

CARBON OFFSETTING: SIX THINGS YOU NEED TO KNOW

Want to offset your holiday emissions — but confused how it works?
Here's how to ensure your money is *really* doing good...

1 Limiting is better than offsetting

You'll make the most impact by limiting your holiday's carbon footprint rather than offsetting it. If you're travelling to the Continent, ditch the plane and take the car instead: per person emissions for a family of four in a medium vehicle are roughly 43g per km, as opposed to 102g by plane (travel to Europe by Eurostar and that figure drops to just 6g per km). If flying is the only option, look out for Skyscanner's green leaf tool and Google's green badge which identify the most eco-friendly flights on your chosen route.

2 Offsetting could be considered a 'guilt tax'

Whether you offset or not, the carbon you use on holiday will stay in the atmosphere for hundreds of years — which is why some experts are so against it. But, in the absence of viable alternatives, others believe offsetting schemes can be a good way to contribute positively to the environment.

3 Holidays are a fraction of your carbon footprint

Once you get down to the minutiae, it's hard to figure out the total 'carbon cost' of a holiday (unless you book through the handful of companies who carbon-label their trips, including Pura Aventura and Much Better Adventures). That's why it's usually better to calculate your emissions for the whole year and offset the lot (see WWF's online tool, footprint.wwf.org.uk). If parts of your trip have already been offset by your tour operator or airline, experts advocate 'double-offsetting' or removing twice the carbon you use.

4 There's more to offsetting than air travel

It's not just flights that equal pollution. Using water, energy and transport at your destination ups your footprint too. The most surprising contributor? Food. If yours is shipped in (think Maldivian islands) or the menu is meat-heavy (think *beaucoup de steak frites*) the carbon cost can be stratospheric.

5 Don't rely on airline schemes alone

Most airlines offer the option to offset directly, but their initiatives aren't perfect. Some don't allow you to specify which class you are flying, others charge a flat fee rather than one based on total footprint — and still more add a hefty processing cost to the price. And while offsetting your flight shows good intentions, it won't take into account emissions from the rest of your holiday.

6 Tree planting schemes aren't the only option

Though they're the best-known offsets out there, be wary of tree-planting schemes. Some allow customers to pay for trees that would have been planted regardless; others use non-indigenous trees that can't survive (meaning the carbon trapped in them is released back into the air when they die). Avoid these issues by supporting Mossy Earth, which plants native trees every month; mossy.earth. Or opt for a scheme accredited by Swiss non-profit Gold Standard — such schemes include generating electricity from Indian rice husks and reducing emissions from plastic recycling in Romania; goldstandard.org. 

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