discussion is needed around our conservation, citizen science and rewilding holiday categories.

Our 'citizen science' holiday section was established in 2023. A number of our existing holidays include this element, but need to be recategorised under this heading.

Note that in general the conservation volunteering sector has been struggling commercially (customers tend to be younger and affected by student fees and/or the cost of living crisis).



## NATURE ACTIONS & PROGRESS

### Lobbying for system change

#### Goals

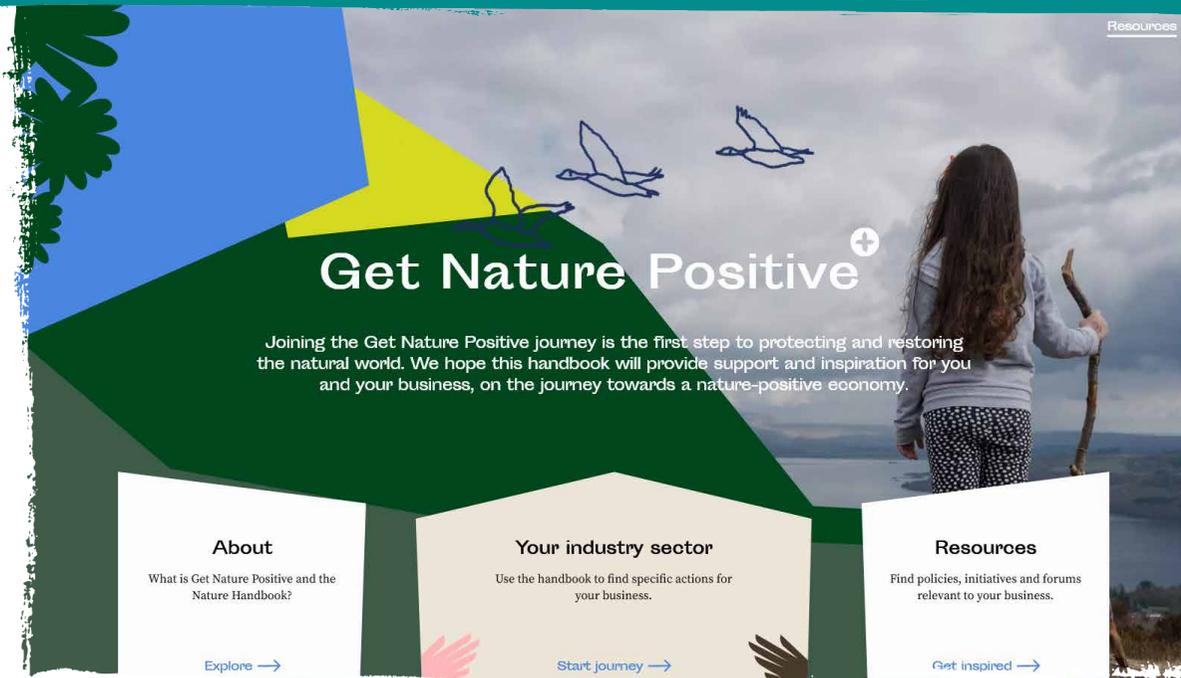
Establish 'nature positive' as the guiding principle for business, including tourism.

#### Advice

Our CEO Justin Francis co-led the business leader's nature event at COP26 attended by Al Gore and the UK Environment Secretary. 25 percent of FTSE 100 businesses signed up to GetNaturePositive.com, an initiative established by the Council for Sustainable Business to get nature – and nature based solutions – on the table at COP26, and future climate summits.

Our CEO wrote the [tourism section](#) of the Get Nature Positive handbook for business, showcased at the COP15 Biodiversity Summit and adopted by 80 NGOs globally through the resulting initiative, [Business for Nature](#).

Our CEO and writers have also written breakthrough [articles](#) around 'nature positive' tourism for consumer media and conducted many interviews on the issue.



## NATURE ACTIONS & PROGRESS

### Fund nature-based trips for disadvantaged children in destinations

Approximately 1,340 children have attended 34 nature-focussed trips as part of our Trip for a Trip initiative.

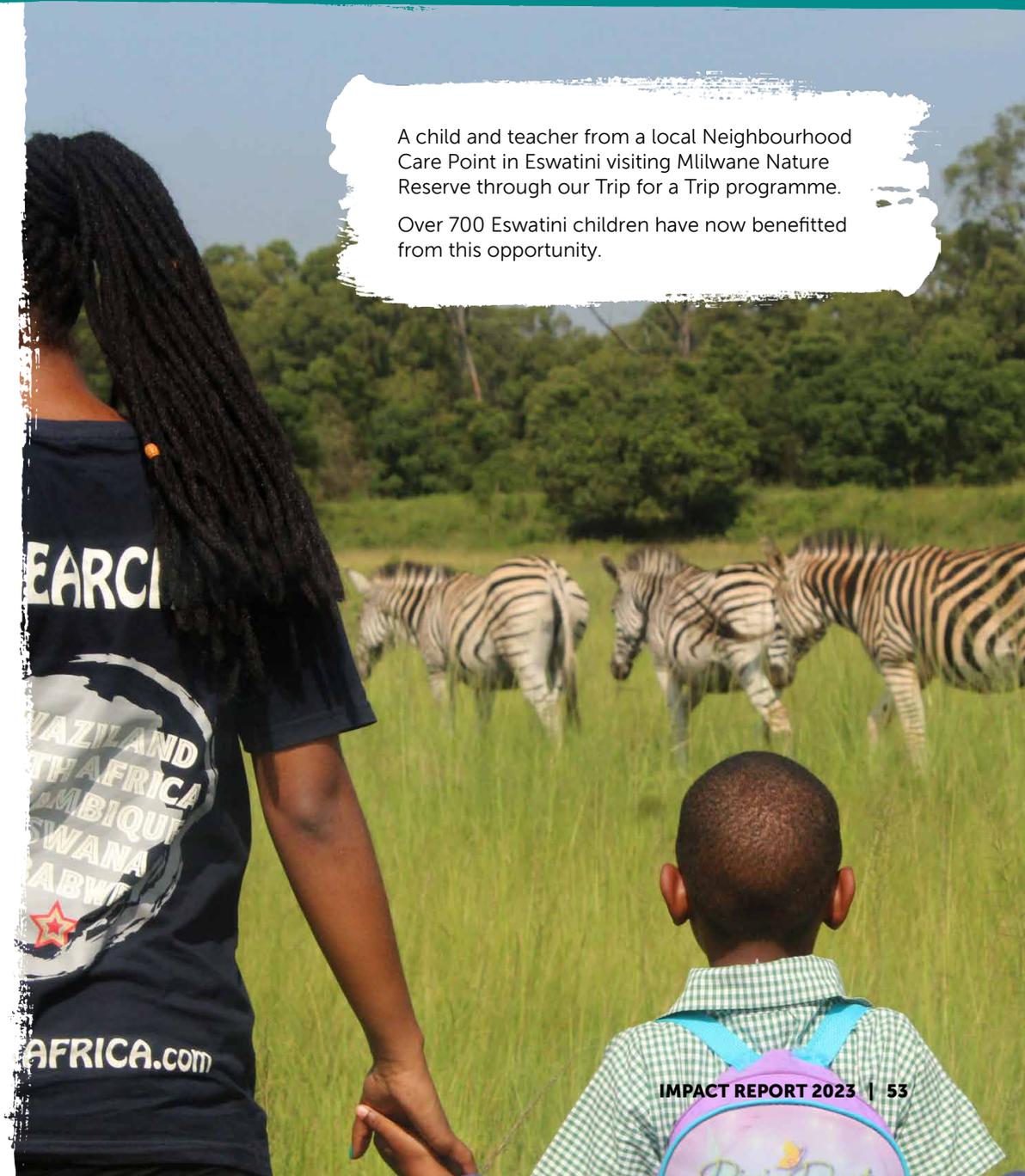
### Funding for nature

We've researched and proposed a [tourism levy](#) to help fund nature. This has been submitted to UK Government's Glover Review, DEFRA's Green Finance team, and with the UK's national parks' CEOs.

Through our CEO, who sits on the board of Saruni Basecamp, Kenya and helps guide its strategy, we've invested time in demonstrating to others – investors, partners, media – the great potential of tourism for nature conservation and local communities (see 'on the ground' case study page [56](#)).

A child and teacher from a local Neighbourhood Care Point in Eswatini visiting Mlilwane Nature Reserve through our Trip for a Trip programme.

Over 700 Eswatini children have now benefited from this opportunity.



## NATURE STAFF VOLUNTEERING

We can all do our bit for nature. And while we work hard to influence change throughout our supply chain and beyond, we also love to get our own hands muddy.

Twice a year our team volunteers for a day on local nature-based initiatives, while all staff are given half a day every month to contribute to volunteering projects of their choice.

## NATURE PROGRESS & LEARNING

Our nature work is in its infancy, and we're excited by its potential. It's an area in which we're able to influence greater and swifter change than carbon, and we're pleased with our work in promoting awareness and system change.

Businesses of any size can help to protect and restore nature. They can do so in ways that inspire their customers – from investing in small local producers to supporting community-led conservation initiatives.

Still, there are challenges. Increasing the number of zero single-use plastic holidays on our site is one we've encountered. It remains a very high bar in many destinations – genuinely difficult, or perceived to be so. And progress became still harder during Covid.

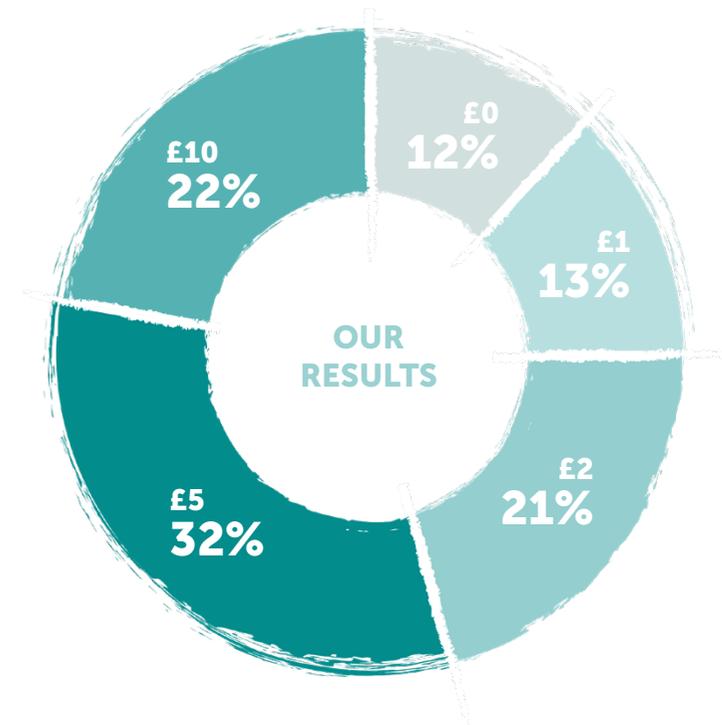
With hindsight, we feel that being more specific with our partners about small intermediary steps – such as removing plastic bags or other items – would have been more engaging and effective, and is how we plan to move forward.

One of our goals is to increase the funding our own supply chain – and wider industry – provides for nature conservation. As part of our work, we polled our customers to understand their willingness to contribute. The work led to enquiries from the UK government and media, as well as national park leaders.

Based on the results, UK tourists could contribute **over £150m** to UK National Parks and Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty.

### Tourism levy poll

**We asked:** When staying overnight in a UK National Park or Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty, what contribution per night would you be willing to make to support local nature conservation?



ON THE GROUND

# SARUNI BASECAMP, KENYA

Member of Responsible Travel since 2011

A shining example of how safari tourism can benefit conservation and create economic value around preserving habitat and protecting wildlife for local communities. Since 2011, 24 Saruni Basecamp safaris have been booked via Responsible Travel.

Saruni Basecamp leases land in the Mara Naboisho Conservancy from 500 Masai landowners for tourism purposes. The Masai set their own rules for how tourism is managed in the conservancy – choosing to keep it high value, low volume and low impact – to minimize disturbance to wildlife and maximize the benefits to the local community.

The project has rejuvenated, and now conserves a vital migration corridor between the Masai Mara National Reserve and the Loita Plains – the Pardamat Conservancy – used by several hundred thousand animals. Lease fees provide a sustainable income in harmony with wildlife, while the business foundation funds education and guide training facilities.

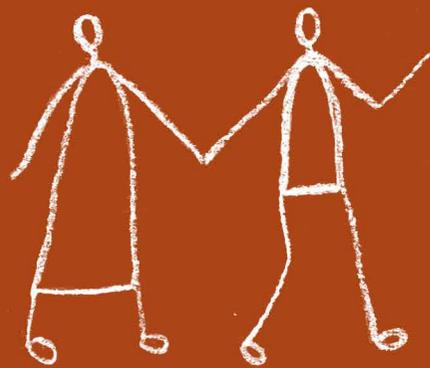
The business now operates in 1.2m hectares of land leased from the local community to benefit them, wildlife and carbon sequestration.



Watch '[On our terms](#)' - our film on responsible tourism in the Masai Mara.



# PEOPLE



## PEOPLE GOALS

### Our topline goal:

We want all of our business, and especially our nature and climate work, to be just and inclusive.

### The bottom line

Tourism can be a powerful force of good, both for travellers, and the places and people they visit.

The following chapter explores ways we're working to improve inclusivity in travel, and to ensure it benefits local communities. You can read more in our [community hub](#).





## LOCAL IMPACT

### BENSON OLE SOIT

Saruni Basecamp, Kenya

Benson Ole Soit is Head Chef at Eagle View and Wilderness Camp safari camps in the Mara Naboisho Conservancy, Kenya, which Responsible Travel customers visit when they choose a safari holiday with Saruni Basecamp.

*“Responsible tourism has increased employment opportunities within conservancies, including roles in camps and lodges and a beadwork market programme to empower women. We also now have access to clean water, healthcare services, and nature conservation training. As a result, almost all the young people in our community are now interested in ecotourism.*

*Responsible tourism has also helped me follow my dream of becoming a chef by allowing me to create a special cookbook. The proceeds from this cookbook provides scholarships to young people in my community. Many families have also gained from these scholarships, and I will always remember this.”*

## PEOPLE COMMUNITIES

### Benefitting local people and nature

A central tenet of responsible tourism is local economic benefit: more money into local hands, rather than it leaking out.

We've been working for this for 20 years and each of our holidays is screened for it. Many of our partners are small, local-run businesses employing local staff, and we advise travellers – through our travel guides, films, media work and direct communications – on ways they can help keep their holiday money in local hands.

Meanwhile, responsible, nature-based tourism can help incentivise the conservation of vital habitats, and even fund new rewilding initiatives – generating well paid, stable jobs, while supporting and amplifying the voice of marginalised communities, and paving the way for successful community-run projects.

### Our travellers, in numbers...

Customer database:

142,000

In 2019 we received booking enquiries from customers in **184** countries.

### Sales and reach

Average monthly unique visitors to site:

260,000

Holiday sales:

£200,000,000  
(excluding flights)

(since 2001)

Customers:

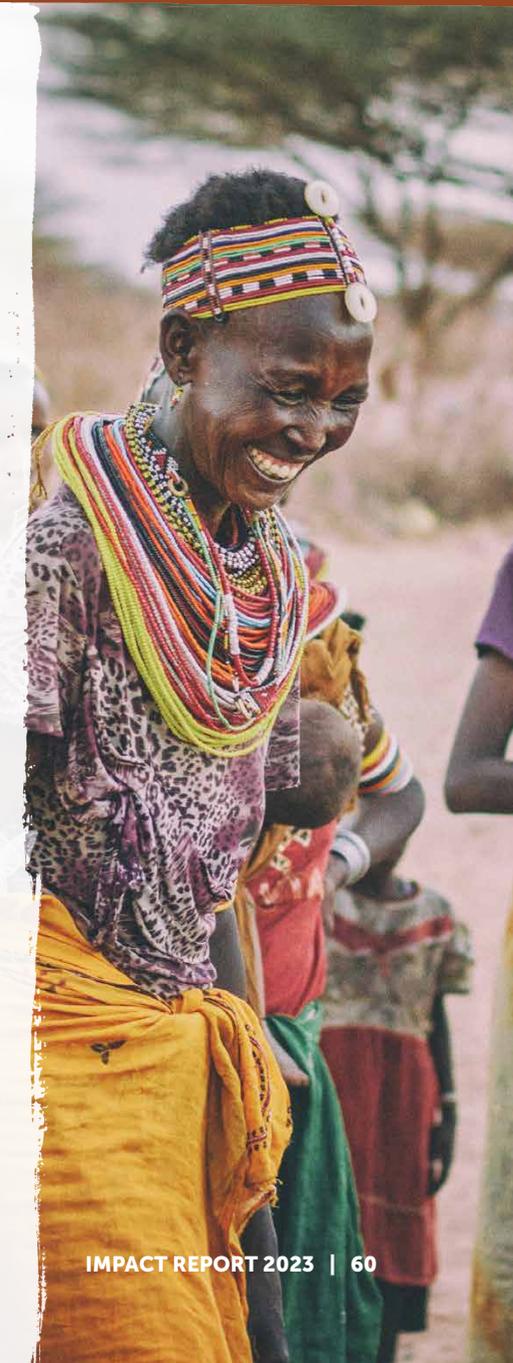
200,000

(since 2001)

Total site visitors:

56,000,000

(since 2006)



## ON THE GROUND

# ETERNAL LANDSCAPES

Member of Responsible Travel since 2012

Eternal Landscapes employs only female trip assistants. But, more than that, they recruit women in Mongolia who have been excluded from being able to participate in tourism and train them as guides. Since 2012, 140 holidays with Eternal Landscapes have been booked via Responsible Travel.

“In Mongolia, things are split pretty much evenly between men and women. But tour drivers are always men. So we thought: if we have all these male drivers, why don’t we provide the opportunity on the other side so that the guides are women?”

As Jessica Brooks from Eternal Landscapes explains, the entry into tourism can broaden the horizon for local women. “People had given me an opportunity when I started in tourism, so why don’t we do that as part of our business philosophy?”

They focus on long term community partnerships, building strong working relationships that support local families with tourism income. The experiences they provide for tourists are guided by what works best for the local people they work with.

So, for example, the itineraries for two-three day homestays with Kazakh eagle hunting families are left intentionally blank. Rather than force hosts to adhere to a set list of activities, guests are instead encouraged to go with the ebb and flow of daily life and be guided by what their hosts can offer each day in line with their traditional nomadic calendar. The result is a much more authentic Mongolian/ Kazakh experience for their guests and a more respectful, sustainable experience for the hosts.



PEOPLE

# TRIP FOR A TRIP

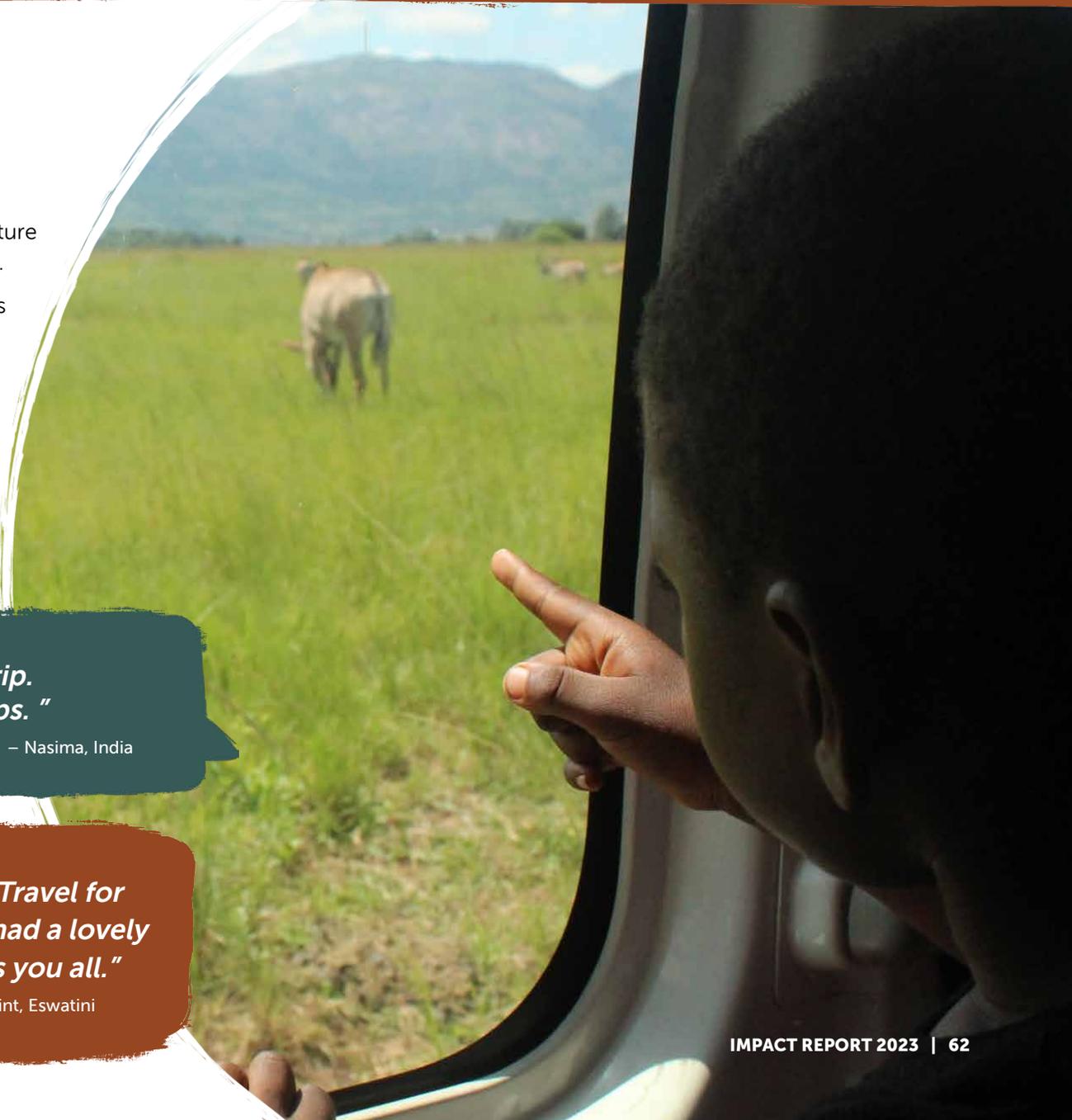
Travel is a joy and a privilege.

But for so many people, the opportunity to enjoy the nature, culture and other attractions right on their doorstep remains inaccessible.

Our **Trip for a Trip** initiative is a small way in which we try to address the inequalities of opportunity in travel experiences.

For every holiday booked with us, we offer to fund a day out for a child from a disadvantaged background on behalf of that customer.

Since we began the initiative, we've funded trips for more than **5,400** children - **more than 550 this year alone** - across **14 countries**, from the UK to Pakistan.



*"I've never seen the sea before this trip.  
It was fun to be able to go on such trips. "*

– Nasima, India

*"Thank you All Out Africa and Responsible Travel for such an amazing journey. It was fun and we had a lovely lunch. Thank you, thank you and God bless you all."*

– Nkhanini Neighbourhood Care Point, Eswatini



## LOCAL IMPACT

### HAJJA KHADEEJA AHMED

Dream Inn, Maldives

Hajja Khadeeja Ahmed is the owner of the Dream Inn hotel on Thulusdhoo Island in the Maldives, an accommodation used when Responsible Travel customers book holidays through our local partner, Secret Paradise.

*"Tourism in local communities here has benefitted many households. Local women have been employed in the guest houses, providing cooking and cleaning services, which means that they are now more empowered and financially independent. All the shops and cafes receive tourists as customers and more people have earned directly from that."*

*More tourists spending on local islands means that there is far less tourism leakage. The international money stays here, circulating directly in the local economy."*

## PEOPLE

# OVERTOURISM

In popular destinations around the world, overtourism – and with it a boom in short term holiday lets such as Airbnb – is pricing local people out of their homes and communities.

Responsible travel aims to create better places for locals to live in, and tourists to visit. Overtourism does the opposite – eroding quality of life for residents, and creating a negative experience for visitors.

To effect real change, governments and local authorities need to look at ways to control numbers – whether through taxes, banning large cruise ships or tighter regulation around holiday lets. Post-pandemic, some are beginning to do just this. Of course, it's vital that local residents are consulted on how tourism is developed and managed in their communities.

There are some ways that we – both travellers and operators – can also help mitigate the negative impacts of overtourism.



PEOPLE

# OVERTOURISM: WHAT CAN WE DO?

**There are things we don't do.**

Our exclusion policy – holidays we won't offer – includes large cruise ships, a major contributor to overtourism.

**And there are things we try to do.**

Much overtourism is extremely localised, and often seasonal. Many of our holidays, led by locals, explore lesser-visited areas, villages and mountains for a more authentic insight into daily life. Group trips are kept small in number with an emphasis on local benefits – eating in local-run restaurants, opting for homestays or local-run B&Bs.

**Education and system change.**

Our [overtourism resource centre](#) explores issues around overtourism and how travellers, governments and residents can address it. Our 2018 documentary 'Crowded Out' has more than 110k views and has been shown at tourism, local government, film and academic events around the world. We've written on the issue for media, and our travel guides provide tips for sensitive and rewarding travel and how to avoid overtourism.



## ON THE GROUND SECRET PARADISE, MALDIVES

Member of Responsible Travel since 2014

Secret Paradise promotes local tourism in a country dominated by foreign-owned resorts. Tourism that benefits local communities and is in line with Maldivian lives and culture.

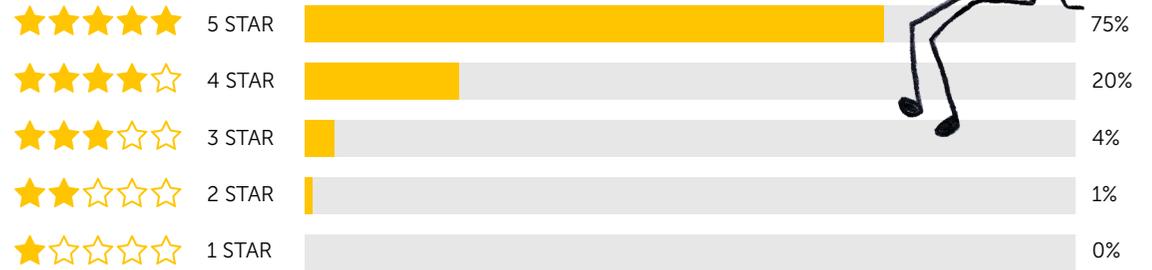
The all-Maldivian team (except Ruth, the founder), uses only locally-owned guest houses and locally-run activity providers for their tours. Their team of Maldivian guides direct guests to craftspeople selling traditional, Maldivian-made souvenirs and help them understand local culture on the islands. They also provide support to their local accommodation partners in business management and marketing.

Since becoming a member, 38 local Maldivian holidays with Secret Paradise have been booked via Responsible Travel.



PEOPLE  
**CUSTOMER REVIEWS**

We know that, when tourism benefits everyone, it also makes for more enjoyable holidays. But proving this is an important goal for us. Great reviews make us happy – but more than that, they help make the case for positive change to the rest of the industry.



Of over 12,000 reviews:

75 percent are ★★★★★ 95 percent are ★★★★★☆ or ★★★★★★

Our reviews can only be written by people who have been on our holidays, and are published in full on the relevant trip page.



*"The warmth of reception was beautiful, in the home stays and also serendipitously – the tea shared as we were invited in to shelter in someone's house in a downpour."*

**Ross Carne**

VIETNAM NORTHERN HIGHLANDS TOUR



*"I painted in olive groves, on the sea coast, in front of ancient churches... Our hosts were wonderful and like family. One of the best trips of my life."*

**Amy Welch**

WALKING AND PAINTING HOLIDAY IN CRETE



*"We were a blessed group and had the most wonderful game viewing you can imagine, due in no small part to the skill and instinct of our guides. We cannot praise them highly enough."*

**Louise Siraj**

BOTSWANA CAMPING SAFARI



## LOCAL IMPACT

### SAID ID AHMAD

Kasbah du Toubkal, Morocco

Said id Ahmad is the Advance Reservations Manager at Kasbah du Toubkal, a Berber community ecolodge in the Atlas Mountains, offering some of our most popular holidays in Morocco.

*"In my 13 years of working at Kasbah du Toubkal, I've witnessed first hand the transformative power of responsible tourism. Partnering with organizations like Responsible Travel has not only bolstered our local economy but has also led to profound cultural exchanges.*

*This partnership has empowered us to showcase and cherish our unique Berber heritage, offering a window into our traditions for visitors from around the globe. Moreover, the consistent growth and opportunities provided by such tourism have been pivotal in uplifting our community, bringing sustainable progress and understanding in its wake."*

PEOPLE

# ACCESSIBLE TRAVEL

We want brilliant adventures to be accessible to all travellers, whatever their needs.

Collaborating with our accessible travel partners like Planet Abled and disability-focused organizations has shown us the importance of providing clear information to enhance inclusivity.

So far, we have 99 holidays fully screened and labelled for accessible travel, alongside an [accessible travel holiday guide](#).

There is still a lot to be done by the tourism industry, read our [manifesto](#) for more information.

**An example of our accessibility labelling on our holiday pages can be seen below:**

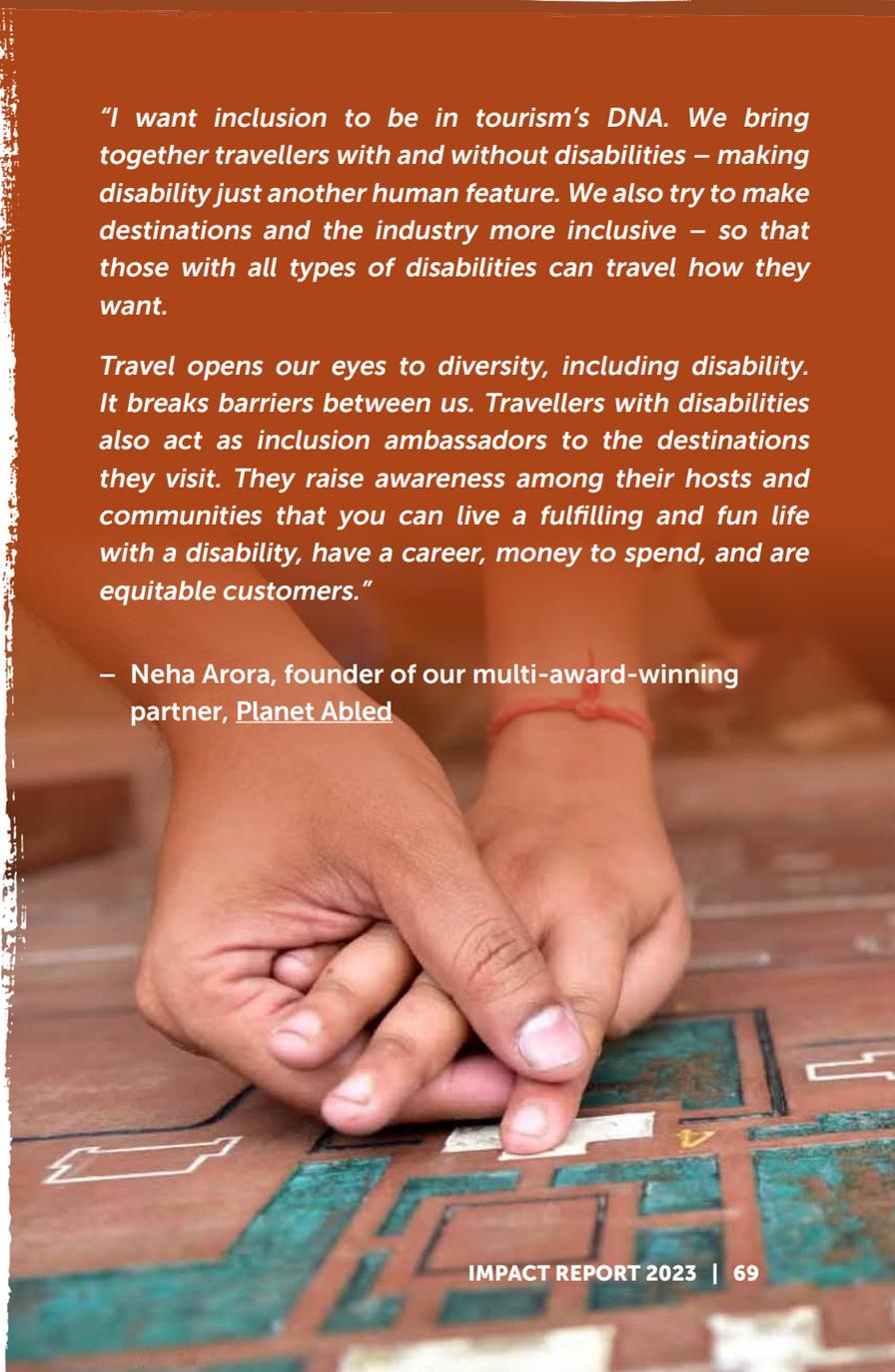
ACCESSIBLE TOURISM OVERVIEW	Whatever your accessibility requirements we can customise your itinerary so that y...	▼
LIMITED MOBILITY:	We have two fully accessible bathrooms and six suits with walk in showers. There i...	▼
WHEELCHAIR:	Activities and the hotel are both wheelchair accessible. The hotel has two wheelchai...	▼
BLIND OR LIMITED VISION:	We are more than happy to cater for people who are blind or have limited vision. In...	▼
DEAF OR LIMITED HEARING:	Travellers who are deaf or of limited hearing are very welcome and we will make ev...	▼
COGNITIVE CONDITIONS:	The hotel and the surrounding area are quiet and relaxed. Autistic children have fou...	▼
FREE FROM FOOD:	Special dierty requirements are absolutely no problem. We are used to allergies, in...	▼
LGBTQI+:	Everyone is welcome. We have guests from all over the world, from all ages, all gend...	▼

Image: © Neha Arora, Planet Abled

*"I want inclusion to be in tourism's DNA. We bring together travellers with and without disabilities – making disability just another human feature. We also try to make destinations and the industry more inclusive – so that those with all types of disabilities can travel how they want.*

*Travel opens our eyes to diversity, including disability. It breaks barriers between us. Travellers with disabilities also act as inclusion ambassadors to the destinations they visit. They raise awareness among their hosts and communities that you can live a fulfilling and fun life with a disability, have a career, money to spend, and are equitable customers."*

– Neha Arora, founder of our multi-award-winning partner, [Planet Abled](#)



## ON THE GROUND

# MAS PELEGRI, SPAIN

Member of Responsible Travel since 2012

This country house turned boutique sports hotel in Catalonia prides itself on its accessibility. Not only are two of its ground-floor suites are wheelchair accessible – as are all the communal spaces at the hotel - but it also recognises that disabilities are more than issues of mobility.

Door code pads throughout the hotel include braille, local activity providers (including horse riding and kayaking) are well-equipped and experienced with catering for guests with all kinds of disability, and quiet spaces around the hotel suit the needs of guests with cognitive disabilities.

“We took horse riding lessons,” says our traveller Tony Mangan. “I am a wheelchair user, but the instructor/owner got me on the horse and was very encouraging and helpful teaching me beginners’ dressage. He really cares for his horses. We also went rowing in a nearby lake. It’s a great outdoors/activity area... We ate out most evenings, and the fact that there are few tourists gives an authentic feel of that part of the country.”

Since 2012, 287 holidays have been booked at Mas Pelegri via Responsible Travel.



## PEOPLE LGBTQI+

A lack of simple, up-to-date information can be a significant challenge for LGBTQI+ travellers. In many countries, laws are complex, attitudes vary widely, and both are fluid.

We've written a dedicated [travel guide](#) to help inform and advise our travellers about LGBTQI+ issues around the world, which we work to keep as up-to-date as possible. We also include signposting to the [Human Dignity Trust](#), which provides specific, up-to-date information on countries that criminalise LGBTQI+ people.



LGBTQI+ guide



Least gay friendly holiday destinations



LGBTQI+ holidays in Bhutan



LGBTQI+ holidays in Costa Rica



LGBTQI+ holidays in Cuba



LGBTQI+ holidays in India



LGBTQI+ holidays in Jamaica



LGBTQI+ holidays in Japan



LGBTQI+ Malaysia holiday advice



LGBTQI+ Morocco holiday advice



LGBTQI+ Russia holiday advice



LGBTQI+ holidays in South Africa



LGBTQI+ holidays in Uganda



LGBTQI+ Vietnam holiday advice

PEOPLE

# MINDING OUR LANGUAGE

## Marketing and greenwash

There are a few reasons we called our business ‘responsible’ rather than ‘sustainable.’ Among them is that, while we can endeavour to lessen the impacts of holidays – to make them ‘more’ sustainable – they can’t be truly sustainable when they involve flying.

It’s easy to get swept along with common terms like this, we have at times. But language does matter. Terms like ‘carbon neutral’ and ‘offsetting’ in particular suggest that holidays are impact-free. That we can hop on a plane, pay a small fee and our emissions simply vanish.

This damages progress on carbon reduction efforts and deceives with the idea that change – across behaviour, industries and governments – is unnecessary.

We all need to stand against that greenwash.

New terms come along thick and fast, and thinking evolves. Ours has - for example, just as no holiday with a flight is carbon neutral, we will not claim that we as a business are nature positive – even while we work towards a more nature positive world.

Becoming ‘nature positive’ should be our aim, but it can’t realistically be our goal and mustn’t become a marketing claim.

We can work hard to contribute to a nature positive world. Just as we can try to maximise the environmental benefits of tourism and minimize its negative impacts – rather than claim to be ‘environmentally friendly’.

This year, we audited our communications with these things in mind. And we’ll continue minding our language moving forwards.





## LOCAL IMPACT

### ODNOO

#### Trip Assistant, Mongolia

Odonmicheg (known as Odnoo) is a local guide with Eternal Landscapes, which runs some of our most popular Mongolia holidays.

*"My life has grown since I started to work with Eternal Landscapes. I'm an English teacher but I always work with tourists in the summer months and my English skills and that of my students are developing year by year. After some difficult years as a single mother, I am now financially independent and feel confident about myself."*



# LOOKING FORWARD: OUR FUTURE VISION

## A NOTE FROM OUR CEO

Thank you for reading our Impact Report, a document of Responsible Travel's story so far. The creation of it was a fascinating and challenging process, involving close scrutiny of our aims and successes so far. It was particularly rewarding to gather so many great Responsible Travel stories together in one place and to see how far we've come – the actual impact of our work – since our journey began in 2001.

We'll always be a business in progress, with a constant drive to keep learning and improving. We've detailed in the report some of the many ways in which the tourism industry, individual businesses and travellers can unleash travel's vast potential for good, and over the next year we'll review our goals with the aim of publishing a 2024-25 update.

To achieve results of the scale discussed in this report will take time and collaboration – sharing ideas that move us all forwards. That's the heart of the responsible travel movement, and something that I look forward to continuing to support through our wonderful global partnership base, and the vast supply chain it represents.

We'll continue lobbying for system change in aviation, and advocating for the need to fly less until the sector can be decarbonised.

At the heart of everything are great holidays. So if you're a Responsible Travel customer, thank you, hopefully this report has shone a light on the wonderful work your holiday has contributed to, and well done for getting this far!

We are proud of Responsible Travel and can't wait to further push the boundaries of what we can achieve.

*Justin Francis*

Justin



Some of the 108 inner city London primary school children who visited The Quadrangle in Shoreham, Kent, UK over four days of countryside learning through our Trip for a Trip programme. For some, their first time out of the city.

## A NOTE OF THANKS

We're grateful to the whole Responsible Travel community – a movement built on decades of commitment to creating a more responsible and just industry.

The passion, activism and dedication of our staff – present and past – continues to inspire us. As does the incredible conservation and community work of our partners.



Responsible Travel Volunteering day 2022



Justin presenting at our Open House event, 2022

Professor Harold Goodwin set the academic framework for the business and co-founded it with Justin Francis. Richard Skinner and Tim Williamson have been directors of the business for twenty and ten years respectively and led its development. Dilys Maltby and Peter Tyson, our non-executive directors have helped steer the development of our purpose and values.

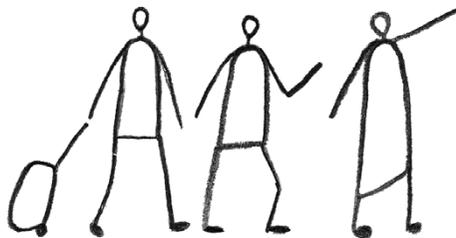
In the early days of our company many NGOs, including Tourism Concern, The International Ecotourism Society, Tearfund and later The Travel Foundation; academics including Megan Epler Wood, Xavier Font, and leading thinkers and travel writers including Richard Hammond, Cathy Mack, Jonathan Tourtellot, Jeremy Smith, Holly Tuppen, Vicky Smith and others made significant and lasting contributions to the responsible travel movement. Thank you, all.

And of course, thanks to our travellers. Without you, none of it would be possible.

We look forward to seeing you out on the road...



**WE LOOK FORWARD  
TO SEEING YOU  
OUT ON THE ROAD**



**AAA RESPONSIBLE  
TRAVEL**

Pioneering responsible travel since 2001

[www.responsibletravel.com](http://www.responsibletravel.com)