

Sitka's Draft Tourism Best Practices (TBMP) Program

PARTNER HANDBOOK AND PROGRAM GUIDELINES FOR SITKA'S VISITOR INDUSTRY

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Sitka's Tourism Best Management Practices (TBMP) Program

Introduction

Sitka and Baranof Island, Alaska is Lingít Aaní, ancestral homeland of the Tlingít people who have been practicing their culture and way of life on these lands and waters for over 10,000 years. Gunałchéesh to the Tlingít people for their stewardship of this land since time immemorial.

The Sitka Tourism Best Management Practices (TBMP) program is modeled after the TBMP program first established in Juneau, 25 years ago. Ketchikan and Skagway have also modeled their TBMPs after Juneau's program. The SitkaTBMP is a voluntary compliance program for partners and organizations in the City and Borough of Sitka. Our TBMP is intended to minimize the impacts of tourism in a manner which addresses both resident and industry concerns while maintaining our quality of life and enhancing the visitor experience in Sitka.

These guidelines do not replace applicable city, state, or federal regulations.

As Sitka's visitor industry has grown, so have concerns about impacts to the community. By actively participating in this voluntary program, participants demonstrate their commitment to address key community concerns.

Partners agree to implement appropriate best practices, including but not limited to the recommendations of the TBMP, in their own policies and training of their staff.

Partners also agree to address issues or concerns raised by other partners, community partners and/or the City and Borough and other governmental agencies within a timely manner.

Partners comprise anyone signing on to the plan, including all tour and attractions operators, retail businesses serving visitor clientele, restaurants, shuttle, van and taxi operators, cruise ship docking facilities and the cruise lines themselves.

TBD: Sitka's TBMP program is administered by ___?___ with oversight and support from the Tourism Commission and the municipality and is funded through cruise vessel passenger tax revenue.

TBMP participating partners and organizations who successfully complete implementation and training requirements will be listed on the TBMP website and included in brochures and other promotional materials. Decals will be issued to partners for placement on tour vehicles and storefronts. Partners may include the TBMP logo in their own promotion.

General Agreements for All TBMP Partners

Sitka TBMP partners strive to provide a positive experience for our visitors while minimizing impacts to our community. Partners, organizations and individuals who wish to be recognized as TBMP compliant will abide by the agreements and standards set forth in the handbook and/or posted on a Sitka TBMP website.

Partners will be expected to observe the following practices:

- Conduct business in a legal and ethical manner and not use business practices that damage others through association.
- Emulate the highest standard of customer service.
- Take responsibility to ensure that visitors and community partners are treated with courtesy and respect, in such a way as to leave a positive impression on them.
- Accurately describe our products and services to address any safety, health related, legal or physical restrictions that customers should be aware of and to provide complete information on pricing, duration and location of tours and activities.
- Recognize it is in all our best interests to serve the needs and desires of the customer; and if our product is not appropriate, direct them to the service that best meets their needs.
- Strive to be good ambassadors of the community with accurate knowledge of the locations of public amenities nearby such as post office, bus stops, museums, restrooms, and government buildings.

Training: Partners agree to train all employees on the program objectives and practices and to conduct periodic training sessions for employees hired mid-season. Partners will strive to conduct business in a manner which exhibits common courtesy throughout the season. Employees of participating partners will be required to sign a “**TBMP Employee Partnership Agreement**” certifying that the employee has read, understands and agrees to abide by the Tourism Best Management Practices guidelines applicable to his/her job description.

Cultural Protocols: All partners agree to take steps to ensure accuracy and respect regarding interpretation of Alaska Native culture and other cultural groups, such as our Filipino community by participating in a scheduled training class. This includes fact-based research from recognized sources for tour interpretation and disclosure of the origin of items in the sale of retail products.

Contact Name: Partners agree to provide the TBMP hotline administrator with a contact name, telephone number, fax number and email address.

Work Sessions: Partners agree to participate in periodic work sessions to discuss progress made in attaining program goals.

Community Meetings: All TBMP partners agree to send a representative to an annual preseason community meeting to:

- Identify problem areas where traffic and pedestrian congestion creates conflicts.
- Identify areas of concern to residents.
- Formulate strategies to mitigate or avoid conflicts in these areas and measure the effectiveness of the mitigation strategies.

Partners also agree to attend a postseason community meeting to review the summer and note opportunities for improvement.

Response to TBMP Hotline: Partners agree to respond within 3 business days to calls and emails received via the Tourism Best Management Practices Hotline. Partners will provide the TBMP Hotline Administrator with a summary of their response. Callers will be asked to communicate as much information as possible, including name of participant business and/or staff member, description of the aircraft, watercraft, or vehicle, vehicle number if applicable, and date and approximate time of observation. Callers will also be asked to leave a name, phone number, and/or email address so the partners may respond. Callers are also encouraged to provide positive feedback via the hotline to recognize partners who are making a difference by following the guidelines and operating their business in a courteous and neighborhood-friendly manner.

Self-monitoring: All partners agree to improve their self-monitoring efforts through collaboration and encourage other partners who may not be observing the TBMP guidelines to improve their own compliance. These actions honor the spirit of TBMP and ultimately help all companies reduce tourism impacts in the community.

Ongoing Training of Employees; Partners agree to provide periodic training and coaching for their employees, to reinforce compliance with the guidelines that pertain to their operations.

Litter and Recycling: All TBMP partners are expected to be familiar with and comply with the anti-litter ordinance detailed in Sitka's General Code, Chapter 9.12. Partners are strongly encouraged to commit to a recycling program which is effective for their individual size and type of business. The City and Borough of Sitka and commercial property owners are asked to ensure there are adequate receptacles throughout the community for proper disposal of smoking material and trash.

Cleaning and Sanitation Protocols: All TBMP partners agree to maintain and update as needed, procedures for staff and guests to maintain infection control and mitigate the potential transmission of highly contagious viral diseases such as Norovirus Gastroenteritis and COVID-19 coronavirus. Partners will train staff and monitor policy implementation and agree to comply with all applicable local, state and federal regulations.

Wildlife Protocols: All partners agree to:

- Dispose of and secure trash in a manner which does not attract wildlife.
- Report bear sightings to the police department.
- Not to feed or bait* wildlife of any form and comply with the Sitka General Code Chapter 8.08.050 Fighting or Baiting of Animals.
- To be observant and watch for signs of distress as recommended by Alaska Department of Fish and Game guidelines on wildlife harassment.

Alaska's Smoke Free Workplace Laws: All partners comply with state laws pertaining to smoking in and around the workplace.

Accessibility: To better serve the number of visitors arriving in Sitka each year with limited mobility and/or visual or hearing impairments, TBMP partners agree to establish "best

practice” objectives to provide these visitors with a quality experience. SAIL (SE Alaska Independent Living) provides the following suggestions:

- Consider how best to make accommodation for customers with limited mobility and/or a visual or hearing impairment, as appropriate to their operation.
- Include accessibility information in tour/activity descriptions and have it readily available for those seeking details (i.e. how many steps? How long a walk? Are necessary service companions given complimentary space?).
- Train all employees in accessibility awareness, with focus on how best to accommodate requests for various types of assistance (mobility, hearing, visual, etc.), how to provide good customer service to those with disabilities or impairments, and when to seek additional help in doing so.
- Ensure clearances for wheelchairs or walkers.

Privacy and Security: Partners will train staff to ensure that customer data including but not limited to personal identification, credit/debit card numbers and security codes and other sensitive materials are handled with care to minimize potential identity theft and to safeguard privacy.

Emergency Procedures: Partners will ensure staff are trained to aid customers in the event of an emergency and understand policies and procedures.

TBMP Program Contacts- TBD— Add contacts

Transportation and Vehicles

Commercial passenger vehicles are required to comply with Sitka Municipal Code ordinances, Alaska State Administrative Statutes and US DOT regulations that pertain to the operation of commercial vehicles on public roadways. For purposes of this program, vehicles include motor coaches, buses, mini-buses, limos, vans, trolleys, taxis, motorcycles, airporters. (Residents should remember that tour vehicles are sometimes used for non-tour activities, including charters, government service contracts, school field trips and charity work. While this program focuses on tour activities, operators agree to conduct all activities in a courteous manner and to emphasize these guidelines during pre-season training.

School Zone Safety Protocols: All companies agree to pay special attention to watching for children, when approaching crosswalks, encountering stopped school buses and observing school zone speed limits.

Downtown Traffic/Staging: All companies utilizing staging areas should be aware of times when congestion into and out of these lots will be at peak level. Dispatchers and drivers will assist in promoting efficient traffic flow in the area by managing vehicle movements in a courteous manner and by yielding to other vehicles and users as necessary.

Traffic Flow: Drivers agree not to impede normal traffic flow by slowing down or stopping for sightseeing opportunities except in designated turnouts and will not pull over on bike lanes or walking paths or on the shoulder of roads. Drivers will be especially attentive to not slow down or stop when transiting intersections.

Empty Tour Vehicles: Drivers agree to not park in designated loading zones unless they are loading or unloading guests on tour.

Vehicle fluids and Emissions: Drivers of ALL VEHICLES agree to monitor any engine oil and/or fluid leaks and excess emissions/ black smoke when operating throughout the road system. This includes monitoring at all staging/loading zones, docks and attractions, as well as venues. Should any vehicle exhibit a leak of a substantial nature or visible emissions in excess, the operator should be prepared to immediately pull the vehicle from service until repaired. Any vehicle exhibiting signs of a mechanical failure should pull over immediately at the next safe location for repairs. This is to ensure vehicle failures do not block public rights-of-way.

Engine Idling: Drivers of ALL VEHICLES agree to turn engines off at every reasonable opportunity when loading and unloading passengers and/or when staging in the various loading zones, staging areas and tour venues throughout Sitka. Vehicles should not sit with engines idling while actively loading, unloading, or waiting for passengers to arrive. Engines should be started only when the vehicle is ready to move, and thereafter, only when the vehicle is in motion or in traffic. Exceptions include safety related issues, including vehicles that may need to idle in order to defog windshields and windows, situations where vehicles

with air brakes may need to idle to build air pressure or when weather requires engines to remain on for guest comfort.

Noise Abatement: Drivers of ALL VEHICLES agree to NOT use Compression Braking (commonly known as Jake Braking, Engine Braking, etc.) in the City and Borough of Sitka, except in emergency situations.

Bells and Public Address (PA) systems should not be utilized in any tours unless the noise is restricted to the cabin of the vehicle.

Transiting Residential Neighborhoods: Drivers agree to avoid transiting residential neighborhoods within the City and Borough of Sitka unless conducting a specific pick-up or drop-off in the immediate vicinity, including Katlian and Jeff Davis Streets.

ADA Zones Not for Staging: Drivers utilizing equipment with a wheelchair lift will use the designated ADA zones only for active loading and unloading and not for staging of vehicles.

Safety Backing: All motor coaches, buses, mini-buses and vans will take special care when backing out of loading/unloading zones. When preparing to back, drivers should be aware of the backup beepers and the sound they make and should strive to spend as little time as possible in reverse. Drivers should only shift into reverse when they are ready to commence backing to minimize beeper sounds.

Safety on Roadways: Drivers will take caution when encountering pedestrians, cyclists, and animals on narrow roadways, bike lanes and school zones throughout the city and companies will take this into consideration during their driver training programs. Drivers should strive to operate in a manner which exhibits common courtesy throughout their daily travels. Extra caution when approaching crosswalks. All drivers should be trained on the changing/reduced speed limits throughout the downtown and highway areas. Operators are required to use headsets or Boom mics and NOT hand held microphones. By law and in the interest of safety, all operators agree to abide by Sitka's **no cell phone** policy when their drivers are operating a vehicle except in the case of an emergency.

Resource Scheduling: Operators agree to assign vehicles to scheduled tours and transfers in a manner which efficiently maximizes the use of all vehicles on duty. The number of vehicles and type of equipment will be assigned to a tour or transfer based on capacity needs on a given day. Operators will collaborate with partners/vendors to find opportunities to minimize the number of vehicles on the road whenever possible.

Training of Schedulers: Operators will train all schedulers to take advantage of synergies that are present in the Sitka tourism transportation industry. Schedulers should strive to better serve their constituents and community stakeholders by minimizing vehicles on the road whenever possible.

Crossing Guards: Crossing Guards may be positioned in strategic locations in order to promote safety and facilitate vehicle and pedestrian movement throughout the downtown corridor. TBMP members should be mindful of their presence and obey their instructions.

Identifiers for All Shuttle and Tour Vehicles: Operators agree to ensure all vehicles are easily identifiable with the company name clearly visible on both sides, from a reasonable distance and even while the vehicle is moving.

Local Recreation Areas: Drivers agree not to use **Sandy Beach, __?__ and __?__** as tour destinations. **Define potential local use only areas. See Recommendations.**

As always, Operators are responsible for abiding by Alaska State Statutes governing operation of vehicles on state roadways including but not limited to stopping, standing or parking on highways, unlawful obstruction or blocking traffic, and pedestrians on highways.

Flightseeing (Fixed Wing, Floatplanes & Helicopter):

Flightseeing operations are subject to Federal Aviation Administration (FAA) regulations and operational requirements. Mt. Edgecumbe landing trips are also subject to US Forest Service permit requirements. Although the following guidelines are designed to minimize noise, safety and flight operations take precedence over noise abatement procedures. Operators will conduct pre-season training in a manner which emphasizes these guidelines.

Routes and Aircraft Identifiers: Operators agree to provide the following to TBMP administrator who will make the information available to interested partners of the public:

- Established flight routes
- Common factors influencing route choice, such as weather, turbulence and traffic.
- Aircraft colors or other distinguishing characteristics useful in identifying individual operators.

Seaplane Floats: Commercial use is permitted from the seaplane float. Operations for commercial use of seaplane float is managed and regulated by the Sitka Harbor Department

Altitude: Operators follow voluntarily agreed upon routes for tour flights and maintain minimum altitudes of 1,500 feet for helicopters operating above residential areas, except during takeoff, landing or when deviations are required by weather or traffic.

Fly Neighborly: Helicopter operators agree to conduct flightseeing tours in accordance with the Helicopter Association International (HAI) Fly Neighborly Program. The Fly Neighborly Program is a voluntary noise reduction program designed to be implemented worldwide by local helicopter operators, large and small. Additional information on this program can be viewed on the HAI website— www.rotor.com

Operating Times: Operators agree not to schedule flightseeing tour departures before 7:30 a.m. or after 7:00 p.m. and to complete all tour flights by 8:00 p.m. Operators agree to

minimize tour support operations out-side of these hours. Operators agree to take the same care to minimize their impacts during non-tour flight operations.

Wildlife Viewing: Operators conducting air tours within the Sitka area agree to minimize impacts to backcountry users and wildlife. Operators will not circle, hover, harass or decrease altitude for wildlife viewing. Flightseeing operators also agree to avoid key mountain goat kidding areas.

Walking, Hiking, Bicycling Tours

Commercial use of public trails may be permitted on some municipal, State Parks, National Forest, and National Park lands. All commercial use of public land requires permitting.

Permitted use: Commercial operators are responsible for understanding public land ownership and obtaining permits from each agency. Operators agree to follow group size regulations and avoid crowding on trails.

Identifiers for Tour Guides: All operators agree to ensure tour guides are easily identifiable and that company names are visible on guides' attire and company vehicles.

Peer enforcement: All operators agree to report unpermitted commercial use to the appropriate public land manager. A list of permitted operators is available from each agency.

Trail Conditions & Maintenance: Operators agree to report trail conditions and trail abuse to appropriate regulatory agencies. Operators agree to educate guides on basics of trail maintenance standards to adequately detect emerging issues of erosion and damage. Operators using public trails agree to annually dedicate at least one paid day for at least one guide to support a trail maintenance project, led by the agency or Sitka Trail Works.

Noise Abatement: All tour operators agree to monitor the volume and use of their microphones and outside speakers in a manner which reduces their impact on others.

Resource Protection: Operators agree to protect the environment by encouraging clients do not litter, walk off trail, cut switchbacks, or otherwise damage vegetation and soils adjacent to trails. Operators agree to train guides in Leave No Trace principles and encourage an ethic of care for the land.

State Highways (Halibut Point Rd and Sawmill Creek Rd): Cycling guides agree to instruct clients to use bike lanes and ride single file to the right side of the right lane. A guide will always be in the lead to make sure that clients descend hills at a safe speed. Efforts will be made to keep groups as close together as safely possible.

Bikes and E-bikes: Operators agree to provide each bike rider with a card listing safety precautions and biking rules of the road, including hand signals for bikers. Operators agree to

install bells on ebikes to alert pedestrians and pets of their approach. Operators will encourage riders to use the bike lanes and travel on the right-hand side of the road. Operators will encourage bikers to wear helmets and other safety gear, such as bright colors or reflective clothing.

Safety on Roadways: Drivers will take caution when encountering pedestrians, cyclists, and animals on narrow roadways, bike lanes and school zones throughout the city and companies will take this into consideration during their driver training programs. Drivers should strive to operate in a manner which exhibits common courtesy throughout their daily travels, such as paying attention to biker hand signals, slowing down and giving at least three feet of space.

Trailhead Parking: Operators agree to use all trailhead parking in a courteous and responsible manner and to pay special attention to independent users.

Yield to Other Users: Guides agree to instruct clients to yield to all other users on commercially used trails.

Sitka National Historic Park: In order to keep the Park safe for all users, riding bikes or e-bikes on trails within Sitka National Park is expressly prohibited by Park rules.

Cruise Ships

Emission Standards: All cruise vessels agree to comply with the Marine Vessel Visible Emissions Standards (18 AAC 50-.070) and take all available and reasonable steps to minimize stack effluents on approach to, departure from and while in port in Sitka.

Southeast Alaska Voluntary Waterway Guide: All Cruise ships agree to follow the guidelines included in the Marine Safety Task Force's [Southeast Alaska Voluntary Waterway Guide](#).

P.A. Announcements, Signals and Outdoor Entertainment: Cruise Line Agencies of Alaska (CLAA), Cruise Line Industry Association-Alaska (CLIA Alaska) and individual cruise lines will work to minimize vessel announcements, whistle signals, and outdoor entertainment (movies and use of music, bands or DJ) while docked or anchored within the City of Sitka. Cruise ships are also asked to monitor their outside speakers, announcements and entertainment on approach to and departure from Sitka. Cruise Line Agencies and cruise lines will ensure that shipboard staff understand the importance of this specific guideline. Certain signals and announcements are necessary and required by the US Coast Guard or are necessary for safety reasons.

Courteous use of vessel floats: Cruise ship tender operators agree to use the designated floats at Crescent Harbor or at the bridge dock in a safe and responsible manner. Tender

operators also agree to minimize their wake on approach to and in the harbors, and to operate in a manner which exhibits common courtesy to all others.

Port No Wake Zone: Cruise ships and their lightering tenders over 23 feet in length are required to comply with No Wake requirements in 33 CFR Alaska; navigation. Operators are responsible for their wakes.

Marine Tour Operators, Fishing Charters, Water Taxis and Kayak Tours

Marine tour operators and charter/sportfishing operators will take all available and reasonable steps to minimize impacts to coastal residents and other vessel operators. Vessel operators will strive to minimize the impacts of their wake on other watercraft, docks and beaches throughout Sitka area coastal waterways, including popular crabbing and recreational boating grounds.

Rules of the Road: Marine tour operators agree to adhere to all applicable USCG rules of the road during operation.

Noise Abatement: Marine tour operators agree to monitor the volume and use of their onboard PA systems and outside speakers in a manner which reduces the impact on residents and recreational boaters.

Marine Mammal Viewing: Marine Operators will follow all applicable federal regulations regarding marine mammal viewing and actively participate in Whale Sense, whom establishes guidelines surrounding the viewing of marine mammals. To that regard, each operator will ensure the following:

- Become a member of the Whale Sense organization
- Ensure all licensed operators have conducted the required annual training as part of the whale sense program.
- Ensure all standard operating procedures are in line with the guidelines and regulations established by whale sense.

The link to whale sense is: <https://whalesense.org/>

Whale Sense's regulations are here: <https://www.govinfo.gov/content/pkg/FR-2016-09-08/pdf/2016-21278.pdf>

Port No Wake Zone: Marine sightseeing/tour vessels and charter fishing boats over 23 feet in length are required to comply with 33 CFR Alaska; navigation. Operators are responsible for their wakes.

Vessel Engine Idling: All marine vessel operators (including charter fishing captains) agree to minimize engine idling at every reasonable opportunity. This includes loading and unloading of passengers and/or when standing-by in vessel loading zones. In the interest of reducing emissions, whenever it is deemed safe and prudent by vessel captains, engines should be turned off. Engines should not be started until the vessel is ready to get underway.

Downtown & Retail Partners

All partners agree to comply with City of Sika Municipal Code Chapter 14.12 and 14.16 regarding commercial sign and advertising devices and obstruction of sidewalks, as applicable.

Buildings and Grounds: Merchants will be responsible for keeping their locations neat and welcoming, to include monitoring sidewalks immediately in front of their establishment, sweeping as needed and picking up and properly disposing of litter. Merchants will not place their business' accumulated daily refuse into street-side, public refuse containers.

Seasonal merchants: In order to promote safety and a welcoming feel to downtown during the winter months are asked to utilize ways to brighten up their storefronts in the off season when the business is shut down and refrain from covering windows with brown paper. Consider keeping display windows lit (LED lighting).

Sales Tactics: Merchants and their employees agree to:

- Cooperate with municipal employees including but not limited to police, downtown ambassadors, crossing guards, public works, planning department and revenue staff.
- Refrain from handing out flyers or leaflets outside of their place of business and not engaging in sidewalk hawking or any other disruptive or aggressive physical behavior in order to lure potential customers.
- Refrain from displaying misleading signage or advertising and agree not to post stickers or signage in their windows indicating "cruise ship preferred or guaranteed shopping venue."
- Refrain from reproducing and displaying logos for any cruise line without the line's express written permission.
- Refrain from using false advertising (going out of business, closing soon, etc.) as a sales tactic.

Appendices- Resources **TBD**—add relevant resources, contacts and toolkits.