

## **Adventure Tourism as a vehicle for achieving Sustainable Development Goals**

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Adventure tourism has many benefits for sustainable tourism, the core of which is to empower a global travel community to deliver experiences that protect natural and cultural capital while creating shared economic value. The industry, including the representative Adventure Travel Trade Association (ATTA), holds a belief in the power of tourism—adventure tourism specifically—as a vital force for environmental, social and economic common good. Under the G20 Tourism Working Group meeting held at Siliguri/Darjeeling, India, the thematic discussion on “Adventure tourism as a vehicle for achieving Sustainable Development Goals” were based on setting the core values of sustainability, which will attract high value customers to support local economies. The United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (UNSDGs) serve to inspire and focus the adventure travel community in that mission, making a clear connection between the value of adventure travel as a tangible, result-driven vehicle in the pursuit of these goals and fostering positive change on a global scale.

Defining adventure travel is essential to understanding the market segment’s scope and alignment with the UNSDGs. The ATTA defines adventure travel as a trip that includes at least two of the following three characteristics: physical activity, interaction with nature, and cultural learning or exchange. Dominated by small businesses in rural areas and wilderness environments, adventure travel has a deep impact on human and nature capital, and views the protection and promotion of these resources as central to its continued success.

Adventure travel is inherently connected to the well-being of both natural environments and local communities, making it a sector that can readily contribute to sustainable development. The industry is currently involved in various projects that align with at least 8 of the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (UNSDPs), described in more detail below.

### **SDG1: No Poverty**

### **SDG8: Decent Work & Economic Growth**

In many places, tourism revenue is the primary driver in economic growth. Through rural tourism, the focus is shifted from overpopulated tourist hubs, empowering community-led groups, entrepreneurs and small businesses. Adventure tourism organizations work to connect small businesses to the international market, support local suppliers to ensure the safety of guides and guests, and help regions recover from disasters by revitalizing sustainable tourism.

Research shows that adventure tourism contributes more revenue per visitor to a destination than mass tourism. In adventure tourism, an estimated [65-75% of traveler spend stays in the destination](#) compared to as low as 10-15% from mass tourism. Additionally, [2.6 local jobs are produced per \\$100,000 USD in adventure tourism receipts](#), compared to 1.5 local jobs produced by mass

tourism. Industry organizations like the ATTA work to bring together public and private funding to strengthen an entire tourism network. As one example, the [ATTA's 2019 event AdventureNEXT Near East](#) has led to more than \$3.6M USD in purchasing power being directed to local providers in Jordan.

#### **SDG 4: Quality Education**

Due to the increasing global recognition of adventure travel as an important tool for destinations seeking to build a sustainable travel network, many donor agencies and governments provide small startup companies access to business and tourism training. Trade organizations like the ATTA facilitate global and regional events, with some offering scholarship programs. Many [virtual](#) and [in-person](#) training programs are available to directly support the development of a more qualified and skillful tourism workforce.

#### **SDG5: Gender Equality**

Sustainability in travel and tourism cannot be achieved [without gender equality and empowerment of all women](#). A [study conducted by the ATTA in 2017](#) suggested that female leadership in adventure tourism companies was in a more advanced position compared to the private sector of the economy as a whole. This is particularly key because sustainability is the most important critical global issue for women-led adventure travel organizations, according to a [follow-up 2022 study](#) from the ATTA on the influence and impact of women in adventure travel.

#### **SDG11: Sustainable Cities & Communities**

#### **SDG12: Responsible Consumption & Production**

Preserving nature and culture is at the core of adventure tourism, including community-led tourism. The [Adventure Tourism Development Index \(ATDI\)](#) encourages the protection of cultural and natural assets by linking them to competitiveness and economic success. Preserving adventure destinations through sustainable consumption ensures that future generations will continue to experience a clean world.

#### **SDG13: Climate Action**

#### **SDG15: Life on Land**

Many in the adventure tourism industry believe travel can help support the global transformation to climate-conscious living, thereby taking action to encourage sustainable tourism product development at the national level, and building awareness and understanding of the climate crisis and the role tourism and travelers can play. Education is essential for building the capacity to take meaningful climate action and igniting change from all parts of the tourism industry. Adventure tourism focuses on integrating ecosystem and biodiversity values into national, regional, and local planning.

As individuals and businesses of all types begin the transformation process required to achieve a better tomorrow, facilitators in the adventure travel community such as the ATTA will continue to pursue these goals that are so very aligned with what industry leaders have championed in various ways for decades. This work aligns with all of the UNSDGs in some way, particularly as detailed above.