Embracing Eco-friendly Tourism: Path to World Tourism Day

As the world gears up to celebrate World Tourism Day on 27th September 2023, it's an opportune moment to reflect on the transformative power of tourism and how it can be harnessed to promote sustainability. This year's theme is “Tourism and green investment,” the United Nations World Tourism Organization (UNWTO) highlights the need for more and better eco-friendly investments as a road map to achieve the global Sustainable Development Goals. The theme speaks of the importance of ensuring that tourism leads a path of sustainability by adopting the use of green and eco-friendly measures like carbon offset, tree planting, use of eco-friendly energy sources like solar, wind and bioenergy, eco-friendly modes of transportation, biodegradable products etc. In this article, we explore the key principles and practices in the tourism industry and how they can guide us towards a more sustainable travel industry.

Sustainable tourism, also known as responsible tourism or eco-tourism, is a form of tourism whereby an accommodation facility has established environmentally friendly programs and initiatives into its operations or a way of travelling whereby the tourist promotes eco-friendly practices. It seeks to minimize the negative impacts of tourism while maximizing the positive ones. Here are some key principles of sustainable tourism:

1. Minimizing environmental impact

Sustainable tourism minimizes resource consumption, reduces waste, sustainable waste management, and promotes eco-friendly practices like the use of green products, transportation, and energy options (the below picture taken by AKDN, shows a solar panel project established by Mettle Solar OFGEN in a partnership between them Mara Serena Safari Lodge to ensure that the facility becomes a full solar-powered Lodge).
2. **Promotion of education and awareness**

Travelers are encouraged to learn about the destinations they visit, respecting local customs and traditions. Additionally, they are urged to support green initiatives that promote sustainability.

3. **Community engagement and benefits**

It ensures that local communities benefit from tourism by engaging local communities in tree-planting initiatives, providing employment opportunities, supporting local businesses, and involving residents in decision-making processes. This helps to reduce the carbon footprint, and economically empower and develop host communities.

4. **Preservation of natural and cultural resources**

Sustainable tourism prioritizes the protection of natural habitats, wildlife, and cultural heritage. It encourages responsible activities like wildlife watching, hiking, and cultural experiences that don't harm the environment or disrupt local traditions.

**How travelers contribute to sustainability.**

Travellers play a crucial role in the transition towards sustainable tourism. Here are some ways in which they can contribute:

1. **Choose sustainable accommodations facilities.**

Opt for eco-friendly hotels and lodges that have adopted environmentally responsible practices, such as eco-friendly construction designs, energy-efficient lighting, water conservation measures, and waste recycling.

2. **Support local businesses**

Eat at local restaurants, buy souvenirs from local artisans, and use local guides and services. This directly benefits the local economy and ensures that your tourism dollars stay within the community. This picture taken by the Ecotourism Kenya, Eco rating team in 2022 while reassessing Basecamp Masai Mara illustrates the community initiatives the camp has put in place to support the local groups by creating for them a marketplace where they can freely showcase and sell their products i.e souvenirs, artefacts etc.
3. **Reduce your carbon footprint**

Travelling by electric transportation, or cycling, where possible, can significantly reduce your carbon emissions. You can also consider carbon offset programs to mitigate your travel-related emissions. In a bid to create sustainable tourism through their safari tours, Emboo River Camp, became the first accommodation facility in East Africa to implement the use of electric vans -100% solar-powered (as shown in the picture taken by Emboo).

The World Tourism Day approaches, let us all pledge to make our travel experiences more sustainable. By embracing responsible tourism practices through supporting green investments in the industry, we can protect our planet's natural wonders, preserve cultural heritage and biodiversity, and create opportunities for local communities. Sustainable tourism is not just a trend; it's a vital step towards ensuring that future generations can continue to explore and enjoy the beauty and diversity of our world.