

Standard Operating Procedures for water provided on tours

Background



For further information please see our Sustainability Ratings Charts and Decision Tree for plastic water bottles.

Every day 1.3 billion plastic bottles are used, that's around 1 million bottles per minute! And only 1 out of 5 bottles is recycled, the other four bottles end up in landfills, are incinerated, or become litter, polluting environments and oceans and threatening wildlife. **Plastic can take hundreds of years to break down**, and in doing so it leaves very small plastic pieces behind that have already been found in marine species that are consumed by humans.

Bottled water is convenient, especially on tours: Individual travellers can bring as many water bottles with them as needed, tour operators can provide drinking water very easily for every guest without having to plan in advance or include frequent stops, and bottles can easily be disposed of when empty. Bottled water is often also perceived as more hygienic than refillable water bottles or water dispensers which is not necessarily true if basic hygiene standards are followed.

Tourism businesses can be part of the solution by providing refillable water for their guests whilst on tours.

Steps to consider when using reusable bottles

- 1 Ensure that **guests can refill their bottles during the tour**. It is recommended to provide refillable options free of charge. There are many ways to do this:
 - a. **Water refill stations:** Plan to pass a water fountain (either public fountains or fountains installed on the premises of a café, restaurant or hotel) every 1-2 hours.
 - b. **Large containers** (20 litres or more) from which guests can refill their bottles. Use an insulated cover to keep water cool.
 - c. **Portable filter bottles:** Water bottles with built-in filters to refill from freshwater sources. It is recommended for nature tours where water can mostly be obtained through public washing basin faucets or sweet water rivers.
- 2 Decide whether you would like to give each customer a bottle for them to take home or whether the bottles will be collected after the tour, cleaned and re-used for the next tour. Your decision might depend on existing facilities to clean the bottles hygienically, available storage space, customer perception (you can provide very positive communications that make it clear bottles are thoroughly cleaned) etc.
 - a. When providing bottles for guests to take home bear in mind to **use a high-quality material and nice-looking design** which will encourage guests to reuse the bottle many times.
 - b. When providing bottles only for the tour, **establish a procedure to ensure all bottles are collected and cleaned** properly before their next use.



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- 3 **Calculate how many refillable bottles you will need** without having a shortage and decide on an appropriate material. Glass bottles might look nice but are very heavy and may break more easily, whereas steel or aluminium bottles are lighter and very resistant. → See our Sustainable Ratings Charts to make a more informed decision.
 - 4 **Encourage your guests to bring their own reusable bottle** by integrating a brief and positive communication in the booking confirmation.
 - 5 **Involve and train your staff** so that they support the plastic waste reduction measure(s) and know their responsibilities.
 - 6 **Provide a refillable bottle to each guest prior or at the tour start** and make sure the bottle is labelled with the guest's name and give them an opportunity to fill it before setting off on the trip.
 - 7 **Inform your guests WHY you are providing reusable bottles** and also explain the benefits. Assure your guests that the bottles are clean and the water is safe to drink (especially when offering tap water/water from fountains).

IMPORTANT: Preparation is the key! Depending on the type of tours you offer, the circumstances will vary greatly. For some tours it will be easy to include water refill stations in the itinerary, for others such as nature tours, it might require more planning and collaboration with other businesses that can offer water refill opportunities throughout the trip or ensuring extra water is carried in some way.



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