

www.mountainkingdoms.com

Responsible Tourism



AITO 5-star & Award Winning Responsible Tourism

At Mountain Kingdoms we are committed to responsible tourism through our policies and practices which permeate all aspects of our business, ensuring that all our holidays are undertaken in a way which is socially, environmentally and culturally sound. Responsible Tourism remains at the very core of everything we do as a tour operator.

We feel strongly that all our holidays should benefit the local communities, protect the environment by minimising pollution and respecting local traditions, religion and heritage. We tread lightly - low volume, low impact holidays are the best way of preserving the beautiful and fragile places we visit. Mountain Kingdoms has a top five star AITO rating for responsible tourism, and in January 2008 was presented with the prestigious annual AITO Responsible Tourism award.

Northpoint School, Kathmandu

We believe that responsible tourism is about more than just policies. It involves giving something tangible back to the communities that we visit. That is why, since 2005, Mountain Kingdoms has been committed to working with SHIVA Charity to support Northpoint English School, near Bhaktapur, Nepal. The school, currently housed in a rented building, has struggled to pay its teachers whilst still providing the necessary books and equipment.

To date we have now raised approximately £10,000 through a host of fundraising activities and client donations and we will continue our commitment to supporting Northpoint. So far, these funds have been used to help with building of new class rooms, a walled playground, computers, a new building, nursery class furniture and equipment, and a library. The next project at the school is teacher training with a focus on practical lessons.

English lessons, Kathmandu

Mountain Kingdoms is offering courses of English lessons to Nepali trekking staff. Many have not had the benefits of a good education, and yet good spoken & written English would significantly improve their career progression to become Sirdars (head guides) and/or to work in offices in later life. We designed a course focusing on vocabulary related to the Himalayan environment and the first of these intensive 45 day courses ran early in 2008.

In January 2009, we were delighted to have our English Language Programme led by two exceptionally dedicated and talented teachers - who happen to be MK clients! They spent a month in Kathmandu devoting their time to helping 32 sherpas improve their conversation and written English skills through an innovative and practical learning programme. The courses focused on practical skills such as first aid and mountain sickness, city tours focusing on the country's history and culture, flora and fauna training, and cooking skills. Various local experts were brought in to train in their field. The sherpas gave presentations and practised what they had learnt until they felt confident. Both the teachers and students agreed the programme had been a resounding success.

New Life Centre, Kathmandu

Mountain Kingdoms provides on-going support to the New Life Centre - an orphanage in Kathmandu, run by one of our past clients. MK has contributed over £1000 in the last two years. We also encourage our clients to support the New Life Centre by including it on our Himalayan charities leaflet sent out with all post trek/tour questionnaires. This new residential centre, the first stage of which was built in 2008, will mean that the centre will be more sustainable long term, with money being spent on the children and their education, rather than rent. The first stage will accommodate the existing 30 children and basic amenities. The 2nd stage will provide facilities such as library/study room, offices, physiotherapy room and volunteers' accommodation.

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For further Responsible Tourism information contact Niki Morgan, Responsible Tourism Manager on 0845 330 8579 or e-mail niki@mountainkingdoms.com

Machermo Porter Shelter/Rescue Post

We actively support IPPG (International Porter protection Group) who, in association with CAN (Community Action Nepal), have established a first aid post and rescue centre for porters in the Gokyo valley. The facility not only saves lives but also acts as a place to educate porters on the dangers they face in the mountains. The shelter has been so successful that IPPG and CAN are now aiming to build a second centre at Gorak Shep, close to Kala Pattar and Everest Base Camp. Mountain Kingdoms is helping to raise funds towards establishing this vital facility.

Carbon Offsetting

Working with the Tourism Industry Carbon Offset Service (TICOS) we offset the carbon emissions for every Mountain Kingdoms holiday booked by clients that includes a flight, as well as staff and trek leader flights.

TICOS is an industry-wide programme supported by international agencies such as UNESCO and bodies such as the Association of Independent Tour Operators (AITO) to stimulate collective action by travel companies selling holidays which include air travel. We are working with TICOS to allocate funds to a solar energy project by the Druk White Lotus School in Ladakh, a charity we have worked with for a number of years.

Agent Manual

We have created a manual for all overseas agents detailing how we expect our trips to be operated including advice on waste removal at campsites, encouragement of socially and culturally responsible behaviour from clients, taking care of local trekking staff, and acting in a way which does not impact negatively on the environment. Only on the agent's agreement to adhere to the principles and practices in the guidelines, will the agent be accepted to work with Mountain Kingdoms.

Client Information & Support

We have a comprehensive section in the trek dossiers, which are set out to all clients highlighting our responsible tourism practices, policies and recommendations. We advise our clients how to trek sympathetically with awareness of, and sensitivity to, local customs and culture. Specifically we give information on: Visitor Impact, Preservation of local culture, Protecting the global environment, Porter Protection and Himalayan charities.

We also send out a charities leaflet to all our clients when they return from their holiday. Since January 2005 we have raised nearly £25,000 for our combined charities from the generous donations of our clients.

Client Feedback & Leader Evaluation

Clients and leaders are invited to feedback on issues concerning staff welfare, or any other concerns to responsible tourism on their holiday through a post-holiday questionnaire. Any issues are then fed straight back to the supplier so any problems are quickly resolved.

Office Practice

We have a formal Responsible Tourism policy for office practice. This includes guidelines on reducing waste, recycling, heating, lighting, buying fair-trade products, supporting local independent shops, buying environmentally friendly cleaning products and use of compute, printers and photocopiers. MK is happy to pay a premium for goods and services that are environmentally friendly and ethical, and in the last 12 months has significantly increased recycling and fair-trade product purchase.

Other charities supported by Mountain Kingdoms

- Dental Project, Peru
- The LATA Foundation
- Druk White Lotus School, Leh, Ladakh
- The Michael Aris Memorial Trust, Tibet
- The Tibet Foundation
- The Bhutan Society of the United Kingdom
- Jimmy Roberts Memorial Fund, Nepal
- Everest Memorial Trust, Nepal
- The Gurkha Welfare Trust
- Global Action Network
- The Nepali Children's Trust
- KINOE
- Sir Edmund Hillary's Himalayan Trust
- Ginette Harrison Memorial Fund. Village Education Project Kilimanjaro'

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