

# Sustainable Geotourism

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Growing concern for the integrity and longevity of popular tourist attractions has prompted the global “geotourism” initiative. In order to responsibly manage the fossil site at Sexi, the principles of geotourism are being considered when developing The Petrified Forest Piedra Chamana for visitors.

## “Geotourism” Defined

According to the National Geographic Center for Sustainable Destinations (2010), geotourism sustains or enhances the geographical character of a place—its environments, culture, aesthetics, heritage, and the well-being of its residents.” Geotourism therefore maintains ties to the conservation goals of ecotourism and sustainable tourism while additionally considering “place.” In effect, geotourism aims not only to protect natural resources, but also to preserve the culture and history that help make specific destinations attractive to tourists.



Prior to the 1990s, the paleontological significance of Sexi was unknown. Subsequent research has revealed the importance of the fossils, and given rise to the development of geotourism in the town and fossil forest.

## Sustainable Geotourism in Sexi

Because of subsistence lifestyles and distances from major cities, economic opportunities for the people in Sexi are very limited. However, geotourism is a possible source of jobs and other economic activities to improve the peoples' quality of life. Revenue from geotourism services, such as leading guided tours and accommodating visitors, could supplement the local economy currently supported by small-scale farming and raising livestock.

Donations are managed by The Friends of the Florissant Fossil Beds, Inc. To support the current projects at Sexi, please see Donations page.



## Looking Forward

The present goal is to encourage visitors to come see the fossil forest through cultural immersion travel. However, while the citizens of Sexi look forward to hosting visitors, additional resources are currently necessary to make geotourism at Sexi a lasting reality. Anticipated projects to achieve this goal include creating new exhibits and developing an interpretive route through the fossil forest for visitors. Protection of the fossil sites still requires fencing to inhibit damage from animals and illegal collecting. Additionally, although scientific research has recently revealed much about Sexi's Eocene environment, many questions remain unanswered, such as those surrounding the ancient forest's structure and variation in composition. Donations previously received by The Friends of the Florissant Fossil Beds, a partner nonprofit, have gone toward a variety of projects, such as:

- Producing and printing exhibits and an interpretive brochure
- Providing on-site travel support to visiting scientists
- Sponsoring an internship necessary to create this website