

METROPOLITAN TOURING AND ITS ROLE IN SUSTAINABLE TOURISM

A SMALL BIT OF HISTORY

Back in 1953, Metropolitan Touring embarked on a mission to share the wonders of Ecuador and the Galapagos with the world. Over 65 years later, we've amassed thousands of unforgettable stories from our guests, galvanizing just how far we've come and how much we've achieved in all that time.

The Metropolitan Touring difference is marked by a multitude of different factors, but if we had to narrow it down to just three of those, we'd say they're: the warm and friendly **Spirit** we bring to the table when it comes to satisfying the desires and interests of our guests; the **Passion** we share for the destinations we take them to; and the **Vision** we have for the future of our planet and its unique destinations. By coming along with us, you don't take part in any type of tour – you embark on an outstanding trip in the company of seasoned, professional travel experts.

Promoting Ecuador was a bit of a challenge in the early 1960s, but the founders of Metropolitan Touring had a clear vision of preserving the integrity of local cultures and their traditions, as well as cautious actions in pristine natural environments. This is how the first trips to the Otavalo ethnic market started, the first-ever organized tours in the Galapagos Islands, the first floating hotel in Amazonia (aptly named Flotel), and the first thorough understanding of majestic cities like Quito, later named World Heritage Site.

MILESTONES IN UNDERSTANDING RESPONSIBLE TOURISM

In the early days of the 1970s, the term “ecotourism” surfaced, and Ecuador was the first country which founded an ecotourism association of tour operators. Efforts in the Amazon, and particularly in the Galapagos Islands, became a priority particularly, in the design of a management plan, visitor behaviour, zoning, community interaction, and exploring natural protected areas such as national parks, ecological reserves, geobotanical reserves, etc. All these early initiatives paid off when the Galapagos Islands and the city of Quito were both declared World Heritage Sites by UNESCO in 1978. This was very sensible proof that what started as pure visionary conviction, could become a world model for conservation.

METROPOLITAN TOURING SEES HUMAN IMPACT IN TOURISM AS THE GREATEST NICHE

Scientific research, conservation efforts, and funding for restoration in the Galapagos Islands were highly welcomed realities after the establishment of the Galapagos National Park Service and the Charles Darwin Foundation. In few years of institutional collaboration, the islands became one of the most respected locations on Earth for conducting scientific research in a broad field of natural-history subjects. With the launching of our first Galapagos cruise liner, a small 60-guest vessel, cooperating with the National Park in the decade of the 1970s was not only the logical step forward, but also the milestone move that will let us understand what our primary role as tour operators should be. We assisted the first needs of researchers by providing free transportation to scientists and their supplies from island to island, as well as the island weekly mail delivery, and even the needed hot-water shower for scientists. A refreshing cold beer was always welcomed by those field scientists. Managing visitors, though, was a totally different endeavor, as wildlife locations, safe anchorages, walking areas, snorkeling sites, and more were needed to be planned on each island. We took this task seriously and worked with the National Park in the early design of rules for visitation, layout of trails for exploring, and determining the basics of understanding the full potential of this stunning natural resource.

With the increase in visitor numbers, as well as local growth of the populated islands, Galapagos faced a totally different scenario both in the 1980s and in the 1990s. Our role as responsible operators needed a complete shift of gears, and in the early 1990s, we established Fundacion Galapagos-Ecuador as our most dedicated effort in giving back to the islands. The fields of “green cooperation” (science) were already covered, and we chose to fully immerse our work in “brown issues” (human impact). Shortly after, our leading projects incorporated a new vision of cooperation which was already coined under the definition of sustainability. Taking the first steps in solid-waste management together with the Municipality of Santa Cruz Island (largest populated island) was highly inspirational, because local residents needed to be fully convinced on why reducing, reusing, and recycling, should be the new approach in understanding the uniqueness of the place we live and work. The highly rewarding results came years later, when the Galapagos province of Ecuador

was the only populated place in all of Ecuador that recycled its solid waste at origin, and its coverage included 95% of the inhabitants. Then, the coastal cleanup project together with local fishermen was an absolute highlight in the local population. Fishermen have to follow no-fishing periods, which basically means no full income during those times. We funded their income by paying them for cleaning the shorelines of the islands from debris and solid waste carried in by large ocean currents. With the help of the Coca-Cola Foundation, this project rapidly grew within the local population, and various cleaning efforts all-year round are now the norm. Another pseudo project we led, took place in the years of a cargo vessel ownership. At our own expense we would sail back with hazardous materials that couldn't be recycled, nor go to the local landfills. Vehicle batteries, tires, and burnt oils were shipped back to the mainland on board our cargo vessel.

Finally, our principles also included providing benefits from our presence to the local community. On board our expedition vessels, we provided free spaces to local students to come on board and explore their islands with us. Most school kids in Galapagos hardly get a chance to explore their vast archipelago as tourists, and we had the pleasure of showing them the uniqueness of the islands' flora and fauna by taking them on board. Fundacion Galapagos took over 700 students through its existence. Although not a project by itself anymore, we still continue taking local students as guests on board.

MOVING ON...OUR GREATEST MOVE!

By the early 21st Century, Metropolitan Touring had grown considerably. It was now owned by Grupo Futuro, a holding group that had been always connected with ambitious local projects. The company now had offices in Colombia and Peru and had expanded its fleet of Galapagos cruises to a total of 3 luxurious Expedition Vessels. Not to mention, the company was now the proud owner and operator of 3 prestigious hotels in Ecuador – two of which are officially a part of National Geographic's Unique Lodges of the World! To this day, Metropolitan Touring prides itself in creating unique experiences in iconic destinations, celebrating our ability to innovate and make a difference throughout the country of Ecuador, and now — a fantastic corner of South America. Grupo Futuro has its own sustainability arm, *Fundación Futuro*, which guides us in all sustainability-related projects for all the companies that are part of the holding group.

With solid growth as a company, more employees, and more properties, came a set of new responsibilities. Our contributions in brown issues continue to lead our visionary actions, and in the early 2010s protecting the highly-threatened biodiversity of Ecuador became our new frontier. This reality was the birthplace for Mashpi Reserve and Mashpi Lodge. This property is located right in the northwest side of Ecuador's Andes, where the moisture from the Pacific Ocean collides with the coolness of the highlands producing great natural conditions for biodiversity to unfold. The lodge was built using the most careful approach to construction impact; in fact, it was prebuilt in scale near Quito, and then, just like a jigsaw puzzle, it was assembled again at its current location. The idea was not to clear any forest land for bringing in super heavy construction machinery and materials. Henceforth, the selection of materials that were used for building Mashpi had to be in sync with our message. But, parallel to the launching of Mashpi Lodge, a new challenge was about to start: addressing climate crisis. Thus, our two-fold vision, now included not just the protection of tropical forests and their biodiversity, but also quantifying the carbon footprint left by all of our operations.

When it comes to sustainability at Metropolitan Touring, we take each and every tour of ours to heart with respect to the state and well-being of our planet. Often times, tourism operations can cause significant damage to fragile environment if they aren't handled in a sustainable manner. Transportation logistics, too, tend to be the biggest contributor to our carbon footprint as a Tourism Company. Fortunately, we do our best to implement highly sustainable tech into numerous different parts of our trips. What's more? Such an impact is offset, in large part, by the 2,500 hectares (6,200 acres) of tropical forest that we own and help preserve at our Mashpi Reserve. The acquisition of this entire property helped conserve a substantial portion of the remaining Choco bio-region in Ecuador after it experienced years of deforestation. The ultimate goal of creating biological corridors is also connected to the idea of expanding this protected area to 14,000 hectares (35,000 acres). Our inspiration is to know that this area of tropical forests produces oxygen for all of us, and it sinks carbon dioxide. Furthermore, the Andean Choco while holding only about 1.4% of the Earth's surface, hosts nearly 60% of our planet's biodiversity. This is the reason why UNESCO declared in 2018, this Bioregion as a World Biosphere Reserve.

While measuring CO2 emissions of our baseline year of operation (2016), we encountered a slight drop in emissions when compared to that of 2017. In fact, we had reduced our emissions almost 3% (268 Ton/CO2) due to different actions related to reducing our footprint. Most of these initiatives were related to energy efficiency, particularly at our administration offices. Furthermore, efforts in energy-related initiatives will give us an additional 5% reduction in emissions for the accountability of 2018 and 2019 (currently being measured and analyzed). Specific actions in emissions reduction include:

- Installation of solar panels at our MT-Quito offices (2018-2019). Future plans in 2020 (TBA).
- Targeted motivational campaigns for office staff in three fronts: energy consumption, water savings, and solid-waste recycling.
- Ships/Yachts: use of fuel additives for higher combustion efficiency
- Ships/Yachts: use of FMS (full synthetic media) filters which retains micro particles down to 0.1 micron. Diesel-combustion efficiency increases to 99.8%. Better diesel quality at combustion reduces GHG emissions.
- Ships/Yachts/Hotels: complete elimination of plastic straws usage (bamboo & metal straws are better options).
- Ships/Yachts/Mashpi Lodge/Finch Bay Hotel: full replacement of single-use plastic bottles with souvenir refillable water bottles. Actual annual impact: about 60,000 bottles less to landfills/recycling facilities. CO2 emissions savings at production level of: 163 Ton/CO2 (equivalent of nearly 9,000 gallons of gasoline).
- Installation of LED lights (full replacement of fluorescent units). Better luminosity with lower levels of energy consumption.

In 2018, all of Metropolitan Touring operations became 100% carbon neutral, making us the first tour operator with complete offsetting of its CO2 emissions. Carbon neutrality applies to 2016 and 2017. The tropical forests where we offset our emissions are those that greatly impact the biodiversity of the Andean Choco Bioregion. Our clients can now also pass this benefit to exploring guests by inviting them to offset their carbon footprint during their entire Ecuador trip with Metropolitan Touring. Our carbon neutral program has become our most ambitious project ever. Find out more:

<https://www.metropolitan-touring.com/carbon-neutral-expedition-travel>

Watch our Carbon Neutral video: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=x1ZRnSi4wkA>

Last, but not least, when it comes to community, we also never forget to do our part and lend a tremendous hand: sponsoring trips for students, dedicating time to Naturalist Guides that are still in training and offering empowering workshops for numerous different communities. Our commitment efforts have not gone unnoticed and have been recognized with numerous awards, including Honorable Mentions in Condé Nast Traveler magazine's World Savers Award, "Best Ground Operator" in the UK's Latin American Travel Association, a finalist nomination in the World Travel & Tourism Council 'Tourism for Tomorrow Awards', and "South America's Leading Green Hotel" for the Finch Bay Galapagos Hotel and Mashpi Lodge.

The world talks about us here:

ultratravel

SCHOOL
HOUSE

The Daily Telegraph

HARRODS
TRAVEL

TTG

Condé Nast
Traveler

The
New York
Times

NATIONAL
GEOGRAPHIC
TRAVELER

Good Housekeeping

CRUISE CRITIC

Forbes

INDULGE
and live play

AFAR

TRAVEL+
LEISURE

Our most respected clients include:

Who trusts us?

Have a look at who we work with:

USA

ABERCROMBIE & KENT
ADVENTURE ASSOCIATES INC.
ADVENTURE BY DISNEY
ADVENTURESMITH EXPLORATIONS
ALEXANDER-ROBERTS
ALLURING AMERICAS
AUDLEY TRAVEL US
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MONTECITO VILLAGE TRAVEL
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R. CRUSOE & SON
ROYAL ADVENTURES
SA LUXURY EXPEDITIONS
SPICED DESTINATIONS
STANFORD ALUMNI ASSOCIATION
TAUCK WORLD DISCOVERY
THOMAS P. GOHAGAN & COMPANY
UN-CRUISE ADVENTURES (UCA)

UNITED KINGDOM

AUDLEY TRAVEL
COX & KINGS TRAVEL LIMITED
IMAGINE LATIN AMERICA
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KUONI TRAVEL UK LTD
LLAMA TRAVEL
SCOTT DUNN LATIN AMERICA
SUNVIL
THE LOTUS GROUP
THE ULTIMATE TRAVEL COMPANY
TRAILFINDERS
TRAVEL 2

VELOSO TOURS
WESTERN AND ORIENTAL TRAVEL LIMITED

GERMANY

AKZENTE REISEN
STUDIOSUS
WINDROSE INTERCONTINENTAL TRAVEL

AUSTRALIA

ADVENTURE WORLD AU
APT GROUP
AURORA EXPEDITIONS
CHIMU ADVENTURES
CONTOURS
SOUTH AMERICA TOURISM OFFICE
SOUTH AMERICA TRAVEL CENTRE
WORLD JOURNEYS

REST OF THE WORLD

MASTER TOURS
QUEENSBERRY

GATEWAYS INTERNATIONAL
GOWAY TRAVEL
KENSINGTON TOURS
AGENCIA DE VIAJES MIDLAND TRAVEL
COLUMBUSTRAVEL CIA. LTDA.
ECOLEVIJES ECUADOR S.A.
EXCLUSIVE GALAPAGOS CRUISES
GENTIAN TRAILS CIA. LTDA.
GTC GALAPING CIA. LTDA.
GULLIVER EXPEDITIONS
LATZTURISMO SA
TRAVELPASIÓN S.A.
PURE ECUADOR CIA. LTDA.
TROPIC ECOLOGICAL ADVENTURES
CATAI
EL CORTE INGLES TOURMUNDIAL
EXPEDITION TOURS
SOUTH AMERICAN TOURS DE URUGUAY S.A.
TMR INTERNATIONAL
MISTRAL QUALITY GROUP
HALLELUJAH WORLD TRAVEL
ADVENTURE WORLD NZ
VIAJES PENTAGRAMA S.A.
JAMBO TOURS
THABELA TRAVEL

And many, many more!

Metropolitan Touring is absolutely glad to consider you our partner in responsible tourism.



www.metropolitan-touring.com

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