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Chapter 1

Treading Carefully While Exploring the World

Times have changed. Travel has changed. And travelers are changing, too. People are traveling more than ever before — some are making up for lost opportunities during the pandemic years, while others are continuing a life-long love-affair with exploring as many corners of the Earth as possible. But for many — including me — there's a new awareness around *how* you travel and a desire to tread more lightly and to plan more thoughtfully.

Sometimes the imprint left behind is invisible, a barely perceptible trail in the sky or a temperature rise of just a fraction of a degree. Climate change became an emergency while the world was looking the other way. In other cases, the impact of mass tourism is shocking and in-your-face. Perhaps, like me, you're rethinking the need to go somewhere, anywhere, just because you can. Staying at home is not a palatable option for most inveterate travelers, who already know what they would miss out on by doing so. Whether you travel afar or close to home, getting out into the wider world opens up your life to new experiences that test your boundaries, expand your understanding of how other people live, and create lasting connections with the people you

meet and communities you visit. But if you travel, you should do so mindfully.

In this chapter, I explain the impact your travel choices can have and how you can plan to lessen that impact to the best of your ability.



FIND
ONLINE

For links to all the web addresses mentioned in this chapter, along with other helpful resources, visit www.dummies.com/go/sustainabletravelfd.

Sustainable versus Responsible Travel — What’s the Difference?

You have to get over the semantics first. What is “sustainable” travel, and how is it different to “responsible” travel? Can you be a sustainable *and* responsible traveler — or is it really just the same thing with a different name?

There’s a subtle difference. Put in its simplest terms, sustainable travel is travel that imparts a neutral or, preferably, a positive impact on the environment (including greenhouse gas emissions) as well as the local community and economy. It is about trying to promote the benefits of tourism to communities, achieving sustainable outcomes, promoting cross-cultural understanding, preserving culture, and protecting the environment and all living things.

Responsible travel is about what you can do to make travel more sustainable, putting the onus on travelers to ensure tourism provides that positive impact, asking travelers to take responsibility for changing and improving how tourism affects all those it touches, and ensuring it benefits communities and destinations.

The concept of “responsible travel,” which first emerged in the 1980s as the impacts of mass tourism began to be noticed, was first defined in the **Cape Town Declaration on Responsible Tourism in Destinations** at the Earth Summit which preceded the United Nations World Summit on Sustainable Development in 2002. The declaration outlined the characteristics of responsible tourism as:

- » Minimizing negative economic, environmental, and social impacts
- » Generating greater economic benefits for local people
- » Enhancing the well-being of host communities
- » Improving working conditions and access to the industry
- » Involving local people in decisions that affect their lives and life chances
- » Making positive contributions to the conservation of natural and cultural heritage, to the maintenance of the world's diversity
- » Providing more enjoyable experiences for tourists through more meaningful connections with local people and a greater understanding of local, cultural, social, and environmental issues
- » Providing access for people with physical challenges
- » Being culturally sensitive
- » Engendering respect between tourists and hosts
- » Building local pride and confidence

These are all principles that are now applied to sustainable travel. Quality of life for all those involved in tourism and travel ventures — whether human, plant, landscape, waterway, or other animal — is at the heart of sustainable and responsible travel. Sustainable travel is just what the name suggests: it should be able to sustain itself well into the future, for generations ahead to enjoy the same experiences in an environment that has not been depleted or degraded by selfish or thoughtless travel practices. You're hearing more about sustainable travel now than ever before because the effect of travel — such as greenhouse gas emissions — is being recognized as a contributor to climate change.

Understanding Why We Should Care about Sustainable Travel

Changing times call for changing ways. Recognition of the impact that people are having on the world's climate — much of it related to travel — is causing a shift in how people see the world.

Sustainable travel is a way in which you can continue to celebrate the beauty and diversity of the world, while trying to limit the harm you do. Rather than checking off another sight on a must-see-before-I-die list, it's about choosing travel experiences that will bring you joy, safe in the knowledge that you are not contributing to loving the planet to death.

Traveling allows you to see the world's most beautiful, fragile, and precious places. By employing sustainable travel practices, it's possible to still do that while ensuring those places stay protected for the next generation of travelers — and those that come after them. Similarly, taking care of the unique wildlife that shares this planet ensures that the children of today's children will still be able to see elephants, tigers, koalas, and other threatened species when they set out on their own travel adventures.



REMEMBER

Sustainable travel is sometimes called *eco-tourism*, *responsible tourism*, or *ethical tourism*. These terms all have slightly different meanings — and are subject to misinterpretation, misuse, green-washing, and exploitation — but all intrinsically have the common aim of reducing travel's negative impacts and preserving the joy of meaningful travel.

This book explains how to tell the difference between the truly sustainable and the green-wash facade and how to travel sustainably.

Flight shaming and climate change

With plenty of time on my hands when travel halted during the pandemic, I began to think about how much I had traveled in the past, the places I'd been, and where I might go when the world set itself right again. But in this new quiet space, a world without travel, many people began to see a silver lining: streets, skies, and seas emptied, allowing the natural world to recover from the impact of mass travel and tourism.

I watched as social media and news reports showed changes being wrought by the halt in travel. Reduced air pollution was reported around the world. Clearer skies above northern India made the Himalayas visible from Delhi for the first time in 30 years and pollution levels in New York and China dropped significantly because of less traffic and factory shut-downs. Seismologists around the world found fewer tramping feet, rumbling vehicles, and roaring

jet engines enhanced their ability to hear seismic signals from deep inside Earth. Without cruise and container ships, the oceans, too, became quieter, a change that researchers said would lower stress levels for marine life.

Without people around, wildlife became bolder, reclaiming their territory. I laughed when I read that more than 100 wild goats living on a headland outside Llandudno in Wales had invaded the town. Elsewhere, other animals, free of the presence of humans, took the chance to expand their territory and breed more successfully. It was almost like witnessing a different — dare I say, better — world.

Climate change and over-tourism were already worrying issues. A new word had emerged: *flygskam* or “flight-shaming.” It was coined in 2018 in Sweden and popularized by celebrities, including musician Malena Ernman, the mother of teenage climate activist Greta Thunberg, who pledged to stop flying. Within a short time, it was being widely used around the world to describe the practice of discouraging air travel in order to lower carbon emissions.

Aviation is responsible for an estimated 2 percent of global greenhouse gas emissions — and growing. Most of this is from fossil fuel burned during each flight, which results in the release of carbon dioxide and other gases into the atmosphere. But as travelers rush to make up for lost time after the pandemic, it seems that flight-shaming is not something that will influence all travelers — at least in the short term. European travelers have the advantage of being able to avoid flying by using extensive rail networks or by driving to other countries; for travelers in more remote and isolated locations, such as the South Pacific, getting anywhere else except by flying is a much more difficult proposition. Global travel patterns seem likely to change, with implications for the tourism industry in more far-flung destinations.

A *carbon footprint* is the term used for the total amount of greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions (including carbon dioxide and methane) that our actions generate, expressed in metric tons.

While it’s difficult to pinpoint the emissions created solely by travel, the average American has a carbon footprint of around 16 metric tons, while the average footprint globally is around 4 tons. People living in developed countries — such as the United States, Canada, Europe, the UK, and Australia — generally have

a much higher carbon footprint than those in developing nations where people have less access to energy supplies.

In flight terms, one person making a round-trip flight from New York to San Francisco creates a carbon footprint of about 0.9 metric tons. In the next section, I explain how you can compensate for the emissions from your travel by contributing to environmental projects.

Is all travel bad for the environment?

Should everyone just stay at home? If you are reading this book, the chances are you won't think so — and neither do I. To stop traveling and stay home is almost unthinkable after you've had a taste of what the world can offer. Each travel experience opens our minds and hearts to new possibilities and allow us to see how other people live.



REMEMBER

While there are well-founded serious concerns about the impact that travel, especially mass travel, has on the environment, the answer is not to stay home, but to travel differently. Slow down and rethink your travel plans and look at ways in which you can make a positive contribution to reducing or eliminating detrimental impacts on the planet or the people whose lives you might be disrupting by your presence.



TIP

Instead of flying on every trip, consider alternatives. Train travel has a far less heavy carbon footprint than air travel, as does traveling by road. Why not take a vacation where you are walking or cycling instead of taking a bus tour — it's better for you and the environment. Be proactive in helping restore ecosystems by volunteering on conservation projects, combining a holiday with a chance to do good. As well as helping the natural world, it will give you a greater connection with the destination you visit and the people who call it home.

Staying closer to home is another option. You may not see the Eiffel Tower if you choose to go to Quebec, but you will still get the chance to practice your French and indulge in some French culture. Instead of an African safari, think about an American safari where you will see bears, wolves, and other wildlife. Thinking outside the box might bring unexpected rewards.

Why does traveling sustainably make sense?

You might be traveling for business or for pleasure to relax on a tropical beach that looks like it belongs on a postcard or to attend a convention or meeting. Everyone's reason for traveling is different, but the way that you travel can make you stand out from the crowd. It can also set an example for other travelers and for your children.

Travel offers a world of opportunities, both for travelers and those who welcome them into their lives, in places sometimes distant and unfamiliar and sometimes not so far from home. But there's no doubt that in the world today, travel has negative impacts on people, wildlife, and the places they live in. Communities, economies, and environments are sometimes at the mercy of the desire of others to travel.

The impact of tourism can be devastating, and as travelers you have a responsibility to help combat those negative effects if you want to continue to see the world. Understanding how to travel sustainably is one step toward achieving that. I'm sure that, like me, the most memorable travel experiences are those that benefit the lives of others in some way and that have deeper meaning than just ticking a "been there, seen that" box.



REMEMBER

Traveling sustainably, responsibly, and ethically is the only way that makes sense in our changing world if we want to continue to explore the world and to enable future generations the same privilege.

Weighing Some Financial Costs of Sustainable Travel

Some aspects of sustainable travel may be discouraging. Will it cost more than if you blithely continued without a thought for *how* you travel? Possibly. Some things might cost you more, but others will be cheaper — or even free! If you walk, rather than driving a short distance, it will cost you nothing. If you go camping in a national park, it will be much cheaper than staying in a hotel. Each flight or hotel you book, each step you take when

planning your vacation, will have some cost both to your hip-pocket and to the planet. That's why it's so important to approach your travel plans mindfully, weighing the impact your travel will have on the places you go and the people or animals you encounter, as well as the cost.

Offsetting your carbon footprint

Every time you buckle your seat belt on a plane, you're about to create a carbon footprint. There's no exception and no way around it. The size of your footprint is calculated using the length of your flight, the type of aircraft you are flying on and the cabin class you are seated in (yes, Business Class creates a higher footprint).

The good news is that you can offset your carbon footprint. What does this mean? Simply, it is a way of paying to either reduce (offset) or balance out (neutralize) the carbon emissions created when you travel. Carbon offsetting is usually associated with flying but can also be applied to other forms of travel — and other aspects of life — that create emissions. Offsetting is an easy (and inexpensive) way to make a difference.



TIP

Fly direct if you can, as stop-overs add to emissions. Take-off and landing are the most polluting times of your flight.

Offsetting through your airline

The easiest way to offset your flights is through the airline when you are making your booking. The option is usually presented toward the end of the booking process. Just tick the box that asks if you want to offset your flights and the cost will be added to your booking (with some airlines, you can use frequent-flier points to pay for your carbon offsets). Some airlines use a calculator that allows you to put in your flight details separately and then click to buy.

It is usually only a few extra dollars, and the airline will send you a thank-you email outlining the projects your money has gone to. For example, after booking a recent flight with Qantas, my receipt explained that my carbon offset payment would be invested into one of more than forty carbon offsetting projects around the world, such as restoring native vegetation in Australia or building wind turbines in India. It's common for airlines to partner with projects in various parts of the world. For example, you could fly to Australia, but your offset may go to a project in the Amazon.



WARNING

Airlines are as prone to greenwashing as hotels are. Several airlines have faced criticism — and litigation — for false advertising over misleading environmental claims. Before choosing your airline, check the claims it makes on its website. Is there specific detail about carbon offset programs or just vague promises? Is the airline trialing sustainable biofuels? Are they reducing single-use plastics? Be skeptical about any claims to be “carbon neutral” or “climate-friendly” — it’s just not possible yet.

Using other offset companies instead

Generally, you’re not able to choose which projects or suppliers your payment is allocated to. If that’s important to you, or if the airline you are traveling with doesn’t provide offset options, you can offset your flight emissions by using other offset companies. This may enable you to contribute to projects that directly benefit the place you are traveling to.

Do some research before you choose an offset company, as there are hundreds to choose from. One good website with lots of information about carbon offsets is **8BillionTrees** (www.8billiontrees.com). A popular US-based offset company is **Terrapass** (www.terrapass.com), which has a strong focus on funding US projects like reforestation and wind farms. Others include **Carbonfund.Org** (www.carbonfund.org), **South Pole** (www.southpole.com), which has more than 700 projects to choose from, and **Carbon Offsets to Alleviate Poverty** (www.cotap.org).



WARNING

Carbon-offsetting is a good step toward mitigating the impact of your travel — particularly your flights — but it’s not entirely a get-out-of-jail-free card. It’s better than doing nothing, but the reality is that if everyone continues as normal, but pays to offset their flights, emissions will still be created. Reducing your need to fly by taking other forms of transport is something to seriously consider.

Slow travel — at what cost?

It’s difficult to put a price on travel of any kind. The rich rewards that it brings are indeed priceless, but the reality is that all travelers have a budget. While you might love nothing more than the idea of throwing in your job and daily grind and setting off on an endless journey of personal discovery as you travel the world for a year — or more — the reality is usually different.

Slow travel, in reality, is more a state of mind than a long, unfettered journey. Your trip might be a week or two, or even just a few days, but the way you travel is the key to slowing down. Slow travel need not necessarily be any more expensive than the way you used to travel — it just depends on how you approach it.

Remember to balance all aspects of your trip planning. For example, you might decide to travel by train to lower your carbon emissions. It's true that some train fares — especially if you are booking a sleeper — can be more expensive than cheap flights. However, bear in mind that you are saving on a hotel room by taking an overnight train, and the fare includes meals.



TIP

Traveling by bicycle or by foot is a great way to enjoy slow travel. It's free or almost free, and the only negative is that you won't cover as much ground as you would in other forms of transport. But think of the back streets you can explore! You'll need more time, of course, but good planning will ensure you see and do everything you want to within the bounds of your vacation time. Staying in one place means you will explore it more fully and come away with a greater understanding of it.

Another aspect of slow travel is to plan your travel in the shoulder or offseasons, avoiding the most popular tourist times and avoiding crowds and queues. These times also have the cheapest prices for flights, hotels and restaurants, saving you a considerable amount of money (with which you can stay longer!). You might also be lucky enough to score the best house-sit or Airbnb.



REMEMBER

From time to time, here and there, slow travel might be marginally more expensive than normal travel. I doubt that the cost will be significant. What will be significant is the reduced impact on the planet that your actions in choosing slow travel will have. You can't put a price on that.

Making Sustainability Your Choice in Travel

Sustainable travel, as you'll discover as you browse the pages of this book, has many benefits. Done well, tourism provides jobs and opportunities for communities, creating income from sources that do not harm the environment or creatures that share it with

them. It provides the means for children to have better health and education and for communities to retain their cultural heritage.

Choosing a destination that is a little off the beaten path, away from the most popular — and overcrowded — places will help to spread that income around as well as taking pressure off the busiest places. As a traveler, you'll benefit from a closer connection with those you encounter, who are likely to be more open to visitors and welcome the benefits your presence brings.

Being thoughtful about how you travel, embracing slow travel as a way of getting around, has the benefit of expanding your world. Slowing down, using public transport or your own energy to get around, and going to fewer places for a longer time all help to deepen your knowledge of a destination. You're more likely to meet people, be invited into someone's home or given tips about places that only the locals know.



REMEMBER

The important thing is to think not so much about how travel can benefit *you*, but how it will benefit the people you meet and the landscape you traverse as a visitor. This will help guide your choices as you plan your trip. Ask how your presence will benefit or improve the lives of those you will be observing or the ecosystems you visit. Instead of being a “taker,” transform your travel experience into an exchange where you balance what you gain from it with what you give back. If you can do that, your visit is likely to be a benefit to your destination and its inhabitants — both the human and wild inhabitants — rather than a burden.

Learning to live alongside other species that share this planet, and to ensure that their habitat, as well as your own, is preserved for the future is essential to sustainable living. As a traveler, you should respect the homes of others — be they human or other living beings — as they tolerate your presence. Traveling to new places and becoming, even for a short time, part of the life there should be of benefit to those who live there as well as to yourself.



TIP

As you put some of the suggestions in this book into practice, you can also become an advocate for sustainable travel. Share your knowledge and your experiences with your friends and fellow travel addicts and provide feedback to the travel providers you interact with. Spread the word far and wide — it will make a difference.

