

## **The Developing World's 10 Best Ethical Destinations**

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As the world becomes ever more interconnected, being an ethical traveler becomes both easier and more urgent. Travelers today have access to far more information than we did even 10 years ago. We can observe—almost in real time—the impact that smart or selfish choices, by governments and individuals, have on rainforests and reefs, cultures and communities.

Travel is one of the biggest industries on Earth, and our economic power as travelers is enormous. When we're mindful of where our money is going, we turn that power into political activism. Deciding which countries to visit—and where to eat, sleep and tour when we get there—are not trivial concerns. The way we travel has a real impact on the environment, human rights, and the way our home countries are perceived by people in other lands.

While Ethical Traveler sees all travel as potentially positive, we do urge travelers to step off the beaten path whenever possible. Each year, after extensive research, our team chooses the 10 best countries to visit in the developing world. These destinations may not always be as glamorous as Paris, or as modern as Singapore. But they're rich in natural wonders, and alive with fascinating culture. They're also committed to conserving their natural treasures, while building economies that sustain and empower local communities. Our visits to these countries acknowledges these efforts, and inspires neighboring nations to embrace similar values.

Clearly, the idea of naming the 10 “best” developing countries has its perils. No country in the world is perfect. All the places on our list have both strengths and weaknesses. Still these are the best of the best. We sincerely hope this list inspires your travels. We also hope that our summary sheds light on the many concerns that every country must tackle to balance best practices with often challenging economic realities.

Ethical Traveler congratulates the countries on our 2010/2011 list of “The Developing World’s 10 Best Ethical Destinations.” The winners, in alphabetical order (not in order of merit), are: **Argentina\***, **Barbados**, **Chile\***, **Costa Rica**, **Dominica**, **Latvia**, **Lithuania\***, **Palau**, **Poland\*** and **Uruguay** ( \* = also appeared on our 2010 list).

### **How the List was Created**

Every year Ethical Traveler conducts a study of developing nations, from Afghanistan to Zimbabwe, to identify the best tourism destinations among them. We begin our research by focusing on three general categories: Environmental Protection, Social Welfare, and Human Rights. For each of these categories, we look at information past and present so that we understand not only the current state of a country, but how it has changed over time. This helps us select countries that are actively improving the state of their people, government, and environment.

In the first phase of our process, we consider country scores from a variety of databases related to one of the three categories, using information from sources like Freedom House, the Millennium Challenge Corporation, and the World Bank. After identifying the

top performers, we turn to detailed case research, focusing on actions governments have taken over the year to improve (or in some cases, weaken) practices and circumstances in the countries.

Please note that this report is not an exhaustive explanation of our methodology, but a brief and general view of how we conduct and verify our research. An appendix listing our sources will be sent upon request. We also understand that no country, particularly those facing significant economic limitations, is faultless – our goal is to encourage the behaviors we see as creating a safer and more sustainable world.

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 main resource is the Socioeconomic Data and Applications Center (SEDAC) Environmental Performance Index (EPI), a joint initiative between the Yale Center for Environmental Law & Policy and Columbia University's Center for International Earth Science Information Network. The index uses indicators focused on (i) reducing environmental stresses on human health and (ii) promoting ecosystem vitality and sound natural resource management, allowing us to measure these countries against 25 separate indicators of environmental responsibility.

Latin America countries continue to be top scorers in environmental protection. Costa Rica scored exceedingly high in the Environmental

Policy Index (EPI), the only developing country – and indeed one of only four countries in the world – to make it into the top “100-85” scorer category. Chile also scored high, particularly in sustainable fishery and forestry. Argentina continues to impress with its environmental initiatives, particularly an innovative new law designed to protect its glaciers.

Another notable environmental success is Palau, which declared its waters a dolphin, shark and whale sanctuary; rescinded support for Japanese “scientific” whaling, and called for an international moratorium on shark finning. Dominica was the recipient of a Green Globe for sustainable ecotourism. We also applaud Barbados for organizing the Caribbean Green Economic Conference for 2011, to discuss opportunities and challenges to developing a green economy in the region.

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 research.

UNICEF scores on child mortality rates are one indicator of social welfare. In this category, Lithuania and Latvia scored particularly high. To gauge issues such as access to safe drinking water, sustainable water management, responsible sanitation practices, and agricultural management, we considered the 2009 Human Development Report, compiled by the UN Development Program

(UNDP). Barbados was the highest ranked Ethical Destination country on the index this year, followed by Poland. Uruguay received the highest scores for Latin American countries.

The Millennium Challenge Corporation also offers information on such aspects of social welfare as immunization rates, girls' access to primary education, and health expenditure. That none of the MCC partner countries – typically some of the poorest in the world – actually made it on to the Ethical Destinations list this year points to a deep connection between economic and social health.

Human Rights: To evaluate countries' 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. Every country has human rights issues, but it was important for us to see efforts made towards improving known situations and the preservation of basic human rights for all.

Costa Rica returned to the list, after falling off last year, due to increased efforts by recently elected president Laura Chinchilla to address human trafficking problems. While there remains a great deal of work to be done – particularly to stem the country's sex tourism industry – we applaud the progress.

Lithuania is the only country on the Ethical Destinations list to reach Tier 1 of the 2010 State Department's Trafficking in Persons report. All other countries were listed as Tier 2 (a source, transit or

destination country making significant efforts to improve) or Tier 2 watch list (a source, transit or destination country that has not shown significant improvement).

There is more to making our list, of course, than excelling in categories. Each of the countries selected as a Best Ethical Destination also boasts wonderful opportunities for the traveler - opportunities to experience nature at its most pristine, and to interact with local people and cultures in a meaningful, mutually enlightening way.

### **General Trends and Conclusions**

Although the worst of the economic downturn has passed, efforts towards sustainability, responsible tourism, and environmental stewardship are only slowly recovering.

It is not surprising that again not a single Asian country made it to the Top 10. Although the economic recession has temporarily halted many development projects, their poor human rights record and lack of strong environmental policy keeps them once again from the list of ethical destinations. Contrary to last year, not a single African country made it to the list because of serious violations to the basic human rights of their citizens. We hope this is not a trend and that we can welcome some African countries in next year's Top 10.

Notably, three small island states are in the Top 10: Barbados, Dominica and Palau. One of the main reasons for their strong presence is their strong environmental efforts. These states

understand that their islands will be affected the strongest by climate change in the short term and are trying to fight it as well as they can.

Among the newcomers are also two re-entering Latin American countries: Uruguay and Costa Rica. Costa Rica has been top rated for years by many important indicators. Last year, however, World Vision considered it among the world's most notorious destinations for sexual predators. Although the problem has not completely disappeared, Costa Rica is back on the 2011 list of ethical destinations because it has seriously stepped up its attempts on a government level to address human trafficking by taking on increased public awareness campaigns, creating a new office focusing on human trafficking, and training officials. Costa Rica should see this as an encouragement to step up efforts to combat human trafficking even more. Uruguay has been absent for a few years from the Top 10, but deserves its spot this year again because of its outstanding human rights and human development record. It has the highest level of human development in Latin America and it was the first country to allow gay marriage. In addition, the first human rights violators of the dictatorship period were convicted to prison sentences in 2010 after decades of impunity. After settling the pulp mill conflict with Argentina, Uruguay put more stringent monitoring mechanisms for pollution by the pulp mills into place.

Certain countries that made our previous Ethical Destinations list were omitted this time around. Unfortunately these included all African countries. Although South Africa, Ghana, Namibia and the Seychelles are still making considerable environmental efforts, for all

of them there was an important deal-breaker, which led to their elimination from the Top 10. In South Africa and Ghana, some of the most vulnerable people were evicted from their houses, often without proper alternative housing, compensation or in some cases even without prior notice. In South Africa, these people were forced to relocate to make space for development projects leading up to the World Cup Soccer Tournament. The World Cup also caused an increase in sex trafficking into the country. Namibia lost its place in the Top 10 because of forced sterilization of HIV-positive women in hospital and because the latest elections were contested, even possibly manipulated. The Seychelles' economy was buffeted by the global recession and by the expanding reach and incidence of piracy in the Indian Ocean, and therefore less was invested in sustainability. Furthermore, there were incidences of serious violations of freedom of speech, press and assembly.

Suriname was removed from our list after the UN Committee on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination urged Suriname to ensure legal acknowledgement of the collective rights of Indigenous Peoples. We remove Suriname with regret, as the country had conquered a place in last year's Top 10 due to its unspoiled rainforest biodiversity and sincere efforts towards ecotourism and environmental preservation. However, the protection of indigenous peoples is an essential aspect of an ethical destination and we urge Suriname to work on this so they can be considered for the Top 10 again next year. Along the same line, we encourage Chile – which made our list due to significant efforts to introduce new legislation regarding its



indigenous peoples – to continue to pursue constitutional rights of representation for native peoples within its borders.

Belize did not make it to this year's Top 10 either due to the government seizure of mineral rich land, high profile corruption and emerging child sex tourism. Furthermore the urge for development threatens its mangrove islands.

None of the countries on this year's Ethical Destinations list is perfect, and four countries must include special caveats. In Barbados and Dominica, homosexuality remains criminalized. Normally this is a deal-breaker for us, but the laws do not appear to be zealously enforced. We sincerely hope that our vote of confidence will persuade these country's leaders to repeal these backward laws. Latvia, Lithuania and Poland should do more to prevent discrimination against ethnic and sexual minorities while Costa Rica, Argentina, and Barbados have to step up their efforts even further to halt sex trafficking.

We sincerely hope that travelers will refer to this list when planning their 2011 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](http://www.ethicaltraveler.org).