The Code of Practice and Ethics of Tour guides In Rwanda

THIS DOCUMENT SPECIFIES THE ACCEPTABLE CODE OF PRACTICE AND ETHICAL STANDARDS FOR TOUR GUIDES AND CAN BE USED AS A QUALITY TOOL

BACKGROUND

As a continuously growing industry worldwide, tourism in Rwanda is also growing on a double quick match. Various factors are behind its growth in this country among which includes; the famous beauty of Rwanda's natural attractions, introduction of new products and the improvement of services in the country. In addition to total peace and security, new policies have been created that have eased and created a conducive atmosphere for investment which has resulted in increased investment in the tourism industry.

Interestingly guiding services are paramount to the tour party's experience and obviously satisfaction. After realizing the fact that tour guiding plays a vital role in a tour party's experiences, this code of practice for the establishment and maintenance of minimum acceptable level of service for tour guiding was put in place. Users of this code of practice are obliged to go beyond the requirements documented here.

Objectives

This code of practice and ethics of a tour guide was developed mainly;

To help provide improved quality services to the tour party that would give the tour party a memorable experience and encourage repeat businesses in the tourism industry.

Ensure sustainability of tourism products by reducing on their damage and having guides who understands the best practices and respects their ethics.

Assist in conserving the attractions basing on this code of practice and ethics of a tour guides which clearly guides both tourists and guides on how best they can use these attractions and not have any negative impact on them to avoid this saying that "tourism destroys tourism".

To provide a positive impact on the surrounding community with in which the tours occur.

As part of the tourism inspection department's strategic plan to improve service delivery in the tourism industry.

COMMON TERMINOLOGIES

Tour: Any prearranged journey to one or more destinations provided by a tour guide or tour operator to a tour party for remuneration. This code of practice will hence assist in providing better and memorable tours by our tour guides to the tour party.

Tour guide. Means an individual who leads a tour party, provides general information, interprets, indicates and informs items of interest along the way to and or at a tour destination. From this code of practice, guides will be able to improve their knowledge and understanding of carrying out a more organized and successful tours.

Tour party. Means an individual or groups of individuals who is a participant of a tour. Basing on this code of practice and ethics of a tour guide, the tour party will be able to be rendered better services that will give them a better enjoyment and satisfaction by the improved way of how guides will be conducting themselves and tours respectively.

Ethics and Standards

- A professional tour guide provides a skilled, knowledgeable presentation, informs, interprets and highlights the surroundings and maintains objectivity and enthusiasm in a courteous and polite manner.
- A professional tour guide will ensure that all information presented is factual and makes a clear distinction between what is true and what are stories, legends and opinions.
- A professional tour guide will keep current on changes throughout the area he or she works including but not limited to seasonal events, new exhibits, facilities and traffic laws, and is expected to follow the rules and regulations at all sites where tours will be taken and act accordingly.
- A professional tour guide should always be prepared for each tour when the itinerary is furnished in advance, reports on time and is responsible for facilitating the smooth, efficient, safe and timely movements of the tour.
- A professional tour guide is sensitive to the interests and values of the tour group and does not share his/her personal views on controversial subjects, such as religion politics or lifestyles.
- A professional tour guide will know and follow the policies of the company that contracts him/her and will not solicit a job from that company's client without the consent of the company.
- A professional tourist guide will maintain loyalty to the company that contracted his/her services and protect the confidentiality of proprietary information. Also he/she will strive to establish a friendly and helpful relationship with the client.
- A professional tour guide will dress appropriately for the type of a tour being conducted.
- A professional tour guide will extend a professional respect and spirit of cooperation to fellow guides, and will strive to establish a good working relationship with all service providers on the tour route.

- A professional tour guide accepts each tour as a serious commitment and cancels only when absolutely necessary, providing as much advance notice as possible.

Skills & knowledge

Tour guides need to have:

- Knowledge of the route to be covered and its features or attractions
- Knowledge of Rwandan culture, history, society, geography, flora and fauna
- Knowledge of other cultures
- Research skills, to collect information to use on the tour
- Knowledge of how to run tours with minimal impact on the environment
- Leadership, communication and public speaking skills
- Problem-solving skills
- Knowledge of safety procedures and relevant laws, and crisis and risk management skills
- Planning, organizational and time management skills.

Tour guides who run their own business or manage a company also need business and sales skills.

“You need very good research skills; otherwise you won't have enough to talk about. Tourists don't want just the height of a mountain; they also want that little anecdote. You need to have your eyes and ears open all the time for the local stories.

Personal Qualities

Tour guides need to be:

- Friendly, outgoing and able to put people at ease
- Polite, patient and professional
- Responsible and trustworthy
- Helpful and perceptive of visitors' needs
- Able to take criticism
- Able to relate to people from a wide range of cultures and back ground.
- Tour guide should be fun.

GENERAL RESPONSIBILITIES OF ATOUR GUIDE

The behaviour and conduct of a tour guide shall reflect the responsibilities that are required of representative of country. The major responsibility of the tour guide shall be:

- Contribute to the promotion and preservation of the tourism industry in the country.
- Contribute to the promotion and preservation of local tourism products.
- Contribute towards the conservation of the environment.
- Provide for safety of the tourist / tour party.
- Inform and where possible advise members of the tour party on current charges services or item that may be purchased.
- Provide the tour party with accurate information about transport, tourist services, social and Economic conditions, accommodation and dining facilities and other matters of interest in the country.
- Inform the tour party on their acceptable modes of behaviour and practices.

SPECIFIC RESPONSIBILITIES OF A TOUR GUIDE

- The safety of the tour party while on tour.
- Assisting the tour party to minimise any negative impacts on the attractions.
- Provide the tour party with general information about the social, historical, cultural and environmental attributes.
- Observing all pertinent laws and ensuring as far as possible, that no laws are broken by tour party while on tour.
- Ensure that the tour itinerary outline is generally adhered to while on tour and ensure that all regal requirements are met.

APPEARANCE.

The tour guide is a service provider and is expected to be professional all the time hence;

- Be appropriately reached and suitably groomed while on and off duty.
- Shall be medically fit all the time he/she is to take on a tour thus they should undertake routine medical check-up to avoid transmission of the disease to the tour party and affect his guiding abilities.
- Ensure that good personal hygiene practices are up held at all times.
- Wear proper identification at all time for example uniforms and badges with in and around the work premises.
- Should immediately report any symptoms of illness.

CONDUCT

- Be hospitable and maintain good, courteous conduct towards visitors.
- Use appropriate language and be capable of expressing him or herself clearly.
- In case of specialised tours communication should be in the language declared in the package offered to the tour party.
- Not be under the influence of alcohol or drugs or other intoxicating substances prior to or during the tour.
- Demonstrate professional and ethical behaviour.
- Not solicit tips from tourist, but may accept or gratuities voluntarily provided by clients.
- Retrain from using in appropriate language and engaging in behaviours that is offensive to tourists
- Respect the cultural differences and individual views and beliefs of the clients to avoid confrontation with a member.

EQUIPMENTS USE

- Ensure that all equipment to be used in the tour is in proper working order.
- Be competent on the use of equipment to be used in the tour.
- Have where practical, an effective means of communication with a responsible third party, in event of emergencies.
- Ensure that the safety equipment provided is utilised throughout the tour where relevant for example life jackets while tourists are on floating craft.

PRE-TOUR PREPARATION

Before a tour is carried out the tour guide should:

- Research materials for the tour to ensure that facts on the tourist attraction are available, current and relevant.
- Determine the tourists profile in information available for example gender, age group, physical disabilities.
- Check communication and safety equipment to use to ensure that they are working properly and familiarise their use.
- Determine the route intended for a tour and find out whether it is safe and suitable for passage.
- Be familiar with alternate routes in the event that the original intended path is inaccessible.

- Ensure that the first aid kit is complete.
- Notify any relevant agency or responsible third party of intentions to host the tour in a particular area like the local service police could be notified of the proposed departure and the arrival times and the intended routes.

RECEPTION AND DEPARTURE FOR TOUR

The tour guide shall arrive well before the scheduled arrival of the tour party in order to prepare him or herself.

The tour guide shall guide or direct the tour party to a strategic assembly point up on the arrival of the tour party. The tour guide shall:

- Formally welcome the tour party and conduct introduction.
- Verify the number or names of individuals in the tour party.
- Determine any special concerns or restrictions of the individuals of the tour party with respect to the organised tour.
- Briefly describe the tour, informing the tour party of unknown changes from the anticipated itinerary if any.
- Alert the tour party of the eventual fragile environment and the ways to avoid negative impacts on them.
- Inform the tour party about any regulations and rules regarding the tourism attraction to be visited.
- Inform the tour party about the condition to tour level of difficult expected climatic conditions and anything else associated with tour that requires special attention.
- Inform the tour party about appropriate actions in the event of an injury or a member being separated from the rest of the tour party.
- Perform a demonstration on the use of the relevant safety equipment.
- Inform the tour party of the rules and regulations concerning the rights of the private land owners, tress passing on private property and ensure that tour party adhere to these rules and regulations.

In the Vehicle

- Ensure that the driver doesn't exceed a speed of 40km/h inside the park.
- Ensure that there is no off road driving to avoid trampling and vegetation damage.
- Make sure that there is no tour party who attempts to feed or dump any food staff in the park. As it may upset the diet of wild animals and endanger their lives or even lead to unnecessary dependence on people.
- Ensure that all tourist experiences are done with an officially assigned park guide.
- Please advise tourists to leave vehicle at official designated trail entrances.

DIFFICULT SITUATIONS

The tour guide shall have contingency plans for dealing with unexpected events such as:

- Sick or injured members of the tour party.
- Missing members or lost items of the tour party.
- Disruptive or undesirable behaviour from one or more members of the tour party.
- Adverse weather conditions.
- Mechanical failure.
- Therefore the tour guide as a part of the contingency plans, shall be knowledgeable about relevant agencies to contact and locations of the nearest relevant emergency facilities.

POST TOUR ACTIVITIES

At the end of the tour, the tour guide shall:

- Guide the tour party back to the starting points or other pre-arranged location.
- Ensure that all members of tour party are present and accounted for.
- Thank the members/member of the tour party for their participation in the tour.
- Inform the tour parties of other tours and attraction at that tourism destination or elsewhere in the country.
- Follow up any information promised to the tour party.
- Make available evaluation forms to the tour party and collect them as participants leave and end their tour.
- Provide suggestion and recommendation materials to the tour party and guide them to where they can deposit them like a suggestion boxes for management use.

POST TOUR EVALUATION

In the interest of continuous improvement, after the tour the tour guided shall:

- Document any positive lights of the tour, as well as any problem or difficulties experienced and the actions taken to resolve them.
- Report any issue discovered both positive and negative to the relevant agency for follow up action
- Use the information used from evaluation forms to improve the quality of these services provided.

COMPLAINTS

Systems shall be implemented for dealing with customer's complaints and the tour guide shall direct clients to relevant authority to address any client's complaints or grievances. When faced with complaints the tour guide shall:

- Not admit liability until details and implications are known
- Investigate the complaint.
- Determine the nature of the complaint.
- Deal with the complaint in a timely manner.
- Select and implement any appropriate solution aimed at addressing the tour party or rectifying the relevant procedure or process.
- Follow up where relevant.
- Document the complaint for future information.
- Monitor the corrective action and implementation of the remedies to avoid repetition of the complaint.