

Ecotourism is defined by the The International Ecotourism Society (TIES) as "responsible travel to natural areas that conserves the environment and improves the well-being of local people."

Their principles of *uniting conservation, communities, and sustainable travel* include:

- Minimize impact.
- Build environmental and cultural awareness and respect.
- Provide positive experiences for both visitors and hosts.
- Provide direct financial benefits for conservation.
- Provide financial benefits and empowerment for local people.
- Raise sensitivity to host countries' political, environmental, and social climate.

Eco-friendly tours' main motivation should be the observation and appreciation of both the local ecology and culture, and should contain "educational and interpretation features." To truly benefit the host community, it should be organized for small groups by local businesses, it should minimize impact on both the natural and cultural environment, and it should generate income for the host community (i.e., through local accommodations, restaurants/food, music, art & shopping) and increase awareness of the need for conserving its natural and cultural assets.

From (almost) A to Z, tours can be found around the world that satisfy several criteria that speak to both the enjoyment of the traveler and the well being of the host community. Here are just a few examples in countries that you may be visiting in 2012:

Recoleta (Buenos Aires) Afternoon Walking Tour

Of the many neighborhoods in Buenos Aires, only a few show the grandeur and sophistication of Argentina's capital city. Find out which areas are of international interest on a Recoleta Afternoon Walking Tour. The influences from the Spanish, British, Italian and French become tangible as you walk the culturally glowing streets of these neighborhoods. Sample the unique food and music that have blended so well over the years of multiple immigrations.

Prague Walking Tour Following in Mozart's Footsteps

For a different view of Prague, take a guided tour of locations connected with the famous Austrian composer Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart. Mozart visited Prague on four occasions in the 1780s and 1790s, and his works were rapturously received. This tour offers you the unique opportunity to visit locations where Mozart stayed in Prague. It also reveals why Prague's citizens welcomed Mozart so warmly, and why his music continues to win Czech hearts today.

Treetop Canopy Walk in Whistler (Canada)

Keep your feet on the ground as you walk through the air at Whistler's only treetop canopy walk! On this eco-adventure, you'll walk on wooden bridges suspended up to 200 feet (61 meters)

above the ground for a unique bird's-eye perspective of the forest! Get an understanding of the local ecosystem and the varied species of plants, trees, birds and other flora and fauna in the Pacific Cascade mountain range.

Bali Full-Day Downhill Eco Cycling Tour with Lunch

The fragrant scent of flowers in the cool morning is ideal to begin your 'downhill cycling tour.' While cycling, you'll see local craftsmen at work, a bubbling stream or landscape lush with fertile vegetation. Bali is a tropical island still rich with distinctive customs and culture for you to explore so take time to stop to chat with locals about their favorite foods, spices & drink. The friendly smiling faces of the Balinese await your arrival.

The Historic Northside of Dublin Walking Tour

Discover places most Dublin visitors rarely see, from the east end of the historic Temple Bar district, the 17th and 18th century docklands area and now Dublin's Left Bank and cultural quarter. Walk over the famous Ha'penny Bridge and along the boardwalk to enjoy the River Liffey. Over 1,000 years ago, Norse longboats captured the early Christian village of Dublin. They went on to build what was to become one of the most important trading towns in the Viking world. Now you can enjoy the laughter & sense of pride of this seafaring town going back generations.

Ho Chi Minh Cycle and Walking Small Group Tour

Explore the vibrant streets of Ho Chi Minh City on foot and cycle on with a small group. Travel like a local as you discover Ho Chi Minh City's many sights. Get a taste of colonial days at the majestic Notre Dame Cathedral, see the beautiful central post office and get an insight into the horror of modern war at the War Remnants museum. Meet the locals and get a sense of their warm hospitality while experiencing their innate shyness at the same time.

As an eco- traveler it is your responsibility to prevent or minimize any negative impacts on the environment, local community and economy of the destination you are visiting. Remember the principles of ecotourism on your trip & enjoy a different slant on your destination!

Connie Valimont is an independent travel consultant and contributor. She has nearly twenty years' experience in the travel industry. She can be reached at 843.368.1104 or conniev@travelsociety.com

[Read more Travel Tapas](#)