



# World Heritage Alliance for Sustainable Tourism

## *Associate Partner Commitment Framework*

### **Mission**

To promote and preserve World Heritage sites through sustainable tourism.

### **Objective**

The World Heritage Alliance for Sustainable Tourism is an industry-led initiative that works to support World Heritage conservation, promote sustainable tourism, and seek local economic development for communities in and around UNESCO World Heritage sites. By adopting the WHA principles, partners create direct and immediate impacts that promote the conservation of natural and cultural resources, encourage social responsibility, ensure business is conducted in a way that benefits nearby communities, and greatly enrich travelers' experiences.

Success of the World Heritage Alliance is based on effective and meaningful engagement of the travel industry with governments, non-governmental organizations, associations and membership-based organizations, academia, industry service providers, and individuals to achieve these goals. Associate partners of the World Heritage Alliance play a vital role in supporting the WHA and industry members to reach their goals of promoting and preserving World Heritage sites.

### **World Heritage Alliance Principles<sup>1</sup>**

The World Heritage Alliance for Sustainable Tourism (WHA) has adopted the below principles<sup>2</sup> to guide efforts that foster sustainable tourism in and around World Heritage sites. By implementing these principles, Alliance members and associate partners recognize their significant role and capacity to enhance a destination while minimizing negative impacts, promoting social responsibility, ensuring satisfaction to visitors of World Heritage sites.

All World Heritage Alliance members and associate partners should comply with the below principles. Associate partners can be instrumental in working with the tourism industry to reach their commitments.

### **Destination Impact**

#### **Integrity of Place**

Businesses and organizations should ensure that natural habitats, heritage sites, aesthetic appeal, and local culture – most especially World Heritage sites – are sustained. Keep volumes of tourists within maximum acceptable limits and seek business models that can operate profitably within those limits, so as to ensure the protection of built heritage, ecosystems, biodiversity, and endangered species within World Heritage sites and surrounding landscapes. Present and interpret the authenticity of these places and cultural experiences to enhance the appreciation and understanding of the natural and cultural heritage of the destination.

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<sup>1</sup> The WHA principles are subject to occasional revision as best practices emerge for both sustainable tourism and World Heritage conservation.

<sup>2</sup> These guidelines are based on the geotourism principles established and promoted by National Geographic, with pertinent references to the World Tourism Organization's Global Code of Ethics for Tourism and the International Council on Monuments and Sites' Principles of the Cultural Tourism Charter.

Businesses and organizations should enhance the geographical character of the destination by developing and improving property, destination, and community in ways that support and reflect the region's aesthetic, social, and cultural dimensions; natural and cultural landscapes; and biodiversity characteristics, so as to encourage markets differentiation and cultural pride. Preference should be given to using local materials and working with native communities and should take account the character of place and vernacular traditions.

Activities in World Heritage sites should be planned in such a way as to protect the cultural heritage of the destination by allowing traditional cultural products, crafts, and folklore to survive and flourish, rather than causing them to degenerate and become standardized.

### **Market Selectivity**

Encourage responsible growth in tourism market segments most likely to appreciate, respect, and disseminate information about the distinctive assets of the locale and its surrounding World Heritage sites. This includes partnering with businesses that are sensitive to environmental, cultural, and social needs or supporting businesses to adopt these principles

### **Market Diversity**

Associate partner programs should encourage a full range of appropriate food and other tourism-related products and services of the sustainable tourism market and so maximize economic resiliency over both the short and long term. Associate partners may support businesses should seek to reduce the pressure of tourism activity on the environment and enhance its beneficial impact on the tourism industry and the local economy by offering promotions and specials in the low seasons and taking advantage of the potential diversity of nearby World Heritage sites and its surroundings through broader tourism offerings.

### **Conservation of Resources**

Stakeholders in tourism development should safeguard the natural environment with a view to achieving sound, continuous and sustainable economic growth geared to satisfying equitably the needs and aspirations of present and future generations. Associate partners are encouraged to practice, and where appropriate work with businesses to adopt, policies on energy efficiency, water management, solid waste, water treatment, and air quality in their management plans. Associate partners can help businesses advertise these measures in a way that it educates travelers on conscientious behavior while traveling.

### **Evaluation**

In order to cultivate best practices in environmental and cultural sustainability, businesses should establish a system that allows them to identify and monitor environmental, social, and internal business impacts generated by company operations. Associate partners should encourage, and where appropriate assist, businesses in implementing baseline criteria that will enable recording of current practices and measurement of improvement. This monitoring should be reinforced by an evaluation process to be conducted on a regular basis by an independent party that can deliver, with the greatest transparency and objectivity, information on future programs and goals to enhance existing and future commitments. The best evaluation programs actively engage staff in the process.

### **Social Responsibility**

Recognize that the ethical values common to humanity, with an attitude of tolerance and respect for the diversity of religious, philosophical, and moral beliefs, are both the foundation and the consequence of responsible tourism. Stakeholders in tourism development should observe the social and cultural traditions and practices of all peoples, including those minorities and indigenous peoples and to recognize their worth. Tourism development and practices should be conducted in harmony with the attributes and tradition of the host religions and countries and in respect for their laws, practices, and customs.

## **Tourist Experience**

### **Tourist Enthusiasm**

Ensure that satisfied, excited World Heritage visitors bring new vacation stories home and send friends off to experience the same thing, thus providing continuing demand for the destination.

### **Interactive Interpretation**

Engage both visitors and hosts in learning about nearby World Heritage sites and its surrounding communities. Encourage residents to show off the natural and cultural heritage of their communities, so that tourists gain a richer experience and residents develop pride in their locales.

### **Sustainable Tourism Market**

Work to promote sustainable tourism as a traveling philosophy. Educate visitors about the benefits of sustainable tourism and how they can contribute to the conservation of natural resources, cultural preservation, and local economic development through their travel decisions. Encourage businesses to offer products, services, and activities that responsible tourists would appreciate and recommend to other responsible travelers.

## **Community Advantage**

Base tourism on community resources to the greatest extent possible by working with local small businesses and civic groups to build partnerships to promote and provide a distinctive, honest visitor experience, market their locales effectively, emphasize economic and social benefits, and address poverty alleviation, with clear communication of the destination stewardship policies required to maintain those benefits.

Local populations should be associated with tourism activities and share equitably in the economic, social, and cultural benefits they generate, and particularly in the creation of direct and indirect jobs resulting from them. Tourism businesses should encourage the training and employment of guides and site interpreters from the host community to enhance the skills of local people in the presentation and interpretation of their cultural values. Associate partners and businesses should also help local small businesses develop approaches to tourism that build on the area's nature, history, and culture, including food and drink, artisanry, performance arts, etc.

The fundamental rights of salaried and self-employed workers in the tourism industry and related activities should be guaranteed under the supervision of the national and local administrations, both of their states of origin and of the host countries, with particular care given to the specific constraints linked to the seasonality of their activity, the global dimension of their industry, and the flexibility often required of them by the nature of their work.

## Associate Partner Commitments

Associate partners of the World Heritage Alliance are governments, non-governmental organizations, service businesses or media that are committed to protecting and promoting World Heritage sites through sustainable tourism by adhering to and promoting the World Heritage Alliance Principles.

WHA associate partners are asked to work to achieve the following commitments:

### *Adopt the World Heritage Alliance Principles*

By implementing the principles outlined above, Alliance associate partners recognize their significant role and capacity to work with the travel industry to enhance the destination while minimizing negative impacts, promoting social responsibility, ensuring tourist satisfaction, and conducting business in such a way that benefits nearby communities through their own programs or supporting the travel industry.

Associate partners are asked to adhere to and support the travel industry in committing to the World Heritage Alliance Principles.

### *Engage stakeholders in support of World Heritage*

WHA associate partners play an important role in reaching out to the major destination stakeholders and helping to shape attitudes on the value of World Heritage and the importance of responsible tourism. WHA associate partners are asked to inform and educate various stakeholder audiences - including travelers, members and partners - on the value of World Heritage and the importance of responsible tourism. This can be done through:

- Promoting unique World Heritage related content and information to stakeholders, whether online, in marketing materials, or other collateral (magazines, etc.);
- Direct stakeholder engagement with local communities and conservation activities in and around World Heritage sites, such as through volunteering;
- Supporting community-based sustainable tourism products – from local handicrafts to tour operators – which will give stakeholders the ability to directly contribute to the sustainable development of communities in and around World Heritage sites; or
- Raising funds: Using different fundraising platforms, associate partners can provide their audiences with a vehicle to further support the WH sites.

To facilitate communication with travelers that reflects our common commitment, the WHA created Friends of World Heritage (FOWH), a grassroots initiative and website ([www.friendsofworldheritage.org](http://www.friendsofworldheritage.org)). As a platform to raise awareness about World Heritage, including opportunities for travelers to help preserve World Heritage sites. FOWH provides information about World Heritage, disseminates responsible travel tips, engages travelers in interactive communication and raises funds for site preservation and support of local communities. The funds go directly to the UN Foundation and are invested in small grants to World Heritage projects in developing countries. A donation also provides tax exemption to donors.

### *Support community development in and around World Heritage sites*

As associate partners of the World Heritage Alliance, organizations have the ability to develop programs or work in collaboration with the travel industry, agencies of the United Nations, and other partners to develop and contribute resources to local economic development, education, or environmental/cultural conservation projects in and around World Heritage sites. By working with local actors, Alliance partners will help build local capacity to provide those services that are required to enhance sustainable travel and site conservation, while promoting local development of the community.

In-kind, technical and financial resources can all be devoted to specific community development projects or for unrestricted use by the WHA.

### Engage organization employees

Employees of associate partners are a tremendous professional and technical asset to the Alliance since they can bring added skills and expertise to foster and develop sustainable tourism and World Heritage conservation. Employees also provide a valuable audience to convey the importance of World Heritage and community-based tourism development for WHA leadership.

The WHA can provide guidance on creating a volunteer program to allow employees to donate time and talent to support World Heritage site conservation and local economic development. For example, these employees could work side-by-side with local community-based initiatives to identify needs and provide expertise to address that community's most pressing issues.

Partners may enroll their staff in the WHA training course, either online or in person, to better inform them about the key issues related to World Heritage and sustainable tourism, and to identify strategies for discussing these issues with others.

### Be a voice for sustainable tourism and local economic development

Many World Heritage sites are at risk of over visitation, unsustainable exploitation, and lack of adequate policies and control by the government.

Organizations can help the long term preservation of World Heritage sites by being active participants in the dialogue on sustainable tourism and World Heritage conservation. World Heritage Alliance partners are encouraged to participate at both at the international level by working with World Heritage Alliance industry members and international bodies, including UN agencies, as well as at a local or national level when specific site-based or policy-based challenges arise.

## Membership Benefits

World Heritage Alliance membership yields numerous philanthropic and strategic benefits for associate partners, including:

- Enhanced education about World Heritage and sustainable tourism for stakeholder audiences;
- Participation in the long-term preservation of some of the most remarkable and important travel destinations for future generations of travelers to enjoy;
- Differentiation of the partner from its peers through its visible and demonstrated commitment to World Heritage, sustainable tourism, and local community development;
- Affiliation with, and access to, a network of renowned and reputable partners, including Expedia, Inc., the UN Foundation, the United Nations and a growing list of WHA industry members and associate partners ([www.worldheritagealliance.org/about/our-members](http://www.worldheritagealliance.org/about/our-members));
- Branding and marketing opportunities that differentiate the organization from its partners.

Along with the above benefits, members will receive:

- Access to live and online staff training programs on World Heritage and responsible tourism education;
- Access to World Heritage and responsible tourism communication materials (brochures, etc.) for customers and travelers;
- Access to information on World Heritage-related issues via partner emails and websites;
- Public recognition through listing on the World Heritage Alliance website, the Expedia.com World Heritage pages, events, and other outreach opportunities;
- Web links to/from partner to WHA websites;
- Use of the WHA logo for related activities, publications, signage and outreach (with prior consent of WHA Founding Partners).