



**SimienEcoTours**

*Enjoy Ethiopian Diversity*

# CHILD SAFE POLICY



January-2023

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## 1. INTRODUCTION

Through the Child Safe Policy ,SimienEcoTours wishes to state its strong commitment to protect children in the destinations where we operate. We also want to position ourselves as a pro-active pioneering tour company that has, since 2013, decided to ban any interaction between foreign visitors and children under 12 years old.

SimienEcoTours endorses the UN's International Convention of Children's RIGHTS. The Convention on the Rights of the Child sets out the rights that must be realized for children to develop their full potential, free from hunger and want, neglect and abuse. It reflects a new vision of the child. Children are neither the property of their parents nor are they helpless objects of charity. They are human beings and are the subject of their own rights. The Convention offers a vision of the child as an individual and as a member of a family and community, with rights and responsibilities appropriate to his or her age and stage of development. By recognizing children's rights in this way, the Convention firmly sets the focus on the whole child. At SimienEcoTours, we are committed, through our own activities, to contribute to a more sustainable development of the destinations where we operate and, ensuring as much as we can act upon, that children are growing up in a safe and fulfilling environment which is a prerequisite to future well being of any society. It is even more crucial in the countries where we operate where social rights are nascent, poverty rates are still very high and a large population of disadvantaged children are at risk (child refugees, urban migrant's children, children with

disabilities, children of minority or indigenous groups) and, are still too often considered as money makers and cheap labour, while being denied their basic rights such as a free primary education and basic needs. Because they are developing, children are especially vulnerable - more so than adults- to poor living conditions such as poverty, inadequate health care, nutrition, clean water, housing and environmental pollution. The effects of disease, malnutrition and poverty threaten the future of children and therefore the future of the societies in which they live.

### **1.1. What is child abuse?**

SimienEcoTours adopts the World Health Organization definition: 'Child abuse' or 'maltreatment' constitutes all forms of physical and/or emotional ill-treatment ,sexual abuse, neglect or negligent treatment or commercial or other exploitation, resulting in actual or potential harm to the child's health, survival, development or dignity in the context of a relationship of responsibility, trust or power'. Physical abuse occurs when a person purposefully injures or threatens to injure a child or a young person. This may take the form of but is not limited to slapping , punching , shaking , burning, shoving or grabbing. The injury may take the form of bruises, cuts, burns, fractures etc.

Emotional abuse is a chronic attack on a child's or a young person's self esteem. It can take the form of but is not limited to name- calling , threatening, ridiculing, intimidating or isolating the child or young person. Sexual abuse is any act that involves sexual molestation or exploitation of a child or a young person regardless of whether physical injuries are sustained. Child sexual abuse is a physical violation of a child's body through any sort of sexual contact or psychological violation of a child's space through verbal or visual sexual behavior. Neglect is the persistent failure to meet a child's or a young person's basic needs: Physical needs, such as adequate nutrition, personal hygiene, shelter and appropriate supervision. Medical needs, such as general and mental health care.

### **1.2 why do we need a policy protecting childrens' rights and safety**

- Because we consider it is everyone's duty to support the protection and well-being of children as much as possible. SimienEcoTours is committed to contributing to the protection of children and supporting their sound development, and we actively spread and promote childrens' rights among our suppliers and clients.

- Because, as any other sector of active in Asia, where childrens' rights are all nascent and often spoilt, we need to be careful to prevent and avoid any abuse or exploitation that could take place along our supply chain, suppliers or service providers.
- Because sadly tourism is considered as one of the main incentives of child exploitation and abuse. As a leading tour company, we have a duty to involve indeepth.

### **Sex tourism with under age children are on the rise**

A new study by ECPAT The Global Study; 'Offenders on the move',reveals that the extent of Sexual Exploitation of Children in Travel and Tourism (SECTT) has increased drastically and its nature has changed dramatically. White, western, wealthy ,middle-aged men are no longer the typical offender.

Offenders can be foreign or local, young or old; some are pedophiles, but most are not. Local, domestic, and intra-regional travelers account for most, with many being “situational” offenders, i.e. engaging in child exploitation because of an opportunity and because they feel they will get away with it. The Global Study highlighted that Southeast Asia has long been viewed as a primary region for SECTT and remains a destinations for offenders today.

Dr. Najat Maalla M'jid, Chair of the High-Level Task Force for the Global Study on the Sexual Exploitation of Children in Travel and Tourism, said that, “We must all share the burden of ending sexual exploitation of children in travel and tourism. It is a moral obligation to act now to protect all children from this shocking crime wherever they are.”

### **Tourism activities involving children are on the rise**

Although not as severe a problem as sexual exploitation and abuse of children, but a growing concern is the orphanage tourism or volunteer tourism and, the rising demand from tourists and travelers to interact with children although with good intention through school visits or volunteering in children centers or teaching English for a few hours. Such visits, which tend to be repetitive ,short term and even somemes without any control of any sort in particular school visits which occur spontaneously all over Asia, are denounced by child protection organization as detrimental to the emotional and proper educational development of children. Unfortunately what may seem at first sight as a good deed is turning into an established part of 'tours' and ends up diverging these centers from their original goal which is to educate and provide care to children, turning the children themselves into tourist attractions. Encouraged by the demand from tourists, the number of orphanages and NGOs has

boomed in the recent years with many behaving as if their main purpose was a lucrative business, rather than child care.

These visits are also considered by some organization such as APLE as likely to incite and/or facilitate future sexual offense; as children are then more vulnerable to potential predators who use grooming techniques and are more difficult to discern from a well intention person. The global study released in May 2016 by ECPAT says: Tourists and domestic offenders gain access to vulnerable boys and girls through several channels: via establishment-based prostitution (bars, karaoke venues, beer gardens, massage parlours and brothels); through direct or facilitated solicitation of children living and/or working in public places such as beaches or marketplaces; as well as via voluntary or professional engagement in child-contact roles, including schools, orphanages and humanitarian aid.

SimienEcoTours is not willing to have any responsibility directly or indirectly to any child abuse. As such, since 2013, SimienEcoTours has banned visits to schools and orphanages and offers meaningful alternatives activities supporting parents and children in a more efficient and harmless manner. What seems obvious in western countries appears to be a challenge here. Many western Tourists themselves, who would never allow this to occur in their own schools, view it as a good acon in a poorer country.

As part of our advocacy and, in order to further define our position already stated in our Responsible Travel Policy, Employee's Manual, Guide Handbook, and Cooperation Agreement with organization we support through our SimienEcoTours Foundation, as well as in our to travelers, we have decided to formalize a dedicated Child Safe Policy compiling our different areas of acon. It is also part of our Childsafe certification by Friends International.

### **1.3 our Guiding principles**

Our guiding principles regarding child protection follow those commended by friends international All children are human beings, who are the subject and receivers of human rights that SimienEcoTours will respect at all times.

- All children have equal rights to be protected from all forms of abuse and exploitation regardless of their gender, race, health situation, religion, age, disability, sexual orientation, social background or culture. Child abuse will never be acceptable by any means.
- All children should be encouraged to fulfill their potential and inequalities shouldn't be challenged.

- Everybody has a responsibility to support the care and protection of children.
- Our suppliers and the projects we support have a responsibility to meet minimum standards of protection for the children in their programs and activities.

## **WE HELP TO PROTECT CHILDREN THROUGH THE FOLLOWING MEANS**

- **Awareness:** we ensure that all staff, board members, beneficiary organization, suppliers, guides, clients and partners are aware of the problems of child abuse and the risks to children.
- **Prevention:** we ensure, through awareness, guidelines and good practice, that staff, guides, board members, suppliers and clients minimize the risks to children.
- **Reporting:** we ensure that staff, guides, suppliers and clients need to be informed on the steps (the legal compliance) to be taken when concerns arise regarding the safety of children.
- **Responding:** we ensure that action is taken to support and protect children where concerns arise regarding possible abuse. This process will be fair and transparent.
- **Supporting:** SimienEcoTours Foundation fund child care organization, education projects and projects supporting disadvantaged families, which are included in our tours when appropriate; vocational training restaurants, craft shops. Welcome gifts given to travelers are purchased from such projects.

## **2. SCOPE OF EXO CHILD SAFE POLICY**

**EXO Child Protection policy is public and available to all, its scope applies to all staff, board members, guides, partners, beneficiary organization, and to our suppliers.**

### **2.1. Education and Training**

We provide Child Safe training to our staff and to our freelance guides. Training has been conducted by Friends International and evolved throughout the years. They include child protection policy principles and procedures, learning about, recognizing and responding to child abuse. So far they have taken place in Cambodia, Laos, Myanmar, Thailand and Vietnam and shall be delivered in Malaysia, Indonesia, China and Japan.

**Guides** are key actors working in the field in tourism sites they are those most likely to be confronted with situation where children are at risk. Some guides are even offering tourists to help or to interact with children to go visit children centers, or it might be the traveler asking the guide to take him to such centers. As such SimienEcoTours makes it very clear to guides we hire as freelance service providers that this is completely against the company regulations. (See Guide's Handbook extract below)

### **Guide's Handbook Extract**

#### **One particular point we want to highlight is Child Protection:**

Child protection is a strong commitment for SimienEcoTours and we are an active member of the ChildSafe movement ([www.childsafetourism.org](http://www.childsafetourism.org)). SimienEcoTours goal is to provide yearly training about Child Protection with our partners at Friends International. Information on available training dates will be distributed by EXO offices to guides and do sign up early please!

We have also adopted a policy to cease all school and orphanage visits (where children are under 10 years old) considered as detrimental to child emotional and human development. Instead we offer more meaningful activities which are safely contributing to the personal and educational development of children. Should you encounter any form of abuse or disrespect (related to any of the points above) during your assignments by SimienEcoTours, clients, SimienEcoTours suppliers? please inform SimienEcoTours by learning us know in your Guide. Although our own staff are not on the field and are less likely to be confronted by such situation during their work, we deemed it necessary to sensise them on ChildSafe issues; so that they understand the company's policy, are able to explain our position to clients and know how to handle such situation in their everyday life.

Our **Employee's Manual**, which is signed by all employees, has a specific topic on child safety issues (see extract below). As such, new employees are made aware as soon as they join.

### **Sexual tourism**

Some single visitors come to countries of Southeast Asia also looking for sexual adventures. While this in itself is not illegal we want to make sure that any employee of SimienEcoTours, especially the guides, will not under any circumstances facilitate or arrange sexual encounters for our clients even if requested to do so, and even if offered to be paid large amounts of money .

Sexual tourism is not encouraged and supported by SimienEcoTours and therefore no SimienEcoTours employee should facilitate such behaviour in any kind of form. We are not responsible for what clients do after their tour finishes but SimienEcoTours staff will under no circumstances advise or help clients who ask for such information. Any employee not observing this rule will face severe disciplinary consequences. Furthermore if SimienEcoTours employee is witness to abuse or suspected sexual abuse of children (paedophilia),s/he is requested to report this to the nearest police station and SimienEcoTours supports and exposes such a case the person to be liable for any legal procedures. Paedophilia is a grave and terrible crime and tourists/foreigners can be pursued in justice in their home country for this. SimienEcoTours is a member of ChildSafe network,

ChildSafe training shall be delivered by Friends International to all employees, in order to improve their understanding of issues at stake and so they can recognize when a child is in danger. They will also know how to act in case they are confronted by such situations.

### **Education centers and orphanage visits**

SimienEcoTours has made the decision to cease visits to schools, orphanages and other children's centers following reports from child welfare organizations that work with disadvantaged children and families, such as Friends International and UNICEF, of a negative impact. Reports show that such visits are detrimental to the psychological development of children. Based on these reports and the fact that such practices are strictly forbidden in any western country, we do not offer or promote these activities. There are many other ways to help out and EXO, as the main donor of the SimienEcoTours foundation, supports children's rehabilitation programs of various organizations and projects in each country, which have been carefully selected for their transparency and efficiency. See

[www.SimienEcoToursfoundation.org](http://www.SimienEcoToursfoundation.org) for more information. Some tourists are requesting to visit such centers with a sincere willingness to do well and support education and poverty alleviation. Unfortunately what may seem at first sight as a good deed is turning into an established part of 'tours' and ends up diverging these centers from their original goal which is to educate and provide care to children, turning the children themselves into tourist attractions. As we do have clients requesting such activities, the best way to consult with them on this is to use the points listed in our internal document to explain why SimienEcoTours has taken this position. More often than not, clients are unaware of the detrimental effects of these visits and would be more than happy to select a more responsible activity. Please use the SimienEcoTours Foundation as a resource if you need assistance



with selecting alternatives working with SimienEcoTours. New employees also receive training on the company's Responsible Travel Policy.

## **2.2. OUT REACH SENSITIZATION AND COMMUNICATION**

### **Towards suppliers**

#### **Accommodation, Transport Providers, Excursion and activities providers:**

A tour is a complex combination of services and activities which are usually all purchased from external suppliers. As such, our commitment to child protection ensures there is no mistreatment of children directly or indirectly along our supply chain. Not being entitled to verify, we ask all our suppliers to sign an addendum to contract where they commit not to use any child labour, to respect international and national labor laws, including respect of maternity leave and working conditions for pregnant women, and to fight against any kind of exploitation of children, including not hiring organization (orphanages, dance schools) that are using under aged children (below 24 years old) to perform dance shows, or else, on a regular basis or, at night me in hotels or tourism sites.

#### **Extract from addendum to suppliers contracts**

The minimum practices and standards we are looking at, as listed below, are essential points we consider key to finalizing the contractual agreement. And SimienEcoTours with holds the right to terminate the contract with immediate effect if there is clear evidence that the Supplier is not respecting the following: The contracted supplier is not involved in compulsory labour nor employes children to complete work normally undertaken by adults. There are special working conditions for children (< 14 years) working within the business, (including performances by under aged, unpaid children at certain hours) in accordance with the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child and/or the ILO convention No. 182 on the worst forms of child labour and No. 138 on the minimum age ([www.ilo.org/ipecc](http://www.ilo.org/ipecc)). Doesn't tolerate child protection within or outside its premises and facilities. We encourage all our Suppliers to commit to at least one of the following organizations such as ChildSafe, The Code - ECPAT, etc. and, to communicate about it to their clients.

including our Child Safe Policy. Report at the end of your trip.

Our SimienEcoTours **Responsible Travel Policy**, widely communicated, is articulated around 7 main commitments, our commitment to child protection is mentioned in 5 of them (*see extracts below*)

#### ***Extracts from our responsible travel policy***

**Commitment 1, we commit to our people**

Refuse child labour and all forms of forced and compulsory labour from outsourced contracted companies for office maintenance or any work done for the company; Respect national and international regulations for working conditions of pregnant women, respect of maternity leave and facilitation of breastfeeding.

**Commitment 2, we respect human rights**

By this policy statement we commit overall and across our activities and partnerships to: Act to protect children against sexual exploitation in our destinations; Make sure that we are not directly or indirectly complicit in any human rights abuse.

**The Management in each country will ensure that we strive to:**

- ✓ Respect all individual civil and political rights.
- ✓ Facilitate access and, when possible, provide support and facilitates for education and lifelong learning for community members.
- ✓ Regularly assess the impact of our policies and activities.

Child protection is a strong commitment of SimienEcoTours and we are an active member of the ChildSafe network. Consequently we have adopted a policy to cease all school and orphanage visits (where children are under 10 years old) considered as detrimental to child emotional and human development. Instead we offer more meaningful activities, which are contributing efficiently to the sound and safe human and educational development of children.

**Commitment 3, we involve our supply-chain (accommodation, excursions, activities, guides)**

We ask all our suppliers through an addendum to contracts specific clause where they commit to:

- ✓ Respect basic Human Rights against compulsory/forced labour.
- ✓ Fight against child labour and sexual exploitation of children.
- ✓ Respect international and national labor laws including maternity protection.

**Our tour leaders, local representatives and guides** are invited to follow specific training to

Identify and fight against exploitation of children.

#### **Commitment 4, we support community involvement and development**

Fund local projects supporting education and vocational training/ fighting against human trafficking and child abuse / health care & sanitation, community development / local economic development / environmental conservation / humanitarian aid & culture and arts.

#### **Commitment 5, we care about our customers**

Communicate to clients about sustainable issues in the destination. We commit to give them recommendations about illegal souvenirs, sustainable transport, sexual exploitation, protection and respect of children, detrimental effects of orphanage and school visits, preference for local services and goods, respect of traditional culture and customs, environmental issues and animal welfare.

#### **Towards clients and travelers**

Communication to clients and travelers is the most delicate and complex as most people asking for such activity are, of course, convinced it is a good thing to do and this is precisely why they wish to do it! Sometimes it is just for the photo opportunity of them with children. It is not easy to convince well.

Intentioned people in a client relationship that it is not such a good thing! Our communication to clients & travelers is channeled through different sources and at all stages of our relationship.

Our membership to ChildSafe movement with their logo proudly featured in our websites and all documents online to be found here.

The SimienEcoTours E-newsletter where we regularly publish articles on how to help children in need efficiently, linking to the SimienEcoToursFoundaon.

Our Travel consultants advise: whenever there is a request from clients for a school visit or a volunteering experience with children, Travel Consultants and sales are trained to offer alternatives which are elaborated and customized for each client in an ad hoc manner and seek advice from our sustainability team. Templates of argumentation explaining our position to clients are available. They are also trained on ChildSafe issues.

Our Guides are trained to recognize and act whenever they see a child at risk by Friends International as well as to advise travelers on most appropriate behavior.

### **SimienEcoTours tips for responsible travels**

This small booklet is distributed to travelers with the authorization of their travel agents. It contains tips to help travelers have the best possible impact on the destinations they visit so their holiday also becomes more meaningful. A second is dedicated to children and their protection, and we also reproduce there the ChildSafe Movement 7 tips and campaigns.

### **Extract SimienEcoTours Tips For Responsible Travels**

#### **ETHICAL TRAVEL**

When travelling through a developing country it is easy to become overwhelmed by the plight of some children. Misery and social issues can be affecting and travelers may be moved to take action, or wish to contribute in a meaningful way. However, direct contribution often only add to the problem and reinforce practices that put children in vulnerable and dangerous situations.

#### **Children are NOT tourist attractions**

Visiting children centers, orphanages or, schools is forbidden in western countries. Research has shown that short-term visits (including volunteer tourism) can be harmful to a child's development and emotional balance. UNICEF, Friends International and an increasing number of children organizations are now campaigning to stop what has become an exploitative practices that turns children and misery into tourist commodities and commercial assets. Ask yourself: would you allow complete strangers to approach your children, take pictures of them, or give them candies? DO NOT give gifts, money or sweets to children or buy anything from them - although you might think it helps, it only encourages them to stay by the streets where they have a little hope of a better life however, they are vulnerable. These children are openly exploited by local mafias or even their own family.

#### **If you wish to learn more about this please visit:**

[www.thinkchildsafe.org](http://www.thinkchildsafe.org). Our guides have been trained to react appropriately when confronted to such situations, should you witness any situations in which a child seems to be at risk, please tell your guide or contact hotline numbers provided below...

**SimienEcoTours foundation**

The **SimienEcoTours** Foundaon, our philanthropic arm, which acts as our sustainability advisory has been coaching us on children protection issues. All projects funded are requested to strictly follow our ChildSafe Policy and specific clauses are included in the cooperation agreement they sign as per below. Any breach to this agreement will end the project funding immediately.

**Extract from SimienEcoToursFoundation Cooperation Agreement ; Ethical Requirements**

Both parties must comply with all mandatory laws, regulations and compulsory minimum standards in the country they operate. If the project contravenes mandatory national or international law (e.g. If there is evidence that child labour is involved, that an employee is acting as an intermediary for child prostitution /exploitation or if ecological legislation is breached) the Foundation has the right to cancel the cooperation with immediate effect.

**Child Protection**

As a member of the ChildSafe network, the **SimienEcoTours** Foundation does not financially support organization that facilitate, promote, back up or organize visits by tourists or short term volunteers to any centre that shelters children under 12 years old, such as schools and orphanages. When the visits take place at an information centre, presenting the project without any interaction with children, we may accept. (.....)

Child labour and any form of child exploitation, as defined by national law, and any working condition that resemble slavery or are harmful to children's health are forbidden.

**Requirements for external communication about children**

**SimienEcoTours** is careful and recognizes that it has a responsibility to the children that might be portrayed through its philanthropic or commercial communication. Every child has a right to be accurately represented through both words and imagery. The portrayal of a child must not be manipulated or sensationalized in any way, but provide a balanced depiction of their life and circumstances. Children must be presented as human beings with their own identity and dignity preserved. Language and images that could possibly degrade or victimize or shame children are avoided.

Policy Owner: SimienEcoTours

Signatory: Marco Degasper (General Manager)



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