

THE WORLD'S 10 BEST Ethical Travel Destinations for 2014

BY MEGAN JERRARD

ETHICALTRAVELER.ORG HAS released their annual report naming ten developing countries as the World's Ten Best Ethical Travel Destinations.

Travel is now the world's largest industry, exceeding a trillion dollars a year. Each year Ethical Traveler measures the world's most ethical travel destinations by considering Environmental Protection, Social Welfare and Human Rights. This year Animal Welfare was also added to their list of factors. The below countries not only excelled in all categories, but also offer the opportunity to experience unspoiled natural beauty, and to interact with local people and cultures in a meaningful, mutually enriching way.

The countries to be congratulated this year (in alphabetical order) are: The Bahamas, Barbados, Cape Verde, Chile, Dominica, Latvia, Lithuania, Mauritius, Palau, Uruguay. This is the second year in a row the Bahamas, Barbados, Cape Verde, Latvia, Lithuania, Mauritius, Palau and Uruguay have made this list.

The in-depth ranking procedure draws data from sources such as Freedom House, the Millennium Challenge Corporation, Reporters Without Borders, UNICEF, the World Bank, and many other environmental indicators such as the Socioeconomic Data & Applications Center and the Environmental Performance Index.

In Environmental Protection, Latvia and Lithuania received the highest marks, with Latvia in particular being a top performer in 22 indicators spanning ten policy categories reflecting areas of both environmental public health and ecosystem vitality. Lithuania and Chile showed improving environmental performance.

Palau also scored highly, with 28.2% of precious marine and terrestrial area protected (the highest percentage of this year's countries). Barbados stood out for finding sustainable means of building tourism while protecting its coastline.

Social welfare scores compiled by UNICEF included indicators such as child mortality rates (Cape Verde and Barbados scored highly here), human trafficking, safe drinking water, universal primary education, maternal health, sustainable water and agriculture management, and responsible sanitation practices.

Chile and Mauritius were praised this year for having made 'substantial progress' in areas of social welfare. Mauritius receiving its highest score to date, now sitting significantly above the world average in a category of 'high human development'.

Chile received the highest score for equality, with Uruguay ranked a close second. Palau received the highest score for press freedom, and Latvia emerged as a leader in gender equality. Latvia was, however, identified as a nation who could make greater efforts to prevent sex trafficking.

Every country listed this year was identified as having some Human Rights issues, however they were also commended for efforts to improve those situations. The Bahamas, Barbados, Chile, Dominica, Cape Verde, Lithuania, Palau and Uruguay received the highest possible scores in the categories of Political Rights and Civil Liberties, in some cases ranking even better than many developed countries. The treatment of indigenous populations and gay citizens were the most prevalent human rights issues. Chile was nearly excluded from the list due to the use of an antiterrorism law against Mapuche protestors, and Latvia urgently needs to address institutionalized discrimination of non-Latvians living in the country.

While laxly enforced, outdated laws criminalizing homosexuality still exist in Barbados, Dominica and Mauritius. While boasting impressive records in environmental standards, Ghana was excluded from last year's list due to stringently enforced anti-gay laws. Not only did Ghana fail to make much progress this year, but the situation and violence actually worsened.

Animal Welfare was a new consideration for 2014, and provided mixed scores. Dominica, Palau and Lithuania scored highly, while Mauritius and the Bahamas did not. Ethical Traveler placed a call to action on both nations, singling out Mauritius as the world's second largest supplier of wild-caught and captive-bred monkeys (many of which are used for laboratory purposes), and the Bahamas for its plethora of swim-with-dolphin parks.

Among the countries that made the 2012 list but were not included this year were Samoa, Costa Rica and Argentina. Costa Rica and Argentina were excluded because of their violations of indigenous rights. While applauded for implementing sustainable development programs, Samoa's implementation of environmental initiatives appeared weak. No Asian countries qualified for the list due to the human rights and environmental records of these nations.

Five additional nations were identified as "destinations of interest," selected for their commitment to social justice and environmental practices: Cuba, Egypt, Iran, The Philippines, and Namibia.

All of the countries on the EthicalTraveler.org list are great destinations, but the annual report serves as a reminder to travelers to be mindful of how powerful their travel choices can be. We here at Green Global Travel hope that you will consider the above factors in your future travel plans, and perhaps decide to prioritize one of these phenomenal destinations for 2014.

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PALAU ROCK ISLANDS

