



# RESPONSIBLE TOURISM POLICY

(updated January 2019)



## WHY HAVE A POLICY?

We believe that writing things down is a really powerful way of setting an intention.

It is the best way to explain Open Eyes' principles to team members and travellers, and it is a relevant way with which to reflect, work and improve year after year.

## WHO ARE WE?

Open Eyes ([www.openeyesproject.com](http://www.openeyesproject.com)) is a growing international social enterprise, founded in 2011. We organize responsible holidays in India and have created cultural (e.g. arts & craft, religious, sight-seeing tours), mindful (e.g. yoga, meditation, Ayurveda), and educational tours (e.g. universities) for groups and families, including both pre-packaged and tailor-made tours.

## WHY ARE WE IN BUSINESS



### 1. Vision and Mission

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Our vision is to "to create powerful heart-warming and soul-healing connections between vulnerable women of all continents".

We want to break the barriers between women of different continents, cultures, backgrounds, means, and physical abilities to speak and see from the heart rather than judge with the eyes.

Our mission is to "include the poor, and especially women and people with visual impairments, in the tourism value chain to activate positive change in the places we visit".

To do this, we identify the skills of tourism stakeholders usually excluded from the conventional holiday experience (e.g. female-only taxi services, small artisans/artists, rural communities near tourist honey-pots). We train them and create immersive experiences, which connect them to travellers, in both urban and rural settings.



### 2. Core Values

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We firmly believe that to make a change in the tourism industry (partnerships, customers....) we must start with ourselves, by **inspiring** and raising **awareness** about honest responsible tourism practices.

We are guided by the core idea that all our actions have consequences. As a company, we take the role we play in managing the impacts of our commercial activities very seriously.

In this context, we have a responsibility to promote the human dignity and human rights of our all partners.

Practically, we work 1) towards ensuring the **economic sustainability** of the communities we work with by contributing to reducing poverty among the poorest, and 2) towards **showing the world** that people who are excluded from society in India, where the cast system is still strongly embedded, have an incredible amount of wisdom and knowledge to contribute to enhance everyone's life for the better.

Our experiences **connect** individuals of different cultures, **enrich** our clients' understanding of India, and **fortifies** mutual respect for the benefits of partners, hosts and guests to create **long-lasting** and **life-changing impacts**.

## IMPACTS



### 1. Economic Impacts

Instead of alleviating poverty through philanthropy, we reward our local partners for their incredible contribution into our tours by paying them for their services fairly and letting them decide how to best use the money they earn.

#### Women

Whenever feasible, we employ women throughout our supply chain, including female taxi drivers, female guides, female artisans and female massage therapists. All women are paid as much as men would be for that particular job. In the case of guides, women are paid more than men because they need to spend more on ensuring they are safe at all time (e.g. they need to stay in more expensive accommodation, will travel by taxis rather than public transport, etc.).

Our "Women in Tourism" initiative has been initiated to include more women into the tourism value chain. As well, to create more opportunities for women to work and benefit from a more nurturing, authentic and sustainable world. Our main project partners (NAB, Sakha and Anoothi) is primarily founded by women and mainly focused on women, to balance our collaboration with the rest of our tourism partners who are led by men.

#### Drivers

We believe drivers in India need dignified work to compensate for their long drives on customer's trips. Usually, drivers are not provided accommodation during overnight trips and end up sleeping in their cars, where they have no access to showers. We have created an internal policy to provide drivers with accommodation; when hotels do not provide free accommodation to drivers (in rural areas), we give them an allocation of €7/night to overnight in a guest house – the vast majority of tour operators expect them to sleep in their car.

Shopping at local markets offering local produce, items, souvenirs etc.

In 2011, we started an ethical fashion project with women in rural areas of Jaipur. We connect travellers with different ethical fashion initiatives and artisans, providing them with an opportunity to buy their products and learn their stories.

### Sourcing locally

All our suppliers are Indian (food and accommodation). We primarily employ staff from Indian origin too (e.g. web developers, graphic designers, content writers, guides).

### Paying our team members fairly

Because income levels differ drastically, even within the same city and for the same job, it is impossible to access valid data on average pay levels or living wages. From experience of living in Delhi, we estimate that it is possible to have a normal life for Indian standards (e.g. rent a flat, buy food, save some money) on a monthly earning of €500. With this in mind, we have set our lowest salary at €600/month, and offered flexible options for part-time work from home or the office to achieve a better work-life balance.



## 2. Socio-cultural Impacts

The actions we have undertaken towards preparing employees for work and creating jobs is aligned with the Sustainable Development Goal 1: 'End Poverty in all its forms.'

### Social business / Giving back to the community

We are passionate about social entrepreneurship. Our company's business model is a not-for-profit organization. The profits we generate through our tours enable us to run our training programs without external funding. While we categorically remain a non-profit, we actively work towards full financial sustainability.

### Inclusiveness

We offer livelihood and employment opportunities to excluded communities. Through tourism-related income, we bring financial freedom to individuals that are confined within the limitations of, what sadly remains, a cast-based society.

### Youth

We work to ensure inclusive and equitable, quality education. In August 2014, we developed our Vocational Training in Tourism pilot for underprivileged youth to promote Inclusive Tourism in India.

### Promoting universal accessibility

We work towards universal accessibility in two ways. First, by providing livelihood and employment opportunities to excluded communities; second, by improving the psychological wellbeing of people with disabilities, which we also aim to target as clients, in India and abroad.



## Investing in the team

Our core objective is to create an ecosystem for the developmental growth of team members. They benefit from private language lessons in Spanish, within office hours that helps them be more involved in the practical aspects of running the company, such as dealing with the clients on the phone and travelling with guests on our tours; this gives them also much more exposure to people from other countries and is an opportunity to also strike friendships.

## How to be a responsible traveller

We impress upon travellers to follow certain standards, which allow for equal enjoyment and preservation of the community for the duration of the traveller's trip. The standards are as follows:

- *Before travelling:* do research about the country you are going to visit. Learn about its culture, nature, customs, religion, etc. It's important to understand and respect the country's social and cultural norms and etiquette.
- *During travel:* try to adapt yourself to the customs of the country without imposing your own habits or lifestyle. We are privileged to be tourists in another country. We are their guests. Leave stereotypes and prejudices at home, and approach local people with friendliness, respect, and sensitivity. Open your mind to accept "other truths," so that you can benefit from having these vastly different experiences.
- *After travelling:* take your time to reflect on everything you've seen and discovered. Keep any promises you have made with local people. Stay in contact with us: you can learn about sustainable tourism and responsible travel by following us.

## Do & Don't Manual on Arrival

Upon arrival, we provide travellers with a Do & Don't Manual, which helps to preserve the community standards and allows for a more meaningful experience.

- *Dictionary:* we provide a dictionary so that they can interact more with the community, allowing for a better emotional experience between the traveller and locals.
- *Dress code:* we suggest a dress code, so as to not call attention to the travellers and to demonstrate a level of respect for the communities or religious places that they are entering.
- *Gifts/ Homelessness:* we explain that donations while tempting often do not help in the long-term, as they perpetuate underlying societal problems. We advise for travellers to make donations to local community development projects, which have a more sustained impact.
- *Photography:* India is a country worthy of a thousand pictures, where travellers want to capture everything. However, we ask that travellers always be respectful and ask before taking photos of community members. We challenge travellers to take photos which preserve the beauty of the landscape without interfering or harming the dignity of those they're photographing, especially when taking photos of children.



### 3. Environmental Impacts

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India is not an eco – friendly destination. We are still a small team in India and have a lot of work to do towards contributing to the environmental practices in India. So far, we have implemented essential ethical practices regarding waste management, transportation, and wildlife preservation. Our first and foremost priority has always been and will continue to be people and their wellbeing, however, we are looking forward to increasing the number of environmental policies in the following year.

#### Waste Management

Travellers can accumulate several plastic bags during their shopping trip in local markets. Therefore, we provide them with a block printed, one of the most ancient printing techniques in Rajasthan, fabric bag produced by our female artisans to carry goods in and reduce the number of plastic bags on their trip.

#### Paper

We print on both sides of the trip documentation we provide to customers. Additionally, we are adopting better purchasing practices and sourcing products with recycled material.

#### Transport

We use local transport when it is safe, reliable and feasible. When this is not feasible, we use private, locally-owned transport.

#### Wildlife

We are strongly opposed to promoting and including elephant rides in our tours. Instead, rather than just ignoring the practice, we have included a compulsory visit to an Elephant Rescue Centre as part of our trips in order to highlight to our guests how these animals are being exploited through tourism.