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# Can you really see the world while saving it?



Choosing alternative methods of transport is the best way to reduce your impact. Train travel is the least polluting, followed by coach, car, and ferry CREDIT: GETTY

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By **Holly Tuppen**

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## Can you really see the world while saving it? Sustainability expert Holly Tuppen investigates

Our jet setting habits are under scrutiny like never before. Thanks to Greta Thunberg, Extinction Rebellion and thousands of schoolchildren worldwide, more people are asking: is it morally acceptable to have several holidays a year while we're experiencing the highest levels of atmospheric carbon since prehistoric times? The fact is, we're in danger of destroying the very things that inspire our wanderlust.

So deep is the existential crisis that hotel companies, airlines and tour operators are starting to scramble around for meaningful eco initiatives. Above the subsequent PR noise, most consumers are exhausted, none the wiser and more in need of a holiday than ever before.

The problem is that measuring eco-friendliness is complicated. A hotel's recycling policy is only as good as the local infrastructure, and electric cars are still problematic if the electricity they use comes from fossil fuels. When you consider the carbon footprint of flying, environmentally savvy travellers hopping between eco-lodges in Bali may be causing more harm than a family going all-inclusive on the Costa Del Sol once a year.

It might seem like a confusing and insurmountable problem, but that doesn't mean we have to give up: it's a matter of lessening our footprint and supporting companies making a positive impact.

### Is carbon offsetting the answer?

Tourism is responsible for around eight per cent of global carbon emissions, and flying makes up a considerable chunk of this: a return flight to New York from London emits more carbon than an average person does in a whole year in most African countries. And between 2013 and 2018, carbon emissions from aviation shot up by 32 per cent.

Carbon offsetting is fraught with problems: a recent EU report revealed that 85 per cent of offsetting schemes don't actually work. There's also the argument that they relieve guilt in the short term without fixing the problem — a little bit like letting your dog foul the pavement while you pick up litter.

***Take a look at: Cool Earth ([coolearth.org](https://www.coolearth.org)) and the World Land Trust ([worldlandtrust.org](http://www.worldlandtrust.org)), which are both David Attenborough-approved schemes. Much Better Adventures mitigates four times the carbon of each customer with Cool Earth.***



## Take the train instead

Choosing alternative methods of transport is the best way to reduce your impact. Train travel is the least polluting, followed by coach, car, and ferry. Getting the Eurostar to Paris is 90 per cent less polluting than flying; eco halos are reserved for those walking, cycling or sailing. If you're worried about using up your precious holiday time by making lower-impact travel decisions, nag your employer to sign up to Climate Perks ([climateperks.com](http://climateperks.com) (<http://climateperks.com>)) to give employees time off for overland travel.

**Take a look at:** Rail Europe ([raileurope.com](https://www.raileurope.com/) (<https://www.raileurope.com/>)) and Man in Seat 61 ([seat61.com](https://www.seat61.com/) (<https://www.seat61.com/>)) to book and find info on train travel across Europe.





## Or fly better

If you have no choice but to fly, select an efficient airline: according to Atmosfair, KLM, Air Canada and TUI Airways rank highly with full planes, newer fleets and efficient routes.

You can also fly direct, turn right rather than left (the carbon footprint of Business Class is three times higher than economy). Or show your support for green aviation tax campaigns like [A Free Ride \(afreeride.org\)](http://afreeride.org), which hopes to introduce a frequent flyer levy, investing the resulting tax revenue in clean tech.

**Take a look at:** [Atmosfair \(https://www.atmosfair.de/en/air-travel-and-climate/atmosfair-airline-index/\)](https://www.atmosfair.de/en/air-travel-and-climate/atmosfair-airline-index/)'s airline index ranks airlines for carbon efficiency.

## Think about your accommodation

When you're choosing a hotel or resort, look for a sustainability commitment that includes local sourcing, human rights, waste reduction, energy targets, local employment, plastic-free front- and back-of-house and the protection of wildlife and culture.

## Trains v planes | CO2 emissions

Journey	Plane	Train/Ferry	% difference
London to Paris	244kg of CO2 per passenger	22kg	91%
London to Edinburgh	193kg	24kg	87%
London to Nice	250kg	36kg	85%
London to Amsterdam	136kg	27.2kg	80%
London to Dublin	174.8kg	46.8kg	73%
London to Tangier	435kg	63kg	85%

Source: [www.seat61.com](http://www.seat61.com)

You can be eco-wise with your destination, too. Ditch the Instagram-fuelled bucket lists which are so often responsible for over-tourism and environmental degradation and go off-piste. Choose holidays that save a species from extinction and preserve fragile ecosystems. Unfortunately, greenwashing is rife, so it's crucial to scrutinise claims. Is your cruise ship to Antarctica having a positive impact just because it's got a couple of scientists onboard? Probably not.

**Take a look at:** *Bookdifferent* ([bookdifferent.com/en/](http://bookdifferent.com/en/) (<https://www.bookdifferent.com/en/>)) or *Ecobnb* ([ecobnb.com](http://ecobnb.com) (<https://ecobnb.com>)) and *The Long Run* ([thelongrun.org](http://thelongrun.org) (<https://www.thelongrun.org/>)) for a collection of vetted sustainable hotels. *The Cayuga Collection* ([cayugacollection.com](http://cayugacollection.com) (<https://www.cayugacollection.com/>)) is one of the most sustainable hotel management companies.

## Avoid the honeypots

Overtourism only sprung to life as a word last year and isn't going anywhere. The term was coined in response to unrest in places like Venice and Barcelona where locals are fed up with an invasion of tourists that disrupt their daily lives. Rather than contribute to the problem, be creative about where you go. Opt for secondary cities and lesser-known countries. Choose destinations that have suffered from natural or manmade disaster and need tourists to return. Avoid UNESCO sites and travel to popular destinations off-season. Also, favour places like Costa Rica with strong country-wide sustainability credentials. It's no fun queueing for a view, hiking with hundreds of others, and being booed at by locals anyway.

***Take a look at: Sri Lanka is incentivising visitors to return after the bombings ([lovesrilanka.org](https://www.lovesrilanka.org) (<https://www.lovesrilanka.org>)) and the Balearics have created a compelling Better in Winter campaign (<https://www.illesbalears.travel/experience/en/illesbalears/better-in-winter>).***

## Pack with a conscience

Every little helps, and what we pack is as important as where we go. The fashion industry consumes more energy than the aviation and shipping industry combined; whatever you spend, your new holiday wardrobe does cost the earth. Try to buy from B-Corps like Patagonia or go second hand (charity shops are up there with trains on bragging rights). Despite David Attenborough's best efforts, we're still tackling a huge plastic problem – do your bit by carrying reusable bags, bottles, coffee cups and utensils everywhere. Never use sun cream with micro-beads. Pack light to limit carbon emissions on take-off, use solar chargers where possible, and remove and recycle packaging before you travel.



Costa Rica has embraced sustainable tourism CREDIT: GETTY

***Take a look at: Lifestraw ([lifestraw.com](https://www.lifestraw.com) (<https://www.lifestraw.com>)) water bottles filter water as you drink making it safe to avoid plastic anywhere in the world.***

## Quiz your tour operator

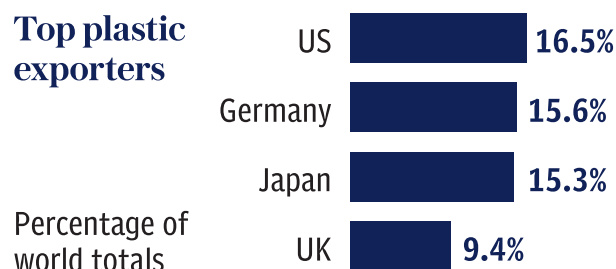
Tour operators are the lynchpin of the travel industry's supply chain, and so their actions have a significant impact on how responsible your holiday is. Since the supply chain is so



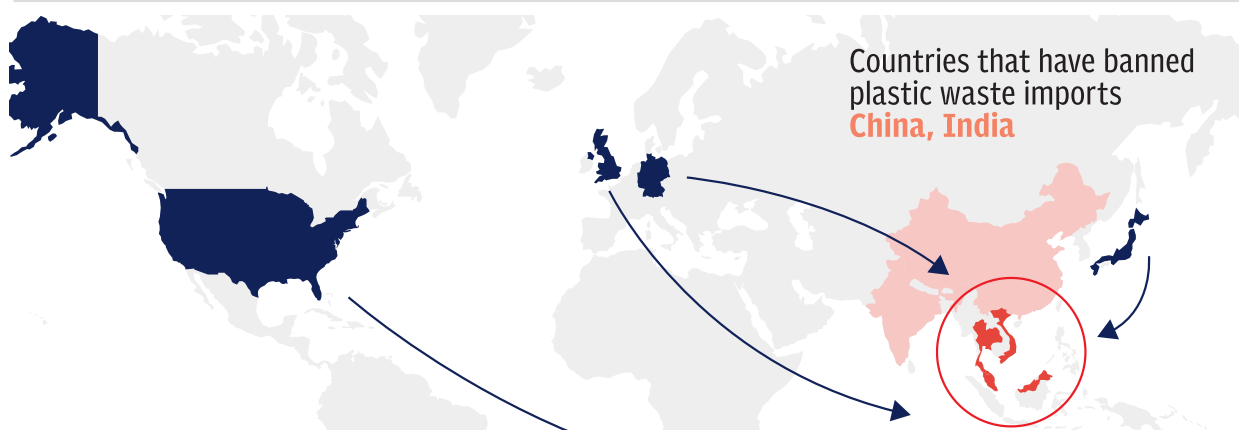
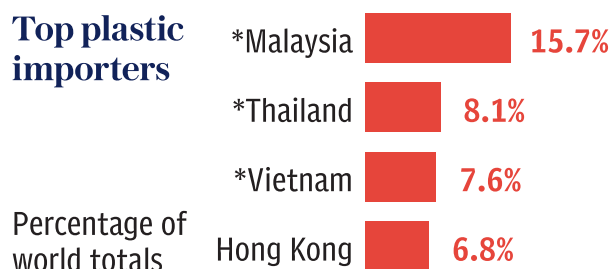
complicated, they can be less forthright with information on sustainability creds. Firstly, look for a tour operator that uses a local host — this means that more of your money will stay in the destination. It also leads to a more authentic experience. Also check to see whether they commit to reducing waste, especially plastic use, recycle, visit lesser-known sites, avoid overtourism, reduce carbon emissions where possible, and contribute to community or conservation projects. If this information isn't available, don't be afraid to ask before booking.

## Plastic Waste

### Top plastic exporters



### Top plastic importers



**Take a look at:** *Travel Local* ([travellocal.com](https://www.travellocal.com/)) cuts out the middle man to give more money to local hosts and *Intrepid* ([intrepidtravel.com/uk/a/](https://www.intrepidtravel.com/uk/a/)) and *Better Places Travel* ([betterplacestravel.com](http://betterplacestravel.com/)) are certified B-Corps. *Responsible Travel* ([responsibletravel.com](https://www.responsibletravel.com/)) vets 6,000 holidays for sustainable credentials.

## Scrutinise ethics

When done well, community tourism is a win-win, but when done badly, it can lead to exploitation. The simple rule of engagement is that if a situation wouldn't be comfortable at home, it isn't comfortable abroad either. Interactions with local people should always be two-way rather than voyeuristic. Community tourism experiences are best when created in consultation with the community, not on behalf of them. When kids are involved, double-down on scrutiny and don't be afraid to say if you're uncomfortable. Children

should be with families, not in institutions, so avoid funding the latter (orphanages). When volunteering, ensure that it's not taking work away from local people, e.g. instead of planting trees, you could provide money to pay someone that needs an income.

**Take a look at:** *Orbis Expeditions* ([orbis-expeditions.com](https://www.orbis-expeditions.com) (<https://www.orbis-expeditions.com>)) organises skill-sharing and sports trips to Malawi several times a year and *Village Ways* ([www.villageways.com](https://www.villageways.com) (<https://www.villageways.com>)) organises responsible homestay-based itineraries in the Himalayas.

## Be a mindful guest

Globalisation and increasing tourist numbers have undermined customs and culture in some places. Ten years ago, tourists wouldn't have dreamed of stomping through Marrakesh's medina in skimpy Western clothes, but they are now more common than jellabas. While traditions should always be allowed to evolve (keeping people in a museum-state for tourist's sake is as bad), it should be on local terms. If in doubt, always respect customs regarding food, clothing and behaviour, even if others around you aren't. Think local whenever possible. This includes adhering to environmental advice, e.g. urgent water-saving measures in Cape Town, seeking locally-managed and designed excursions, and favouring restaurants that use local suppliers.

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### Top 10 | Ethical destinations, according to the Ethical Traveler

- 1 Belize
- 2 Benin
- 3 Chile
- 4 Colombia
- 5 Costa Rica
- 6 Mongolia
- 7 Palau
- 8 St. Kitts & Nevis
- 9 Uruguay
- 10 Vanuatu

**Take a look at:** *The Government's Travel Aware* ([travelaware.campaign.gov.uk](https://travelaware.campaign.gov.uk) (<https://travelaware.campaign.gov.uk>)) campaign for tips on travelling to over 200 countries.



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Modern Slavery

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