

RECOMMENDATIONS AND GUIDELINES FOR THOSE INTERESTED IN VISITING ARCHAEOLOGICAL SITES

The ARCHAEOLOGICAL INSTITUTE of AMERICA, ARCHAEOLOGY, and the ATTA have applied the ethical standards of archaeology to archaeological tourism, creating guidelines for visiting sites with input from archaeologists, conservators, tour operators, national governments, local businesses, civic groups, and local communities.

An archaeological site should be considered a common resource, one that benefits everyone and, by extension, one for which everyone is responsible. Visiting an archaeological site can be a very rewarding and educating experience. A well-planned visit will increase your awareness of the site, the culture that built and occupied it, the local environment and community, and their practices and traditions.

The “DOs and DON’Ts” listed below are not a comprehensive listing of good practices at archaeological sites. Generally, it is important to keep in mind the three important principles listed below:

1. Archaeological sites are fragile and non-renewable. Destruction of a site results in the loss of physical materials and all information that can be obtained from that site.
2. Sites are part of a larger context that includes both the environment and local communities. Respect both.
3. Removal of cultural materials is usually illegal and always unethical.

Site Awareness

- Before you visit a site or a region try to get a basic understanding of the region’s cultural and material history. Many travel guides deal specifically with the archaeology of different regions and there are publications that incorporate both the archaeological and cultural aspects of a region into their narrative;
- Ask questions about the physical demands of the tour before leaving;
- Ask your tour guide questions about how you should behave (if you have a doubt) and about the site’s guidelines;
- Follow all guidelines prescribed by the tour operators and the site managers. This includes keeping to marked paths and obeying all signage.

Minimize Impact

- Never climb, sit, or stand on archaeological structures or remains;
- Never remove anything from an archaeological site. If you pick something up from the surface, return it to the same spot before you move on. It is best not to pick anything up. Also remember that removing objects from archaeological sites is illegal;
- Do not enter an area where archaeological excavations are taking place or where there are open archaeological excavations;
- Respect all signage and fences;
- Don’t leave anything on the site—carry all your belongings and trash away;
- Do not take off-road vehicles, all-terrain vehicles, mountain bikes, etc. through archaeological sites;
- Report vandalism at sites—you may be the only one that sees it.

Community Support

- Support local craftspeople and businesses;
- Participate in local events that are designed to enrich and supplement your site visit. These could include re-enactments, special shows, and other cultural activities.

Don’t Purchase Artifacts!

In most cases it is illegal to purchase artifacts, and you should not buy “authentic” objects offered for sale. If these are indeed authentic, they were most likely to have been acquired by looting sites. Purchasing a looted artifact does not help a local individual or community but it does result in the destruction of archaeological sites. Buying replicas and locally produced objects supports the local economy.

Finally, archaeological tourism is popular and the number of people engaging in it will continue to grow. Increased tourism brings with it the potential for serious harm to the sites that are being visited. The guidelines and “good practices” presented here are designed to minimize the adverse impact of tourism. Being aware of the potential dangers is the first step in protecting, preserving, and enjoying our shared archaeological heritage.