

Alaska Geotourism Mission Statement

Geotourism is defined as tourism that sustains or enhances the geographical character of a place – its environment, culture, aesthetics, heritage, and the well-being of its residents. Alaska Geotourism is an economic approach for maximizing beneficial tourism and furthering good destination stewardship. (see [Note 1](#))

The Alaska Geotourism Charter

WHEREAS the Alaska geotourism approach is all-inclusive, focusing not only on the environment, but also on the diversity of the cultural, historic, and scenic assets of Alaska, and also recognizes the potential of geotourism strategies to enhance economic and workforce development opportunities for Alaska; and,

WHEREAS participation in Alaska’s geotourism efforts is open to all Alaskans and to tourists who support these geotourism principles; and, to those whose “hearts and minds” are Alaskan; and,

WHEREAS any of Alaska’s many diverse communities, regions and other groups/organizations are welcome to further develop the Alaska geotourism concept for the benefit of their respective membership - stakeholder and/or target participation groups; and,

WHEREAS Alaska’s geotourism approach encourages all Alaskans and visitors to get involved rather than remain tourism spectators; and,

WHEREAS Alaska’s geotourism approach seeks to bring recognition to Alaska’s many geotourism efforts (current and on-going) at both the national and international levels with an Alaska identity and pride, stressing what is authentic and unique to Alaska,

THE ALASKA GEOTOURISM COUNCIL supports these geotourism principles to sustain and enhance the geographical character of Alaska - its environment, culture, aesthetics, heritage, and the well-being of its residents: (see [Note 2](#))

1. Integrity of place: Enhance a location's geographical character so as to encourage market differentiation and cultural pride in ways that are reflective of its distinctive natural and cultural heritage.

2. International codes: Adhere to the principles embodied in the World Tourism Organization's *Global Code of Ethics for Tourism*, the *Principles of the Cultural Tourism Charter* established by the International Council on Monuments and Sites (ICOMOS), and the *Criteria for Sustainable Destinations* put forth by the Global Sustainable Tourism Council.

3. Market selectivity: Encourage growth in tourism market segments most likely to appreciate, respect, and disseminate information about the distinctive assets of Alaska.

4. Market diversity: Encourage a full range of appropriate amenities and experiences, so as to appeal to the entire demographic spectrum of the geotourism market.

5. Tourist enthusiasm: Ensure, where applicable, that geotourism projects produce satisfied and excited geotourist who bring new vacation stories home and send friends off to experience the same thing, thus providing continuing demand for the destination.

6. Community involvement: Base tourism on community resources to the extent possible, encouraging local small businesses and civic groups to build partnerships to promote and provide a distinctive, honest visitor experience and market their locales effectively. Help businesses develop approaches to tourism that build on the area's nature, history and culture.

7. Community benefit: Encourage enterprises and tourism business strategies that emphasize sustainable economic and social benefits desired by the communities.

8. Protection and enhancement of destination appeal: Encourage businesses to sustain natural habitats, heritage sites, aesthetic appeal, and local culture. Prevent degradation by keeping volumes of tourists within maximum acceptable limits.

9. Land Use: Anticipate (tourism-related real-estate) development pressures and work to minimize resource degradation. Work to ensure the preservation of the destination's integrity and sustainability and encourage public access to waterfronts and other resources.

10. Conservation of Resources: Encourage government and businesses to promote sustainable practices that minimize pollution, waste, energy consumption, water usage and overly bright nighttime lighting. Encourage the advertising of these measures in a way that attracts the large, environmentally sympathetic tourist market.

11. Planning: Recognize and respect immediate needs without sacrificing long-term character and the geotourism potential of the destination. Encourage an integrative planning approach that will make it a "year-round" sustainable destination. Where possible, encourage the utilization of existing facilities and infrastructure to enhance the geotourism visitor experience. Adopt public strategies for mitigate practices that are incompatible with geotourism and damaging to the image of the destination.

12. Interactive Interpretation: Engage both visitors and hosts in learning about our great state of Alaska, and its people and places. Support training programs and curriculum that show off the natural and cultural heritage of their communities, so that tourists gain a richer experience and residents develop pride in their locales.

13. Collaboration: Cooperation and collaboration are important aspects of the Alaska geotourism approach for Alaska's community and regional efforts. (see [Notes 3 & 4](#))

14. Evaluation: The Alaska Geotourism evaluation process will be conducted on a regular basis by the University of Alaska Cooperative Development Program (UACDP) Geotourism Project and work with the Alaska Geotourism Council to disseminate reports and publicize evaluation results on AKSourceLink (www.aksourcelink.com)

Reference Notes

Note 1: What Is Geotourism?

As coined by Jonathan Tourtellot and Sally Bensusen (1997) and officially defined by National Geographic Society and the Travel Industry Association of America (now USTA) in the report, *Geotourism: The New Trend in Travel* (2003). “Geotourism is the kind of tourism that sustains or enhances the geographical character of a place as it relates to its environment, culture, aesthetics, heritage, and the well being of its residents. It involves the community. Local businesses and civic groups join to provide a distinctive, authentic visitor experience. It benefits residents economically. Travel businesses hire local workers, and use local services, products, and supplies. As a result, when community members understand the benefits of geotourism, they take responsibility for destination stewardship.” (See: <http://travel.nationalgeographic.com/travel/sustainable/>)

Note 2: Revised Geotourism Charter and Principles discussion with commentary © by Jonathan Tourtellot, originator of the geotourism concept. May be quoted freely with attribution. These Geotourism Principles are listed in the National Geographic's Geotourism Charter and expanded upon by J Tourtellot (November 2013).

(See: www.AlaskaSourceLink.com re: Rural Tourism / Geotourism in Alaska)

Note 3: See *Stakeholders and Target Populations* in Edgar J. Boone, Community Based Programming (1987). (see UAF class syllabus RD 651 Rural Development Management Strategies www.uaf.edu)

Note 4: See *Co-ops and Cooperative Approaches as a Heritage Tourism Strategy for your Community: A Web Module* This web module is a part of the Michigan State University series <http://museum.msu.edu/heritagetourism> re: What is New?)