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elcome to the ultimate guide to cutting through the greenwash – a shortcut to being a more conscious planner and responsible traveller. Understanding key sustainability-related terms and knowing what qualities to look out for allows us to be intuitive about the impact of our adventures on the places we visit. Researching where our money is going or who has what policies in place on energy or waste is vital. Not sure how environmentally friendly a supplier’s practices are? Don’t be shy – ask. If you communicate what you care about, travel providers have to sit up and listen. Since tourism accounts for one in 10 jobs globally and employs hundreds of millions of people, having a holiday that pays it forward is pretty powerful. A little signposting and some reading of the small print can make all the difference.

ACCESSIBILITY

There’s more to this than wheelchair ramps. By supporting travel services and hosts that allow everyone to have the fullest experiences, regardless of ability or age, we encourage inclusivity, which leads to more people with special needs or physical challenges being catered for.



ANIMAL WELFARE

Wildlife should be left to be exactly that, and none of us should compromise the natural behaviour of any animals. Sorry guys – no riding elephants or having cuddly encounters with koalas for photo ops. Look, don't touch.

BIODIVERSITY

This is the complexity of life on Earth in all its forms, and it's never been so under threat. In the natural world, every ecosystem is perfectly balanced and works in harmony to contribute to our planet's overall health. Those working hard to preserve and cultivate biodiversity deserve our support. Rewilding is always a winner, as exemplified by Alladale Wilderness Reserve in the Scottish Highlands.

BIOPHILIC DESIGN

A love of nature and our craving for getting closer to it means we increasingly seek a look and feel that riffs on Mother Nature. Louis Thompson of Nomadic Resorts created the Cocoon Suites at Sri Lanka's Wild Coast Tented Lodge, and he loves setting the stage so guests are immersed in a way that also lets them benefit from the healing power of wilderness. 'Our design approach is inspired by the genius loci – or spirit of the place. We respect the physical characteristics, geological features, native vegetation, natural energy flows and traditional migration patterns particular to that area, to gain an understanding of what makes that place biologically unique.'



CARBON EMISSIONS

The measurement of the volume of greenhouse gases (GHGs) being released. The concern is that these GHGs are creating a layer in the atmosphere that's wrapping the planet in a blanket, causing it to warm up. Tourism is guilty of spewing out about 10 per cent of the world's total emissions. [Steppes Travel](#) is one travel company that is responding to increased awareness: it has launched a Trees & Science campaign with the Woodland Trust. By cultivating an actual 12-hectare wood of 4,000 trees near Scunthorpe (known for having the UK's worst-polluted air), it's creating a significant CO₂-zapping carbon sink, improving local air quality, boosting biodiversity and setting a standard among tour operators.

CARBON FOOTPRINT

The total amount of greenhouse gases produced by an individual or business, usually represented in tonnes of carbon dioxide. Flying is unequivocally the single biggest contributor to our personal carbon footprints. And it's the taking off and landing part that causes the highest emissions, so minimising short-haul flights and stopovers will lessen your footprint. While you're on the road, skip internal flights in favour of public transport and walking, stay in energy-efficient hotels and swerve beef at mealtimes.

CARBON NEUTRAL

Net-zero carbon emissions is declared when businesses measure the amount of carbon they're responsible for releasing and then balance this out with an equivalent amount, usually through the purchase of carbon credits. Intrepid Travel has been carbon neutral for many years by working out the emissions from its offices and trips (transport, accommodation and waste) and offsetting this by supporting renewable energy projects.

CERTIFICATIONS

Accreditations from third-party assessments, usually through an audit, signify that an operator has conformed to a standard of practice.

EarthCheck is a leading system of scientific benchmarking, certification and advice. BREEAM (Building Research Establishment Environmental Assessment Method) and LEED (Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design) denote green building principles. Browse B Corp's accredited businesses, all of which have been legally required to consider the impact of all decisions on their workers, their customers, their suppliers, the community and the environment. The Long Run is a non-profit programme that ensures that member resorts and lodges have attained the highest standards of sustainability encompassing conservation, community, culture and commerce – what they call the 4Cs.



CIRCULAR ECONOMY

A closed loop where operations aren't wasteful and supply chains are usually ethical. Striving for this virtuous circle involves using traceable suppliers and goods that are reused or repurposed and then put back into the economy, rather than following a traditional linear approach to procurement, which generally involves buying goods, using them and then disposing of them. It can refer to the use of greywater for gardening or kitchen waste being composted or, in the case of [QO in Amsterdam](#), having carpets made entirely of upcycled fishing nets.

COMMUNITY TOURISM

This is a concept relating to holidays that consider the wellbeing of people in a less well-off destination and that prioritise involving locals in decision-making while having direct positive social and economic impact through employment or ownership. G Adventures has long hosted tours that aim to leave as much money as possible in local economies, through hotels, transport, restaurants, experiences and guides. Its Ripple Score audits hundreds of trips and evaluates every supplier for local ownership. Almost 700 trips on the website now have an out-of-100 score, which allows transparency about how much of the money spent in a given destination goes directly into the hands of locals. The average score is 93.

CITIZEN SCIENTIST

Data collection can be the most time-consuming part of conservation, and travellers taking part in field research can be a great way to contribute. One campaign group that rallies its community to clear oceans is [Surfers Against Sewage](#), which asks supporters to report on water conditions and take action where needed.

CONSERVATION

Also known as nature conservation, this movement is about protecting natural resources, safeguarding biodiversity and extolling the benefits of promoting ecosystems with integrity. It's also about teaching responsible management of energy, water and waste, land-planning and carbon-impact reduction. [The Long Run](#) represents many who do it well; its Global Ecosphere Retreats demonstrate true commitment, such as Cottar's 1920s Safari Camp in Kenya and the Grootbos Private Nature Reserve in [South Africa](#).



DISASTER TOURISM

Despite the negative-sounding name, it can be fantastically beneficial for tourists to intentionally book a trip to an area that has been affected by a natural disaster or where a situation has caused foreigners to otherwise stop visiting.

ECO HOTEL

An environmentally friendly property that demonstrates ecological sustainability and whose accommodation makes a valuable contribution to the environment or to a community. [Regenerative Resorts](#) has curated a collection of cut-above eco escapes.

ECO-TOURISM

Giving back to the environment through a holiday is a great way to support conservation. As Responsible Travel reminds us, the mantra for this would be: ‘Take only photographs, leave only footprints.’ [Earth Changers](#) helps you find and book transformative trips that tread lightly.

EDUCATION

Sharing knowledge is the most powerful way to change the world for the better. It doesn’t always have to be through formal channels: as Gunter Pauli, author of *The Blue Economy*, says: ‘If you really want to have a positive impact, then tell a great surprising and inspiring story to a child, every single day, for the rest of your life. It will make a wonderful difference when we all think about solutions and we are all ready to act – that will be what sets off that spark that will turn the world around.’”



EMPLOYMENT

A company's recruitment policies and its approach to the treatment of team members is an important consideration if you care about corporate social responsibility (CSR). Support businesses whose CSR programmes ensure that all employees are paid fairly and enjoy decent terms when it comes to working hours and benefits. To qualify, companies must demonstrate that diversity and inclusivity have been considered in all respects of their operations. In the UK, the [Living Wage Foundation](#) leads a campaign to recognise responsible employers who choose to pay a real living wage based on the cost of living, not just the government minimum. InterContinental Hotels Group (IHG) was the first UK hotel chain to qualify.

FLYGSKAM

'Flight shaming', as the Swedes call it, lifted off in 2018; it is said to have caused air traffic to fall by 12 per cent in Sweden in 2019.

FOOD PRINT

Diets based on local and seasonal plants have a much lower food print – a nickname for the ecological impact of the food industry, from production to waste. Agriculture relies heavily on fossil-fuel-dependent farming, processing, storage and transportation, particularly in remote areas where luxury hotels want to serve international menus. Food prepared for the tourism sector – in particular, meat – contributes to GHG emissions during storage, transportation, and cooking, while leftovers from international travellers can contribute significantly to methane emissions, especially when they are discarded and left to find their way to landfills.

FOUNDATIONS

Hotels that support charities in meaningful ways deserve support. An increasing number of hotels have a charitable side to what they do. We'll spotlight [Cambodia's Shinta Mani Foundation](#) as one NGO supported by a percentage of the room charge. Bill Bensley's initiatives have been enabling education, employment and healthcare in underprivileged villages around the world since 2004.



GREENWASHING

Brands are getting ever cleverer at sharing their heart-prodding claims about the environmental benefits of their products or practices, often appearing a good deal more sustainable than they really are. By shouting about their do-gooding (which in truth is often negligible), it distracts us from what they might be doing that is not so considerate. The term originates from those notes in hotels suggesting guests reuse towels as a way of saving the environment, implying that the hosts care about the planet when in fact their motivation is to reduce laundry and housekeeping costs. Hotels are frantically trying to polish their halos, so it's becoming harder to tell who the true heroes are.

GUERRILLA HUMANITARIANISM

This is hands-on holiday activism, such as beach clean-ups or distributing essentials to those in need. Lots of luxury hotels task their staff with litter pick-ups, the obvious incentive being cleaner, more photogenic stretches of sand. [Waves For Water](#) has a specialised clean-water task force known as the Clean Water Corps, where military veterans implement strategic humanitarian initiatives addressing the major global issue of waterborne disease – but you can also get involved and help in the distribution of their filtration systems. [Pack for a Purpose](#) is an American non-profit informing travellers how to take supplies where they are needed by flagging up hotels and the goods they distribute, such as Ulusaba Private Game Reserve in South Africa, where paperbacks and holiday reads are used for its adult literacy programme.

HOMESTAYS

Accommodation that invites foreigners to stay in the home of locals results in authentic, immersive experiences – ideally with the added benefit of direct-action wealth distribution to a household in an underprivileged area. [Panauti](#) is a UNESCO-recognised town in [Nepal](#) that launched a Community Homestay initiative in 2012 and has since empowered many women by providing somewhere simple and characterful to stay outside of Kathmandu's oversubscribed hostels and hotels.

INDIGENOUS PEOPLE

Preserving the culture of aboriginal groups who are the original people of a place – or the longest-term residents – by helping them and their descendants celebrate their distinct linguistic, cultural and social characteristics is immeasurably valuable. Cottar's Safaris in [Kenya](#) encourages visits to meet the Maasai in a way that enhances the wellbeing of this once-nomadic people. 'For tourism to be truly sustainable, it must bring direct and indirect benefits for all, in the short and long term,' explains Calvin Cottar. There is a small charge per visitor which is given directly to the elders of a village to be distributed to the rest of the community. 'The intention is that they see a direct benefit from our clients and the donations made are a thank you to the community for opening up their homes to our guests. Our approach creates an incentive for local people to preserve and value their cultural heritage and traditional practices.'

OFF-GRID

Self-sufficient hosts who harness the power of renewable energy to heat everything from their pools to their showers are a good thing. [Cheetah Plains](#) in South Africa has achieved this with its Electric Land Cruisers for game drives: silent engines, customised suspension and zero-emission Tesla batteries. The Other Side hotel, in the [Bahamas](#), is the antidote to the hubbub of [Harbour Island](#) (seven minutes away by speedboat). This self-sufficient, solar-powered [Caribbean](#) camp has us saying so long to Wi-Fi and hello to feeling more connected.

OFFSETTING

Carbon emissions are calculated and then offset through schemes where the carbon output is being countered by paid-for 'reductions' made in emissions at another location. Each credit represents one tonne of carbon avoided, sequestered or captured. Many environmentalists argue that while offsetting is better than doing nothing, the reduction of emissions should be the priority – not continuing to pollute while paying others not to. A study by the European Commission found that 85 per cent of the offset projects used by the EU under the UN's Clean Development Mechanism (CDM) failed to reduce emissions. [NOW Offset Carbon](#) is a simple-to-use calculator and offset tool powered by highly regarded South Pole, a Swiss carbon finance consultancy.



OVERTOURISM

All-too-popular destinations – such as [Venice](#) and [Machu Picchu](#) – are famously victims of their own success, as the crowds that flock to such sites are probably doing more harm than good. If you must visit such favourites, it's smarter and more sustainable to do so in off season.

PERMACULTURE

It's great to see more biodynamic farming processes being talked about, with enthusiasts excitedly educating everyone on why they've chosen permaculture over pesticides and why worm farms are a winner at mulching organic waste. One hotel that walks you through how it transforms food scraps into nutrient-rich soil and manages to lure guests out of the spa or off the pristine beach to get a back-of-house tour of the zero-waste journey is The Datai, in [Langkawi](#).

PLASTIC

Millions of tonnes of plastic enters our oceans every year, and 80 per cent of this junk comes from the land, so the best thing we can do is to eschew polymers in all their forms. As single-use plastic is vilified, bioplastics are increasingly wheeled out as substitutes – but recycling experts say that these alternatives present their own challenges. Disposable packaging made from plants instead of fossil fuels needs to be composted in specific conditions. If it isn't, it can contaminate recycling and affect the pH levels of soil or water as it degrades. It's complicated. So play it safe – avoid all things disposable.

PROVENANCE

This term relates to the origin of goods but is best known in relation to food, with particular reverence being shown to high-welfare meats and ingredients that have not been farmed industrially. The sustainable option for anything you buy is to always choose natural, local or seasonal – even for amenities. Marking a move away from mass-produced junk even in the mass market, Scandinavian Airlines has curated eco-friendly Filippa K washbags (for business-class passengers) that include a corn-starch toothbrush and natural mint-flavoured toothpaste by socially responsible The Humble Co, Verso Skincare products, SwedSafe ear plugs and Swedish Stockings, which use recycled materials and environmentally friendly dyes.



RENEWABLE ENERGY

Energy generated from solar, wind, biomass, geothermal, hydropower and ocean resources, directly or indirectly, is a friend to the future of all. In [Jordan](#), the 26-room Feynan Lodge in the Dana Biosphere Reserve is entirely solar powered – even the fridges run on sunshine – so the limited supply means it even forgoes serving meat – a more sustainable sacrifice.

SOCIAL ENTERPRISES

An inspiring way to plan an itinerary is by choosing to support businesses along the way that have a positive impact. G Adventures, as mentioned before, is a tour operator that empowers local communities by ensuring that many links in the supply chains of its trips have a conscience. Over the years, founder Bruce Poon-Tip has launched scores of social enterprises that tackle poverty and create jobs and launch responsible tourism, from [Peru](#) to [Vietnam](#).

TÅGSKRYT

‘Train-bragging’ in Swedish – this is the smugness expressed by those who’ve swapped jet-setting for slow travel by rail.

UNDERTOURISM

What you do when you head to under-the-radar coordinates that will benefit from your visit. Good options for this? Untrammelled paths to a [UNESCO](#)-protected paradise await in [Costa Rica](#), where much of the electricity is renewably sourced. [Bhutan](#)’s ‘low-volume, high-value’ policy has helped the country thrive through a less-is-more approach to tourism.