

Principles of Sustainable Tourism

Sustainable tourism is “tourism which meets the needs of present visitors and host regions while protecting and enhancing opportunity for the future” (World Tourism Organisation).

The concept of sustainability is at the heart of the SA Tourism Plan 2003–2008. South Australia’s sustainable tourism strategy is guided by twelve clear principles, based on the Triple Bottom Line (i.e. on economic, social and environmental factors).

Sustainable tourism is characterised by:

1. Being different

The key to successful and sustainable tourism is achieving a *clear sense of difference* from other competing destinations. This can be achieved by basing development and marketing on the *attributes and strengths* of the destination.

2. Achieving authenticity

The attractions most likely to be successful, and those with the greatest enduring appeal, are those which are *genuinely* relevant to the history, industry, culture lifestyle and natural resources of the district.

3. Reflecting community values

This means representing the past, present and future aspirations of the local community in a *living and dynamic way* rather than embalming the past. This involves listening to and responding to the community.

4. Understanding and targeting the market

Understanding the broad market *trends* and the *needs* of specific segments is critical. This involves the development of specialised products based on the inherent attributes of an area.

5. Enhancing the experience

Peoples motivation for travel is to seek something they cannot experience at home. The ‘*bundling*’ of *attributes* enhances the appeal of a place, and the likelihood of visitation.

6. Adding value

Adding value to existing attributes achieves a *richer tourism experience* and helps to diversify the local economy. This can include accommodation, sales outlets, conference facilities and dining in association with established industries.

7. Respecting natural and cultural values

Sustainable tourism development derives its form and appeal from these qualities, and adds to the special nature of the destination and in particular respects *ecological processes*.

8. Achieving conservation outcomes

A mutually beneficial alliance can be achieved between tourism and conservation. That is, through *understanding and enjoyment* comes *greater appreciation and empathy, advocacy and protection* for the resource.

9. Having good ‘content’ (‘telling the story’)

Tourism development can interpret (present and explain) natural, social, historic and ecological features. ‘*Telling the story*’ provides a more rewarding experience and helps conserve the destination.

10. Achieving excellence and innovation in design

Good design respects the resource, achieves conservation outcomes, reflects community values, and is instrumental in telling the story. It is not just about form and function but also about invoking an *emotional response* from the visitor.

11. Providing mutual benefits to visitors and hosts

Tourism is not encouraged for its own sake. It is an economic and community development tool and must take into account the *benefits* that both the host community and the visitor seek.

12. Building local capacity

Good tourism businesses do not stand isolated from the communities they operate in. They get involved with the community and collaborate with other businesses and stakeholders to build a *positive and self-sufficient capacity*.

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