

Empowering travellers to become

AMBASSADORS FOR NATURE

A guide for the travel industry
Version 1.0

AMBASSADORS FOR NATURE

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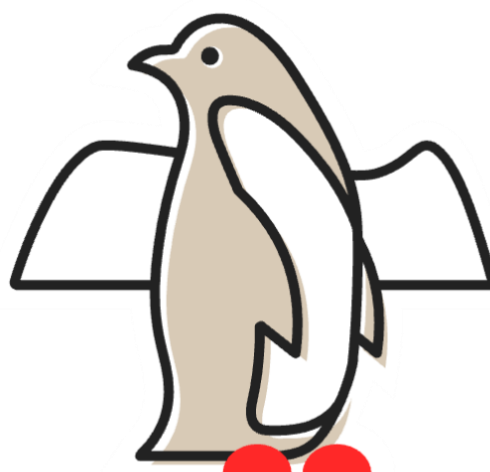
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**With support from University of Tasmania's (UTAS)
Antarctic Tourism Research Program¹.**

This guide explores the potential collective power of our customers as ambassadors for nature. It looks at how each stage of the travel journey can be used to build environmental awareness and lay the foundation for turning good intentions into meaningful action, driven by the wonder, learning and joy that travel uniquely provides.

It also aims to show travel companies how they can empower their customers to stand up for nature. In turn, this will enable industry to better protect the wildlife, ecosystems, and biodiversity that it depends on, and ensure they continue to thrive for generations to come.



¹ University of Tasmania - [Institute for Marine and Antarctic Studies](#)

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Introduction: The need to stand up for nature through travel

The world is facing an urgent climate and biodiversity crisis, but many people have lost or have become disconnected from a sense of stewardship for wild places².

As a global travel company, we recognise our responsibility to protect the natural environments and communities that make travel meaningful. Tourism contributes 9% of global emissions²³, and it's also one of the industries that is most vulnerable to climate change. Not only is the restoration of nature a climate action tool, but action to prevent and reverse deforestation, pollution, desertification, habitat destruction, soil erosion and biodiversity loss will only enhance places that our travellers visit and the communities that live in them.

Greater ambition is needed to tackle immense global challenges. We must reach, grow, and nurture more people to take collective action.

Travel has a role here. By connecting people more deeply with nature in places where they can see, feel and smell its benefits, travellers can learn about and develop empathy for the systems required to protect it. This empathy and reconnection can then lead to action.

Whether through trips to national parks, biosphere reserves, wild oceans or just connecting with backyard and urban nature in cities, the opportunities to create nature ambassadors among the millions who take holidays each year cannot be underestimated.

A note on the research

Many of the recommendations in this report come directly from discussions with guests on four of Intrepid's Antarctica expeditions in 2023 and 2024. With Intrepid's support, academic researchers from the University of Tasmania (UTAS), Australia, participated in and observed activities on offer and conducted a series of interviews with both guests and staff. They interviewed 121 guests, the majority of them twice, once at the start and once near the end of the trip, and 26 staff members. All but one of the quotes in this report are from those interviews.

Although the questions were originally tailored to guests on Antarctic experience trips, we believe that the insights gained serve as a valuable guide for a broad range of nature-based experiences worldwide, thereby extending the relevance and impact of the research.



² [U.S. Study Shows Widening Disconnect with Nature, and Potential Solutions - Yale E360](#); [Humans and nature are growing further apart | Popular Science](#)

³ [Drivers of global tourism carbon emissions | Nature Communications](#)

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Why should travel create ambassadors for nature?

Each stage of the traveller journey can create opportunities that not only tell a story about the importance of nature protection but also give customers opportunities to be inspired to create positive change.

Travellers increasingly want real experiences and greater connection from their trips

Experiential travel continues to be one of the fastest growing trends in the industry with people wanting greater connection, awe, simplicity and wellness out of their trips⁴. Intrepid has observed that sustainable, experience-rich travellers, especially millennials, also desire different, ultra-local and immersive travel experiences. These customers want to connect with people in a real way, understanding and getting inspired by different ways of life and places rather than just passing through them.

"I love to explore the world, to connect with like-minded people and get out of my comfort zone. Unlike my travels 10 years ago, I'm more aware now of the negative impacts of travel. My purchasing decisions are influenced by my values, and I want to know that the business I'm giving my money to cares about their people and environment. I seek adventures with local experiences, human connections that support local communities. As a traveller, I want to be a part of the solution, not the problem."

Intrepid customer, 2025

Travel can inspire deeper engagement with nature

While nature can be appreciated in everyday life, direct and active interactions with nature are needed to create the greatest changes in behaviours.

More than 80% of the value of travel & tourism goods and services are highly dependent on nature⁵ while outside of its economic value, nature's intrinsic benefits are well known for boosting mental health, binding communities and helping people to derive meaning from their lives⁶.

On holiday, where people are removed from their daily routines and open to new perspectives and to trying new things, travel companies can inspire greater individual environmental responsibility and even spark changes that lead customers to deeper and lasting commitments to protect nature within their wider communities.

Moving people to act requires social, emotional and environmental influences, not just education

Changing people's behaviours is hard. Moving people to act differently involves a range of factors beyond education, including social, emotional and environmental influences. For travel companies, this means that simply providing guest information is not enough. To inspire meaningful change, we must also consider and address opportunities across the entire travel journey – from the point of dreaming of a holiday to telling the stories once back home.

⁴ [Cover - Travel Provider Insights 2024, \(5\) Experience Economy 2025: Trends and Insights | LinkedIn](#)

⁵ Nature Positive Travel & Tourism, WTTC, 2022

⁶ [6 Ways Being in Nature Is Good for Your Health, According to an Environmental Neuroscientist | Center for Practical Wisdom | The University of Chicago](#)

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Questions for the reader

- How much of your business relies on nature?

Think of how many of your trips go to nature-rich places (parks, reserves etc.), and even outside of nature-rich places, the vistas and scenery guests see along the way. Or, consider how nature provides the resources your business and customers need so that the air is clean, food is available and water is plentiful.

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How travel companies can create ambassadors for nature

Multi-sensory nature engagement opportunities can be integrated into itineraries, activities and accommodations to better guide customers to become ambassadors. Collaboration with NGOs and local stakeholders will help ensure that the engagement is authentic and unique.

Considering nature in itinerary design

The ability to engage with nature must first start with the trip itinerary. The decisions on where the trip is going, what customers will be doing, where they will be staying and all the choices along the way, can support and fund the protection of nature and wildlife and the communities who have most to gain from its value.

In practice, this might look like:

- Small group sizes and limited visits to fragile ecosystems.
- A balance of time in nature or in smaller, rural, less touristed places as well as other destinations, taking particular care to avoid or mitigate areas where overtourism has created a negative experience for visitors, locals or the environment or where there is a risk of this occurring.
- Low-impact, non-fossil-fuel-dependant or noise-polluting activities that are led by local community leaders that allow immersion, deep understanding and respect for the culture, history or nature within a place.
- Opportunities for real engagement with local and Indigenous peoples in a way that acknowledges their history and supports community development, job creation and entrepreneurialism.
- Support for local NGOs or conservation groups who have knowledge and know how to ensure funds meet the greatest need in the places visited.

- Smaller-scale, locally and independently-owned accommodations that have a focus on sustainability including using renewable energy and prioritising waste management.
- Meals in independently-owned restaurants with food grown and sourced locally.

Supporting conservation organisations through travel

The Black Mambas are the world's first all-female anti-poaching unit. This dedicated team of (unarmed) women patrol 20,000 hectares within South Africa's Greater Kruger National Park, home to the largest population of rhinos in the world.

In 2023, Intrepid Travel started working with the Black Mambas through its non-profit, The Intrepid Foundation. In 2024, we became the first global tour operator to offer a unique opportunity for travellers to visit the Black Mambas at their HQ and join them on their patrol. On select departures, travellers stay overnight at the Black Mambas HQ, join the women on a special bushwalk through the park, spend time together by the campfire to hear the Mambas' stories and find out what they can then do to contribute to conservation in Southern Africa.

Today, this partnership not only supports critical conservation in the region, but the support for the Black Mambas and integration into Intrepid trips provides economic opportunities within the community, enables conservation classes for local schoolchildren and helps educate travellers about the importance of this work.

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Questions for the reader

- What points of active engagement with nature could you add across your trip itinerary?
- Where can you support the efforts of your suppliers?
- Where could you add an immersive First Nations or community-led activity to your itineraries?

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Pre-trip anticipation is powerful

Academic research shows not only that the emotions people experience while anticipating a trip or event are often more vivid and powerful than those felt in retrospect⁷, but that the planning phase alone can significantly boost happiness, even before a journey begins!

Travel companies can maximise these pre-trip emotions and excitement by providing details on specific local ecosystems, wildlife, cultures and conservation efforts in advance, priming customers' interests and questions for when they arrive.

University-designed pre-trip course

The University of Tasmania's Institute for Marine and Antarctic Studies (IMAS) has gone as far as to launch an online course⁸ with an Antarctic Expedition company exploring Antarctica from environmental, political and historical perspectives.

"People finishing the course will know about the environment, how it is governed, and how humans have inhabited it and impacted it. They will also learn how they can minimise their own impact and become part of the solution, not the problem,"

Professor Elizabeth Leane, UTAS.



⁷ [We'll Always Have Paris: The Hedonic Payoff from Experiential and Material Investments - ScienceDirect](#)

⁸ [HX and University of Tasmania launch world-first program to educate Antarctic passengers | University of Tasmania](#)

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Questions for the reader

- What are all the customer touchpoints between them booking and travelling with you? Are you striking a balance between practical and inspiring messaging?
- Are there things that you can do to help build anticipation or knowledge prior to a trip? What might you send customers to watch, read or listen to that might help prepare them for their experience (especially related to nature)?
- Can you build partnerships with educational institutions or NGOs to help share their knowledge?

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Immersive and enriching travel experiences

Enriching travel through nature requires more than just noticing nature. Activities that involve active sensory engagement result in a much higher level of nature connectedness. At Intrepid, tour leaders are encouraged to support immersive activities on their trips.

For example:

- **Facilitating moments of stillness and challenge** – when people are still and immersed in an environment that is devoid of external noises and voices, they are often able to experience a deeper sense of personal connection with a place, fostering a sense of respect, care, and responsibility for the environment.

A challenge, on the other hand, could “shake” visitors out of a sense they are just “on vacation” and give them a sense of purpose:

“It was freezing and uncomfortable and raining... I personally actually really loved that part, even though it's the most uncomfortable.... I thought that was some of the best reminders [of] where you are and what you're trying to preserve... to not have full control over everything in the human experience, but actually, to be subject to and enjoy everything that this part of the world has to offer ...”

*Intrepid customer,
interviewed by UTAS in Antarctica, 2024*

“I started out as someone who was going to enjoy his holiday [and] ended up becoming emotionally involved”.

*Intrepid customer,
interviewed by UTAS in Antarctica, 2024*

The kinds of activities that bring nature to people and make positive environmental actions as simple and enjoyable as possible can be facilitated by travel companies on most trips:

- **Opening up opportunities for direct and multi-sensory experiences** – Tour leaders can enhance walks in nature with prompts for guests to, for example, (and always safely and respectfully) feel or smell certain leaves or branches, taste edible roots, smell the aroma of wild herbs, listen out for specific animal sounds or stop to fully appreciate natural views.

“I've seen seals before, but ... the sights, the smells ... just the whole ambience had a different kind of an effect that I didn't expect. Penguin perfume was something I didn't expect. But I appreciate.”

*Intrepid customer,
interviewed by UTAS in Antarctica, 2024*

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- **Hands-on conservation activities** – picking up rubbish or watering tree saplings are examples of easy access points to environmental action and immediately create a sense of doing good.

Engaging customers in protecting nature

In Nepal, one day on each Intrepid trekking trip is designated as a "Purpose Day" where leaders as well as guests pick up trash from the trekking trail. The leaders give briefings to customers about this activity and the purpose behind it. This is a purely volunteer activity, and although the customers are not required to take part, almost all do.

In addition to picking up trash, in an initiative organised by our TIF partner, Sagarmatha Next, guests also transport pre-packaged 1 kg "carry me back" waste from Namche to Lukla in the Everest region. They trek about 16 km to reach Lukla, where they handover these bags.

Last year, guests and leaders were able to collect roughly 1,200 kgs of dry waste from the trekking trails including the "carry me back", and they have either been properly disposed of or handed over to the appropriate institutions.

- **Citizen science** – Citizen science provides ways for people to go beyond just being a tourist and empowers them to give back to nature and communities. It also helps show that individual behaviour does matter.

These activities vary widely and often involve collecting data to help NGOs and universities with greater understanding. At Intrepid, our customers have been involved in activities as varied as taking pictures of whale fins for WWF in the Southern Ocean, or in Nepal, supporting scientists to develop better understanding of how we can detect, predict and prevent Acute Mountain Sickness (AMS)⁹. Many types of citizen science activities can easily be brought into travel through collaborative partnerships.

Collaborating with Industry Partners

Working with the UK's Travel by B Corp collective, Intrepid Travel is in the process of building a compendium of citizen science activities that travel companies encourage their customers to take part in, regardless of where they are in the world.

⁹ [Detection, Prediction and Prevention of Acute Mountain Sickness – BMRES](#)

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Questions for the reader

- Where can you build immersive nature activities into your trips?
- Can you involve more of the five senses so customers can touch, feel, smell and taste new things, or take part in science?

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Qualities of leaders that support the creation of nature ambassadors

Customer knowledge and storytelling can be enhanced through tour leader and staff and crew training so guests hear, understand and then can go on to tell better stories themselves.

Talented tour leaders and guides are the storytellers who are key to fostering engagement and often employ different strategies to nurture guests' attachment to a place or to an environmental issue. These approaches help to give customers a greater platform from which to then advocate for nature's protection.

8 qualities of tour leaders that support the creation of nature ambassadors

1. **Lead by example** – Tour leaders and crew set the tone for responsible travel by modelling environmentally conscious behaviour.
2. **Personalise the experiences** – Skilled tour leaders build a sense of community and inspire curiosity by sharing their own passions and values through stories. In getting to know their guests and understanding what they are excited to see or learn, they can also adapt their approach for different cultures and backgrounds.
3. **Promote conservation awareness** – Tour leaders' own ecological literacy and communication on conservation can support customers in forming informed opinions and help visitors understand that experiencing pristine natural environments comes with a shared responsibility to protect them for the future.
4. **Encourage reflection in nature** – Moments of stillness in natural settings can reduce stress and enhance well-being. By inviting guests to pause, set aside distractions like phones and cameras, and fully immerse themselves, quiet moments can also create powerful, personal connections with nature.
5. **Highlight privilege and inspire gratitude** – By reminding guests of how rare and special it is to visit extraordinary natural places, especially protected areas, leaders can help cultivate a sense of gratitude.
6. **Foster community and inclusivity** – Great leaders create an inclusive atmosphere where guests feel welcome to share their backgrounds and perspectives. Encouraging conversation and connection, especially in diverse groups, can lead to a stronger collective experience and a shared sense of discovery.
7. **Manage expectations with empathy** – When challenges arise, such as changes in weather, wildlife visibility or physical difficulty, tour leaders play a key role in managing expectations. By communicating openly, empathising with guests' feelings, and offering thoughtful alternatives, they help maintain a positive experience for everyone.
8. **Support post-trip intentions and environmental commitments** – Leaders can encourage guests at the end of an experience to reflect on their experiences in nature and commit to a specific environmental action for when they return home. Studies show that when commitments are voluntary, written, and shared with others, they are more likely to lead to real change.

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"... like most guides down here ... our end goal ... is to get people excited about this area and [to] want to become an ambassador. So if they leave here, and all they're happy about is ticking that box ... I feel like I kind of failed."

*Intrepid leader,
interviewed by UTAS in Antarctica, 2024*

"I asked the guests to put their phones down [and] touch the water [to] connect with the place ... one of my goals as a guide is to plant a seed of conservation... that they are watching something that might change in the future."

*Intrepid leader,
interviewed by UTAS in Antarctica, 2024*

"[I emphasise] what a privilege it is to be able to travel to the bottom of the world on a warm, comfortable ship, get into your dry suit and a kayak and go and paddle with whales... it's a real privilege. And I think that sometimes people don't realise that privilege until it's illustrated to them."

*Intrepid leader,
interviewed by UTAS in Antarctica, 2024*



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Questions for the reader

- How are tour leaders encouraged to share their own stories?
- What can we learn from the very best leaders in terms of establishing connection, encouraging curiosity, supporting learning and truly inspiring new ideas and ways of thinking that may help your guests take initial action?

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Turning awe and inspiration into post trip action

Learning, measuring and reporting on post-trip engagement and behavioural change and then celebrating successes provides motivation for others to continue.

Turning the awe and inspiration that travellers experience from nature into positive action to protect requires conditions that maximise effectiveness.

These conditions of success include:

- **Recognising change is not for everyone** - Regardless of the quality of the trip and its leader, not all guests will be compelled to take action for nature and environmental protection. Creating trips with more consciousness about nature and more opportunity for customers to engage in it is still an essential step for business to help safeguard the future of the environment and of our industry.
- **Setting clear & achievable actions** – It's important to be clear on what customers are encouraged to do (or not do) once they return home; eat less meat, avoid plastic, buy locally grown fruits and vegetables where possible etc. (See Framework for Travellers, page 19).
- **Providing expert knowledge** – Post-trip communication can offer further information or access to trusted and evidence-backed resources that help customers tell better stories of their experiences and create positive ripple effects in communities.

- **Allowing time to process experiences** – It can often take time for guests to be able to fully process what they have learned on an awe-inspiring trip, especially if they return and get absorbed in the busy-ness of everyday life. Guests might welcome reminders or updates on specific wildlife or destination initiatives many months after they have returned.
- **Encouraging donations for organisations encountered on the trips** - At Intrepid, the Intrepid Foundation empowers our travellers to give back to the communities they visit. In 2024, 37% of all Intrepid Foundation donations went specifically to projects that either protect the environment or take a stand for wildlife. Guests often tell us that they want to support and follow the progress of projects they experience or learn about on trips.

"It's really doubled down how much I need to do to be an ambassador of our climate, and it's made me rethink kind of a lot of my actions. I order everything on Amazon, and there's just things like that. I can cut back on my consumption."

*Intrepid customer,
interviewed by UTAS in Antarctica, 2024*

"I like to think that I look[ed] after the environment at home before I came here, but now I think there are extra steps that I will take in terms of things like food wastage. I guess being a bit more responsible around certain things, especially when it comes to my eating habits...the impact I'm having with plastics and how that can end up ..."

*Intrepid customer,
interviewed by UTAS in Antarctica, 2024*

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Questions for the reader

- Do your trips end by encouraging your guests to reflect, appreciate and share reflections? Could they?
- How do you inspire your guests to stay connected to the passions and values they discovered during the trip and carry them forward into their daily lives?
- Are there ways that you continue to engage your customers beyond the end of the trip and help them to continue driving positive action in nature?

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Framework for travellers

1. Reflect & Reconnect

Goal: Turn travel experiences into personal motivation for environmental stewardship.

- Make a note of your impact: Reflect on how your trip affected the environment (e.g., flights, plastic use) and what you learned about nature.
- Share stories: Talk about environmental issues you saw with friends or on social media to raise awareness.
- Support local initiatives: Donate to or advocate for the communities and ecosystems you visited. See, for example, www.theintrepidfoundation.org

2. Reduce & Reuse

Goal: Cut down on waste and overconsumption at home.

- Minimise single-use items: Avoid plastic bags, bottles, and packaging. Invest in reusable alternatives.
- Compost food waste: Start a home composting system or use the one in your community (if it exists) to reduce landfill contributions.
- Buy less, choose well: Choose quality items with lower environmental impact, especially clothes and electronics.

3. Green Your Routine

Goal: Make daily life more eco-conscious.

- Switch to green energy: Use a renewable energy provider or, if possible, invest in solar panels for your own electricity generation.
- Cut energy use: Turn off unused electronics, insulate your home and use LED lighting.
- Reduce water waste: Set timers for running the tap or showering, make sure the dishwasher or washing machine is a full load. Can you plant drought-resistant plants at home, rather than those requiring lots of watering?

4. Consume Responsibly

Goal: Make conscious, nature-positive choices.

- Eat sustainably: Choose local and seasonal and eat plant-based meals more often.
- Support ethical brands: Buy from companies (like B Corps) that have high standards of environmental and social governance.
- Avoid harmful souvenirs: Don't buy products made from endangered species or unsustainable materials (have a look at [Intrepid's animal welfare guidelines](#) if you are unsure).

5. Take Local Action

Goal: Protect the environment in your own community.

- Join a conservation group: Volunteer with local clean-ups or reforestation efforts.
- Plant a pollinator garden: Create space for bees, butterflies, and birds – even a window box can bring nature to you.
- Educate and advocate: Encourage others to take environmental action and support pro-nature policies.

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Recommendations for Travel Companies

Travel has the unique potential to help people discover a connection to nature and foster a renewed sense of stewardship. To protect nature at the scale required, we must go beyond simple information campaigns, which rarely lead to lasting behaviour change. Instead, we need our businesses to create meaningful experiences that inspire action and drive wider change.

While there are still many actions that Intrepid can adopt in our trips, we hope this guide offers ideas and guiding questions to help other travel businesses weave nature more deeply into the travel experience. As an industry that depends so heavily on healthy ecosystems, we all have the opportunity and responsibility to make travel a catalyst for conservation.



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Appendix

Resources:

- Intrepid's Ethical Marketing Guidelines: [Ethical Marketing Guidelines | Intrepid Travel UK](#)
- Intrepid's Animal Welfare Guidelines: [IntrepidAnimalWelfarePolicy_2025.pdf](#)

Further Reading:

- Project Drawdown – Climate Solutions 101 ([Climate Solutions 101 | Project Drawdown®](#))
- Nature Positive Tourism: [Nature Positive – Travel & Tourism in Action | World Tourism Organization](#)
- Nature Positive Travel & Tourism: Travelling in harmony with nature: [Nature Positive Travel & Tourism: Travelling in Harmony with Nature | WTTC Research Hub](#)



