

The Mastered Art of Eco-Travelling

Words by Natalia Barszz



Photograph by Doug Brown

What do I need to know about tourism?

5th most polluting industry in the world

8% global greenhouse emissions produced

4.5 gigatonnes of CO2 produced yearly

130% predicted increase of pollutants' emissions by 2025

30,000 single-use plastic water bottles used by adventure travel operator during trips yearly →

Sit down, relax, and discover the simple world of mindful traveling - changing your surroundings for a few days doesn't have to mean leaving your conscious habits behind.

Where do I go?

If you still haven't booked a trip, but want to escape for a few days, you might want to first consider a destination with a sustainable philosophy. We have scoured for the most eco-friendly world nooks, that will serve as perfect places for a relaxed trip for you and the planet.

If you've never been to Scandinavia, now is the time to tick it off your list, as it has one of the well-known sustainable cities in the world. Oslo, Europe's Green Capital of 2019, shows serious commitment to becoming car-free and carbon neutral in the near future, with its emission cutting schemes, development of electric vehicles, bio-gas produced from the city's bio-waste, and strategies to encourage the use of public transport. Its neighbour to the West, Stockholm, is actually the first city to receive the European Green Capital Award in 2010 for its minimal use of fossil fuels, and support for environmentally-friendly housing and lifestyle program, Hammarby Sjöstad. Stockholm's airport is completely carbon neutral, and the city itself is one of the leaders in recycling, vintage fashion and green innovation investments. Further down south, we've got Copenhagen, proudly aiming to become completely carbon neutral by 2025 and switch all fossil fuel public buses to be completely electrically-run this year. The city is big on sustainable, infrastructure and innovation, encouraging both citizens and tourists to drink clear tap water from the more than 60 drinking fountains spread across the city. Don't think we need to mention their famous bikes, do we?

Fancy going somewhere warmer with a bigger budget? Consider Singapore. Incorporating nature in its architecture, using sustainable materials for construction, and proudly embracing rich biodiversity, makes it a sustainable jewel amongst the other highly polluted Asian cities. Costa Rica is another great place to explore, as it not only derives 93% of its electricity from renewable sources, but also holds 5% of the world's biodiversity with its wildlife and green ecology. It also aims to be the first carbon neutral country by 2020.

There are quite a few places to check out if you want to venture West. Starting from Canada, Vancouver is the sustainable place to be, as it prides itself in having one of the lowest carbon emissions in North America, and plans to become zero-waste and use 100% renewable energy in the future. There is also a huge focus on local produce and urban farming. If you want to see what your daily life would look like without single-use plastic water bottles, head to San Francisco - the first ever city to ban their overall sale. The city is also planning to go waste-free by 2020, and has an impressively wide vegan and vintage scene. If you're thinking of South America, consider Curitiba, Brazil's Green Capital, where citizens came up with a new currency given in exchange for

separating their recycling, that can then be used for food, bus tickets and school supplies.

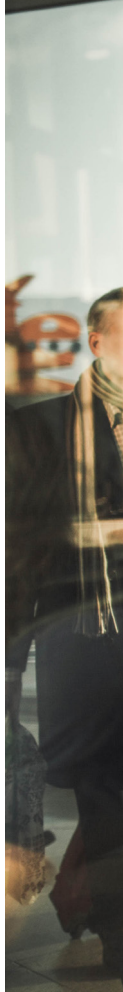
How do I get there?

Here's the thing - flying is one of the most polluting modes of transport. In 2018 alone, we took over 3 billion flights. It's quick, convenient, and fairly cheap. Yet it is important to know that aviation accounts for a big chunk of our planet's pollution. Did you know that a 7-hour flight generates 20% of your car's yearly greenhouse gases emissions? Or that your convenient, 1.5 hour flight to Paris emits 244 kilograms of CO₂?

With that in mind, whenever possible, try driving or taking a train instead of flying. A three hour Eurostar journey to Paris will save 91% of those emissions, and a 4.5 hour scenic train ride to Edinburgh will only produce 24 kilograms of CO₂, in comparison to 193 kilograms produced from taking a plane. Traveling by ship is also a great option, as there are many companies offering eco-friendly and economically efficient cruise journeys all around the world, such as Aqua Expeditions and Alaskan Dream Cruises.

We do understand that taking a train or a cruise might not always be possible, or the most convenient, especially when travelling to a different continent. So don't worry if flying is your only option - there's still a lot you can do to make your journey more sustainable. When choosing an airline, check whether it has an IATA (International Air Transport Association) membership with secured carbon offset programs that invest in carbon reduction. Two companies worth highlighting are Air New Zealand and Hi Fly from Portugal. The former was hailed as the Eco Airline of 2019, with its carbon reducing program, reusing and recycling unused aircraft items (such as unopened and sealed beverages or snacks), and removing all single-use plastic items across the board and all aircrafts last year. The latter is planning to do the same by the end of 2019 and has so far been trying to radically reduce the use of all kinds of single-use products across the business. Although not an airline, but a charter lending company, Hi Fly's dedication to sustainability is very impressive and we definitely recommend trying to catch their services when you can. If you like their mission and want to fly with them, simply check their website for information about who they offer their service to.

If you don't have the option to choose one of these airlines, booking a non-stop flight, rather than a few shorter ones, can significantly help reduce carbon emissions as most are generated during take-off and landing. Try flying economy more often as well - it's three times less polluting than business and five times less polluting than first class, taking into consideration the seats' width and body capacity.





Where do I stay?

Let's start with a simple fact – it's a lot more sustainable to stay in an apartment or an Airbnb rather than in a hotel as you are the one in control of the amount of energy and water you use, you can cook your own meals, you are the one cleaning. Yet, if you prefer staying in a hotel and do not want such responsibilities during your time off, you can use services such as Green Tourism in the UK, USGB in the US, or Earth Check in Australia to find information on various hostels', hotels', and lodges' environmentally conscious practices, specifically in terms of energy and water efficiency, design, material selection, and various other daily choices.

Already found the perfect hotel? Then just unwind and enjoy your eco-conscious getaway – but remember a few things to make your stay even more sustainable:

REMEMBER to carry your reusable water bottle and coffee at all times! Train stations and airports all over offer free water refill stations – there are 12,000 officially registered in the UK itself. Most shops, cafes, and restaurants now offer a free tap water refill when asked – and significant discounts for coffee bought without the takeaway cup.

ALWAYS carry a portable, foldable, reusable shopping bag that is ready to whip up from your pocket when shopping for souvenirs, or produce from local farmers' markets. Plastic bags are so 2018, aren't they?

PACK LIGHT by transferring your shampoos, soaps, body lotions, skincare etc. into smaller, plastic-free, reusable containers. There's no need to buy miniature versions every time you travel, if you already love the products you use at home. But if you somehow forgot to take your own toiletries and end up using the ones provided by your hotel...

TAKE any leftover hotel shampoos and soaps with you if you haven't used them up during your stay – whatever is left in the room after the guests leave tends to be thrown away. You'll also be able to reuse the small bottles next time you travel light.

DON'T use the hotel laundry if it offers one – the staff tends to wash guests' clothes separately, which results in vast and unnecessary water waste. If you really need to wash something, just hand wash it in your sink or while your shower.

HANG UP the hotel towels after use – this is a universal sign of intending to use them again. This ensures that the housekeeping won't take them away and put new towels in their place. After all, do you wash your towels every day when you're at home?

RETURN all tourist information at the end of your stay – we're talking maps, brochures, offers, leaflets. You will probably never look at them again, yet future travellers might benefit from them just as you did. ♦