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Making Sustainable Travel More Affordable



By [Gemma Alexander](#)

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Most travelers want their [trips to be more sustainable](#), but with rising airfares and general inflation, they aren't necessarily willing or even able to spend more for it. If you don't have the budget to pay a premium for greener travel, but you still want to see the world – or just your family far away – you can still minimize your impact.

The [largest contributor](#) to Americans' carbon footprint is transportation, generating 28% of overall emissions. Only 8% of all U.S. transportation emissions comes from airplanes or other modes of transportation besides automobiles, simply because Americans drive so much more than they travel any other way.

Airlines' efforts to be more sustainable frequently are not what they want us to believe, just [greenwashed claims](#) that someday they will do better. When you look at individual trips, the [climate impact of air travel](#) is tremendous. On average, a plane produces a little over [53 pounds](#) of carbon dioxide per mile and one passenger's share of emissions on a 2,500-mile flight melts [32 square feet](#) of Arctic summer sea ice.

On top of that, hotels are often responsible for development in natural areas and contribute 60 million tons of CO2 emissions annually through their [operations](#). The average hotel uses 6,000 gallons of water per month just for daily housekeeping. Tourists are often [directly responsible](#) for destruction of historical buildings, [sculpture](#) and [monuments](#), as well as damage to [trails](#) and beaches; visitors create litter even in [national parks](#).

Sustainable Travel Dilemma

Eco-vacation packages and travel products advertised as sustainable often cost more than mainstream options. According to Booking.com's 2023 [Sustainable Travel Report](#), 76% of travelers want to travel more sustainably, and 43% would be willing to pay more to do so. But the report indicates that just as many travelers are feeling the pinch of rising costs of living and believe that sustainable travel options are unaffordable.

Although many sustainable travel options do cater to wealthier patrons – “luxury” is a buzzword in every sector of travel – it is not necessarily true that you have to pay a premium to travel more sustainably. Sustainable lodgings in popular city break destinations cost an average of \$151 less per night – a [savings of 39%](#) simply by using the “travel sustainably” filter on Booking.com.

Budget Conscious Sustainability

As they say, haste makes waste. Quick vacations that cover a lot of ground may seem efficient, but they pack a lot of emissions into a short trip.

[Slow travel](#), if you have the time, can be more sustainable. If you are fit, long-distance bicycle trips make the journey the destination and eliminate the use of internal combustion engines entirely. Hiking and [camping](#) instead of staying in hotels can be nearly free and uses very few resources. Taking the train is less carbon intensive, can be cheaper than flying, and lets you see more while you're at it. You might even book passage on a cargo ship instead of an airplane to cross the ocean with adding any emissions to what industry already produces.

Traveling outside of peak season can help avoid overcrowding while saving money, even at [eco-certified lodgings](#). And bringing your 'buy local' mantra with you on vacation to shop small, independent stores – as long as you are not [eating endangered](#)

[animals](#) or [buying harmful products](#) – can support local communities and sustainable craft industries. Avoid carbon-intensive activities like helicopter rides, jetskis and off-road vehicles. Instead, vet your options with advance research and choose activities that can make a positive difference: whale-watching or [shark tours](#); visiting [zoos that are doing conservation work](#) and [animal sanctuaries](#).

Not all sustainable travel choices require changing your travel plans. You can take many of the same [small actions on vacation](#) that help you be more sustainable at home. Avoid single use plastics whenever possible. Hang onto your garbage until you find a proper receptacle to dispose or recycle it. Turn off the lights and air conditioning in your room when you are out and use bedding and towels for more than one day. Other good habits encouraged in the study include sightseeing on foot, by bike or using public transport instead of big tourist buses and rental cars or taxis. For longer distances or to visit sites that are not well-served by public transportation, [electric rental vehicles](#) can be a good choice and are becoming more common. Practice [better beach habits](#) when you are near the sea.

With mindfulness and planning, you can be a good [environmental steward when you travel](#), no matter how far from home you roam.



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[Guide to Plant-Based Milk Alternatives](#)



By [Gemma Alexander](#)

Gemma Alexander has an M.S. in urban horticulture and a backyard filled with native plants. After working in a genetics laboratory and at a landfill, she now writes about the environment, the arts and family. See more of her writing [here](#).

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Guide to Plant-Based Milk Alternatives

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