ENVIRONMENT ISSUES: Responsible Tourism

We all travel to different places - this could be locally from home to school or work, or further away on holiday. As a visitor or 'tourist' in another region or country, you have the potential to support its local economy, learn more about another culture and perhaps even pick up a new language. But tourism is not always seen as positive, and with increasing concerns about the environment due to global warming, travel to far away holiday destinations could become a thing of the past. Below are some of the key benefits and criticisms of tourism.

Benefits
- Tourism helps the economic well-being of local citizens by bringing customers to them.
- It sustains local cultures and customs by giving them the opportunity to pass on knowledge.
- It raises awareness of issues to be addressed in the area (e.g. ice caps melting in the Arctic, deforestation of rainforest).

Criticisms
- Tourism involves travel, which adds to our carbon footprint with transport pollution.
- Some overseas destinations (especially with warmer climates) tend to cater towards their tourists rather than showcasing their own culture (e.g. serving international food rather than local specialties).
- Tourists can also harm natural environments by not respecting local areas or policies.

Being a responsible tourist

The idea of 'responsible tourism' is for people visiting other places to respect the local people, their cultures and the environment. It should also encourage economic benefit to the local people as a result of tourism. Sometimes referred to as 'eco-tourism' or 'sustainable tourism', it encourages all parts of the industry to take responsibility for the impact of their actions; not only tourists themselves, but also businesses, tour operators and governments.

Responsible tourists leave the local environment the way they encounter it (e.g. taking their litter away with them or not disturbing the natural habitat of animals). Being a responsible tourist can also mean getting to know more about the local culture, learning a few words of the language and respecting local customs (some of which may differ from customs and rituals in the UK).

As a responsible tourist, you should also be aware of your carbon footprint; holiday destinations don't always require air travel! Consider more environmentally friendly transport alternatives, such as trains or buses. You could also explore other parts of your own country you have not yet visited, to learn more about your own culture, history and customs.

Did you know?

Responsible tourism is becoming a global trend and is popular in destinations such as South Africa, UK, USA, Gambia, India, Sri Lanka and many more.

Sustainable Living