

Ecotourism Tipsheet 50p



Centre for
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Publications

Step lightly when you holiday, at home or abroad, and help preserve the environment for the wellbeing of local communities.

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Every time we make a choice – what to eat and drink, how to heat our homes, what consumer goods to buy, how to travel and where to go on holiday – we depend in some way or another on the use of fossil fuels. As a result, our apparently harmless lifestyle choices can lead to the emission into the Earth's atmosphere of harmful, climate-changing greenhouse gases, in particular carbon dioxide (CO₂). An ecological footprint is a measure of the impact our lifestyles have on the planet's environment and its people. Of these, the footprint of travel and tourism is one of the most pronounced and it is set to get even bigger if as holidaymakers we do not adjust our habits and lighten our step when we travel.

Why all the fuss? Tourism and sustainability

Tourism is one of the world's fastest growing industries generating jobs and profits worth billions of pounds, but aviation is one of the fastest growing sources of climate change. The air travel industry in the UK thrives by providing tourists with easy bookings and cheap flights. Unfortunately, while this makes the nation's favourite beach holiday much easier to arrange and afford, it increases the size of our ecological footprints. It's not just the environment that suffers when we jet off into the sun, but also the people living in the world's tourist hot spots. In general, tourism is notorious for long working hours and the underpayment of local suppliers, and the more exotic your plans, the more likely they are to have a negative impact. For instance, in Africa the nomadic Masai are being forced off their traditional hunting and grazing lands and might only receive a mere 3% of the total safari holidaymaker spend.

The 2003 Government white paper on energy called for a 60% reduction of UK greenhouse gas emissions by 2050 in order to prevent serious climate change. However, an average Briton taking one or two flights abroad in a year emits 9,000kgs of carbon emissions – if everyone in the world did the same, we would need two and a half planets to support our lifestyles. Even more worrying is that the UK's aviation industry wants to double the number of people travelling through UK airports by 2030 to more than half a billion a year – that's 320 million more than at present!

What is ecotourism?

A search for 'ecotourism' on the Internet is likely to return results for a particular type of holiday package, for example, trips to rural villages in Peru or organic farms in India where you can appreciate nature while providing a fair economic return for the host community. Ecotourism of this kind is a rapidly expanding business, with ecotourists paying more for a rudimentary 'ecolodge' than mass tourists pay for a typical beach holiday. While this type of ecotourism may have many benefits for both the participants and the hosts, it can be subject to 'greenwashing' (i.e. exaggeration of environmental and social concern) on the

part of some tourism operators. To avoid unpleasant surprises do a little research into your destination, the culture and people before you go, and consult sustainable tourism organisations like Tourism Concern that can provide information on where you want to go and what you can do once you are there. (See Resources, overleaf.) In general, avoid the big, impersonal tour operators (who often put profit before people or planet) and look for companies offering locally organised tours and lodgings.

Go local

There is no way of eliminating the pollution from aircraft; we can only limit the amount we fly. You don't have to jet off to far-flung places to be an ecotourist. From trekking the West Highland Way to relaxing in a cottage in the picturesque Peak District, there is a more genuine brand of ecotourism you can be a part of closer to home. By choosing a holiday in the UK you can help reduce climate change, support communities, preserve your own heritage and landscape and rediscover your own culture, history,

Cheap flights?

- Air travel produces 12% of all transport related emissions.
- Each day Heathrow Airport alone handles 1,250 flights of over 90 airlines.
- Airports and airlines pay no tax on fuel. This saves them £5 billion a year, supports the market for cut-price flights and means the taxpayer is lumped with the cost, whether they fly or not.
- Each year the world's airlines produce as much carbon dioxide as all human activity in Africa.
- Airports are not regulated for emissions in the same way as large factories. They are immune from prosecution for nuisance and pollution.
- Aviation is not the only CO₂ culprit: for every 625 miles covered, an average car emits the same amount of carbon dioxide as 7,000 kettles boiling at once.



and folklore. For backpackers there is still plenty of adventure to be had, and for those who prefer the creature comforts, there is a wealth of traditional farmhouses, B&Bs and independent hotels to be discovered.

Tips – be an ecotourist at home and abroad

- Get on your bike – you can't get to the same places in a plane or a car as you can on your bike. Bikes are healthy, adventurous and, next to walking, the best way to see the most interesting parts of your holiday destination.
- Use public transport – public transport may not be 100% reliable, but British train and bus networks cover most areas and can take you to some remote rural locations. You can also benefit from a selection of offers and passes on trains and buses, e.g. travel to the Centre for Alternative Technology by rail and get a discounted joint rail/entry ticket.
- If you do drive – try and fill your car and only use it for essential long journeys. If you drive to your holiday destination rent bikes for the time you are there.
- Spend locally – make your holiday spending benefit local traders, producers and businesses. Find out when local markets and farmers' markets are held. Avoid supermarkets and chain stores by searching out local general stores.
- Minimise your waste – reduce, reuse, recycle. Lessen the impact of your holiday on the environment by avoiding highly packaged foods, recycle any materials and try to compost your food waste where you can. Reuse bags and bottles.
- Conserve your energy – all tourism is a drain on natural resources with people less concerned about how they use facilities. Just as at home, remember to switch lights and sockets off when you are not using them. Don't leave taps running – water is our most precious natural resource and must be carefully conserved, even in the UK.
- Try the local cuisine – local, seasonal food is often the greenest, and tastiest, option.
- Go on a working holiday – there are plenty of opportunities to work with communities, on farms or conservation areas, and to give something back to the area where you holiday.
- Avoid 'all-inclusive' package holidays or hotel chains – try and stay in local independent accommodation where you will make a direct contribution to the local economy and get to meet the locals. If you want adventure, travel in small groups – up to 12 or 15 people – and check the conditions for workers, e.g. if you go trekking in Nepal check the provisions and workload of the porters.
- Explore green ideas – visit eco-centres, nature reserves, and wildlife refuges and find out how the local community is working to preserve its eco-systems.

Recommended reading

- *Ecotourism: An introduction*
David A. Fennel, Routledge, 1999
A broad introduction to ecotourism's impact on local communities, including case studies and further reading.
- *Ecotourism and Sustainable Development*
Martha Honey, Island Press, 1999
Examining ecotourism as a tool for development.
- *The Good Alternative Travel Guide*
Mark Mann, Earthscan in association with Tourism Concern, 2002
Concentrates on community-based holidays.
- *The Ethical Travel Guide*, Tourism Concern, 2006
Tourism Concern's latest guide to choosing eco-holidays wisely contains hundreds of ideas for green breaks.

Compare the eco-impact...

Beach holiday in the Mediterranean

- Return car journey to airport and return flight to destination.
- Rental car: journey to big chain hotel, daily short trips.
- Extensive use of water for extra showers, swimming pool, hotel laundry, that annual round of golf in the sun.
- Shop at supermarket, drink imported beer and bottled water.
- Eat some local cuisine and support local beach cafés, and lots of packaged ice cream and cheap convenience food.
- Some coach trips with big tour operator organised from home.

Camping trip to Wales

- Car journey to campsite, rental bikes for local trips, train journeys when too far for the bike.
- Minimised water use on campsite, some for hand washing and some for cooking...
- Final night at independent B&B.
- Food shop at local farmers' market and at village general store, eat at local establishments, drink local beer.
- Arrange own trips and ask locals for information.
- Discounted trip to CAT for using public transport.

Resources and further information

- **Carbon Gym**, www.cat.org.uk/carbongym
Use the carbon calculator to do a carbon check up and judge the impact of your ecological footprint.
- **Low Carbon Buildings Programme**, www.lowcarbonbuildings.org.uk
Provides grants for energy efficiency measures.
- **Egeneration**, www.egeneration.co.uk
Provides free services, support and advice on best practice for green businesses.
- **Green Dragon**, www.greendragonwales.com
The Green Dragon Standard is a stepped environmental management standard for Wales that assesses the environmental practice of participating companies.
- **Green Tourism**, www.greentourism.org.uk
Promotes sustainable tourism in Scotland.
- **The International Ecotourism Society (Ties)**, www.ecotourism.org
International non-profit organisation. Website contains search engines for eco-friendly tour operators, eco-lodges and travel advice.
- **Responsible Travel**, www.responsibletravel.com
Promotes holidays in over 100 countries, works with international operators and indigenous communities and contributes 5% of pre-tax profits to local communities.
- **REST Campaign**, www.rest-hotels.org
EU sponsored, provides advice on grants and improving the energy efficiency of businesses.
- **Tourism Concern**, www.tourismconcern.org.uk
Membership organisation campaigning for ethical and fairly traded overseas tourism.
- **The Travel Foundation**, www.thetravelfoundation.org.uk
Independent UK charity aiming to help the outbound travel industry manage tourism more sustainably.
- **Carbon Trade Watch**, www.carbontradewatch.org
Monitoring 'carbon offset' schemes that claim to mitigate harmful CO₂ emissions, particularly from aviation.