Tourism Law and Legislation
Assignment 4
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1. Purpose and importance of the Global Code of Ethics for Tourism

The Global Code of Ethics for Tourism was adopted by the World Tourism Organization (UNWTO) in 1999 and later recognised by the United Nations General Assembly in 2001. It sets out ten articles describing how governments, tourism businesses, local communities and travellers should behave if tourism is to benefit everyone it affects. It is not a law and cannot fine anyone, but it works as a shared reference point for what responsible tourism looks like.

Its main purpose is to balance the economic gains of tourism against its social and environmental costs. Tourism is one of the world's biggest industries. It creates jobs, brings in foreign income and can pay for conservation. Left unchecked, though, it can push up local prices, damage ecosystems, wear away traditions and exploit workers. The Code tries to encourage the first set of outcomes and limit the second. Its articles cover things like respect for cultural heritage, sustainable development, benefits for host communities, the rights of tourism workers and the responsibilities of each stakeholder.

The Code matters for several reasons. First, it treats responsibility as shared. Governments are expected to create fair policies, businesses to operate honestly and protect staff and the environment, and tourists to respect local customs and laws. No single group carries the burden alone. Second, it puts host communities at the centre. Local people should share in tourism income and have a say in how their culture and surroundings are presented, rather than being treated as scenery. Third, it protects vulnerable people. It strongly opposes the exploitation of human beings in tourism, particularly children.

The Code also gives direction to other tools. National tourism policies, certification schemes and company sustainability pledges often draw on its principles. In 2019, the Framework Convention on Tourism Ethics gave these ideas a firmer legal footing for countries that choose

to sign it. The World Committee on Tourism Ethics also exists to promote the principles and support their application.

2. Case study: Bhutan

Bhutan is often held up as a model of responsible tourism, and for good reason. The country opened to foreign visitors in 1974 and has deliberately followed a “high value, low volume” approach ever since. Tourism policy sits within the national philosophy of Gross National Happiness, which treats cultural preservation and environmental protection as being as important as economic growth.

What Bhutan does well. Its environmental record is strong. The constitution requires at least 60 percent of the country to stay under forest cover, and Bhutan is widely described as carbon negative. Visitors must pay a Sustainable Development Fee, currently US$100 per person per night for most international adult visitors, which goes to the government rather than to tour companies. That money supports public services such as free healthcare and education as well as conservation, so tourists contribute to the host country instead of only consuming it. The fee and the guided-travel system also keep numbers manageable and protect cultural sites from overcrowding. This fits the Global Code’s emphasis on sustainable development, respect for heritage and benefits for local people.

Where problems remain. The model is not perfect. Visitors cluster around a few places, especially Paro, Thimphu and the trek to Taktsang (Tiger’s Nest), which creates pressure on those sites and leaves other regions with little income. Tourism is also seasonal, which makes jobs less stable. Rising arrivals bring more waste and transport emissions, and the high cost of travel can exclude many people, which sits uneasily with the Code’s idea of tourism being open to all. The fee has also been adjusted several times, which shows how policy has to balance revenue against competitiveness.

Overall, Bhutan follows the principles of responsible and sustainable tourism more closely than most destinations, but there is room to improve.

Three recommendations

1. **Spread tourism across regions and seasons.** Promote lesser-visited eastern districts and off-peak travel with targeted marketing and small incentives. This would ease pressure on popular sites and share income more fairly.
2. **Strengthen community-based tourism.** Support homestays, local guides and village-run enterprises, and encourage hotels and tour operators to buy local food and crafts. More money would then stay in rural communities.
3. **Monitor capacity and manage waste.** Set visitor limits based on evidence at sensitive sites such as Taktsang and invest in waste collection and visitor education so numbers do not overwhelm the environment as arrivals grow.