

How Airlines Are Offsetting Their Own Carbon Footprint

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In the fight for clean air, airlines are committing to greener travel with these new measures.

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There's no doubt that 2019 has been a **watershed year for the global collective conscience**, a series of ticking truth bombs triggering a mass epiphany that every one of our actions counts. Never before have so many vowed, researched how, and debated ways to buy better, eat better, and travel better. On the latter, the most contentious question of all is: How do we fly better?

That air travel is a **large contributor** to an individual's carbon footprint is one of those tough truths for travelers. It now accounts for two percent of total global emissions, leaving the **sustainably minded** with only two options: fly less or offset carbon output with payments that have environmental limitations. "It is better to offset than not offset," says Alexa Poortier, who recently launched the NOW Offset Carbon tool, a carbon footprint calculator. "But it is also critical that [airlines] have integrity, accountability, and transparency."

While food-industry regulations require clear labeling to help consumers make informed choices, aviation has so far lagged behind. But there are signs that the tailwinds may finally be changing direction. At least 78 countries (including the U.S.), representing three-quarters of international flights, will participate in a 2021 pilot program to offset emissions, put forth by CORSIA, the **Carbon Offsetting and Reduction Scheme for International Aviation**. It's not an ultimate solution, but a collective commitment to change, with **Royal Dutch Airlines KLM** at the fore.

The company is on track to meet its pledge to reduce passenger CO2 emissions 20 percent by 2020, while a carbon-reduction road map lays out its intended use of current and future technologies. Meanwhile, Clive Jackson, CEO of private jet charter Victor, is taking steps to improve that sector's sustainability record—flying private generates 20 times more emissions per passenger than commercial airlines—with a 200 percent carbon offset per flight, and by using RocketRoute software to optimize fuel efficiency through better-planned flight routes. And last year, **Alaska Airlines switched from plastic stirrers to a version made from white birch**, while Virgin Atlantic celebrated its new A350 planes by introducing goody bags made from Earth-friendly craft paper. British Airways is also taking up the charge, with new aircraft built to reduce noise and emissions, and by swapping out **single-use plastics** for sustainable alternatives like bamboo and paper.

We might be in for the long-haul before we see an age of sustainable air travel, but hope is on the horizon. ✦