



# Center for Responsible Travel

*Transforming the Way the World Travels*

[www.responsibletravel.org](http://www.responsibletravel.org)

## Closing Remarks

**Jonathan Tourtellot, CEO, Destination Stewardship Center**

Today, we have examined the five pillars that UNWTO has put forth for this International Year of Sustainable Tourism for Development. *Sustainable* tourism for *development*. Which word gets the emphasis? I like that “sustainable” comes before “development.” Too often the sequence is reversed.

Elizabeth Becker’s keynote told of the growing problem of “overtourism,” for example. We cannot continue packing infinitely growing numbers of visitors into finite spaces.

And just what do those five pillars support? What are they holding up? Let’s review them.

**1. Social inclusiveness.** Involve the people of the place in the tourism process. In Grenada, in Jamaica, we’ve heard how to do this—through music, food, athletics, and grassroots relationships.

**2. Sustainable economic growth.** Make money in a way that you don’t use up your resource: the character of the place. Remain competitive by staying distinctive. Whether in Zambia or Haiti, food and drink are great ways to do that. They have stories to tell, and they taste good.

**3. Protect the environment**—for the destination, and for the planet on which we reside. Let’s remember, too, that the planetary environment and biodiversity depend on natural habitats *at the destination level*. They must be protected and enjoyed. We heard about the comeback of leatherback turtles, about reef restoration. This pillar represents an opportunity for tourism’s least recognized benefit: public education. Adults are hard to educate, but travel can work.

**4. Culture and heritage.** Respect, celebrate, and protect them. We heard how the indigenous people of the Great Bear Rain Forest learned how to protect and present their culture, and how historic Savannah fights to keep visitor numbers at reasonable levels. Culture and heritage are the warp and woof of the human tourism experience. They must not be worn threadbare by too much tourism.

**5. Mutual understanding.** Frankly, you are less likely to bomb someone whom you just got to know on your vacation. This pillar is sometimes known as “public diplomacy”—the discovery that those people across the border or the ocean are human after all. Why, you might even like them. We learned that today from Cuba and Mexico. To echo the closing sentiment on Chris Blackwell’s video: Build bridges, not walls.

So what, then, do these pillars support? The place and its people!

The destination itself is what holds this all together, and as more and more millions of people travel every year, it is care for the destinations that will determine whether the “development” part of this International Year truly is sustainable.

Let’s all work on how to do that.