

V1 - SEP 2021

# BEST PRACTICE GUIDELINES

FOR PROFESSIONALISM,  
QUALITY AND EXCELLENCE.





# HELLO

Wild Scotland Best Practice guidelines are in place to ensure that the Scottish nature-based tourism industry maintains its international reputation for professionalism, quality and excellence.



Image: Whirlpool Special | Open RIB



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Image: A young Red Deer Stag | Shutterstock





# INTRO

**Wild Scotland Best Practice Guidelines provide general advice for businesses and operators in the wildlife, adventure and activity sectors in Scotland who take people out into the countryside onto the water and to watch wildlife.**

## **Why do we need best practice guidelines?**

Responsible and sustainable tourism is a key part of Wild Scotland's activities, and all our members are required to sign up to, follow and adhere to guidelines which relate to 4 key Principles: Care, Responsibility, Sustainability and Excellence. As the national body representing wildlife, adventure and activity tourism in Scotland, we are setting standards through the collective experience and knowledge of our members.

As adventure and nature-based tourism increases, we want to make sure that our wildlife and countryside is not affected by the increasing number of people wanting to visit it.

Our first wildlife watching guidelines were the first of their kind in the UK and were launched at the first World Responsible Tourism Day in London in 2007.



# STANDARDS AND EXPECTATIONS





## SUSTAINABLE PRACTICES

- Aspire to do better and continually improve through sharing ideas, learning from others and benchmarking against the best in the sector.
- Ensure frequent connection and networking with fellow peers.
- Always consider the impact your actions have on the environment, communities, wildlife and the land you operate on.
- Be mindful of your responsibilities both legal and ethical.



## CARE

- Actively engage and collaborate with each other and the communities in which you operate.
- Respect, nurture and develop staff.
- Take the greatest care of wildlife, fauna and flora.
- Consider sustainability in relation to people, local environment, planet, profit and the willingness to accept responsibility for healthier and regenerative ecosystems.
- Be passionate about your offering through carefully crafted experiences.
- Seek to inspire awe and wonder in your customers.
- Seek to deliver transformational experiences, where possible.



Image: Wilderness Scotland



## ACCESSIBLE TOURISM

- Accept responsibility to bring an awareness of enhanced human health and wellbeing when spending time in nature.
- Recognise that access to nature for everybody is vitally important, regardless of their physical or mental limitations.
- Endeavour to offer products and services that are accessible for all to enjoy, where possible.
- The [Wild Scotland](#) website that will include information about and signposting to accessible tourism, first aid, mental health and wellbeing.



## NATURAL & CULTURAL ENVIRONMENT

- Lead by example ensuring that operator values correlate with policies and Wild Scotland [Best Practice Principles](#).
- Provide people with experiences and resources to become advocates for Scotland's natural and cultural environment.
- Wellbeing, safety and care of our ecosystem and cultural heritage must be regarded and respected at all times.
- Be aware of sensitive areas and local codes of conduct for specific species. Where necessary, communicate with landowners to seek advice on local issues so that activities can be adjusted accordingly.

SCOTLAND'S NATURAL ENVIRONMENT >

## ALL YOU NEED TO KNOW

- A welcome and introduction to the team.
- Safety instructions.
- Basic housekeeping (toilets, refreshments, storage, litter bins etc).
- Details of the trip and itinerary, including what wildlife may be seen. Do not set expectations too high, it is better to set reasonable expectations and exceed them.
- Information about how the activity, vehicle or vessel will be handled to minimise wildlife disturbance and why this is important. This will give your guests a better understanding of what you are doing and encourage their support.
- Information for guests about how they should behave when wildlife is encountered.
- Any other issues relevant to the trip relating to conservation, data collection, local codes, etc.
- The opportunity to ask questions.







## EXCELLENCE

- Offer high standard, quality experiences.
- Strive for continual improvement and ongoing skill sharing through interactive collaborative efforts.
- Facilitate staff training sessions, in person and virtual, to educate and increase awareness in addition to developing skills that sustain and nurture the environment.
- Ensure that all content including digital, advertising, PR is of high quality, up to date and concise using simple language with relevant key information.
- Communicate clearly in a friendly and welcoming tone providing links to resources when necessary.
- Operators are encouraged to join the Green Tourism Business Scheme and, where applicable WiSe (Wildlife Safe) accreditation.
- Businesses should display their Wild Scotland logo and other relevant logos on tour vehicles, vessels and marketing materials highlighting that they are a responsible and sustainable operator delivering best practice.
- Be aware of your access right responsibilities and follow the [Scottish Outdoor Access Code](#) and the [Scottish Marine Wildlife Watching Code](#).
- Guests should be encouraged to provide written feedback about their tour. This feedback should be used to make improvements to your operations.
- Encourage additional professional qualifications such as interpretation or guiding certification, mountain leader and [Leave No Trace](#).

Image: Golden eagle | Shutterstock







## SAFETY

- The safety of your staff and visitors, both physical and mental, is of paramount importance to provide visitors with confidence.
- Ensure robust risk assessments are in place to mitigate danger and make all parties aware in advance. This should include pre-arranged grid reference points in case the SCAA resume helicopter is needed.
- Ensure that Terms & Conditions are readily available on websites or, at minimum, on request from visitors.
- All licences, insurances, policy statements (e.g. Health and Safety, Child Protection, Disability), staff disclosures and qualifications should be up-to-date and available for inspection by competent authorities.
- All regulations relating to machinery, equipment, personnel should be adhered to.
- Machinery, vehicles, vessels and equipment should be well-maintained and regularly checked.
- Where driver regulations require, a separate guide should be on the tour.
- Consideration should be given to obtaining specialist [off-road driver training](#) if appropriate.
- Where activity takes place single-handedly or only one member of staff present, particular care must be exercised in relation to the choice of route, conditions and safety should the operator become incapacitated.
- Operators should be part of a National Governing Body, where possible, and qualified Instructors who have a recognised qualification framework, must be used as a minimum.
- Adventure Activities Licensing Authority (AALA) is not always necessary but should be the standard, particularly when working with under 18s.
- Disclosure checks must be carried out for all staff working with under 18's and vulnerable adults at [Disclosure Scotland](#).



## VISITOR RESPONSIBILITY

- Act responsibly when spending time in nature.
- Ensure that businesses make visitors aware of how to act responsibly by providing tools and information prior to, during and post stay.
- Encouraging the sharing of messaging. Linking into campaigns such as [#RespectProtectEnjoy](#) [#RespectTheDestination](#) etc.

# SCOTTISH OUTDOOR ACCESS CODE KNOW THE CODE BEFORE YOU GO

## RESPONSIBLE ACCESS

Everyone has the right to be on most land and inland water providing they act responsibly. Your access rights and responsibilities are explained fully in the Scottish Outdoor Access Code (SOAC).

Whether you are in the outdoors or managing the outdoors, the key things are to:

- Take responsibility for your own actions
- Respect the interests of other people
- Care for the environment

Full information [here](#)



## LEAVE NO TRACE: THE 7 PRINCIPLES:

- Plan Ahead & Prepare
- Travel & Camp on Durable Surfaces
- Dispose of Waste Properly
- Leave What You Find
- Minimise Campfire Impacts
- Respect Wildlife
- Be Considerate of Other Visitors
- Full information at [here](#)



Image: Camping stove | Shutterstock



# OPERATOR 'GOOD GUIDING'



The operator is responsible for guests' safety and enjoyment during experiences and also to ensure that the activities are undertaken safely and responsibly. Wild Scotland therefore recommends the following guidelines:



## PLANNING

- Follow the advice in the [Scottish Outdoor Access Code](#) about running a business which utilises access rights. Contact the Land Manager to request approval to use the land and for advice on minimising your impact on land management activities, the environment and other people.
- Choose your destination carefully, avoid visiting sites where there are lots of other operators, it increases the potential to disturb ecosystems and decreases the visitors' experience of nature. Stay in contact with other groups in the vicinity to avoid repeated disturbance.
- Always consider the local communities in which you operate and ensure that your actions are responsible and sustainable.
- If you are likely to come across wildlife during the holiday, activity or experience, make sure you include the wildlife you are likely to see in the planning, both to reduce possible disturbance as well as enhance your clients 'experience' and demonstrate best practice.
- Ensure you have the appropriate equipment for a memorable and safe visitor experience.
- Consider the size of your group in relation to the sensitivity of the situation. Keep guests together in sensitive areas and keep them informed on appropriate behaviour. The 'Leave no Trace' principles are a good start.
- Do not overcrowd. Observe the environment around you. On occasion you may be in an area where other people reside and call home. Be considerate to their circumstances.



## PRE-ARRIVAL

- Be prepared for all eventualities including weather, illness, pandemics, political and financial changes.
- Plan and prepare to mitigate the risk of [ticks and Lyme Disease](#).
- Dynamic Risk Assessments must be included in standard operating procedures and carried out on arrival at the site.
- Offer resource to ensure that every aspect of an experience is carefully planned from the concept, delivery and beyond seeking high quality and value for the customer.
- Always endeavour to exceed customer expectations that align with business communications, including marketing strategies.
- Make reference to business operating guidelines about current circumstances. e.g global pandemics.
- Arrival information clearly outlined to guests when they book including information about what to wear, what to bring with them, [visitor responsibility](#) expectations, directions and sustainable travel options (e.g public transport, electric charging points), terms and conditions and your business contact information.
- Issue a polite reminder email in advance of the booking date, highlighting all of the above information and, if relevant, additional detail relating to the local area and community.
- When guests arrive, staff, vehicles, vessels and equipment should be clean and ready.



## BRIEFING

- The Leader should be knowledgeable and enthusiastic about their subject.
- When speaking to the group ensure that everyone can hear. The best way to check is to ask.
- A brief and friendly introduction is a professional way to start and will help manage guests' expectations.
- Advise guests of safe and responsible behaviour during the trip, e.g. keeping noise and movement to a minimum when you come across wildlife; listen to the tour leader/ guide/ skipper and crew for instruction, respect the local community you are visiting, not dropping litter, using flash photography or approaching wildlife; staying on paths etc.
- Visitor Responsibility Guidance
- Respect The Destination – for Boaters
- Know the code before you go



## DURING THE EXPERIENCE

- Be approachable, helpful and willing to speak to people and answer questions.
- Set a good example. If you drop litter, disturb wildlife, your clients and others watching will think it is acceptable to do the same. If in doubt, back off and explain your actions.
- Keep to paths and routes that avoid disturbance and be aware that regular use of routes can lead to wildlife becoming accustomed to your presence, but that over-use of routes could drive sensible wildlife away from the area. Use your judgement and ask experts if in doubt.
- For all activities including walking, kayaking, cycling etc, set the pace to the slowest participant.
- When speaking to the group, ensure that everyone can hear and see you. The best way to check is to ask. If using an amplifier, ensure the balance is suitable to weather conditions.
- Educate visitors on responsibility. Explain and demonstrate how to use equipment safely, such as knives, fire skills and techniques, along with the risks and best practice such as using fire pits/ bowls. Educate about the risks of wildfires and preventative measure to avoid such incidents occurring.
- If possible, carry equipment (e.g kayaks), rather than drag when moving overland.
- Follow responsible guidance on lighting fires.
- Report incidences of pollution.
- If camping, follow the Mountaineering Council of Scotland's Guide to Wild Camping and make sure you do not pitch your tent close to dens, seal colonies, sites used by birds for nesting and roosting or otter holts.
- Remove all trace of camping and follow responsible guidance.



## FOLLOW UP

- Send courtesy follow up to customers, with request to submit feedback and links to review pages (TripAdvisor, Facebook, Google) to support continual improvement.
- Acknowledge all reviews positive and negative, both in the public domain and privately.
- Keep in touch with previous guests questions.



# RESPONSIBLE TOURISM PRACTICES



## BEST PRACTICE AROUND WILDLIFE FOR ALL WILDLIFE, ADVENTURE AND ACTIVITY OPERATORS

- Above all, you should set a good example, if you disturb wildlife, your guests and others watching you will think it is acceptable to do the same. If in doubt, back off and explain your actions to your guests.
- Be aware of land practices including [wildlife management](#).
- Report incidences of [wildlife crime](#)
- Ensure that guests understand how to behave responsibly around wildlife.
- Any wildlife encounter should be on the animals' terms. Do not pursue an animal that continually turns away.
- Do not allow flash photography around wildlife. Encourage guests to turn off automatic flash settings on phones and cameras if they are likely to encounter wildlife on their trip/ experience.
- Limit wildlife encounters to 15 minutes. Unless the animal is obviously associated with your activity and departure may cause disturbance.
- Avoid lone young animals and never come between mothers and their young. Take extra care during sensitive times of year in places where animals may be breeding, on nests or with their young.
- [Scottish Marine Wildlife Watching Code](#)
- [Wildlife Watching by Sea Kayak](#)
- [Wildlife Watching by Foot](#)
- [Wildlife Watching by Vehicle](#)
- [Mountain Biking](#)







Image: Cairngorms National Park | VisitScotland



## **WHEN USING A MOTORISED VEHICLE**

- Do not address the whole group whilst driving unless your licence allows this and all the group can hear. Consider a lapel microphone and a speaker.
- Where possible, vehicles should remain on surfaced roads to avoid disturbance and habitat destruction, however if off-road is necessary, follow existing tracks.
- It is an offence to idle your engine unnecessarily; turning off improves air quality and reduces your fuel costs. Turn off engines if stationary for more than a few minutes.
- Drive at an appropriate and comfortable speed for the benefit of your guests.
- Always park your vehicle responsibly in relation to wildlife and other users.



# THE LAW

It is your responsibility as an operator to ensure that you are familiar with the law and NGB guidance relating to your activity. A summary of links is shown [here](#), but these are not exhaustive, and reference should be made to the legislation and guidance itself.

FURTHER INFORMATION >





# QUESTIONS & CONTACT

Should you have any queries regarding the content of this document, or require clarification on any points, please contact us.

[info@wild-scotland.co.uk](mailto:info@wild-scotland.co.uk)



[VIEW OUR PRINCIPLES >](#)

[VIEW OUR CODE OF CONDUCT >](#)

Image: Sea Kayaking on Isle of Mull | Shutterstock