1. The Purpose and Importance of the Global Code of Ethics for Tourism

The Global Code of Ethics for Tourism (GCET), adopted by the UN World Tourism Organization in 1999, serves as a foundational framework of principles designed to guide the responsible and sustainable development of tourism worldwide . Its primary purpose is to maximize tourism's co ntribution to mutual understanding, economic development, and environmental preservation while minimizing its negative social, cultural, and ecological impacts.

The Code establishes a comprehensive set of obligations for all tourism stakeholders—including governments, the private sector, local communities, and tourists themselves . It articulates ten core principles that cover a wide spectrum of concerns: from tourism's role in fostering peace and respect for human rights, to the obligation to protect the natural environment and cultural heritage, and the rights of local populations to share equitably in the economic benefits generated by tourism . By providing this ethical compass, the GCET asserts that tourism activity should be planned in harmony with local traditions and should not cause the degeneration of cultural products or environments .

The importance of the Code for promoting ethical practices lies in its function as a universally recognized reference point. It empowers destinations and operators to self-regulate and provides a normative basis for policy formulation. The Code is particularly crucial in the context of emerging challenges, such as the digitalization of tourism. Recent guidance emphasizes that the principles of the GCET must be integrated into digital strategies to ensure transparency, data protection, and consumer rights online . Ultimately, the Code serves as the "cornerstone of sustainable tourism development," providing the moral and practical guidance necessary to ensure that tourism remains a force for good, balancing economic growth with the preservation of the planet's resources and the well-being of host communities .

2. Case Study: Kenya's Adherence to Responsible and Sustainable Tourism

Kenya's tourism sector is a vital economic pillar, yet its practices present a mixed picture regarding responsible and sustainable tourism. The country demonstrates strong policy commitments but struggles with the practical implementation of sustainability principles, particularly regarding environmental degradation and community benefit-sharing.

<u>Assessment of Current Practices</u>

Kenya's National Tourism Strategy 2025–2030 explicitly commits to "long-term environmental, economic, and social sustainability" . The strategy aims to diversify products beyond traditional

safaris to alleviate pressure on a few iconic parks and proposes the creation of gateway cities to reduce infrastructure strain within protected areas . However, the push to double international arriva ls to 5 million poses significant risks. The Maasai Mara exemplifies the consequences of unmanaged growth: the 2023 management plan acknowledges overcrowding, with up to 150 vehicles at a single river crossing during peak migration, leading to off-road driving, habitat damage, and wildlife disruption . Furthermore, water and waste management are critical concerns; a tourist in a five-star hotel can consume up to 440 liters of water daily, straining resources in water-scarce wildlife lan dscapes .

From a social perspective, the Code's principle of equitable benefit-sharing is not being met. Landowners in wildlife-rich ecosystems, which support nearly 70% of Kenya's wildlife, receive less than 0.5% of national tourism revenue, creating little incentive for communities to protect wildlife corridors .

Recommendations for Improvement

1. Enforce Carrying Capacity and Zoning Regulations: The government must move beyond policy c ommitments to strict enforcement in hotspot areas like the Maasai Mara. This involves implementing and policing daily vehicle limits per sighting, strictly prohibiting off-road driving, and enforcing zoning that keeps lodge development away from critical wildlife corridors and riverine forests .

2. Establish Mandatory Sustainability Reporting and Incentives; Kenya's tourism sector lacks systematic documentation for energy, water, and waste . The government should mandate standardized sustainability reporting for classified hotels and tour operators. This data should be link ed to a certification scheme that provides tangible incentives, such as tax rebates or marketing adv antages, for operators who demonstrably reduce resource consumption and adopt circular economy practices.

3. Legislate Equitable Revenue-Sharing Frameworks: To align with the GCET's call for local population s to share equitably in benefits, Kenya should establish a transparent revenue-sharing mechanism. A fixed percentage of park entry fees and a tourism levy from high-end lodges should be channeled directly to community conservancies and landowners. This would transform local residents into prim ary stakeholders in conservation, incentivizing them to protect the very resources upon which tourism depends .