



RESPONSIBLE TOURISM, A NEW ERA OF TRAVEL

The term 'tourism' conjures up cozy images of palm trees and sunny beaches. But beneath the hype, tourism is big business. The "leisure industry" is the world's largest, accounting for 10.4 percent of world Gross Domestic Product (GDP) and over 11 percent of both consumption spending and capital investment. The industry provides approximately 4 percent of world employment and \$3 trillion in trade per year.¹ Phenomenal figures for an industry that produces few physical products of its own!

Defying recession, the travel industry has enjoyed startling growth: an average of 12 percent annually since 1950. That year's 25 million international tourist arrivals exploded to 694 million in 2003, an average annual growth rate of 7%. The World Tourism Organization estimates that by the year 2020, there will be 1.6 billion arrivals, with tourism receipts surpassing \$2 trillion.²

Although international tourism is dominated by travelers from the industrialized countries (80 percent of world travel originates in the Americas and Europe) tourism has become a global enterprise with every country sending forth and receiving tourists. Wealthier citizens of the newly industrialized countries have begun criss-crossing the globe. Tourism accounts for 50% of traffic movements globally. Since the tourism industry is growing 23 percent faster than the world economy, by sheer weight of numbers it deserves a closer look.³

HISTORY OF TOURISM

Tourism's roots originated during the period of the Roman Empire. In this era, the privileged elite constructed resorts on the Bay of Naples and sent their sons on refinement tours to Athens, Rhodes and Alexandria. This tradition of cultural tourism reemerged as the Grand Tour of the sixteenth centuries. Visits to the cultural and historical meccas of Italy and later Franco were viewed as necessary capstones to an Englishman's classical education and a prelude to a diplomatic career. The 19th century saw the emergence of nature-based tourism and Switzerland's first tourist hotels. The character of tourism changed greatly at this time when rising affluence opened the Continent to larger numbers of English tourists. The Mediterranean's low cost, libertine atmosphere and slower pace drew tourists seeking escape from industrial and puritanical England. Increasing numbers fostered tourist "ghettos" and cultural insensitivity, as well as local resentment. In terms similar to those used to lampoon modern

tourists, a Frenchman observed, "In a hundred there are not two that seek to instruct themselves. To take tea at the inns: to speak ill of all other nations and to boast of their own; that is what the crowd of English call travelling."⁴

Modern tourism and its related problems were emerging. As described in *The Golden Hordes* by Louis Turner and John Ash, travel became "a flight from civilization and progress in search of a world of pleasure."⁵ A catalyst was soon provided by an English preacher named Thomas Cook. In 1841, he came up with the idea of chartering a train to provide discount fares for his followers to attend a distant temperance meeting. The venture was so popular, Cook followed with other prearranged "excursions" throughout Europe, the Near East and by 1890, India. The mass tourist was born.

No longer the preserve of aristocrats and eccentrics, tourism became an industry that appealed to the growing middle class. Cook's tourists traveled in groups demanding uniformity in prices and accommodations. This new breed of tourists soon drew critics. One wrote, "they never separate and you see them forty in number pouring along a street with their director circling them like a sheepdog."⁶

THE LURE OF TOURISM

Despite these critics, tourism has long enjoyed a position of popular respect. President John F. Kennedy expressed these sentiments: "Travel has become one of the great forces for peace and understanding in our time. As people move throughout the world and learn to know each other's customs and to appreciate the qualities of individuals of each nation, we are building a level of international understanding which can sharply improve the atmosphere for world peace." Using tourism to promote peace continues to progress since President Kennedy's term in office. In November 2000, over 450 world leaders of the travel and tourism industry ratified the "Amman Declaration" at the first Global Summit of Peace Through Tourism. This document recognizes "travel and tourism as a global peace industry."⁷ Simply put, travel can be used as a tool to build understanding across cultures and physical boundaries. This connection helps humanize the "other" and creates human empathy and connection.

To developing economies, tourism is enticing for a few tangible inputs; a promise of foreign exchange, job creation, a higher standard of living and an infrastructure that can encourage industrial development. Faced with falling agricultural prices and limited



industrial potentials, the governments of many developing countries find the implementation of tourism an offer too good to refuse. Many third world governments are now facing massive repayments of foreign debt and are desperate to earn hard currency. Tourism further compounds their situations due to the industry's allure of slowing urbanization by increasing rural incomes and promoting cultural pride and survival through foreign interest and spending.

Tourism is the world's largest export earner, ahead of automotive products, food, petroleum and chemicals. According to the World Tourism Organization, 698 million people traveled internationally in 2000, spending more than US\$478 billion.⁸

Despite tourism's booming economic status, critics point to the superficial nature of tourism's economic benefits and its damage to local environments and cultures, particularly in developing countries. Since tourism accounts for such a large percentage of hard currency earnings in so many poor countries, a critical reexamination of tourism is timely and necessary.

NOT ALL IT'S CRACKED UP TO BE

While often thought to be an economic windfall, tourism is really just another part of a global economy that systematically transfers wealth from the toiling majority to the property owning minority. The airlines, tour organizers, hotel developers and managers serving most tourists who travel to the southern hemisphere are owned by multinational corporations that reap most of the financial benefits. The majority of all-inclusive travel packages result in approximately 80% of travelers' expenditures going to the airlines, hotels and other companies and not to the local businesses. On average, 40%-50% of gross tourism earnings in developing countries are lost to import-related "leakage" back to the industrialized world.⁹ Leakage in actuality is capital flight. Profits leave the country and only small amounts stay in the local or national economy. Leakage is estimated at 80 percent of all tourist receipts in the Caribbean, 70% in Thailand and 40% in India.

When multinational corporations enter a market, local enterprises suffer from the unequal competition. Governments often entice this foreign investment through tax holidays and other incentives, creating the paradoxical situation of poor countries' citizens subsidizing holidays for wealthy foreigners. While members of the local elite, in cooperation with the foreign investors,

IN-COUNTRY GUIDELINES FOR RESPONSIBLE TRAVEL

- Know and be sensitive to local customs regarding religion, dress, photography, tipping and public affection.
- Sometimes "local handicraft" souvenirs are manufactured elsewhere. Support local artisans and make sure you are buying the real thing. Never acquire sacred or historic items, or products from endangered species (which U.S. Customs may confiscate on arrival anyway).
- Broaden your experience, meet people and support the local economy by choosing indigenous hotels, food and transport. Patronize the most environmentally responsible hotels available.
- Hospitality is central to many cultures. Don't abuse it.
- Get beyond brochure stereotypes by inquiring about working and living conditions, wages, prices, education and politics. You will be rewarded with knowledge and personal contact.
- Make no promises (e.g., raising money, sending photographs) which you cannot keep.
- Present a realistic picture of the social, environmental and economic realities in the United States. Counter the impression that all Americans are independently wealthy travelers.
- Show respect by attempting to converse in the native language.
- Realize that other cultures have different concepts of time. Be patient. Relish the adventure and unpredictability of travel.
- Follow local practice in haggling. Paying extra for a craft souvenir may benefit the craftsman but paying inflated prices for essential goods and services raises the cost to local consumers also.
- Slow down and spend time getting to know a place rather than trying to see everything while understanding nothing.



receive the primary financial benefits of tourism, the local working class pays its economic, environmental and social costs.

Excessive dependence on tourism promotes a non-diversified economy. This can weaken the economy and result in vulnerability to factors not under local control (such as airfares, currency exchange rates, political instability and weather). Tourism-dependent societies risk neglecting economically and culturally important activities such as agricultural improvement. The intricate and expansive Banaue rice terraces in the Philippines are deteriorating, as the community members responsible for their maintenance increasingly occupy themselves by selling to foreign visitors. School attendance in tourist areas often drops during peak seasons for the same reason.

The local employment generated by tourism is typically non-managerial, menial, low-paid and seasonal. Tourism tends to create work which “breeds subservience and obsequiousness.” It creates a nation of servants, waiters and waitresses, croupiers and cleaners, bellhops and tour guides, and yes, of pimps and prostitutes.”¹⁰

Moreover, any associated rise in income is partially offset by localized inflation due to increased tourist demand for food and other essential goods and services. Many of the indigenous inhabitants of Thailand’s resort islands have left their home communities due to unaffordable land and food prices. The introduction of “traditional handicraft” souvenirs that are actually massproduced elsewhere, can undermine cottage industries, further reducing local income.

Tourism is a land-hungry industry, requiring prime locations for hotels and golf courses. Developers are rarely deterred by the fact that this land usually provides homes and sustenance for long-established societies. Local inhabitants lose their land in exchange for compensation that is often minimal. Native Hawaiians accuse resorts of destroying burial grounds and sacred sites. In West Java, Indonesia, farmers were imprisoned and their homes demolished following peaceful protests against their illegal eviction by a tourism developer. In Langkawi, Malaysia, families have been forcibly removed to make way for hotels and an airport runway.

Tourism has resulted in fisherpeople the world over being denied access to beaches. In the resort areas on the north coast of Jamaica, police prevent residents from mingling with tourists on once public beaches. When resorts are foreign-owned, as is the case of 90 percent of coastal developments in Belize, local access and control may be lost forever and economic dependency is assured.

ENVIRONMENTAL DAMAGE

The environment frequently suffers as much as the displaced residents. The resources required and waste generated in meeting tourist expectations frequently exceed local capacity to deal with these problems. Hotel construction is particularly damaging. Coastal developments in Belize clear and fill coastal mangrove swamps with soil mined from the inland savanna, destroying two distinctive ecosystems in the process. Fiji has spent millions of dollars removing mango trees to make way for resort development.

In Bali, Indonesia and in the Maldives blocks of coral are the preferred hotel building material due to their property of naturally fusing together. Reef demolition has destroyed complex marine ecosystems and resulted in beach erosion, compromising two prime tourist-attracting assets. Reefs around the world have also been damaged by discharges of untreated resort sewage, tour boat anchors and clumsy or greedy snorkelers.

Golf courses, a frequent adjunct to tourism development, carry their own brand of trouble. In Thailand where courses are being built at a rate of one every ten days, each course uses an amount of water equivalent to 50,000 villagers. Japanese golf courses use eight times the pesticides of nearby rice fields, and the Japanese Environmental Agency estimates the annual worldwide forest destruction due to golf course construction at 12,350 acres. The Global Anti-Golf Movement (GAG’M), a coalition of international anti-golf lobby groups, is calling for a worldwide moratorium on golf course construction.

Environmental degradation is not limited to foreign beach resorts. In the summer, as many as 6,000 people per day enter the Grand Canyon’s South Rim. The Grand Canyon has become the second most visited national park in the system. More than 5 million people visit each year, stressing a system built to accommodate less than 500,000.

CULTURE CRASH

The environmental destruction caused by tourism is often surpassed by its cultural damage. The tourist economy is an externally imposed, Western-designed system that forces indigenous societies to accept alien work roles and life-styles. Tourism’s particular contribution to global cultural homogenization is its extension into areas untouched by other industries. Once an area is targeted by tourism, subsistence agrarian communities are impacted by such modern appurtenances as phones, high-rise buildings, electricity and foreign visitors—all in a very compressed time frame. Changes which occur over decades elsewhere must be accommodated in a few years.



While tourism's defenders contend that increased foreign interest and economic support can save threatened cultural traditions, its critics say it leads to cultural prostitution. Referred to as "hula marketing," results in the commercialization of local festivals, ceremonies and crafts. These culturally invasive acts strip tradition of spiritual significance, scrutinizes local people as "products," and further patronizes stereotypes.

Once sacred Balinese temple dances are now staged for tourist cameras in hotel lobbies. Long ceremonies are shortened. Modest costumes are made more revealing. Rather than promoting native artistry, the lure of tourist dollars encourages craftspeople to produce homogenized knock-offs of bestselling designs. Women of the Padung tribe in northern Thailand have revived the defunct practice of neck stretching to attract tourists willing to pay to shoot photos. Some tribes in Africa and the Amazon exchange their jeans and sneakers for traditional dress only when tourists are in town to purchase crafts. What is being sold is not cultural understanding but an artificial image based on the travelers' preconceived notions.

Mutual cooperation, a necessity in fishing and agrarian communities, is replaced by competition as local production becomes integrated with the global economy and money gains importance. In the Ladakh region of northern India, farmers must now compensate neighbors' help during harvest to offset lost tourist income.¹¹ As in the industrialized world, now time is money.

Tourists, with no visible responsibilities and seemingly huge cash reserves, provide as glamorous and unrealistic a vision of the West as the American movies and advertisements beamed around the world. In India, the amount an average tourist spends on souvenirs in one day could feed and clothe an entire family for one year. Such a vision has seductive appeal particularly to the young. The negative misconception can lead to a rejection of traditional norms and values and adoption of tourist dress and behavior. Offensive behavior, such as narcotics, nudity and promiscuity, can result in friction between generations and between tourists and locals.

A SOCIALLY RESPONSIBLE ALTERNATIVE

"If tourism is to be salvaged, a thorough rethinking and restructuring of the whole industry is called for, taking as its basic premise not profit-making and crass materialism, but the fundamental spiritual and human development of peoples everywhere."
-Christian Conference of Asia¹²

SEX TOURISM DEVASTATES THE YOUNG AND POOR

Thousands of U.S. men—our husbands, fathers, sons and brothers—are contributing to one of the worst injustices stemming from poverty: child prostitution. Approximately 25% of sex tourists are Americans.

Across the Third World, especially in Asian countries such as Thailand and the Philippines, sex tourism is a large and growing market. Over 2 million children are enslaved in the child sex industry.

Driven by poverty and often deceived by unscrupulous pimps, young people are either deceived or forced into a form of bondage that often results in premature death.

In Bangkok's red-light district there is a saying "At ten you are a woman. At twenty you are an old woman. And at thirty, you are dead."

Child prostitutes are advertised as a "fresher product" or as virgins to allay the fears of clients that they might contract HIV/AIDS. This is a myth: the risk of infection is not reduced by the youth of the prostitute. In fact, children's bodies are much more delicate than adults' and they tend to bleed more easily. Thus, the risk of acquiring HIV/AIDS is high.

Few Americans are aware that it is illegal for a U.S. citizen to travel overseas and engage in sexual acts with minors. In 1994, the Violent Crime Control and Law Enforcement Act (Crime Bill) was signed into U.S. law. Anyone found guilty under this law can be imprisoned up to 10 years, fined, or both.

There are unprincipled travel agents who market male sex-fantasy tours, profiting from the desperate economic situation of the poor. How would we feel if it were our children who were being marketed like this?

To get involved in fighting this evil contact: End Childhood Prostitution in Asian Tourism (ECPAT), 475 Riverside Dr., Rm. 621, New York, NY 10115 (212)870-2427.



Beginning in the 1970s, regional church groups, mainly in Asia and the Pacific, began pushing for reform in the tourism industry. As eyewitnesses to the many negative effects of commercial tourism, the church groups and their allies in trade unions and human rights organizations developed a mode to transform the industry. They proposed an alternative form of tourism that would sensitize tourists to local conditions rather than wrap them in a cocoon of luxury at the expense of local people.

The International Union of Foodworkers (IUF) has been active in reshaping tourism to fit this new definition. As IUF General Secretary Dan Gallin told us: "Of course vacations should be fun, but they can be both fun and educational. They can be an opportunity for workers to learn about different societies and to create ties with other workers."¹³

Alternative tourism in the United States experienced rapid growth in the 1980's. The increase resulted from groups traveling to Central America as part of their opposition to the Reagan administration's aggression against left movements that were gaining strength. As church workers and solidarity activists developed empathy for the plight of Central Americans, they developed relationships between locals and Americans. The collaboration included material aid projects, sister schools, sister communities, volunteer work brigades and human rights delegations. As more people visited the region, the power of alternative tourism was brought home to a growing solidarity movement in the United States that now included thousands of activists who were motivated by emotional ties as well as an intellectual analysis.

These changes helped produce an entire movement of socially responsible tour operators, such as Global Exchange, whose focus is on tourism aimed at educating tour participants and building direct links between concerned citizens here and in other countries.

ECOTOURISM TAKES OFF

A key area of reform in the tourism industry has been a growing sensitivity to environmental issues. Companies are finding that there is a growing market among people concerned about the preservation of wild places and the long-term health of the planet. Tourism associations and operators around the world have issued environmental codes of conduct and guidelines for sustainable development.

Ecotourism became the fastest growing sector of the international tourism industry in the 1990s. While tourism grew by 4% annually, ecotourism/nature tourism grew 10-30% each year.

Today, ecotourism/nature tourism is growing three times faster than the tourism industry.¹⁴ Ecotourism gained further global recognition in 2002, when the United Nations declared that as the International Year of Ecotourism. Quite ironically, despite the unprecedented growth of ecotourism, it is still a relatively misconstrued and understood term.

The most widely used and accepted definition is that of The International Ecotourism Society: "Responsible travel to natural areas that conserves the environment and improves the well being of the local people." Ecotourism differentiates from tourism, nature and adventure tourism by one major component. While the other forms of tourism describe only *what* the tourist does, ecotourism also includes *the impact* of the activity on the environment and local community. When applied correctly, ecotourism has proven to successfully address and improve conservation, cultural and financial issues worldwide.

Who are these travelers? A survey by ARA Consulting Group profiles the average American client of ecotour operators as college educated, age 35-54 and likely to be traveling in a couple. According to the World Tourism Organization, the top geographic destinations of U.S. ecotourists are Central America (30.9%), Western Europe (16.7%) and South America (12.4%).¹⁵ World Wildlife Fund studies indicate that nature-oriented tourists are more valuable to destinations than the beach resort crowd as they typically stay longer, spend more, and have more modest demands in accommodation

Ecotourism's phenomenal expansion is attributable to several factors. First, it is part of the larger growth in environmental consciousness and outdoor recreation. Second, it is a result of increasing dissatisfaction among travelers with the polluted, overbuilt, overcrowded and homogeneous massmarket destinations. In response to customer wishes, many hotels have added green suites with recycled tissue, filtered water, and environmentally friendly soaps. While many reforms may be motivated by genuine concern, most are responses to changing customer demands. Increasingly, consumers are seeking unique experiences, personal development and education in their travels. Also, intensive marketing and product development by the tourism industry has helped move its interpretation of "ecotourism" into the mainstream.

Since the 1980s, ecotourism has been the subject of innumerable articles, international conferences and academic papers. It has attracted the attention of mainstream funders such as the World Bank and the U.S. Agency for International Development (AID).



Glossy brochures now proudly advertise ecotours, ecoventures, ecosafaris and ecocruises.

After an initially warm reception hailing its many benefits, ecotourism has begun to attract criticism. Conservationists worry that the growth of nature and adventure travel threaten natural areas. Critical articles with titles such as “Ecotour, Hold the Eco” and “Can Ecotourism Spoil What it Seeks to Save?” began appearing in the U.S. press as early as 1990. Some critics have renamed it “egotourism,” for allowing travelers to behave much as before yet with a clean conscience by placing the blame on “other” mass tourists. Although some problems may be traced to unscrupulous operators, others illustrate the real difficulties faced in implementing ecotourism principles and avoiding the same blunders made by mass tourism

CONTRIBUTING TO THE ECONOMY

Ecotourism can help in several ways. User fees provide funds which the thousands of national parks and wilderness preserves in developing countries need to perform maintenance, control poachers and resist encroachment from neighboring communities.

Ecotourist dollars can induce governments and landowners to conserve pristine areas which otherwise have no dollar value until mined of timber, oil or minerals. Ecotourism has the additional advantage of bringing money from urban centers to rural areas, unlike the corporate-dominated extraction industries that take huge profits made in rural areas back to the cities and often entirely out of the country. Ecotourism dollars help fund the environmental education of Honduran schoolchildren. They are routinely taken from the capital city of Tegucigalpa, to visit La Tigra cloud forest visitor center to learn about rainforest ecosystems.

One of the world’s most endangered great apes is the mountain gorilla of the Great Lakes Region in Africa. This species is not only vital ecologically, but economically and politically. Their habitat lies on the borders of southwestern Uganda, eastern Democratic Republic of Congo and northwestern Rwanda. Despite 10 years of political civil war in this region, all sides in the conflict have cooperated in the efforts to protect the apes and their habitat. The result of this cooperative has generated ape-related tourism revenue. Due to the establishment of a gorilla tracking permit, each individual gorilla is worth nearly US\$90,000 a year to Uganda. This clearly exemplifies how ecotourism can result in the protection of endangered species and conservation areas while improving the economy of local communities.¹⁶

HOW TO TELL IF A TOUR COMPANY IS SOCIALLY RESPONSIBLE

The following questions, which a responsible tour operator should be willing to answer, can assist in choosing a tour operator and/or destination.

- What pre-departure educational materials or forums are provided to participants?
- Is the group size small enough to allow non-intrusive interaction with host peoples and environments?
- What are the qualifications and role of guides in preparing visitors for and interpreting cultures and ecosystems visited?
- Are local people and cultures portrayed realistically or are they merely being marketed? What seems to be the company’s attitude toward the culture?
- Who will benefit from the cost of your trip?
- What opportunities are provided to interact with local people and organizations?
- Are any post-trip mechanisms in place or advice given on how to maintain your involvement with the country by sharing knowledge with others, lobbying governments and NGOs, staying in touch with local organizations, and keeping informed on current issues?

Another view, held by tour operators and resort developers, focuses on using natural environments to market travel products. This is the most common use of the term ecotourism and includes almost any form of travel to a natural setting. In an opportunistic marketing ploy, many tour operators have jumped on the ecotourism bandwagon by simply relabeling existing products with any nature component as “ecotourism.” Such ventures lack commitment to conserving the environment or sustaining local people and come complete with the same problems foreign ownership, foreign exchange leakage, environmental and cultural degradation—that accompany traditional tourism.

The struggle over ecotourism’s definition is not just semantics. Confusion surrounding the term damages tourism’s potential as a



force for good by drawing well-meaning travelers to irresponsible operators, reducing profits to deserving companies and increasing the numbers of tourists travelling unsustainably in fragile locations.

THE REAL THING

How does true ecotourism differ from the general tourism industry?

First, it requires sound planning and cooperation by businesses, governments and citizens. Market forces alone will not create sustainable tourism. The short term economic gains of ecotourism should be balanced by attention to long-term sustainability.

Smallness of scale facilitates local participation which is essential in ecotourism planning, design, ownership and operation. Responsible tourism is based on the culture and desires of the hosts, not just the tourists.

Local ownership provides more meaningful employment opportunities and supports the economy by utilizing more indigenous products and materials. It minimizes price inflation, land loss to foreign investors, and foreign exchange leakages. Retention of economic benefits is necessary to compensate for limits on traditional activities like grazing, farming and wood cutting.

Maho Bay Camps on the Caribbean island of St. John's were built by hand without earth-moving; walkways and tent cottages are elevated on stilts to prevent erosion and to provide wildlife habitat beneath guests' feet. A communal bathhouse, rainwater harvesting and water recycling reduce plumbing and the drain on scarce water supplies.

The Toledo Ecotourism Association is another model of good ecotourism development. Formed by indigenous Mayan villagers in Belize, the association offers accommodations built with local materials and staffed by villagers. Great care was taken to keep control and financial benefit within the community, prepare local people for tourism's effects, and educate tourists about the Mayan culture and the rainforest environment.

REALITY TOURS: CONNECTING PLACE WITH PEOPLE

More inclusive than ecotourism is a new brand of socially responsible tourism that seeks to combine the best of ecotourism with a broader concern for how human societies interact with nature. After all, if we only focus on saving individual species and ecosys-

tems without understanding the human institutions that threaten the viability of all life, it's unlikely that we'll come up with effective solutions.

Global Exchange has been organizing socially responsible tours since our founding in 1988. We had learned from our own personal travel what a life-changing experience it can be to develop close emotional ties to people from different cultures. The spiritual wisdom that comes from bonding with people, despite political and economic barriers cannot be replicated in a class-room, book or other standard educational device. Over the years, we have had many people pay us the highest compliment possible by reporting after a trip, "you changed my life."

When tourists get to know and respect people with far less material wealth, they learn invaluable lessons about what makes us all human. All Reality Tours are organized with this goal in mind. We plan each of our educational journeys to maximize the opportunities for this human connection to take place and thus to catalyze this individual, and collective, transformation.

For Reality Tours, socially responsible travel is not only just-it is good business. The benefits are widespread. Almost all program costs go directly to the local economies we visit. This generates income for our hosts, that need and deserve it. Local communities want to benefit financially, but more importantly, they want to be treated with dignity and respect. That is why it is important for travelers to be critical about how traditional tourism can adversely affect the environment, cultures, beliefs and values. We build programs and promote exchanges that are respectful to locals and their customs.

When we started our Reality Tour program we had a sense that the growing movement for citizen diplomacy had great potential for changing the policies of governments. This remains true today, especially in the aftermath of 9/11, and subsequent U.S. foreign policy and action around the world. One of the most important things responsible tourism can do is to stimulate in participants to act when they return home. If tourists return with little more than interesting cocktail party conversation, the trip was not truly socially responsible. Our participants should be and are inspired to act. In fact we provide resources and a tool kit, to help them use their experience in whatever way they individually feel the most comfortable with: from just talking about what they learned, holding teach-ins and report backs to hosting fundraisers, from staying involved with organizations they met in the host country to getting involved with groups and organizations working on the issues back home, from lobbying congress to working

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to change international institutions and U.S. Policies that are detrimental to our hosts.

By 2005 Reality Tours ran programs to over 30 countries around the world, and clearly the need for us to continue our journeys to “build people to people ties” continues. For example, the many tours to Cuba organized by Global Exchange and other groups have changed the de-bate on U.S. policy toward Cuba. The thousands of U.S. residents who have visited Cuba-despite the travel restrictions imposed by Washington-come home and explain to their friends and neighbors that the Cubans are not our enemies. These tour participants have become the core of an activist network that is steadily pushing Washington to-ward normalizing relations with our is-land neighbor. We offer similar focused tours to places like Iran, Syria, Afghanistan, Venezuela, Libya, Palestine and Israel and hopefully soon to North Korea.

Reality Tours can be effective human rights tools. By taking delegations into areas with human rights violations, the visitors can act as eyes and ears for the outside world and help restrain government forces that might otherwise abuse their own people or

minority groups. For example, residents of the strife-torn state of Chiapas tell us that our delegations have helped to restrain the Mexican military from its repression of indigenous people.

Reality Tours organizes election observing delegation in countries where social tensions threaten the democratic process. Global Exchange observer teams have monitored elections in South Africa, El Salvador, Nicaragua, the Dominican Republic, Haiti, Venezuela and Mexico. Other fact finding delegations seek out the facts on state or corporate human rights abuses and issue reports about their findings. For example in December of 2005 we will have a fact finding delegation assess the human rights situation in post Tsunami impacted areas and examine how the aid has been used an distributed. Ultimately, it all comes down to us. We can either travel in self-centered way that is oblivious to local people and their environment. O we can travel in a way that honors local people in all their humanness an develops lasting bonds of friendship. Another world is possible, a worl where justice, liberty and dignity exist for all humanity. Relationships among the world’s peoples, like those Global Exchange’s Reality Tours promote, are necessary for such a world to exist.

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