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ADVENTURE TRAVEL

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WHAT IS SUSTAINABLE TRAVEL? WE BREAK IT DOWN FOR YOU

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By Marina Sergeeva

We all love a good escape from time to time, but more of us are beginning to understand the potentially negative impact our holidays can have, and are seeking more sustainable ways to see the world. But what is sustainable travel, really? And how is it different from eco-tourism or ethical travel?

The short answer is that it's not. These three terms are pretty much interchangeable, though ethical travel usually refers to how we interact with local people and cultures, more than the environment. According to the World Commission on Environment and Development, sustainable travel is defined as *'meeting the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs'*. Hmm...a bit vague! I guess all that means is that our current generation should preserve the resources and environment for the young 'uns.

The World Tourism Organisation gives a slightly better definition: the *'management of all resources in such way that economic social and aesthetic needs can be fulfilled while maintaining cultural integrity, essential ecological processes, biological diversity and life support systems.'*

This is pretty much the criteria we use here at Eluxe to determine if a hotel is sustainable – are they managing their water, energy and materials use in a sustainable way? Are their staff comprised of well-paid, well-trained locals? Are they supporting the local environment with organic farming, anti-plastic, rubbish recycling or other eco schemes? Does the hotel use local materials for construction, and local businesses for its operations? Luckily, quite a few (of the usually smaller) hotels are.

But sustainable travel isn't just about the hotel or plane offsets – it's about us, too. How are we travelling? If by air, are we offsetting miles? And how do we behave when we do arrive to our destination? Are we throwing money around huge hotel chains and shops, ensuring no locals will benefit from our spend? Are we ruining local cultures



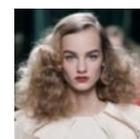
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I've come up with 9 points that basically define a sustainable traveller – but some these points can be applied to eco-hotels and travel agents, too.

1. The look for eco-agencies

You can start with finding eco-travel agencies to help you plan your holiday. They will advise you on all the essentials and find you the best deals available, which have the least impact on the environment.

For example, Responsible Tourism focuses on helping you plan your holiday whilst treating local people well, and protecting wildlife environments in that region. They acknowledge that modern travellers prefer to fly to faraway destinations, but they work towards creating a positive impact on local cultures and live by the mantra, 'Take only photographs, leave only footprints'. Atlas Unbound is a new operator focused on all-eco adventure tourism.

There are plenty more responsible operators and advisors such as NOW travel, who offer travellers advice and hard questions to ask hoteliers about sustainability, and Nature Travels who donate 2% of their profits to conservation efforts in Sweden and offer a donation of £4.15 per person to Climate Care to offset the impact of your travel.



2. They offset their travels

And speaking of offsetting, if you insist on travelling across the world and back numerous times a year, do be kind to the planet and offset the damage. It's easy to do: at Atmosfair, for example, you can research your route to find out your individual CO2 impact, and the cost to offset those emissions. You can even pay right there and then online. Alternatively, you can contribute to an environmental project, plant a tree as a means offsetting your travel.



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3. They embrace public transport

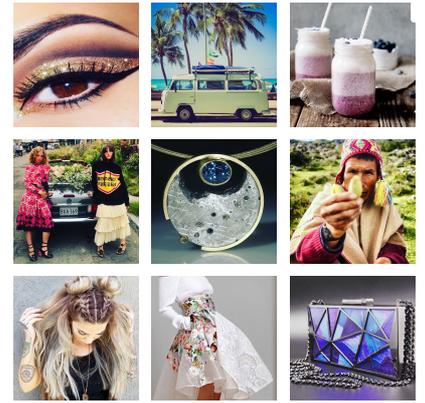
So, now that we've got you to your destination, it's time to think about how you can carry on your sustainable travels. All it takes is a bit of pre-planning and working out the public transport systems.

Trust me, it's not all that hard and will most likely save you some Uber bills or getting ripped off by local taxis. Plan your travel through trams, trains, walking and cycling, where possible, your bank account will appreciate it at least!

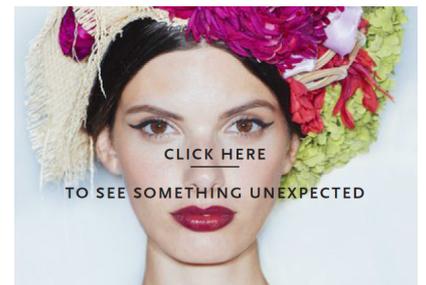


4. They check-in somewhere green

As for where you're staying, why not try an AirBnB or privately owned B&B to contribute to the local economy? Alternatively, search for any eco-retreats or hotels with great sustainability policies in the area. Not sure where to look? Why not book a holiday based only on the sustainability and beauty of the hotel property alone? Trust us, it's worth it! These 7 eco-luxury retreats are a good place to start.



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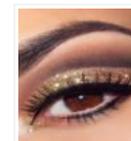
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5. They're respectful to the locals

As suggested earlier, it's not so much sustainable travel, but responsible tourism that is key to making a difference. So adopt new travelling habits like buying local goods from artisans learning local etiquette and basic local language phrases. It's also about being considerate of locals when taking photos; make sure you ask before you snap a local. I mean, how would you like it if someone just walked up to you and took a pic? Also, remember to be respectful in your bargaining if that's part of the culture. There's nothing uglier than a Westerner haggling over a few dollars or even pennies for a good – it makes hardly any difference to us, but for a small market holder, it could be the difference between having dinner that night or not.



6. They're kind to the local flora and fauna



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POLL QUESTION



What are your thoughts on 'extra-plus' sized fashions?

- It's about time! Big women want to be stylish, too!
- Our culture has an obesity problem and this just validates it
- I don't care - people's body size and fashion choices aren't my business

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just expect some lizards or frogs to get into even 5 star rooms in some tropical places!), or maybe not dumping rubbish in forests or parks, being respectful in your habits to the wildlife outside of your window makes you a better – and better liked – traveller.

You may not become the perfect eco-traveler, but making smarter choices for the environment will not only help you experience a new culture in a positive way, it will also expose you to some hidden gems, make you a little more local and save yourself a mini heart-attack upon your return and review of your bank balance.



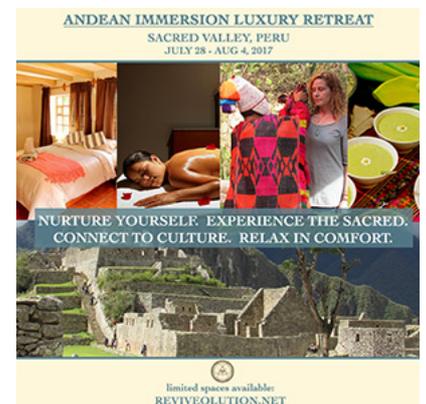
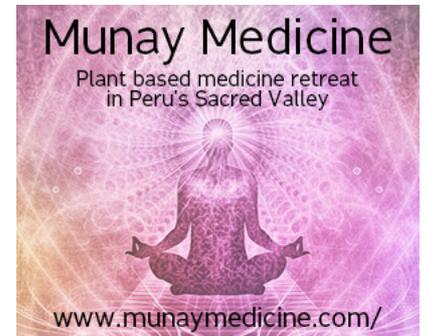
7. They forget about animal attractions

Loads of people think it's cool to swim with dolphins, ride elephants or feed baby tigers. Sure, it's love to be up close and personal with the natural world, but remember: these animals are all kept in captivity. Think about how they got there – they were likely stolen from their mothers- and think of how they are suffering. Dolphins are not meant to exist in small pools or aquariums, full stop. Elephants are tortured to 'tame' them to accept tourists on their backs. Tigers are bred in horrid conditions so tourists can pet their babies – often, the adults are slaughtered for their body parts for Chinese medicine. Do NOT contribute to these heartbreaking practices; ignorance is no excuse.



8. They always say NO to natural souvenirs

Coral, mammoth ivory, bear claws, tortoise shells...there are so, so many natural products offered to tourists that are not only unethical to buy, but in many cases, illegal, too. Resist your urge for any animal artefacts and





9. They learn a little bit before going

Sustainable means *ethical*, right? And there's nothing ethical about assuming everyone speaks English. Sure, it's an international language, but how would you feel if someone came up to you and asked the time in Swahili, then rolled their eyes like 'jeez, learn some Swahili already' when you gave them a blank stare? Just get the basics down – even if you learn one phrase, it should be 'do you speak English?' But it's not only the lingo we need to learn: ensure you're up on the tipping practices. No one likes to get stiffed, but it's also as problematic when you overtip in some cultures: the Japanese, for example, find it embarrassing. And North Americans who over tip (or even give a tip when one is not needed) set the bar for locals starting to demand money from foreigners.



Got any other tips for sustainable travel? We'd love to hear from you in the comments below!