



World Heritage Alliance for Sustainable Tourism *Industry Member Commitment Framework*

Mission

To promote and preserve World Heritage sites through sustainable tourism.

Objective of Membership

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, members create direct and immediate impacts by conserving natural and cultural resources, promoting social responsibility, conducting business in a way that benefits nearby communities, and greatly enriching 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.

World Heritage Alliance Principles¹

The World Heritage Alliance for Sustainable Tourism (WHA) has adopted the below principles² to guide travel industry members in their efforts to foster sustainable tourism in and around World Heritage sites. By implementing these principles, Alliance members recognize their significant role and capacity to enhance the destination while minimizing negative impacts, promoting social responsibility, ensuring satisfaction to visitors of World Heritage sites, and conducting business in such a way that benefits nearby communities.

All World Heritage Alliance members should comply with the below principles. This framework aims to guide in this implementation and WHA members will have access to a series of tools and experts on best practices in sustainable tourism development. WHA members also agree to commit to yearly monitoring and evaluation of their implementation of these principles.³

Destination Impact

Integrity of Place

Businesses 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

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

² 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.

³ The WHA Performance Evaluation Framework with included criteria can be provided upon request to prospective or current WHA members.

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.

Businesses 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.

Tourism activities promoted by businesses 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, and giving preference to community based enterprises.

Market Diversity

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. 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. Businesses should include policies on energy efficiency, water management, solid waste, water treatment, and air quality in their management plans. Businesses can 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. Generating baseline criteria will enable to record current practices and measure 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. 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 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. 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.

Industry Member Commitments

Adopt the World Heritage Alliance Principles

By implementing the principles outlined above, Alliance members recognize their significant role and capacity 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.

Engage customers in World Heritage

WHA members play an important role in shaping the traveler's attitude toward World Heritage preservation. WHA members are asked to educate their travelers 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 customers, whether online, in marketing materials, or other collateral (magazines, etc.);
- Creating exclusive sustainable packages for World Heritage destinations;
- Facilitating customer engagement with local communities and conservation activities in and around World Heritage sites, such as through volunteering;
- Providing customers with community-based sustainable tourism products – from local handicrafts to tour operators – that will give customers the ability to directly interact with local cultures and communities; and
- Raising funds from travelers: Through various means such as auctions, point programs, and others hotels and airlines can provide travelers with a vehicle to further support 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). 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, providing tax exemption to donors, and they are invested in small grants to World Heritage projects in developing countries.

Support community development around World Heritage sites

As members of the WHA, companies have the ability to develop programs or work with conservation partners and others to contribute resources to local economic development, education, or environmental/cultural conservation projects in and around World Heritage sites. Alliance partners will have an opportunity to help build local capacity to provide services to enhance travel experience to sites while also promoting local community development.

In-kind, technical and financial resources can be devoted to specific community development projects or for unrestricted use by the WHA. Projects developed and funded by WHA members may also be eligible for matching funds from the UN Foundation.

Enhance sustainability practices

Members are encouraged to look into their own impacts on World Heritage sites and surrounding areas. The WHA has created the Performance Evaluation Framework that has at its core a set of criteria aligned with the new international standard for Sustainable Tourism Criteria. Members receive guidance and support on strategies to improve impacts through a yearly self-assessment and planning exercise.

The WHA Performance Evaluation Framework is not a certification system, but full compliance with the criteria qualify the member company for recognition as operating within the international standards of the Sustainable Tourism Criteria.

Members are welcome to use their existing work with outside certifications and best practices schemes to inform and include in the WHA Performance Evaluation Framework.

Engage company employees

Employees of WHA members are a tremendous professional and technical asset to the initiative, 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.

Members are asked to 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 their guests.

Be a voice for sustainable tourism and local economic development

Many of the World Heritage sites that draw visitors and stimulate profits for the industry are at risk of over visitation, unsustainable exploitation, and lack of adequate policies and control by the government.

Companies can help the long term preservation of World Heritage sites by being active participants in the dialogue on sustainable travel. The travel industry is severely under-represented at many forums where tourism and development policies are set, depriving policymakers of one of the most powerful voices of change. WHA members are encouraged to participate both at the international level by working with 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 travel industry partners, including:

- Enhancing the travel experience of its customers through unique travel opportunities to World Heritage destinations, and through education about World Heritage and sustainable tourism;
- Participation in the long-term preservation of the some of the most remarkable and important travel destinations for future generations of travelers to enjoy;
- Differentiation of the member company 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);
- 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;
- Access to network of WHA partners and suppliers;
- Use of the WHA logo for related activities, publications, signage and outreach (with prior consent of WHA Founding Partners);
- Access to matching grants program of the United Nations Foundation to support communities in and around World Heritage sites;
- Custom tools for supporting the accomplishment of the WHA principles.