



The World's Ten Best Ethical Destinations 2016

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"I am neither especially clever nor especially gifted. I am only very, very curious."

- Albert Einstein

The year 2015 marked the 100th anniversary of Einstein's General Theory of Relativity, considered by many physicists to be the most beautiful scientific theory ever discovered. In a single virtuoso gesture, Einstein demonstrated that space, time and gravity are interrelated—and that each exerts an indelible influence on the other.

Though few travelers have mastered theoretical physics, we do share a deep appreciation for how interconnected—and interdependent—all things are. A lucky train connection might unlock a conversation with a stranger, leading to a lifelong friendship. A missed flight may open up the door to an unscheduled, life-changing exploration. The decision to visit a country where peoples' values differ from our own, and our openness to engage about those differences, could have a subtle but cumulative impact on international relations.

One of the main differences between physics and travel, of course, is that every journey is a series of unpredictable surprises. We may meet people who enhance our knowledge and inspire our dreams, and confront the human condition in ways we might never have imagined. The impact created by our encounters ripple outward, enriching not only our own lives, but the lives of the people whose worlds we enter. And all of this is driven by the single trait that every traveler—from a climber summing Mt. Kenya to a Bolivian backpacker—shares with Dr. Einstein: curiosity.

During the past decade we have watched travel grow into the world's largest industry, with a trillion-dollar annual footprint. This means that travelers possess more than curiosity; we have enormous power. Where we choose to put *our* footprints has economic and political reverberations that reach far beyond our personal experience. Ethical Traveler believes that mindful travel offers many rewards, both personal and global. By "voting with our wings"—choosing our destinations well, and cultivating our roles as citizen diplomats—we promote international goodwill and help change the world for the better.

Every year, Ethical Traveler reviews the policies and practices of hundreds of nations in the developing world. We then select the ten that are doing the most impressive job of promoting human rights, preserving the environment and supporting social welfare—all while creating a lively, community-based tourism industry. By visiting these countries, we can use our economic leverage to reward good works and support best practices.

We urge you to explore these destinations, and to enjoy the wonderful sights, scenic and cultural, that they have to offer.

Though we are diligent in creating this list, we must continually remind ourselves of something Einstein knew well: Everything is relative. In other words, no country is perfect. All have genuine and often serious shortcomings. Each of our winners, however, is making a genuine effort to “do the right thing” in the areas we take into consideration. If they appear on the list *more* than one year in a row, it means they are actively improving their already excellent record. We sincerely hope that inclusion on this list will motivate the people and leaders of these nations to keep up their admirable work.

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The Winners

Ethical Traveler congratulates the countries on our 2016 list of **The World's Ten Best Ethical Destinations**. The winners, in alphabetical order (**not** in order of merit), are:

Cabo Verde*

Dominica*

Grenada

Micronesia (Federated States)

Mongolia

Panama

Samoa*

Tonga*

Tuvalu

Uruguay*

(* = also appeared on our 2015 list)

How the List Is Created

In the late summer of each year, Ethical Traveler surveys the world's developing nations—from Afghanistan to Zimbabwe. We begin our research by focusing on three general categories: environmental protection, social welfare and human rights. In 2013, responding to requests from our members, we added animal welfare to our investigations.

For each category, 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 nations that are actively improving the state of their people, government and environment. Our goal is to encourage the behaviors we see as creating a safer and more sustainable world.

In this first phase of our process, we consider country scores from a variety of databases related to our three categories, using information from sources like Freedom House, the Millennium Challenge

Corporation, Reporters Without Borders, UNICEF, the World Bank and LGBT resources. After identifying about 25 “short list” performers we turn to detailed case research, focusing on actions these governments have taken over the past year to improve (or, in some cases, weaken) policies and practices in their countries. We use many strategies to finalize our list—including engagement with civic leaders, discussions with travelers and reviews of local English-language media.

For a country to make our list, of course, it must excel in more than metrics. Each Ethical Destination also offers unspoiled natural beauty, great outdoor activities and the opportunity to interact with local people and cultures in a meaningful, mutually enriching way.

Please note that this report is *not* an exhaustive explanation of our methodology, but an overview of how we conduct our research. An appendix listing our sources will be sent upon request.¹

Environmental protection

In evaluating each country's level of environmental protection, we look at indicators of environmental health, preservation of resources and cultivation of beneficial, sustainable practices.

Our main resource is the Socioeconomic Data and Applications Center's (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.

Tonga scored highest in environmental protection among the Ethical Destinations, followed by Panama. Uruguay, Cabo Verde and Mongolia have made the most progress in the EPI ranking over the last year.

Many of the 2016 Ethical Destinations are frontrunners and advocates of a strong strategy to tackle climate change. In particular, island states Samoa, Tonga, FS Micronesia, Grenada and Tuvalu—all members of the Small Island Developing States coalition—have been pushing for greater action on climate change. Tuvalu is a member of The Vulnerable 20 (V20), created to share and scale up innovative approaches to climate finance developed by those countries most affected by climate change.

The countries that have been named 2016 Ethical Destinations have all carried out significant efforts to switch to green energy. Cabo Verde aims to draw 50% of all its energy from renewable sources by 2020. Dominica continues to lead the Caribbean Islands in the development of geothermal electricity, and has set the goal to rely fully on renewable energy. The country is even

¹ Although we are happy to provide general or country-specific lists of our sources, we must charge a modest fee for the researcher time involved. Please contact info@ethicaltraveler.org for details.

expecting to supply energy to other Caribbean countries. Currently 500,000 people, including 70% of Mongolia's herders, have modern electricity generated through solar power. Samoa launched new solar plants in 2015 to achieve its plans of 100% sustainable energy by 2017. Additionally, Tuvalu is trying to reduce its dependency on fossil fuels by launching new solar plants. FS Micronesia is aiming to increase the share of renewable energy to at least 30% by 2020. While Tonga's energy in 2011 still depended on fossil fuels, the nation aspires to generate 50% of its energy from renewable resources by 2020 and is constructing solar arrays on nine outer islands. The top performer in green energy, however, is Uruguay. Uruguay supplied 90% of its electricity from renewable sources this year, and is also working toward powering all public transport with electric energy, as well as creating the world's first fully sustainable airport.

Panama has intensified its reforestation efforts, encouraging farmers to create sustainable tropical ecosystems. Several large-scale reforestation programs are being carried out or planned.

Many of the Ethical Destinations moved to protect more of their unique flora and fauna by establishing protected areas. FS Micronesia passed the protection of 78 acres of forested wetland in the Yela Valley, part of the larger plan to preserve the entire 1,400-acre valley. Tonga did its part by creating more national marine reserves. Grenada is taking action to protect and regenerate its coral reefs by creating coral nurseries. Mongolia has also set aside almost 15% of its land in protected areas like Mongol Daguur and the Khustain National Park.

However, even our Ethical Destinations do not have perfect environmental records. In Panama, for instance, a hydroelectric dam was temporarily suspended over non-compliance with environmental impact assessment, but then overturned by the Supreme Court—even though many believe that this project will threaten the local water and displace many indigenous people. Uruguay needs to protect its savannas, which are threatened by large-scale ranching. Mongolia's mining boom threatens protected areas, and even though the government has taken conservation measures, these are not sufficiently enforced. Fortunately, there is growing awareness in Mongolia about mining's negative impact on the environment.

Mongolia's mining activities and their impact will be monitored this year, and will play an important role in determining if Mongolia will keep its spot in 2017. Botswana, for instance, which has enforced a trophy-hunting ban and has the largest fraction of land under formal conservation of any country in the world, was not included as a 2016 Ethical Destination because of the impact of its mining activities in protected areas (for additional information on mining and its impact, see Destination of Interest: Botswana).

Social Welfare

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

The UN Development Programme's Human Development Index (HDI) is a good indicator of social welfare, as it measures three metrics: life expectancy, average time spent in school and standard of living based on the average gross national income. Of all the countries on our list, Uruguay scored highest, ranking 52nd out of the 187 countries. Panama was not far behind at 60th, moving up another 5 spots compared to last year.

Panama and Mongolia had the lowest unemployment rates of the countries on our list, both reporting less than 5% of the workforce unemployed, while Panama also had the highest life expectancy at birth. Panamanians are living just about as long as Americans and Europeans, with an average life expectancy of 79 years. Ranking #7 in the world, they also came in high on the Happy Planet Index, a composite of "perceived well-being, life expectancy and ecological footprint."

Access to healthcare is always an issue in countries with few resources. Dominica stands out in this area, and serves as a model to other Caribbean nations. They offer widespread, well-organized and free healthcare across the island. In 2015, they were certified free of measles, mumps and rubella. They also embarked on a hospital partnership with nearby islands that will increase the quality of emergency care.

Mongolia is leading the way for end-of-life care in the developing world with healthcare subsidies for families with terminally ill members, good access to pain medicine and an announcement that the Ministry of Health will provide about 600 palliative (hospice) care beds across the country by 2017.

Uruguay's new administration is still focused on education, with plans to increase college scholarships, improve high-school dropout rates and continue the campaign to provide laptop computers to teachers and students—a plan that could propel Uruguay to the continent's leadership position on education. Education is also a priority in Tonga and Dominica, with literacy rates of 99% and 94%, respectively—well above the global average of 84%. In Tuvalu and Micronesia, plans are underway to extend Internet access, which will have a wide-reaching effect on education.

As mentioned earlier, no country is perfect—but one issue that plagues nearly every country on our list is a high level of gender-based violence. Tonga was almost eliminated from this year's list due to the dubious distinction of being only one of seven nations in the world that has not ratified the United Nations Convention for the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women. This stance underscores troubling cultural beliefs regarding the status of women in society, and we ask them to make significant improvements in the coming year.

On the bright side, at the end of 2014, Tuvalu's parliament unanimously passed the Family Protection and Domestic Violence Bill that, at long last, criminalized all forms of domestic violence. Samoa, one of the worst offenders on the list, has also taken a step forward with a landmark "State of Human Rights" report that aims at counteracting the widespread acceptance of domestic violence as a fact of life and increasing protections for women, people with disabilities and prisoners.

In Africa, Cabo Verde is a bright star in terms of gender equality with many women now holding high-ranking leadership positions in both the public and private sector. There is a good possibility the country will see its first female Prime Minister (Janira Hopffer Almada) in 2016. In Mongolia, International Women's Day (March 8th) is a national holiday.

Human Rights

Respect for human rights is a keystone for inclusion on our list. We consult respected resources such as Freedom House, Amnesty International, Human Rights Watch, and Reporters Without Borders to evaluate the human rights record of each country. No country on the list has a perfect record; all have issues. However, each has taken positive steps this year to promote human rights.

In its yearly report on civil and political rights, Freedom House granted perfect scores to Cabo Verde, Dominica, Samoa, Uruguay, and FS Micronesia, while Mongolia, Panama, Tuvalu, Tonga, and Grenada follow with the second highest scores. These countries are beacons that we hope other developing countries will follow. Mongolia, for instance—which celebrated its 25th anniversary of democracy this year—has embarked on a series of sweeping reforms to the country's legal system, including provisions that aim to prevent crimes of hate, bigotry, and discrimination. Panama has ratified all six key international conventions concerning child labor. In Samoa, the Landmark State of Human Rights Report—the first of its kind in the country—highlights the need for better safeguards for women, children, people with disabilities, and prisoners, and Uruguay was one of the first countries to sign the new Inter-American Convention on Protecting the Human Rights of Older Persons, adopted by the Organization of American States (OAS). Tuvalu's Parliament unanimously passed the country's Family Protection and Domestic Violence Bill.

Though Grenada did not make the 2015 list due to its failure to respect or guarantee LGBT rights, it has made cautious progress on this front. The issue of such discrimination was being considered within the ongoing process of constitutional reform, and had been raised in several of the public consultations held throughout Grenada. The general view, however, is that the Constitution should not be amended to give protection to LGBT persons—our 2017 list will take into account whether or not Grenada has made positive headway. Dominica must also be monitored in this area, for while the Sexual Offences Act (which criminalizes same-sex relationships) is very rarely enforced, the country's failure to decriminalize consensual relationships contravenes Dominica's commitment to the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, which it ratified in 1993. Meanwhile, Cabo Verde proudly celebrated its third annual gay pride week in 2015, and Tonga hosted its first Pacific Human Rights on Sexual Orientation and Gender Identification Conference in 2015.

Amnesty International applauds Mongolia's engagement with the Universal Periodic Review, as well as its continued movement towards abolishing the death penalty. Both Panama's and Uruguay's human trafficking designations have improved from 2014's Tier 2 Watch List to Tier 2 in 2015, with Uruguay handing down its first conviction for labor trafficking and assisting sex trafficking victims. Trafficking is still a problem in FS Micronesia, but it has been able to stay at a Tier 2 ranking. And the

U.S State Department's *Human Trafficking in Persons Report* acknowledges Tonga's increased anti-trafficking efforts compared to the previous reporting period.

Animal Welfare

For the second year in a row, animal welfare has played an important role in our determining which nations are added to Ethical Traveler's Top Ten Ethical Destinations list. Animal welfare, a broad term referring to the level of well-being with which an animal lives, varies greatly from country to country, and even within individual countries, depending on whether the animal in question is domestic, working or wild. The good news is that all of the countries on this year's list are making strides towards improving animal welfare, starting with domestic animals.

The overpopulation of cats and dogs is a global problem that leads to stray populations in both developing and developed nations. All ten of the nations on this year's list have some level of partnership with international NGOs to conduct spay/neuter campaigns aimed at reducing the overpopulation of dogs and cats humanely, without the use of the poisons often used to cull stray animals – poisons that are lethal to both domestic animals and native wildlife alike.

Uruguay has brought the law to the side of animals by issuing a legal decree ensuring all animals in that country are entitled to the Five Freedoms: freedom from hunger and thirst, freedom from discomfort, freedom from pain, suffering and disease, freedom from fear and distress, and freedom to express normal behavior. Uruguay has recently banned animal performances in circuses, and took a stand for working animals by enacting an important law to protect the country's ubiquitous cart-drawing horses from overwork, neglect and abuse.

Panama has also made incredible strides, with a new national animal welfare law that specifically bans dogfighting, greyhound racing and hare coursing. It also prohibits all forms of bullfighting, and severely regulates the use of performing animals in circuses.

With a focus on wildlife, both Cabo Verde and Dominica are working hard to protect the marine animals that share their shores. Cabo Verde is the third most important nesting ground worldwide for the endangered loggerhead turtle, and NGOs in that country have made impressive efforts to protect hatchlings from the twin threats of hunting and beach pollution that often hamper the turtles' perilous first trips to sea. Dominica, long hailed as one of the few Caribbean nations to consistently stand against the whaling industry, has upped its efforts to protect those magnificent creatures by creating a nationwide, compulsory primary school curriculum aimed at teaching students to respect and care for whales—along with other marine life living in their coastal waters.

Mongolia faces perhaps the most difficult animal welfare struggle of any country on our list, due to a surge in wildlife trafficking—some illegal, some unsustainable. The softening of their trade borders with China coincided with a decline in central governance, and a reduction in anti-hunting and trade enforcement. Animals like the Saiga Antelope, Musk Deer, Snow Leopard and Siberian Marmot are facing rapid population decline due in part to Chinese demand for TCM ingredients and

fur. Fortunately, both the UK government and the Zoological Society of London are helping to fund partnership projects in Mongolia aimed at enforcing the law and stemming the wildlife trade.

In 2015, we informed Mauritius—admirably progressive in many respects—that the country would not appear on our 2016 list if it did not make clear improvements in animal welfare—more specifically, in protecting monkeys from capture for export to animal-testing facilities in the West. Our research revealed no evidence that any such efforts were initiated in 2015. Though we laud Mauritius for its human rights and environmental positions, we cannot include the country on this year's list. We hope to welcome Mauritius again next year.

Omissions and General Trends

Five countries from our 2015 list were removed this year: Lithuania, Chile, Mauritius, Palau and Vanuatu. Like Latvia in 2014, Lithuania is no longer considered a “developing country,” having earned the IMF status of “mature economy” and making it ineligible for our list. Its growing GDP outpaced that of the EU, and allowed it to make significant gains in education and technology.

Vanuatu suffered terrible destruction from Cyclone Pam in March 2015, destroying 90% of the buildings in its capital and devastating the tourism industry. We fully support Vanuatu's citizens in their rebuilding efforts but do not believe their infrastructure can handle an influx of tourists at this time. Palau, another small Pacific island that has been a fixture on our list, was omitted this year. In order to reclaim their long-held spot they must show clear and verified progress in the fight to end human trafficking, for both domestic labor and sex purposes. This progress should include just prosecution and sentencing of offenders, and increased support for victims.²

Chile failed to amend its archaic law barring abortions under any circumstances, causing many women to terminate their pregnancies via the dangerous black-market and underscoring a disregard for women's reproductive rights. Because of this, they are not in line with our Human Rights requirements. There are other countries on our list that ban abortion as well, but Chile's sweeping restrictions (even forbidding abortion to save the life of the mother) are matched only by El Salvador, Malta, Nicaragua and Vatican City.

With these countries falling off our list, we're delighted to include five new ones: Mongolia, Panama, Grenada, Tuvalu and the Federated States of Micronesia. Six of this year's ten countries are island nations, a continuing trend in our winners' circle. Climate change affects islands dramatically, so they tend to be very aware of the importance of effective environmental policies. Panama, Mongolia and Uruguay are this year's only mainland winners. We are particularly excited to see Mongolia on the list, the first of the developing mainland Asian countries to qualify.

All countries, including this year's winners, face serious challenges that they must address to continue moving forward. While LGBT rights seem to be progressing globally, many countries still

² <http://www.state.gov/j/tip/rls/tiprpt/countries/2015/243509.htm>

outlaw homosexuality, with widespread harassment and discrimination. We would also like to see a stronger stand against domestic violence, a social illness still common in many countries.

The UN estimates that today, “one in every 122 humans is now either a refugee, internally displaced or seeking asylum”³ and the continued expansion of conflicts in the Middle East and Africa indicate that there will be no slow-down in the coming years. Human trafficking remains endemic globally, made worse by the refugee emergency. We strongly urge all countries to increase their efforts to combat modern-day slavery.

Addendum: Destinations of Interest

Along with the countries selected for their commitment to social justice and sustainable environmental practices, we suggest these additional “Destinations of Interest for 2016.” Though these countries are not on this year’s list, travelers can learn a great deal by visiting them.

Tunisia has much more to offer than beautiful Mediterranean beaches. It boasts an incredible diversity of landscapes, from forests and lakes to the Sahara desert, and cultures from the modern life of Tunis to the indigenous Berbers. It has also much to offer to history enthusiasts, with reminders of its Roman, Ottoman and colonial past.

Tunisia held peaceful national elections in 2014, adopting a progressive constitution that contains human rights guarantees and embeds the importance of climate change—only the third country in the world to do so. The new constitution has also contributed to social and political gains for women. Gender based discrimination in relation to health, education and employment is gradually being eliminated. In the 2014 elections, women’s representation rose from 4% in 1990 to 31% of the current parliament. Tunisia still criminalizes homosexuality, but that too may change. In 2015, after a 22-year old student was sentenced to one year in prison for having sexual relations with a man, Tunisia’s justice minister called for repeal of the law. The country’s transition to democracy was marked by the awarding of the 2015 Nobel Peace Prize to its National Dialogue Quartet, a coalition of labor union leaders, businesspeople, lawyers and human rights activists.

Unfortunately, also in 2015, Tunisia was the scene of two terrorist attacks targeting tourists. For that reason, it is not yet appropriate to add it to the Ethical Destinations list. These attacks were a serious setback for Tunisia’s tourism industry, resulting in the loss of many jobs. They also resulted in curbs on freedom of expression and assembly. We hope Tunisia will stay free of attacks, return to its progressive path, and be counted as a beautiful and ethical destination.

Fiji has demonstrated remarkable progress during the past year. For the first time since the military coup in 2006, the country held elections considered “free and fair” by international observers. Fiji is a wonderful place to go for surfing, snorkeling, sailing, diving and deep-sea fishing. But it also offers glimpses into Pacific culture, a thriving Hindu culture and rural tribal villages. The low crime rate, expanding economy and tolerance for the LGBT community give this South Pacific island group great appeal.

³ <http://www.un.org/apps/news/story.asp?NewsID=51185#.Vmho8RorLfA>

Fiji has had a climate change policy in place since 2012. It has also instituted a program called the Fiji Islands Locally Managed Marine Network, in which local NGOs and the government work together with local communities on the management of protected areas. This program was recently shown, in at least one area, to help alleviate poverty. Fiji's government has also committed to protecting 30% of its marine areas by 2020.

Although Fiji obviously made huge steps towards being an ethical destination, many human rights concerns persist. These include severe restrictions on freedom of the press. A Media Decree imposes severe penalties on any publication deemed threatening to public interest or order; those convicted are subject to hefty fines and two years 'imprisonment. There are also restrictions on assembly and expression, clampdowns on worker's rights, and reports of torture and ill treatment in detention. If progress is made to overcome these shortcomings, we will welcome Fiji onto our list.

Botswana is a great place to see African wildlife—including elephants, lions, zebras, and cheetahs—in their natural habitat. The country has made impressive conservation efforts, invested diamond-mining income into civil society, and enjoyed a level of stability rare for the African continent. Botswana has the largest fraction of land under formal conservation of any country in the world—with more than 25% of the land area set aside for parks and reserves. The nation has banned commercial hunting and prohibited the export of animals for hunting in other countries. While elephant poaching in northern Botswana remains an issue, wildlife experts and officials from around 30 governments gathered in Botswana to confront the threat that wild elephants could be heading for extinction.

Additionally, Botswana has a functioning democracy where political and civil rights are generally respected, and a track record of being the most uncorrupt country in Africa. Furthermore, Botswana is undertaking an aggressive prevention program to fill the gaps of the state's current HIV Prevention programming. On the LGBT front—though Botswana still criminalizes homosexuality—the country has recently ruled that gays, lesbians, and bisexuals have equal rights. Not only is Botswana progressing in LGBT equality, but gender equality has also become a recent topic in Botswana.

Botswana was not included on our list because of its mining activities in protected areas and its treatment of indigenous people. In the Kalahari Desert, Bushmen were displaced to make way for diamond mining. Though Botswana's High Court declared this an act of wrongful eviction and granted the Bushmen rights to return, the few who did return face threats and are blocked from water access. In addition, other Bushmen populations were forcibly removed from what is now the Central Kalahari Game Reserve in the name of "conservation efforts."

Costa Rica: A Special Report

For the past two years, controversially, **Costa Rica** has fallen off our Ethical Destinations list.

In May 2015, eager to address this omission, the Costa Rican government invited Jeff Greenwald, Ethical Traveler's Executive Director, to visit the country. Ethical Traveler paid Greenwald's airfare, while his in-country expenses were covered by his hosts. Greenwald made it clear beforehand that accepting this invitation did not obligate Ethical Traveler to include Costa Rica on our 2016 list, and

that he would recuse himself from the final vote for or against its selection.

During his visit Greenwald met with many activists and journalists, along with several government officials—including **Minister of Tourism** Mauricio Ventura Aragon, **Minister of Energy and the Environment** Dr. Edgar Gutierrez Espeleta, and **Vice President** Ana Helena Chacón Echeverría. He left Costa Rica deeply impressed with the country's aspirations, and aware of its many challenges. He was especially moved by the Vice President's passionate commitment to combat child sex trafficking—which is extremely difficult in the online age, and is mainly supported by sex tourists from the USA, Canada and other developed countries.

Much research and hand-wringing went into our decision to omit Costa Rica in 2016. Though we admire the country's many green initiatives, and agree that it is one of the most environmentally progressive countries in the developing world, our annual award is given not just for reputation but for progress—deeds, not words. By this standard, Costa Rica has been static or losing ground on some of its most celebrated initiatives:

— **Shark Finning & Sea Turtle Egg Poaching:**

In 2015, President Solís said his government will work to weaken shark protections, and will lobby shipping companies to backtrack on the recently implemented shark fin shipping bans. Though this policy is ostensibly temporary, Costa Rica cannot be considered an ethical destination while its President is publicly taking positions which harm endangered animals.

— **Indigenous People's Rights:**

The government does not take adequate measures to protect the indigenous communities. Costa Rica's indigenous peoples, estimated at around 60,000, remain the poorest and most marginalized sector of Costa Rican society. The government also struggles to protect members of the Bribri and Teribe—both indigenous communities—from non-indigenous people who have at times violently removed them from their ancestral lands.

— **Environmental Protections:**

No other country on our list is prosecuting (directly, in the case of Sea Shepherd's Paul Watson) or indirectly allowing prosecution of leading environmentalists. In addition, the notorious Jairo Mora environmentalist-murder case was bungled in 2015. It is being retried in 2016.

In spite of all they do to promote ecotourism, it will be difficult for Costa Rica to reclaim a spot on our list until their leaders take lasting, effective actions on the environment and human rights. Ethical Traveler would like to see Costa Rica take verifiable actions such as these, or equivalent:

- Implement a complete ban on fishing for any CITES-listed sharks, a ban on transshipping endangered sharks, and a ban on removing, storing or shipping shark fins.
- Creation of a National Park at Playa Moín (where Jairo Mora was murdered) or in a similarly critical sea turtle habitat, with effective protection and enforcement against squatters and poachers.

- Effective enforcement of laws against the sale of turtle eggs, which are still available at many markets today in Costa Rica.
- Lifting of the INTERPOL warrant against Paul Watson by the Solís administration.
- Poacher/finer retraining programs, to transition workers into careers with better long-term prospects, and which are better aligned with Costa Rica's green values.
- Government funding and support of animal (including primate and predator) rescue shelters.
- Increased wildlife migration lanes in highway development sites.
- Strict penalties for those who harass, injure or threaten environmental activists.

This said, we also recognize Costa Rica's many areas of progress—including clean energy, forest protection, equal rights, access to the disabled, rule of law and LGBT freedom. Costa Rica truly is a Destination of Interest, and we sincerely wish to see it reappear on our Top Ten list.

Finally, we must again include **Cuba**. The transformation of the island nation as it begins normalizing relations with its long-estranged northern neighbor will be fascinating to witness. These long-awaited changes will be dramatic as well as historic, and travelers have the opportunity to visit and interact with a true country-in-transition.

Our shared belief, once again: The foundation of ethical travel is mindful travel. We offer these recommendations in the hope that your journeys will be enlightening, inspiring and of real value—for yourself and for the global citizens you visit.

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