

TEN YEARS AGO, LIFE IN Morocco was, in many respects, different than it is today. Mules, a staple of commercial transport in this developing nation, were 50 percent cheaper than they are now. Marrakech real estate sold for a fraction of today's prices. Mountainside Berber villages near Imlil had no electricity, no education for most children, and no quick way to reach a hospital in an emergency. Tourism has changed all of that.

Moroccans are experiencing a global twenty-first-century reality: Travel is altering lives, for better and for worse, in communities across the planet where voyagers hang their hats. It's a function of scale. With air travel becoming ever more accessible, international tourism has exploded from 25 million visits in 1950 to 842 million in 2006. The World Tourism Organization expects that by 2020, 1.6 billion people will be vacationing internationally.

With visitors comes cash: Tourism receipts totaled \$730 billion in 2006, not including transportation, which makes travel one of the world's largest industries. And that, according to social and environmental activists, puts travelers in an unprecedented position to relieve—or aggravate—some of the world's most pressing problems. It all depends on how they use their expanding clout.

"It's inevitable that we're going to have an impact," says Tricia Barnett, director of Tourism Concern, a Britain-based lobby for ethical travel. "You can't avoid it."

To date, tourists as a group

haven't always had a stellar record. They've flocked by the millions to Egypt's Luxor, threatening the integrity of its many antiquities. Venice faces an overcrowding and pollution crisis, exacerbated by an influx of some 100,000 tourists a day in high season. And the World Monuments Fund has in recent years repeatedly named Chile's Rapa Nui one of the world's 100 Most Endangered Sites. The primary reason: uncontrolled tourism.

International organizations



New Berber homes in the High Atlas Mountains mark tourism's positive impact on Morocco's standard of living.

have tried to help. For instance, UNESCO lists 851 World Heritage Sites in a bid to make sure they're forever revered as treasures. But such commendable efforts have sometimes had deleterious effects, according to Stefaan Poortman, international development manager at the California-based Global Heritage Fund, a nonprofit that works to preserve important archaeological and cultural sites. "When developing nations get a World Heritage designation, it's often a double-edged sword," Poortman says. "While it can bring a flow of resources and people, often the value and finiteness of this asset are not protected. So it becomes a kind of 'get it while you can' philosophy" (see

"Making a List and Checking It Twice," page 104).

Against this checkered backdrop, the onus is increasingly falling on individual travelers—even luxury junkies—to craft trips that have a positive effect on people and places without compromising the traveler's enjoyment. Resources for doing so include books such as Tourism Concern's *The Ethical Travel Guide* and Lonely Planet's *Code Green*, both new in 2006. Twice in the past year, this magazine has published lists of questions to help travelers ferret out which hotels are socially responsible and which just talk a good game. (For a list of ethical-travel resources, see "You Are Not Alone," page 96.)

Finding reliable guidelines is only the first step. To test whether a traveler can reasonably apply these ideals to a real vacation and make a difference without sacrificing real comforts, I decided to take a trip with a mission: to do no harm; to support eco-friendly, labor-friendly, and animal-friendly practices; and to enjoy myself in luxury settings from start to finish. And I would do it all in a place where social responsibility is such an alien concept that the lessons learned could be applied anywhere in the world.

Morocco seemed the perfect destination for such an experiment. This struggling North African country of 35 million—where less than half the adult population can read and unemployment officially hovers around 12 percent—established an ambitious plan in 2000 to create 510,000 new tourism jobs by 2010. Over

Tip Sheet

The lessons we learned in Morocco apply in developing destinations everywhere

↓ DO's



1 Consider using an agent who specializes in luxury travel to your destination. With ample local knowledge, my adviser was able to easily factor in ethical criteria.



2 Prepare by reading ethical-travel guidebooks and Web sites, such as this magazine's new Web site, makeadifference.travel, which flags things to seek out or avoid.



3 Before booking a room, ask hotel managers what they do for their employees and the environment. Open-ended questions can yield more-telling answers than asking, say, "Do you recycle?" in a country where the concept is a foreign one.



4 Ask locals what they wish tourists wouldn't do. They know the social problems that visitors exacerbate and can tell you how to set a better example.

that same period, Morocco aims to nearly triple the number of tourists from 3.9 million per year to 10 million and to build six new megaresorts along the coast, averaging 20,000 beds apiece. Tourism-related revenue has already jumped from \$3.2 billion in 2000 to \$6.5 billion last year. Such rapid growth has some sustainable-tourism advocates worried that Morocco might be creating a future marked by low-wage jobs and exhausted natural resources.

"There is always a tendency on the part of tourism ministries to equate numbers with success," says Martha Honey, executive director of the Center on Ecotourism and Sustainable Development, in Washington, D.C. "But you end up killing the local flavor of a place if you put in tons of high-rise box hotels."

Lost in the Wilderness

For me, Morocco as a destination would be particularly challenging. I prefer (for moral reasons) to eat vegetarian and avoid products made from animal hides. This wouldn't be easy in an animal-dependent culture where grazing flocks represent tomorrow's dinner, shoes, and a lot more. An early dilemma: As an ethical traveler, am I supposed to support local traditions even when I have misgivings about the practices?

"It's appropriate to be who you are one hundred percent of the time," says Jeff Greenwald, executive director of Ethical Traveler, a Berkeley, California-based travelers alliance that advocates for human rights and the environment. "You would not expect Mus-

lims to feel pressured into having a drink at your home if they philosophically don't believe in drinking alcohol. There's absolutely no reason why you have to compromise your own moral code when you travel."

Despite such reassurances, I quickly found myself in a wilderness. There is no guidebook for touring Morocco in style and with a clean conscience. When I searched the Internet



Women make high-end natural cosmetics to sell at the Assouss Argane cooperative.

for high-quality *riads* (guesthouses built around tree-shaded courtyards) in Fez, Marrakech, Essaouira, and the High Atlas Mountains, I turned up 15 with slick Web sites boasting luxe digs. But when I e-mailed a list of questions about such matters as recycling, linen reuse, and training opportunities for staffers, I received just one reply with real answers. (It came from Marrakech's Riad Farnatchi.) Green Globe, a certifier of eco-friendly properties, had no online listings for Morocco. Intrepid Travel, which brings ethical concerns to bear on its group tours, had stopped going to Morocco because the quality of its accommodations was inconsistent. To patronize true visionaries, I

thought, I would need to enlist the help of a Morocco travel expert. I asked four agencies to propose an itinerary for an ethical luxury trip. What I received ran the gamut from helpful to hellacious.

Based in Britain, Naturally Morocco claims on its Web site to "promote sustainability and conservation in Morocco." It sounded good, but some of its recommended accommodations looked shabby on their Web sites, and the agency wanted more than \$1,000 for in-country transportation alone.

To make matters worse, staffers badgered me almost daily for my credit card number, falsely alleging that I had made an irreversible commitment. When I declined its services, Naturally Morocco sent me a bill for more than \$1,500 in cancellation fees. When I refused to pay, its director, Jane Bayley, said the bill was a mistake, but then argued that I should

compensate her for time spent preparing the quote. All this grief came from an agency listed in *The Ethical Travel Guide's* directory. **Lesson one: Don't give your business to an agency just because it claims to practice responsible tourism.**

The results from the three other agencies were mixed. Sahara Soul Travel, based in New York, didn't have much to offer in terms of accommodations with social credentials. Marrakesh Voyage, a U.S. agency run by a Moroccan expatriate, steered me to the newly opened Kasbah Omar, in the village of Anrar, outside Marrakech. This former way station for travelers and their animals has an honorable mission to give



5 Let people spoil you—then tip well. Men and boys were often eager to carry my bags from taxi to hotel or to take me to a hard-to-find address. By indulging in these makeshift services, I got a little luxury and they got a boost for their enterprise.

↓ DON'Ts



1 Avoid giving money directly to children: It encourages truancy and begging. Give instead to an established organization, such as a health clinic or a school.



2 Don't assume that social responsibility takes the same form in all countries. My hotels won kudos from local populations for keeping a subdued facade or for giving each staffer a sheep for slaughter at the Muslim holiday of Eid al-Adha—not exactly Sierra Club orthodoxy, but Moroccans appreciate these practices.



3 Never eat at a tiny food cart just to support its less-than-busy proprietor. Doing so can result in frequent trips to the toilet.

five percent of its income to a Berber village association, but it also makes a deceptive claim to be "lavish enough for the king." When I arrived, I had to scramble up a dirt hill to reach the entryway; my musty room had no circulating air; and cows and roosters in a barn next door made sure I didn't sleep past 3:30 A.M.

Heritage Tours, also in New York, originally told me that the socially responsible trip I had in mind wouldn't be feasible in Morocco because the country's travel industry just isn't geared that way. Nevertheless, the firm rose to the challenge and found three *riads* with high-end comforts, impeccable service—and conscientious credentials, to boot.

Lesson two: As long as an agency knows a destination well and can be trusted to deliver luxury, it can incorporate any number of ethical considerations without compromising on quality.

Transportation posed its own set of challenges. Air travel afforded few choices, since Royal Air Maroc has a monopoly on direct flights from New York to Casablanca. I flew Delta to New York and learned that its flight attendants don't bother to recycle. In terms of ethics, I was off to a shaky start, but I had a plan for penance. Upon return, I'd be sending \$20 to www.flyingforest.org, in the hope that it really would do as promised and plant enough trees in Africa to suck up a good measure of the carbon generated by my travel.

The Fun Begins

Once in Morocco, I rode public transportation as much as possible in order to minimize carbon emissions. **Lesson three:** First-class public transit is the way to go. Two train rides made clear that air-conditioning works far more effectively

in first-class seating, and it cost only about \$8 extra for a seven-hour ride. Although a car with a hired driver sounds luxurious, it didn't prove so for a Hawaiian couple I met, Larry and Diane Swenson of Molokai. When their driver caught sight of a



Breakfast is served on the veranda at Kasbah du Toubkal, a Berber mountain inn that uses local guides and donates to neighboring villages.

lucky goat on the trip from Essaouira to Marrakech, the man bought it on the spot and put it in the backseat with them. My SupraTours bus ride on that same stretch was comparatively luxurious in the absence of farm animals. And it cost only about \$8 for a comfortable two-and-a-half-hour ride.

Lesson four: Social responsibility takes surprising forms far from home. My *riads* underscored this point. The Palais Heure Bleue, in Essaouira, earns kudos locally for sequestering its Relais & Châteaux comforts behind a whitewashed facade so subdued that at first I walked right by it. Moroccans, who generally scorn any hint of ostentation, appreciate the absence of signage, awnings, and picture windows. At the Riad Maison Bleue, in Fez, every staffer from clerk to cook receives at least three months of job training, because owner Mehdi El Abbadi hires only the inexperienced. The Riad Farnatchi

gives its employees a rare five-day workweek, which enables waiter Redouane Elrhell to work toward a degree in property management. And during the Islamic holiday of Eid al-Adha, when tradition dictates that every family slaughter a

what constitutes an ethical hotel, I never would have found one, but fortunately Heritage Tours put them on my radar.

I didn't have to jettison my preconceptions altogether, however. At Kasbah du Toubkal, the restored former home of a feudal chieftain in the High Atlas, a five percent surcharge on my bill went to fund community projects for local Berber villages. Proceeds thus far have paid for two ambulances and a hammam for ritual bathing. A new school for girls is in the works. At this spectacularly situated hotel, where I watched a waterfall from my balcony, management limits waste by asking guests to drink its springwater, shun bottled water, and carry out their own empties. For fun, I hiked with a guide to a Berber village where new homes are going up, thanks to a brisk, tourism-driven local economy. By appealing to a Western sense of what's socially responsible, this place attracts conscientious types such as Aaron and Paige Perrine of Seattle, who designed their honeymoon around it.



YOU ARE NOT ALONE

RESOURCES FOR CARING TRAVELERS

Code Green

This Lonely Planet guidebook lists nearly 100 "responsible" travel experiences, from restoring temples in Nepal to bear-spotting in Transylvania (\$20).

ecotourismcesd.org

The Web site of the Center on Ecotourism and Sustainable Development offers detailed information on ecotourism certification and the impact of travel on indigenous peoples.

ethicaltraveler.org

Under its "What's New" section, this site highlights countries to support and to avoid, based on human rights records and other ethical considerations.

The Ethical Travel Guide

A directory of trips that meet the standards of Tourism Concern, a London-based advocacy group (Earthscan, \$17).

greenglobe21.com

The site is an online catalog of tour

operators who have earned a Green Globe logo for their social and environmental practices.

makeadifference.travel

This month, Condé Nast Traveler launches a new Web site packed with tips on how to take socially responsible trips.

mbayaq.org

The Web site of the Monterey Bay Aquarium, it tells which endangered fish to avoid eating in specific regions.

planeta.com

It's another useful site for travelers shopping for eco-friendly trips.

responsibletravel.com

This easy-to-search site lists socially conscious tours and hotels, sorted by the traveler's budget and trip preference (honeymoon, cycling, beach, etc.).

tourismconcern.org.uk

It identifies ethical issues for travelers to consider and campaigns against operators deemed to be problematic.

"It gets to be very tiring to have to think about every decision," says Aaron. "It's nice that everything you do [at Kasbah du Toubkal] can be beneficial to the place and the people. It allows your Western conscience to relax."

Lesson five: Perfection is elusive. Although I had some success finding commendable properties, I soon learned this lesson. Employees at the Riad Maison Bleue live under the cloud of El Abbadi's stern employment policy, which says, "If you ever leave, you will never work here again." The Palais Heure Bleue features British colonial-themed rooms as well as a lounge, complete with mounted animal heads, that doesn't exactly evoke a sense of harmony with all creatures great and small. Despite Morocco's looming

water shortages, my six-inch showerhead at the Riad Farnatchi drenched me from no less than 95 holes. I slept at the Riad Farnatchi in a newly renovated space that just months earlier had belonged to a Moroccan family who, like others in recent years, sold their home in the medina to make room for foreigners with deep pockets. Such realities upped the ante for my mission, although I faced new ethical challenges at every turn.

Take food. I missed out on much of Morocco's famous cuisine by insisting on meatless meals incorporating locally grown organic produce. That's because Moroccans are omnivores, and those who aren't get bland veggies and couscous most of the time. I had a few

log on to makeadifference.travel today to learn more about our new **Condé Nast Traveler Five & Alive Fund**, which provides clean water, food, and malaria treatment to children around the globe. You'll also find loads of resources and guidance on how to be a more ethical traveler.

gastronomic victories, such as baked stuffed calamari at Lalla Mira, an Essaouira "bio-hotel" that uses solar panels and organic cotton sheets. And I savored the nine well-seasoned vegetables at the Riad Maison Bleue, which preserves tradition by serving up time-tested family recipes. But I also created a lot of garbage by drinking bottled water—18 bottles over eight hot days—because I didn't trust refillable water-filtering bottles (recommended by *The Ethical Travel Guide*) to remove perilous bacteria.






And when I nobly decided to support a young merchant by getting a cheese-and-veggie sandwich from his less than busy food cart, it had the effect of increasing my time spent in the bathroom for the rest of the trip. So much for karma.

Shopping was also a mixed bag. Heritage Tours had steered me to a cooperative where women, illiterate and often divorced, keep 80 percent of the profits from the sale of high-end cosmetics. I gladly paid full price for a few gifts there and also at Afoulki, an Essaouira lamp shop whose profits fund programs for poor children in the area. On the downside, I needed to get a carrying case with a zipper and couldn't find one anywhere to meet my animal-free








ETHICAL SCORECARD

EXPERTS ASSESS HOW OUR REPORTER FARED IN HIS QUEST FOR THE MORAL HIGH ROAD

WHAT I DID	JEFF GREENWALD Executive Director of Ethical Traveler	TRICIA BARNETT Director of London-based Tourism Concern	MARTHA HONEY Executive Director of Center on Ecotourism and Sustainable Development
 <p>I drank bottled water—18 plastic bottles over eight hot days.</p>	<p>D You're guilty of a host of evils here—not the least of which is not drinking enough. Next time, buy just one bottle and have it refilled by your hotel.</p>	<p>D You could have used iodine tablets. What did you do with the plastic bottles?</p>	<p>C It would have been better to carry a refillable bottle with you and use purified water from city hotels.</p>
<p>Despite travel agents' insistence that I ride in chauffeured automobiles, I took two trains and a bus on long-distance portions of the journey.</p> 	<p>B Aside from saving energy, this is a good way to meet locals and serve as a goodwill ambassador. But in certain countries—like India, Iran, or Russia—using a driver/guide can be a smart idea.</p>	<p>A That's spot-on, since instead of being isolated from everyone, you have a great opportunity to engage with local people and get a better sense of the culture of the country.</p>	<p>A Bravo! Given the impact on climate change, there is a growing effort to get travelers to use either buses or trains instead of planes for short- and medium-distance travel.</p>
 <p>I chose first-class train travel for its well-functioning air-conditioning.</p>	<p>C Not the most energy-efficient choice, but, hey, you're on vacation.</p>	<p>F Think about the energy it used—unless it was solar-paneled.</p>	<p>B I'd do the same. It is often a balance between comfort and conservation.</p>
<p>I tipped kids, around 12 to 16 years old, when they helped me find my hotel or carry my bags.</p> 	<p>B Sure—they're offering a service, and you're accepting it. Nothing either heroic or wrong with this transaction. It's simply good manners.</p>	<p>C A 12-year-old and a 16-year-old are quite different. Are you encouraging them not to go to school? You should use adults who need the work.</p>	<p>B It's hard. They performed a legitimate service, but they should probably have been in school. I'd make a contribution to a local social service project instead.</p>
 <p>I bought gifts made of thuya wood, which I later learned is endangered.</p>	<p>C Buying small items made from Barbary thuya is acceptable in Spain and Morocco, though not in Malta—so relax.</p>	<p>D You have a responsibility as a traveler to find out beforehand.</p>	<p>F Try to find out about endangered products before you buy.</p>



WHAT I DID	JEFF GREENWALD	TRICIA BARNETT	MARTHA HONEY
<p>I asked permission before photographing adults and children and offered token payment in exchange.</p> 	<p>B High marks for respecting locals, as long as you didn't sneak a picture if they said no. No need to offer payment unless it's requested—it might create expectations.</p>	<p>F Asking is only polite and respectful. However, it's not appropriate to make people feel that every relationship with a tourist is a money exchange.</p>	<p>B Asking is great, but paying can encourage them to sell their photos to tourists.</p>
<p>I stayed in a hotel where the manager hires only the inexperienced, trains them, and tells them, "If you ever leave [that is, quit], you will never work here again."</p> 	<p>C Well, that happens when you walk out on a service job just about anywhere. More to the point: Were they paid well and treated with respect?</p>	<p>F This sounds like bonded labor. Many hotels pay very low wages, and working conditions are very poor. It's very impressive that you found this out, but you should have checked out of the hotel.</p>	<p>C Unless there are written guarantees that these are good jobs with fair working conditions, sounds like a scheme to get cheap labor and force employees to become virtual slaves.</p>
<p>I hired guides in four of my five destinations, for either urban or hiking tours, and tipped them the equivalent of \$15 to \$25 each.</p> 	<p>A You picked a great way to support the local economy and make tourism a profitable enterprise for local people.</p>	<p>B People should, of course, be paid fair wages. Did you check out what the going rate was?</p>	<p>B Sounds good. I assume there was a wage in addition to the tip.</p>
<p>When small children asked for gifts in one village, I gave each one a colored pen.</p> 	<p>F Bad move. That's a surefire way to ensure that all future visitors will be hounded by packs of kids screaming for handouts. Next time, ask a schoolteacher, parent, or community leader to distribute your gifts.</p>	<p>F This doesn't remove the underlying reservation about begging. It's demeaning to everyone. You should give presents directly to the school.</p>	<p>D Very tempting, but it would have been better to give all the pens to a school or day care center. I'd tell the kids what you are doing—assuming you have a common language.</p>
<p>When small children asked for gifts in another village, I heeded my guide's advice and used a Berber phrase that means, "I have nothing."</p> 	<p>B I'm sure the kids weren't fooled—but you're on the road to undoing the damage wrought by previous pen-flinging tourists. (If you'd shown them a magic trick or a prism or a blow-up globe, you would have gotten an A.)</p>	<p>A Always seek advice about how best to manage children asking for money and presents because it distorts relationships with visitors. Whenever you have a cultural concern, it is always wisest to seek local advice.</p>	<p>D Say that you are making a donation to a village project. Saying you have nothing doesn't sound true to the children and only makes you look stingy.</p>

criterion. I reluctantly bought one made of camel skin. I also stocked up on wooden games for my kids, thinking I was doing a good deed by supporting local craftspeople. Two days later, I learned from a careful Lonely Planet reader that the wood I'd bought, called thuya, is endangered. Foiled again.

Lesson six: Read, then read some more, and keep your ears open for insight into what's ethical in a particular place.

Having stumbled more than once in my quest for ethical purity, I picked the brains of fellow travelers on a similar quest. Our experiences led us to the same conclusion: Ethics and luxury can go hand in

hand, even in the developing world. Stuart and Marilyn Gillard of Santa Barbara had asked their travel agent for "authentic" accommodations with creature comforts and



Fellow travelers on a similar quest had reached the same conclusion: **Ethics and luxury can go hand in hand.**

found themselves in the Riad Maison Bleue, which had become a model of preservationist restoration for 11 other houses in Fez. Lisa Mossy of Houston harbored a concern that "women here [in Morocco] are suppressed" and used concierge.com to find Al Fassia, a women-owned cooperative restaurant in Marrakech.

Mike Weston of Sheffield, England, had wanted a comfortable, adventurous, affordable trip. He chose British outfitter Explore in part because it makes a point of sup-

porting local merchants. "If it was a lousy holiday and they gave twenty dollars to the locals, I wouldn't buy it," Weston says. "But if they provide a comfortable holiday and give to the locals as well, that's all the better."

As the days passed, I innovated. Example: photography. Moroccan etiquette says

to ask permission before taking pictures of people and to offer tokens of appreciation. I photographed metalworkers, fishermen, bricklayers—and often chatted with them as I offered tips. I felt I had found a way to be playfully artistic, share wealth (on a very small scale), document my trip, walk for miles, and have a fun, affordable afternoon.

I also used guides, both for urban tours and hiking. They got a good day's pay; I got a deeper understanding of Morocco in return. Sometimes their insights taught me what helps the locals. For instance, I had heard from Barnett: "Don't barter too hard—you don't want to beat someone