

# The Half-Truth About Adventure Travel



Celebrations at a Monastery Festival in Tibet

The oft-repeated advice when it comes to Adventure Travel is:

**Take nothing but photographs...  
leave nothing but footprints**

Whether the journey is to Kathmandu or Kitimat, Montreal or Machu Picchu, Truro or Tibet, *there is so much more you can get out of travel.*

It is a truism that in general, in life, you get 'out' what you put 'in'. The eco-sustainable-nature-tourism mantra about *taking nothing* and *leaving nothing* sounds so deliciously motherhoody, and as a primer for litterbugs, exotic souvenir seekers, and people who tend like to bring their inconsiderate attitude toward nature wherever they go, this is good, sound advice.

The other half of the truth that is missing relates to all the other things you can leave behind and take with you when you travel. The list of ideas—that follows—are ways to add value to your travel experience in a world that yearns for the cooperation and understanding of travellers in order to sustain it for future generations. As well, these ideas will enhance your own travel experiences and convert them from being 'just

a memory of an excursion', to being a truly meaningful partnership with people and the environment.

**Part of the ecotourism mantra cautions you to 'leave nothing behind'--but you can still...**

1) **Take a photo**—and when your local subject asks for a copy in the mail, actually do it! This may be the only photo they have of themselves.

2) **Enjoy a conversation**—share stories and ideas, thoughts, and laughs about mutual struggles with the language. Learn how people think in another country, and what is important to them. When asking a young porter on a trip to Nepal years ago, what his dream in life would be, he said, "To eat dahl bat (lentil beans and rice), everyday and to lead tours in the mountains." A headman in a village in northern Thailand related that his dream was to be able to cultivate all three fields every year, instead of having to leave one bare to regenerate the soil. Take an interest in the people you meet.

3) **Smile.** In the song *Wooden Ships*, Crosby, Stills, Nash and Young sang, "You smile at me and I will understand...cuz that is something everybody everywhere does in the same language". Remember this when you are

promoting your travel-ability. Your smile will inevitably be returned

4) **Leave a T-shirt** or postcard of your home town, province or country

5) **Give a toy** to a child. I give out finger puppets. A friend gives out Zorro masks—another, bubbles. Don't give toys with small pieces that can, if swallowed, cause a child to choke. Don't give out coins or candy as it encourages begging and contributes to dental problems. Treat a kid, like a kid and it's ok to be a kid yourself, no matter what your age or status in life.

6) **Exchange a song.** When in Mongolia, sometimes you are only allowed to enter a Yurt until after you have sung a song. Row, Row, Row Your Boat, sung in rounds, is a popular selection, as is Frère Jacques, the Inky-Dinky Spider, Do Wah Diddy and even O Canada!

7) **Be polite**—wait your turn—be patient—have realistic expectations—leave a good impression of your culture, of your country and of you.

8) **Find out** how you can benefit the local culture—adopt a foster child when you return home...plant a tree...contribute to an educational foundation.

9) **Leave a donation** when visiting cultural heritage sites: temples, artist studios, musicians. Help the locals to maintain the attraction that you have just enjoyed.

10) **Bargain in good faith.** The 50 cents you save may give you pride because you “beat down” the salesperson, but you may have also robbed that person of extra food or prevented his or her children from purchasing school books or a mandatory school uniform..



The local taxi service: Outside of Kuching, Borneo

The other part of the eco-montra is to "take nothing with you", but you can still take...

- 1) **Excitement**, enthusiasm and a sense of wonderment by visiting a new destination.
- 2) **Understanding** and tolerance of different traditions, customs and ways of thinking.
- 3) **Knowledge** of culture, history and local dress, plus festivals, music and food.
- 4) **Memorable** smiles and photographs

YOU were there to experience this one event in your own unique way.

8) **Another country.** For those country-counters out there, you know that every country has its own unique characteristics. It is not just another number... or another country on a particular continent. It is not a faceless destination but it is actually someone's home. Travel is a declaration against generalizing and stereotyping and should always be a celebration of the diversity of the planet.



The view from the Castle, Cesky Krumlov, The Czech Republic

- 5) The **flavour** of the country—smells and tastes, indigenous to that society
- 6) **A new friend.** All of a sudden the country is not a place-name somewhere on the other side of the globe—it is a friend you once visited. This is what makes the world 'smaller' and creates the vision of a global community
- 7) **A unique experience:** Ponder that when you see something, whether it is sunrise on a mountain top, or a butterfly in a jungle or forest, or a child's smile, or the profound thought that out of the 6 billion people on the earth—only

9) What you take with you is a feeling that even if it is your first-ever country visited, you have made a positive advance toward being a **global citizen.**

10) **What you take with you?** A sense that while our planet may be lonely in the context of being the only one that supports life (that we know of) in our galaxy, the planet is anything but, a sad, disconsolate place. *It is a thriving, boisterous cacophony of life—and it is there for you to fulfill your dreams of discovery.*