

Getting a degree in sustainable travel

By Lori Robertson



A professor lectures his students standing on the Fremont River terraces near Hanksville in southern Utah. (Ethan Welty/Aurora/Getty)

For some, travelling is a calling -- not just to see the world, but to build a career.

And as the ideas of responsible and sustainable tourism have taken hold, so too have university degree programs designed to give students the skills to influence how tourism is managed, with the goal of benefiting local communities, preserving their cultures and protecting their environment.

Here's a look at a few academic programs that can turn a passion into a full-time job:

Leeds Metropolitan University, Leeds, UK

The [masters in responsible tourism management](#) at Leeds Metropolitan University is a pioneer in this course of study. Professor Harold Goodwin brought the course to Leeds from London's University of Greenwich in 2007. Goodwin, who founded [the International Centre for Responsible Tourism](#) (ICRT), also at Leeds, in 2002, said the course is "designed to enable people to make change: to use tourism for sustainable development, to use tourism to make better places for people to live in and better places for people to visit." Distance learning allows mid-career professionals to live and work around the world while taking classes such as responsible tourism theory, local economic development and poverty alleviation. The ICRT works with governments and tourism professionals around the world to promote responsible tourism.

University of North Texas, Denton, Texas, and CATIE, Turrialba, Costa Rica

The [masters of science in international sustainable tourism](#) is a joint degree offered by the University of North Texas (UNT) and Costa Rica's [Tropical Agricultural Research and Higher Education Center \(CATIE\)](#). Students spend two semesters in Texas and three in Costa Rica. According to the UNT, the degree "balances

environmental, economic and socio-cultural benefits and concerns". Several courses focus on environmental issues, while the centre in Costa Rica aims to improve human welfare and "reduce rural poverty through integrated management of agriculture and natural resources".

East Carolina University, Greenville, North Carolina

East Carolina University (ECU) began offering a masters of science in sustainable tourism in autumn 2009. Students take core courses in science, business and policy and then take electives or design their own course of independent study. Like other programs, ECU focuses on "economic, environmental, and sociocultural viability" - or what the university calls the "triple bottom line of sustainable tourism". ECU also houses the Center for Sustainable Tourism, which promotes sustainable practices in North Carolina, runs workshops on issues such as renewable energy and climate, and conducts research on race, ethnicity and social inequity in tourism.

Griffith University, Gold Coast, Australia

Griffith University is home to the International Centre for Ecotourism Research (ICER), launched in 1993 by the Australian government. Since 2009, ICER has been researching conservation, responsible and adventure tourism, as well as climate change and tourism. PhD students in subjects with a tourism or environmental focus study with ICER staff, and undergraduates can sign up for ecotourism field courses that are conducted both in Australia and as far away as Nepal and Ecuador.

George Washington University, Washington DC

George Washington University offers coursework in sustainable tourism destination management, which the university's website says emphasises "minimizing the negative impacts of tourism and preserving cultural and natural resources, while optimizing tourism's overall contribution to economic development in host communities". The School of Business' master of tourism administration includes courses on cultural heritage tourism and ecotourism, and students can also earn a professional certificate in tourism destination management. The school's International Institute of Tourism Studies works with students and faculty in other countries on tourism development projects, among other initiatives.

Lori Robertson writes the Ethical Traveller column for BBC Travel. You can send ethical dilemmas to bbcethicaltravel@gmail.com.

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