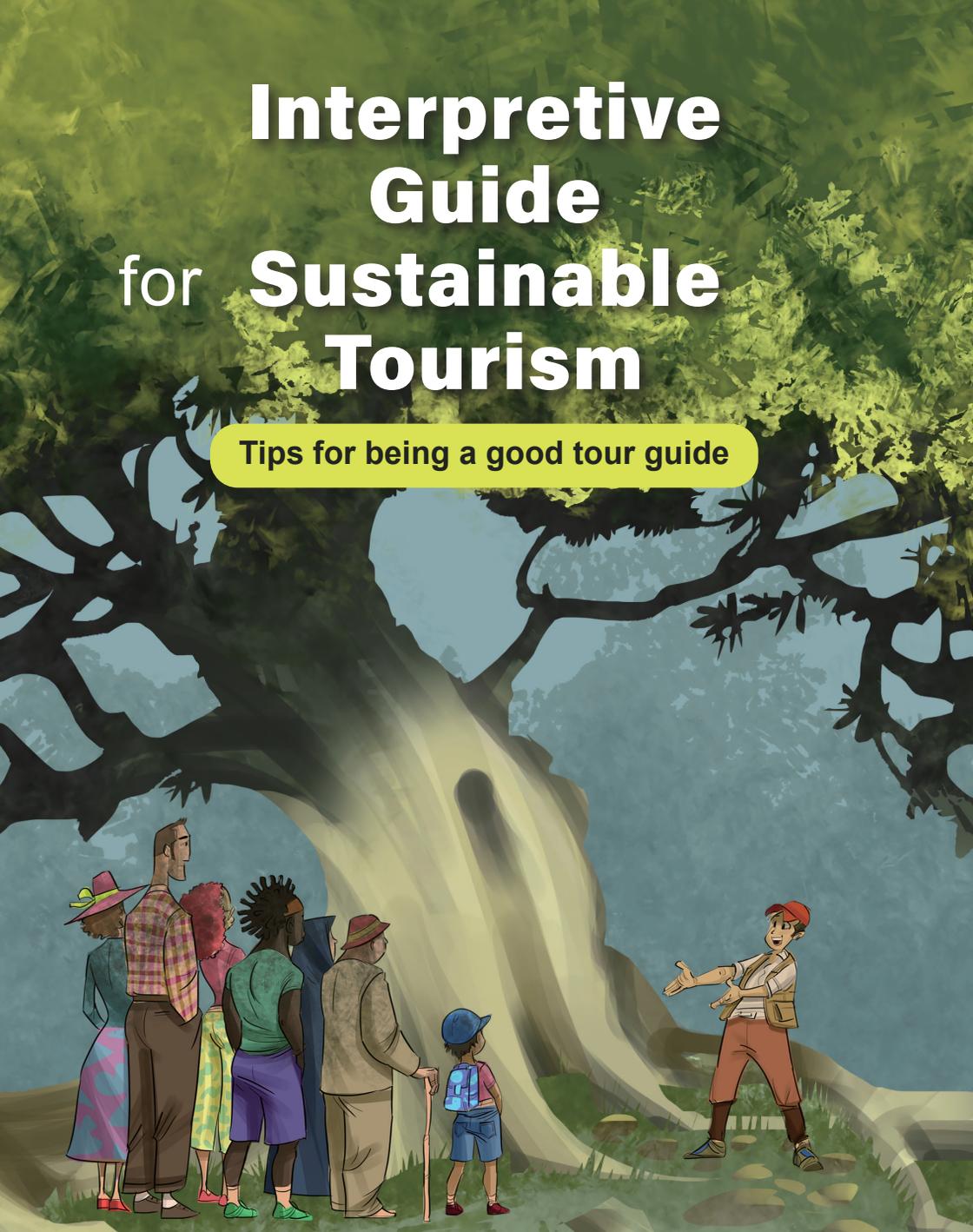


Interpretive Guide for Sustainable Tourism

Tips for being a good tour guide



What is Sustainable Tourism?

Sustainable tourism should:

1. Make optimal use of environmental resources that constitute a key element in tourism development, maintaining essential ecological processes and helping to conserve natural heritage and biodiversity.
2. Respect the socio-cultural authenticity of host communities, conserve their built and living cultural heritage and traditional values, and contribute to inter-cultural understanding and tolerance.
3. Ensure viable, long-term economic operations, providing socio-economic benefits to all stakeholders that are fairly distributed, including stable employment and income-earning opportunities and social services to host communities, and contributing to poverty alleviation.

(UNWTO)

SUSTAINABLE TOURISM



Responsible Travel

ECOTOURISM



**SUSTAINABLE
DEVELOPMENT
GOALS**

What is Interpretation?

Interpretation is a way of communicating that helps people understand and appreciate the resources at tourist sites and villages. Interpretation includes facts, but it also reveals why those facts are important so that individual guests understand why the resources should matter to them.

Interpreters (guides) play a major role in promoting sustainable tourism.



Tangible facts → Intangible values

Why is Interpretation Important?

Brings benefits

Good interpretation inspires guests to further think or act in relation to the people, stories, and unique natural and culture areas they experience.

Provides organization

Organization makes guests more comfortable, orients them, and gives them reasons to participate. Any information or communication that helps people understand what is going to happen is called an advance organizer.

Engages people

People invest in interpretive experiences with both money and time. The experiences must be worth the perceived value and time committed by the guests.

Related to individuals

Guests with no knowledge about your culture may need a description with more comprehensible terms. By talking about “universal concepts”, such as family, food, or homes, guests can better relate to your culture since these are common subjects in many cultures.



Why a Theme is Important?

Convey a theme

A theme is a message. It is what you want your guests to understand and remember the most about your community or a specific place or resource.

Bagan (World Heritage Site, Myanmar)



**People remember themes
but forget facts.**

- Sam Ham -

Step 1

Select the best topic for the site

Topic 5:
Food



Topic 4:
Fish



Topic 3:
School



Topic 1:
Mt. Fuji
Water



Topic 2:
Sake



Selected topic
Mt. Fuji Water



Step 2

Make a strong main theme based on the selected topic

Themes are usually stated as simple sentences. Keeping the theme in the form of a simple statement keeps you focused on what you would like to express about the subject.

Example of bad themes:

Mt. Fuji is important! ❌

(Bad theme. It doesn't answer "Why is it important?")

The height of Mt. Fuji is 3,776 metres. ❌

(Bad theme. So what? It is only information.)

Biodiversity of Mt. Fuji. ❌

(Bad theme. Needs to be explained in a sentence.)

Good theme:

Mt. Fuji provides life for our community. ✓

(Good theme. Answers the reason why, explained in a sentence.)

Step 3

Make sub-themes, activities, and stories to support the main theme

Sub-theme 1: The Shiraito falls are a blessing from the sacred Mt. Fuji.

Activity: Tour of Shiraito Falls

Story: A local guide interprets the geology, history, and culture of the waterfalls.



Sub-theme 2: Mt. Fuji nurtures the unique culture of our community.

Activity: Village cycling

Story: Ride to local villages through natural rural landscapes and rice fields along the waterways, with Mt. Fuji in the background and interpretation by a local guide on the way.



Making an interpretive tour

Case study:
Mt. Fuji, Japan

Sub-theme 3: Good water makes good food.

Activity: Traditional noodle making

Story: A local elder cooking group teaches guests how to make traditional noodles with Japanese tempura made with locally grown vegetables.



Sub-theme 4: The preservation of culture and nature by the community is a key to sustainability.

Activity: Tree-planting site tour

Story: A Buddhist monk who maintains the forest with local students teaches the importance of sustainable management by locals to prevent landslides and wildlife conflicts.



Puerto-Princesa Subterranean River National Park
(World Heritage Site, Philippines)



Theme:

The park represents a significant habitat for biodiversity conservation.

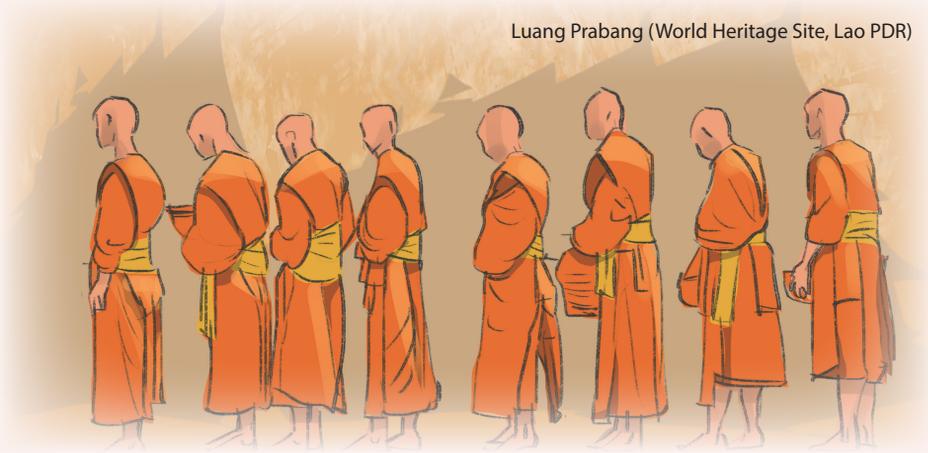
Sea turtles



Theme:

Sea turtles need our help to ensure their future.

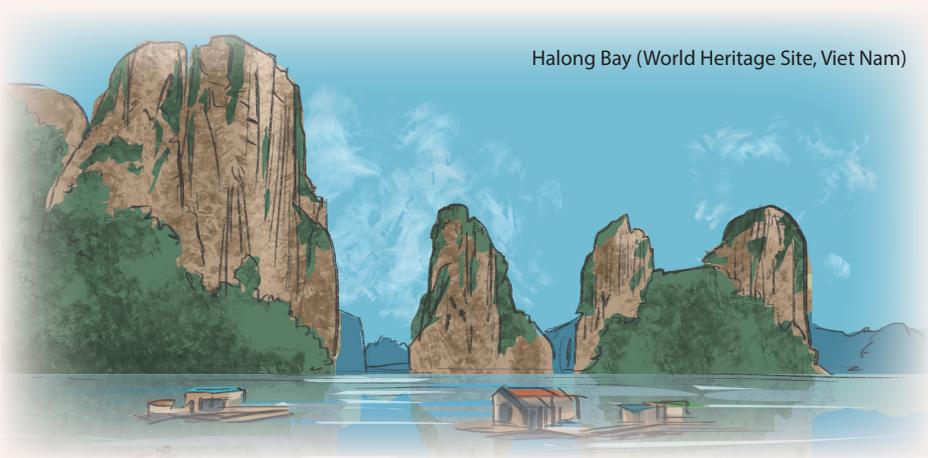
Luang Prabang (World Heritage Site, Lao PDR)



Theme:

Luang Prabang is not only an ancient town, but its traditional cultures are still alive and present in today's communities.

Halong Bay (World Heritage Site, Viet Nam)



Theme:

Halong Bay inspires people of many cultures to explore their connections to the dynamic landscape.

Make Connections

When guests visit tourist sites or communities, they wish to form a lasting connection with the people and places they came to see.

2. Wear local authentic clothes and accessories, such as dress, bags, etc., during tours to introduce and encourage guests to purchase local products as souvenirs.

1. Develop programmes, demonstrations, and activities that are authentic to the communities and local culture.

4. Encourage local people to become guides and hosts so that the economic benefits go directly to community members. (Support translation if necessary.)

3. Support the theme with local food that is unique to the area and prepared by local people.



Interpretive techniques

5. Develop programmes for guests to join traditional festivals.

6. Invite questions and encourage conversations.



Know Your Visitors

Different guests look for different experiences. It is important to know their expectations before starting the tour.

- 1. Explorers:** actively seek additional experiences (Go on a hike or extended tour after seeing the visitor centre).
- 2. Experience seekers:** are motivated by a desire to visit a place because it's a well-known or even "must-see" destination. They are often tourists.
- 3. Facilitators:** like to help others will have the best experience by sharing their knowledge (parents, teachers).
- 4. Spiritual rechargers:** want or have a close and personal connection to the subject matter. They can be satisfied by simply absorbing the experience without gaining additional knowledge.
- 5. Professionals or hobbyists:** have a specific and deep interest in subject matters that are related to their jobs or hobbies.



Experiences in Different Ways

People learn and enjoy experiences in different ways. A good tour will use many different learning styles so that everyone in the group has the chance to enjoy the experience and connect with the resources.

- 1. Listen:** Guests become disengaged if they only listen to you talking!
- 2. Do:** Audience participation will keep guests fully engaged, but it is important to have good explanations.
- 3. Use support tools:** Showing maps, pictures, and signs, passing out handouts, and visiting visitor centres can help guests understand better.



Engage All the Senses

See: Give your guests enough time to enjoy beautiful sites! Setting up chairs and serving traditional drinks at a viewing spot is a great idea.



Touch: Touch flowers, statues, crafts, animals, etc. Touching unique tree stems that have thorns to protect itself from animals is an example of an interesting experience.



Smell: Smell flowers, woods, local medical plants, foods, etc.



Taste: It's always good to try unique local foods.



Listen: Listen to the sound of nature or traditional music and songs. Let your guests listen to the birdsong in the forest!

Ask Questions

Asking questions is one of the most effective ways to influence your guests to think about the varied aspects of protecting natural and cultural resources. Always respond to the answers with respect and enthusiasm.

1. **Where are you from?**
2. **What do you like about this place?**
3. **Do you notice any differences between your house and my house?**
4. **What is the highest mountain in your country and how tall is it?**
5. **What do you think will happen to this area if...?**

Share Personal Stories

Share personal stories about your village, family, friends, and country. Guests want to understand your unique culture and lifestyle. Your stories can give them lasting memories of you and your community.

Example:

“You may not find anything special in this grassland, but this place is very important to me. My grandmother used to come here to collect plants to make medicine when I was sick. This place is a natural pharmacy to us and we must protect it!!”



Lang Biang Biosphere Reserve grassland, Viet Nam

Never Stop Learning

Guests expect tour guides and the local hosts to be experts on subjects in the area. Talk to local elders and researchers and read articles to expand your knowledge.



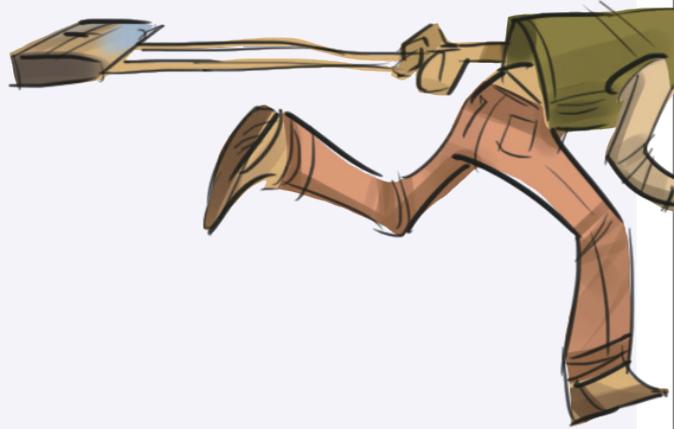
Be Honest

If you cannot answer a question, it is okay to say "I don't know". Try to find the answer and follow up with the guest later by e-mail or by using other information tools.



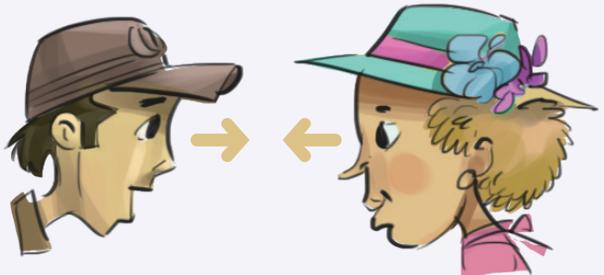
Be on Time

Guests have limited time in their schedule and may be concerned about the waiting time or the length of an activity. Arrive at the meeting site 15 minutes before the tour starts.



Make Eye Contact and Be Friendly

Making eye contact with all guests is important to show respect and sincerity. Use their names in a friendly manner. Take off your sunglasses when speaking to your guests.



Comfortable People Pay Attention

Make sure that guests have access to food, water, shelter, and toilet facilities. Inform in advance how long each activity will take or how difficult it will be. Maps can aid guests' understanding.



Be in the Best Position

When gathering guests to speak, bring them to the shade when possible and avoid having them face into the sun. Avoid standing in front of important objects so that everyone can have a clear view.



Walk at a Reasonable Speed

Pay attention to how fast guests walk. Some guests may have physical limitations or need to go slowly. If you go far away from them, they will lose interest in your stories or have a greater risk of accident.

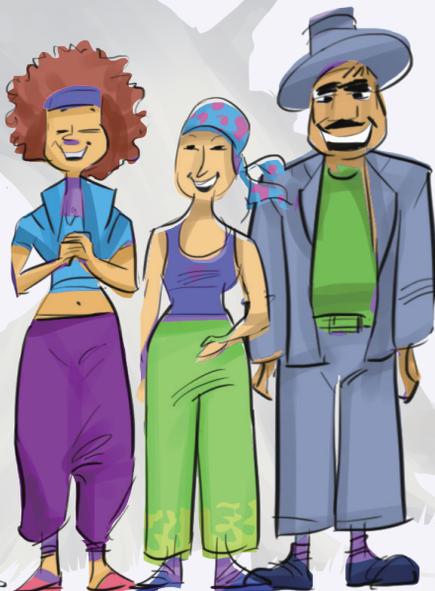


Use Sub-guides Effectively

Usually, a sub-guide stays at the end of a tour group and assists the main guide for safety and group management. If a guest asks a question to the sub-guide, ensure that the main guide answers it and shares the answer with the other guests for better management.



**Convey your messages
to your guests with these
interpretive techniques.**



CREDITS

About AJC:

The ASEAN-Japan Centre (ASEAN Promotion Centre on Trade, Investment and Tourism) is an intergovernmental organization established by the ASEAN Member States and Japan in 1981. It has been promoting exports from ASEAN to Japan while revitalizing investment, tourism as well as people-to-people exchanges between the ASEAN Member States and Japan.

www.asean.or.jp/en/



Ecologic:

Ecologic was established in January 2008, right beneath the iconic Mt. Fuji. The founder of Ecologic, Masanori Shintani, works as an international ecotourism consultant and an interpretive trainer in over 12 countries, and has over 25 years of ecotourism development experience around the world. We also own En-Ya Mt. Fuji Ecotours in Fujinomiya city providing ecotours and glamping as models of interpretive ecotours, working together with community.

www.mtfujiecotours.com/

Illustrations by Dao Van Hoang

Although his background was in advertising, Hoang is now working as a full-time wildlife artist. Combining the communication mindset and artistic skill of a Creative Director, he has completed numerous illustrations, commissioned murals and concept designs for interpretation centres, national parks and public spaces all over Viet Nam and in the region for the purpose of educating children and communities about nature and environment protection.

See more of his works at www.daovanhoang.com



We would like to express our sincere thanks to Ms. Lisa Brochu and Mr. Tim Merriman for sharing their knowledges and experience of interpretation.

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Checklists to be a good interpreter:

- Be Responsible
- Convey a Theme
- Make Connections
- Know Your Visitors
- Engage All the Senses
- Ask Questions
- Share Personal Stories
- Be Honest
- Be on Time
- Make Eye Contact and Be Friendly
- Make Guests Comfortable and Pay Attention
- Walk at a Reasonable Speed
- Use Sub-guides Effectively

