



Dear Leapers,

I'd like to bring your attention to Leap's competition to recognise and reward local guides and services – get your entries in quick! We are working hard to promote local guides and services through the competition and other avenues, and continue progress to make the website as easy to use as possible and expand our geographic reach. As ever, competing for attention in the tourism industry proves challenging, but we continue this battle owing to the positive comments and enthusiasm for what we do from travellers and locals. We are excited by the links we are making with other grassroots organisations, who are also driven by passion and good ethics.

We had a shock before Christmas when our trusted techie guru and friend Robert had a sudden stroke at the age of 23. Fortunately he was near an excellent hospital when it happened, and is clearly made of sturdy stuff. He is miraculously back on his computer, though taking it easy as he recovers. Get well soon Robert!

It seems spending money wisely is a theme never far from the news over the last few months. One of the advantages of using Leap is that because the money goes direct to the local guides and services, the travellers can very often benefit from authentic, in addition to cheaper, travel experiences without compromising the locals' income. Better yet, get a group together and prices per head go down.

We wish you all the best, and look forward to hearing any comments you may have about what you are doing, and what we can do to help you have more enriching experiences abroad.

Happy travelling in 2009!

From Nicky

Co-founder of Leap Local



The Unusual Direct Approach – Competition to reward locals!

Leap Local recently launched a competition to reward good local guides and services. Whenever local guides are recommended or reviewed, they are automatically entered into the competition. Entry is open until the end of February, but the local guides and services need you to get involved for them to have a chance of winning promotion to other travellers, and prizes.

We'd heard a few stories that people were sceptical about how much benefit some of the responsible tourism activities were actually delivering to local communities. In fact when looking into who was and wasn't behaving responsibly in the tourism industry, you might be forgiven for thinking that everyone was doing a brilliant job! As some of the larger companies have started to engage with this agenda, the awards, accreditations and reports of good behaviour have proliferated. And yet with these has come doubt, into who on earth is doing what, as picked up in various articles (Guardian – 'Are you being green washed?' July 2008).

We started to feel a little unusual, since what we do has such a direct benefit to local individuals in tourism destinations. While we knew that some of the responsible tourism initiatives described would filter through and benefit the local communities, we thought we could use Leap as a mechanism to directly reward local guides and services. After all, this was one of the main aims wasn't it? When we looked into who might be doing this already, we were surprised at the lack of recognition of these locals who very often give a trip its unique character and most memorable stories. So we started finding support for the competition. Our first discussions were with organisations who we knew were involved with grassroots tourism activities who quickly showed their enthusiasm for the idea– such as Your Safe Planet and Green Traveller (see below for more details). Belinda, who is Leap's PR person, then did a great job to secure prizes from outdoor clothing and equipment company Go Outdoors. Thanks Go Outdoors!

The launch of this competition has already stimulated travellers to get more involved so that the guides and services which contribute to a great experience can be recommended to other travellers. We know that the Leap approach doesn't guarantee responsible practices, but by empowering local guides and services we hope that travel is encouraged to take more local issues into account.

Of course we realise that we have opened a bit of a thorny issue – what is a local? And is going local always a good thing? Our discussion forum has helped us gather your comments on this, and there are few clear answers. At times foreign investment is necessary since local communities lack the finances to build a new guesthouse or provide appropriate facilities or equipment. Where foreign involvement supports local employment and opportunity it can be great. Sometimes people might expect a local employer to treat the local community well, but they can also be subject to local politics and a personality for poor behaviour. Rather than us make a judgement, we hope that as the Leap site evolves we can gather more information so the traveller can decide the best way for their money to be spent. This competition offers us the opportunity to assess this process, as well as encourage more people to get involved.

So please recommend new guides and services who you think are fab, and review existing ones on www.leaplocal.org. We look forward to announcing the results of the competition in our next newsletter! Please see some individuals who have already been entered into the competition below...

Many thanks to the following organisations for their support of the competition so far. And thank you to Go Outdoors, the outdoors clothing company, for sponsoring the prizes.



www.gooutdoors.co.uk
www.yoursafeplanet.co.uk
www.greentraveller.co.uk
www.maketravelfair.co.uk
www.tourismconcern.org.uk

Meet some of our recently added locals who have automatically been entered into ^{The} Competition...



Name: Arnel Astillero
Location: Bicol Peninsula
Country: Philippines
Speaks: English, Filipino, Bicol
Services: Arnel runs the People to People Tour, bringing together consumers and producers for fair trade products.
Recommended by: Cherie McCosker



Name: Antonlin
Location: Sacred Valley
Country: Peru
Speaks: Spanish, Quechua
Services: Homestay in rustic conditions but with trained cook e.g. learn medicinal plants
Recommended by: Louise



Name: Victor Pumita
Location: Kerala
Country: India
Speaks: English, Malayalam
Services: Local cultural tours and experiences, including wildlife, dance, ayurvedic/natural medicine
Recommended by: Lakshmi Sonbushner



Name: Coconut Creek Homestay
Location: Kottayam district, Kerala
Country: India
Speaks: English, Hindi, Malayalam
Services: Tours, accommodation, food, crafts
Recommended by: Saiby Ipe



Name: **Residencial Petero Atamu**
Location: Easter Island
Country: Chile
Speaks: English, Spanish, Rapa Nui
Services: Tours, accommodation, food, sport, other, crafts

Recommended by: Kirsten Koza



Name: **Leavi**
Location: Republic of the Fiji Islands
Country: Fiji
Speaks: English, Fijian
Services: Tours, accommodation, food, sport, other, crafts

Recommended by: Jim Kerridge



Name: **Save**
Location: Republic of the Fiji Islands
Country: Fiji
Speaks: English, Fijian, Hindi
Services: Tours, accommodation, food, sport, other, crafts

Recommended by: Jim Kerridge



Unconsciously Responsible

By Stephen Chapman

The concept of responsible tourism is often slated as difficult to grasp; the social, environmental, and economical considerations that it embraces can sometimes sound too academic for what is supposed to be a fun activity. The reality of what it promotes however is very straight forward and often somewhat intuitive for those who naturally seek experiences and opportunities to learn about the world as they travel.

Researching places, making plans and visiting destinations with the help of some local knowledge is fast becoming more popular as new tools become available through the internet. By exploiting the social connectivity of the web and tapping into the increasing desire of people to patronise small, local businesses when they travel means that these tools are able to go a long way towards unconsciously fulfilling the social and economical components of responsible tourism. The environmental cost of travel may seem like the easiest element to address - just stop flying - yet it is also one of the hardest to combat due to the dramatic shift in mindset required. Carbon offset contributions have been a good stepping stone for us so far from which to address our concerns, yet fail to deliver what is necessary. Overland travel by road and rail is promoted more

and more these days but unfortunately with the existence of low-cost airlines it's difficult to find any real financial incentive to embrace these alternatives. Travel decisions are made around tight budgets for many of us and often the environment takes a back seat because of it. It is in this area that 'local travel' delivers. Websites like couchsurfing.com and Leap Local make it possible to add value to your experience by becoming completely immersed in a new place from a local perspective, whilst simultaneously eliminating expensive accommodation and travel agency costs. A local insight into a place also generally leads to further money saving tips, making a pretty strong case for travelling locally. If we could tick the environmental box in a similar way that saves us money whilst adding experiential value to our trip we'd be well on the way to 'making travel fair'.

When Tom Allen of ride earth hitch-hiked from the UK to Istanbul recently in 7 days I wondered whether this means of travel will ever one day shake the dodgy, hippy, unwashed stigma associated with it and break into the mainstream. It may not get us across the Atlantic but it can certainly offer an experience to take us a long way east.

www.maketravelfair.com



But is it... Is it Completely Crazy to Wire Money to Local Guides?

By Kirsten Koza

Here I go again - it goes against common sense - am I seriously going to wire money from my Canadian bank account to guides in Russia?

My brother has been considering joining me. I told Shawn we had to wire our payment because www.ecotours-russia.com can't take credit cards. Shawn asked, "How do you know the guides will show up?" I babbled and closed my argument by saying I'd done this before, and the guides always showed. Shawn said ominously, "You're just lucky."

Paying local guides is problematic. They usually can't accept plastic. If you require them to arrange a long trip, they need advance finances. You might have to SWIFT (details below) money to a personal bank account. I'm also in an awkward situation because I invite strangers and friends on my travels - it isn't just my money I'm risking. Then there are the seemingly arbitrary, exorbitant bank fees. Russia brings back the unease of my first wiring experience.

I went to Scotiabank in my hometown and paid a \$60 fee to SWIFT a deposit to the personal bank account of my Romanian mountain bike guide, Horia. For two weeks Horia emailed to say my 300 Euro had not arrived. Daily, for two weeks, I stood in line at Scotiabank to find out why. It was the Canadian bank's fault. Finally the slow SWIFT deposited in Horia's account, but was short funds. That was the Romanian bank's fault. Horia graciously ate the loss. This happened again with my Peruvian guide. I went to the Bank of Montreal and it only cost me \$25 to SWIFT \$708 to Saul's personal bank account. He received \$660. His bank skimmed 6.8%. Saul graciously swallowed the loss. Both Horia and Saul now use PayPal.

I visited PayPal's website to see if it might be a solution for guides worldwide. On PayPal's site there are flags from around the world showing what countries they do business in - lots of flags can send money, not so many can receive. It won't work for Russia. However customers get to use their credit cards at their own computers and PayPal's fee is between 1.9-2.9%. But is it 1.9 or 2.9%, and who pays - customer, merchant or both? PayPal's website didn't answer my questions. I contacted customer service. Leo their jolly rep responded next-day with website directions on how to find the flags. He didn't answer my questions. Then Leo sent me a survey to see if I loved his service.

So, I contacted some PayPal merchant-users, Hamish MacDonald, a Scottish writer, and Horia my Romanian guide. Hamish isn't sure when the 1.9 or 2.9% fee applies and Horia is always charged the max. They both pay this fee, not their clients. Even though Horia says it has been great I note some pretty serious drawbacks. Horia is only allowed to withdraw a maximum of 500 Euros a day, and it costs him \$2 each time. If Horia has ten people coming for a tour, it could take him a month to retrieve his money.

There are other payment services. Moneybookers is available in fewer countries than PayPal. EmerchantPay has a 10% catch, maybe because they cater to gambling and porn. My bank suggested posting a certified cheque. That's cheaper for the tourist, but will it even get where it's going? Not all postal systems are created equal.

Leap Local is currently working on solutions for paying local guides. I've only scratched the surface of the issue because some local guides don't even have bank accounts. I've never had a problem with the guides that I've wired money to, but I do lots of research beforehand.

Kirsten Koza is a Canadian travel writer & author. She's hoping to bring a group of students to Russia this summer, but will their parents wire money to Russian guides?
www.kirstenkoza.com

SWIFT (Society for World-wide Interbank Financial Telecommunications) - most international transfers are executed through SWIFT. It is a co-operative society, founded in 1974 by seven international banks, which operates a global network to facilitate the transfer of money and financial messages.



Photo: Helen Neuman

Would you wire money to the personal bank account of this Romanian guide? Kirsten did. Horia now can accept credit card payment through PayPal.



Kirsten brings over a million Chilean Pesos to Easter Island. Sometimes cash is the only way to pay local guides and services.



Photo: Kirsten Koza

Bank fees when wiring money are just like flushing it down the toilet



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We are always interested in your views on Leap, our newsletter and our website so welcome all your ideas and feedback. If you want to get in touch please go to the 'contact us' section of our website. And for the more experienced travellers amongst you, we are always looking for people to help expand Leap Local to other developing countries. If you come across a local guide or service why not recommend them to another traveller through our website? And if the travel writer in you is waiting to get out, feel free to submit some 'How to go Local' guides.

Get involved - remember, your holiday is their livelihood!



www.leaplocal.org