



The Developing World's 10 Best Ethical Destinations

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During the past few years, the term “Ethical Travel” has entered the globe-trotter’s lexicon. It’s an easy term to define. Ethical travel is simply mindful travel: an awareness of our impact as we explore the world. Travel is now the biggest industry on Earth – even bigger than oil – and the economic clout of travelers is enormous. Which countries should we visit? Where do we spend our money once we get there? How do our interactions with our hosts support international goodwill, and promote cross-cultural understanding? The way we answer these questions has a real influence on the environment, human rights, and the way our home country is viewed abroad.

Every year, millions of travelers pack their bags and head for the usual destinations: Paris, Bangkok, San Francisco, Rio, Beijing. While Ethical Traveler sees all travel as a potentially positive force, we’d like to see people step off the beaten path. Many developing countries, in their efforts to woo travelers, are making noble attempts to preserve their natural assets, create a user-friendly infrastructure, and build an economy where their citizens share the benefits of tourist revenue. By bringing our commerce to such places we encourage their efforts, and inspire neighboring countries to support these values as well.

Ethical Traveler is pleased to announce our 2007-2008 list of *The Developing World's 10 Best Ethical Destinations*. The winners, in alphabetical order, are: **Argentina, Bulgaria, Bolivia, Chile, Costa Rica, Croatia, Estonia, Namibia, Nicaragua, and South Africa.**

How the List is Created

Every two years, Ethical Traveler conducts a study of the world’s 70+ developing nations, from Albania to Zimbabwe. We begin our research by looking at three general categories: Environmental Protection, Social Welfare, and Human Rights.

For all of these categories, we look at information past and present so that we may understand not only the current state of a country, but its forward path. This helps us select countries that are actively improving the state of their people and environment.

Environmental Protection: In evaluating each country’s level of responsible environmental protection, we looked at clear indicators of environmental health,



preservation of resources, and cultivation of beneficial, sustainable practices. Our two main resources are the Socioeconomic Data and Applications Center (SEDAC) Environmental Performance Index and the SEDAC Environmental Sustainability Index. Both are joint initiatives between the Yale Center for Environmental Law & Policy and Columbia University's Center for International Earth Science Information Network. The former uses indicators focused on (i) reducing environmental stresses on human health and (ii) promoting ecosystem vitality and sound natural resource management.¹ Costa Rica scored particularly well, with a very high level of overall environmental health, excellent water resources, biodiversity, air quality, and sustainable energy. The latter index studies indicators of sustainability, resilience, and vulnerability on a national scale.² The combination of the two indices allowed us to measure these countries against 427 separate indicators of environmental responsibility. Croatia, with its large percentage of protected eco-regions, was a top performer on this index. Also noteworthy was Argentina, with outstanding water quality and sustainable forestry practices.

Social Welfare: Another critical point we consider is the social welfare of each country's citizens and visitors. Quantifying this is not a straightforward task. In order to gain the clearest picture of the situation, we combine well-respected resources with our own country-by-country research.

One telling indicator of social welfare is the mortality rate of young children. To understand mortality rates past and present, we researched statistics provided by UNICEF. Bolivia and South Africa had the lowest rates of infant mortality of our Top 10 countries. To measure the civil liberties enjoyed by citizens of each country, we used the Freedom in the World 2007 Report from Freedom House. Estonia and Bulgaria stood out in this ranking, with Chile and Costa Rica also receiving the highest possible score.

To gauge other important issues such as access to safe drinking water, sustainable water management, responsible sanitation practices, and agricultural management, we referred to the 2006 Human Development Report, compiled by the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP). Perhaps surprisingly, Namibia was top-ranked in this category.

Human Rights: A number of sources were used to evaluate each country's human rights record. Respected sources like Amnesty International, Human Rights Watch,



Reporters Without Borders, and Freedom House were consulted to understand the challenges each nation has to address. Freedom House gave Estonia, Chile, and Costa Rica the highest rating in civil liberties. Reporters Without Borders found Argentina to have a very high level of Freedom of the Press, with Nicaragua close behind. Every country has human rights issues—but it was important for us to see efforts being made towards improving known situations and the preservation of basic human rights for all.

General Trends and Conclusions

Notably, half of the Top 10 Destinations are in Latin America, perhaps following the sustainable tourism lead of highly popular, top-ranked Costa Rica. Three other countries – Belize, Peru, and Ecuador – receive honorable mentions as well. On the other hand, not a single Asian country made it to the Top 10. Runaway development, human rights abuses, and a lack of strong environmental policy kept them all off the list this year. Surprising, though, three Eastern European countries made the final list. We believe this bodes well for the future of these emerging nations. We're also excited to have an additional African country – Namibia – appear on the list.

Certain countries that made our previous *Top Ethical Destinations* list were omitted this time around. In 2005, we strongly encouraged travelers to bring their commerce to tsunami-ravaged Sri Lanka. During the past two years, however, the sectarian violence on the island has grown to alarming levels, with tensions between the Tamils and Sinhalese running high. The government has failed to rebuild coastal communities quickly, and corruption is rampant – with reports of large, foreign-owned hotels encroaching on traditional fishing beaches. For these reasons Sri Lanka is unfortunately no longer on our list.

Kenya was also on our 2005 list, but the country's tragic descent into ethnic violence, following December's contested elections, makes a travel recommendation impossible. Also absent this year is Belize. Large-scale construction in sensitive areas, and waste run-off from large hotels is contributing to the destruction of the country's coral reefs and mangroves. Until the government takes sterner steps to protect its ocean environment, we cannot include Belize on our "most recommended" list.

Travelers are often surprised that Bhutan is not one of our Top Ethical Destinations. Despite its sublime natural beauty and extraordinary commitment to preserving the



environment, the highly nationalistic kingdom is still plagued by human rights issues. These concerns include the fate of more than 100,000 Bhutanese of Nepalese descent, who were expelled from country in the early 1990s and still live in refugee camps along the Bhutan/West Bengal/Nepal border.

None of the countries on this year's Ethical Destinations list are perfect, and two in particular come with caveats. Though Nicaragua is committed to fair trade and sustainable tourism, and maintains very low CO2 emissions, homosexuality remains criminalized. Normally, this is a deal-breaker for us; but the law is not enforced, and is the subject of wide protest. We sincerely hope that our vote of confidence will help persuade Nicaragua's leaders to repeal this backward law. South Africa received high marks for supporting eco-friendly, community-based tourism ventures, as well as for species protection and vigilance against poaching. The country, however, has a huge rich/poor gap, and a high crime rate. Travelers should be mindful of the dangers, and stay informed about which areas to avoid.

We sincerely hope that travelers will refer to this list when planning their 2007/2008 journeys. By visiting the countries mentioned here, we "vote with our wings"—sending a signal that travelers are aware of where their money is going, and willing to support nations that care about the environment, human rights, and the global community. To learn more about Ethical Traveler—and to join our alliance of members from more than 60 countries—please visit our website at www.ethicaltraveler.org

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Ethical Traveler's 2007/2008 Top 10 Ethical Destinations:

Argentina	Bolivia	Bulgaria	Chile	Croatia
Costa Rica	Estonia	Namibia	Nicaragua	South Africa