

Traveling for the Planet

Sustainable Ways to Explore the World

by Sandra Yeyati



After more than a year in social isolation, many of us are ready to hit the road, meet new people, fly to exotic locations and enjoy the sights and flavors of anywhere-but-here. Although the travel industry is raring to serve pent-up demand, this unprecedented respite can be an opportunity to reset priorities. When choosing hotels, modes of transportation, places to shop and dine, and other activities, consider their sustainability. Tourism need not harm the planet. With proper planning, it can enrich it while benefiting the people living in the places we visit.

Fly Direct and Economy

“Flying is the most carbon-intensive thing we can do in our lives,” says Holly Tuppen, author of *Sustainable Travel: The Essential Guide to Positive Impact Adventures*. To reduce emissions, she recommends flying direct in space-saving economy seats; taking longer, less frequent vacations; and using trains or other overland transportation whenever possible.

Take it Slow

In 2010, Tuppen travelled around the world without flying for 20 months. “We walked, biked, sailed across the Atlantic, got on a container ship across the Pacific, took trains, hitchhiked—a whole heap of transport cobbled together,” she recalls. “It’s not that

bucket-list idea of flying into a place, doing everything quickly and ticking off experiences. With slow travel, you’re letting the journey be part of the experience and inevitably, you meet more people along the way.”

Don’t Overdo It

In another eco-friendly aspect of that excursion, Tuppen visited places that aren’t tourism hotspots. “From Venice to Bali to Mexico, there are examples of places that before the pandemic had too many visitors—more than the infrastructure could handle,” she says. “That’s a massive problem, because it harms the life of local people. When the cruise industry started to stop in Dubrovnik, Croatia, for example, local amenities like hairdressers and grocery stores became souvenir shops.”

Keep it Local

According to Tuppen, the needs of locals should take precedence over those of tourists. A related problem is tourism economic leakage. “If you spend \$2,000 on a trip to Thailand, my hope would be that I’d be contributing \$2,000 to the economy in Thailand, but in reality, the way that the tourism supply chain is set up, a huge proportion of that money will end up in the hands of international companies,” she explains. “Ideally, we should be looking

for accommodations, experiences, stores, restaurants that are all locally owned rather than being part of an international chain. If you're booking a hotel, 70 percent or more of the workforce should be local."

Pack for a Purpose

To help travelers express their gratitude to a community for their hospitality, Rebecca Rothney founded *PackForAPurpose.org*, which lists items locals need and the accommodations and tour companies that deliver them to more than 450 community projects worldwide. Travelers dedicate a portion of their luggage space to carry in-kind donations and drop them off when they arrive at their hotel or meet their tour guide. Common items are medical and school supplies, as well as crafting materials for women to make and sell items like jewelry and trinkets, providing money to pay for their children's education. "A stethoscope weighs less than a kilo, but it can touch 10,000 hearts," she says.

Book Kind Hotels

Finding sustainable accommodations can be challenging and time-consuming, but *KindTraveler.com* is helping to change that. Recognized by *Travel and Leisure* as a 2020 Global Vision Award recipient, the hotel booking platform offers exclusive rates and perks from vetted, Earth-friendly accommodations when travelers make a nightly donation to a local charity that positively impacts the community visited.

"A \$10 donation will provide care for a rescue kitten for one month in Belize, clean 250 pounds of trash out of a waterway in Sonoma, California, or provide 40 nutritious meals to individuals in need in New York City," says co-founder Jessica Blotter. There are hundreds of participating hotels in 22 countries benefitting 70 global charities with an emphasis on fighting poverty, advancing environmental sustainability and reducing inequalities in communities.

"It's a way to connect, feel good and have meaningful experiences, knowing that your travel dollars are leaving the destination better than before you arrived," Blotter says.

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