



RESPONSIBLE TRAVEL POLICY

Policy Aims

Undiscovered Montenegro aims to create demand for, and provide, more ecologically and socially sustainable ways to holiday at Lake Skadar National Park in Montenegro, a Ramsar-recognised Wetland of International Importance. We are the first tour operator in the area dedicated to offering ways to explore the lake and its hinterland which are low impact on the environment – cycling, hiking and kayaking – but high impact in experience, environmental education and cultural connections. We steer clear of large groups, preferring to host small numbers of people – maximum eight at a time – in quality accommodation and aim to connect our customers with local people through excursions to remote lakeside settlements, domestic farm-holds, local wineries and weekly farmers' markets. Our quality, tailor-made holidays provide valuable income to local people, helping them sustain their traditional way of life. They also demonstrate the value and profitability of “eco-tourism” in an area which has only recently become aware of its attraction to foreigners and must manage this in a sensitive, sustainable way which balances the needs of the environment. We provide a Travellers' Code of Conduct, as well as lots of on-hand advice, to guests on how to manage the social, economic and environmental impacts of their visit in a sustainable way.

Economic Responsibility

The main settlements of Lake Skadar – Virpazar, Rijeka Crnojevica, Godinje, Murici, Karuc and Dododosi – have suffered years of increasing impoverishment resulting from urban migration, an earthquake in 1979 and a lack of public investment during and after the 1990s Balkan war. Tourism is now developing as a new and valuable sector of the economy in this area of outstanding natural beauty, however the market is currently focused on day trippers who, in increasing numbers, are coached in and shepherded onto petrol-driven cruise boats, polluting the water, threatening the wildlife and producing little financial benefit beyond the tour company they booked with. Undiscovered Montenegro is committed to boosting the local economy at Lake Skadar with longer-staying guests (who spread their spending) and by ensuring the financial benefit of our customers is felt at a micro level. We hope others will follow our example.

We set out to achieve these aims by:

- employing guides who live locally and are part of the community to accompany our customers on day hikes, kayak trips, bicycle rides and wine and cultural tours;
- working with German eco-tourism NGO GTZ to provide work experience for newly qualified local guides who passed the 2008 and 2009 training programme;
- partnering with local, lake-based travel agents and service providers to provide activities for our guests, rather than operating through larger agencies based in the nearby capital, Podgorica;
- stimulating the employment of local people by arranging accommodation in privately-owned apartments and houses and in hotels that employ staff from the local community;
- encouraging the local sourcing of food and drinks by providing our customers with detailed guidance notes on where and what to buy, as well as tailor-made tours which involve visits to remote lakeside settlements, local markets, farm-holds and wineries where domestically-produced products can be tasted and purchased, eg wine, brandy, olive oil, honey, smoked ham and carp, goats cheese as well as homegrown fruit and vegetables.

Environmental Responsibility

Undiscovered Montenegro is a small company with extremely low carbon emissions. With a staff of just two, we do not need to keep an office, opting to work from home. We have decided not to use printed brochures as a marketing tool and customers who book will not receive printed and posted information from us. Correspondence by email and with PDFs reduces our need to use paper at all, while any paper we do consume is printed on both sides and recycled. We are also developing our emailed information packs as podcasts so that customers can choose to use these via handheld devices rather than printing them out.

Through our Travellers Code, on our website and during our guided tours, we ensure our customers receive advice on how to reduce their water use, as well as minimise any damage to the environment, wildlife and the eco-system in the National Park that could otherwise result from their visit.

All our tours involve visits to USAid-financed tourist information centres dotted about the lake - a project which is now locally managed, locally staffed and aims to educate visitors about the lake's special ecology and cultural traditions, while building local pride in the area. We are also working with German eco-tourism NGO GTZ, and the World Bank funded 'Albania and Montenegro Lake Skadar Joint Eco-systems Project' to identify formal ways for our customers to volunteer and directly benefit the environment during their stay.

In the meantime, we have instigated ourselves a voluntary litter clearing project operating once a week within the National Park borders and encourage all our visitors to get involved.

Social Responsibility

By encouraging tourists from the West to visit a still relatively unknown destination in the Balkans where centuries-old cultural traditions are maintained, we believe we can create valuable cultural exchange between our customers and the host community. We aim to achieve this by:

- providing pre-trip information on the social and political situation at Lake Skadar and Montenegro in general (this is included in our Travellers' Code) – a basic grounding in turbulent Balkan history and current-day issues is invaluable;
- giving suggestions in our Travellers' Code and on our website on how to minimise negative impacts on local cultures – especially important in a multi-ethnic destination like Lake Skadar where some communities are Muslim, while others are Orthodox Christian;
- ensuring there is a local guide or host to greet our customers at remote communities, as well as someone who can interpret for them (English is seldom spoken or understood around the lake);
- ensuring our customers visit at least one USAid-financed tourist information centre at the lake during their stay - a project which is now locally managed, locally staffed and aims to educate visitors about the lake's special ecology and cultural traditions, while building local pride in the area; and
- actively encouraging visits which generate pride and value in conserving local traditions – from bee-keeping and carp-smoking, to wine-growing and fishing.

This policy will be distributed to all staff members, destination suppliers and made available to our customers. Any complaints or suggestions relating to this policy should be emailed to enquiries@undiscoveredmontenegro.com and we will respond within 28 days. We welcome your contribution!