# Slow Travel Is More Sustainable Travel

*Earth911*

We all know that driving cars contributes to climate change, but it's not entirely avoidable. Flying, on the other hand, is nearly always a luxury, and even when it's necessary, for most people it's something we do rarely.

Yes, there are frequent business travelers, but some people never fly and 87 percent of airline passengers fly only once a year or less. Unfortunately, that annual flight can cancel out the benefit of all your green choices throughout the year.

In fact, one round trip flight emits more carbon dioxide ($CO_2$) than many people generate in a year.

## How Bad Is Flying?

On average, a plane produces a little over 53 pounds of carbon dioxide per mile. According to figures from German nonprofit Atmosfair, flying from London to New York and back generates about 986 kilograms of $CO_2$ per passenger. That is more than the average person in 56 different countries emits in a year.

Consider this: One passenger's share of emissions on a 2,500-mile flight melts 32 square feet of Arctic summer sea ice.

Although more attention has been paid to the problem of airline emissions in the UK, flights from airports in the United States were responsible for almost one-quarter of global passenger flight-related carbon dioxide emissions. An online calculator can help you estimate the emissions from specific flights you might take.

## Car vs. Plane

Driving can be more ecological than flying, especially if you are driving an electric vehicle or are a passenger on a full bus. Because takeoff and landing are less efficient than cruising at altitude, shorter flights are most likely to exceed auto emissions. The calculations are complicated and there is disagreement over how much to weight different factors. But for a rough idea of whether it is better to drive or fly, you can try BeFrugal's fly or drive calculator.

Whether flying or driving emits less carbon dioxide, the unfortunate fact is that both methods of travel are carbon-intensive.

A staycation offers the chance to explore natural and cultural wonders close to home.

## Staying Home

The greenest choice is to not travel at all. If your purpose in traveling is simply to relax, using the money you would have spent on a plane ticket to upgrade your hotel for a staycation may be the best choice. And we often ignore natural and cultural wonders close to home in favor of more distant, exotic locales. Spending some of your travel time on local exploration can provide adventures and discoveries equal to those further away.

Of course, there are times work or a personal emergency requires you to travel long distances in a short time. Although they have their own complications, carbon offsets can help to minimize the impacts of unavoidable flights.

And voluntary travel can be so much more than a simple chance to relax; some of the benefits come from getting outside your comfort zone and experiencing foreign cultures. Research has shown health benefits from travel. Travel makes people more creative, improves problem-solving skills, and builds cultural sensitivity. This kind of personal growth also translates to valuable work skills in a globalized marketplace. So, while there is merit in avoiding unnecessary plane trips, just staying home should not be the only answer.

## Slow Travel

Slow travel can be a solution for seeing the world while minimizing one's contribution to the climate crisis. For most proponents of slow travel, the focus is on replacing stuffed itineraries with mindfulness. One could mindfully experience a $CO_2$ spewing flight, but by eliminating the bucket-list mentality, mindfulness also opens the possibility of literally traveling more slowly with greener transportation options.

If you have the option of traveling by train, it is almost always a greener choice than either flying or driving. In many countries, train travel is not much slower than flying and can even be faster than driving. But rail travel is somewhat limited in the U.S., and it's not an option when oceans must be crossed.

Greta Thunberg's recent trip to the United States has raised interest in older, slower methods of crossing oceans. Unless you are an eco-celebrity or skilled enough to serve as a crew member, it's hard — but not impossible — to find a sailboat to take you across the ocean. And even the most efficient cruise ships emit three to four times more carbon dioxide per passenger-mile than a jet.

Cargo ships are far from emissions-free. But sailing as a passenger on a cargo ship does not generate any additional emissions because the ship will sail with or without you. A handful of travel agencies offer this option, and several shipping companies offer berths directly to passengers. Sailing passengers must be more flexible than other travelers — freighters do not always depart on the scheduled day; an Atlantic crossing takes a full two weeks while crossing the Pacific can take three. But for anyone who seriously wants to see the world without destroying it and thinks a slow boat to China sounds like a wonderful adventure, slow travel is a perfect solution.

**You Might Also Like…**