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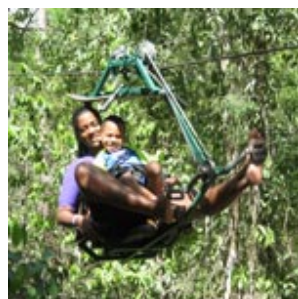
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Make your vacation eco-friendly

Going on vacation? Here are some eco-savvy tips to make your vacation as green as possible

By: Diane Selkirk



A quick scan through the travel ads and it's clear: if you don't mind hanging out at an all-inclusive resort, sipping margaritas and getting massages, there are some killer deals out there. The problem with all-inclusives, for the eco-savvy traveller, is they are not what most people consider a green getaway. In fact, that super-cheap holiday might just be at the expense of another country's environment.

To avoid negating a year's worth of recycling in the quest for a little R&R, try making that bargain trip a little greener with these tips:

Location, location

Not all destinations are environmentally equal, so seek out places that have maintained their uniqueness through wisely managed development. Rodrigo Zurita from tourism [Riviera Maya](http://www.rivieramaya.com/) (<http://www.rivieramaya.com/>) points out that we all benefit when a destination maintains its ecological diversity and its culture: "A healthy environment is what makes a place interesting." Check out locations with [National Geographic's Centre for Sustainable Destinations](http://www.nationalgeographic.com/travel/sustainable/) (<http://www.nationalgeographic.com/travel/sustainable/>) or read through tourism websites for an indication about how the local environment is treated.

Search for certified

With consumer demand for eco-friendly lodging on the increase even mainstream hotels are making an effort obtain green-type certification. You can check [online lists](http://www.independenttraveler.com/resources/article.cfm?AID=738&category=44#lodging) (<http://www.independenttraveler.com/resources/article.cfm?AID=738&category=44#lodging>) , but keep in mind certification standards vary widely. I also like to ask a few questions before booking:

- Is the hotel locally owned and operated?
- Is it staffed by local employees?
- Does the hotel have recycling programs?
- Does the hotel try to reduce consumption? (Limiting sheet/towel washing, energy-efficient lighting, low-flow showers, composting.)
- Does the hotel contribute to the local community? (Highlighting local cuisine, recommending local guides/activities)

Fly green

Flying creates about two percent of the world's carbon dioxide emissions, so jetting off for fun in the sun isn't the most earth-friendly vacation plan. Some airlines offer [carbon offsets](http://www.davidsuzuki.org/Climate_Change/What_You_Can_Do/carbon_offsets.asp) (http://www.davidsuzuki.org/Climate_Change/What_You_Can_Do/carbon_offsets.asp) when you book a flight. But even if your airline doesn't offer offsets, you can still go through the [simple process yourself](http://www.carboncatalog.org/) (<http://www.carboncatalog.org/>) .

I calculated that a recent 8955 km round-trip flight to Cancun emitted about 1.90 tonnes of CO2, which I offset with an \$80 investment in a Canadian [renewable energy company](http://planetair.ca/) (<http://planetair.ca/>) .

Pack with thought

Along with your cutest sundress, flip-flops and biodegradable sunscreen, remember to include a reusable water bottle (I fill mine in the airport before boarding to start off on the right foot), a to-go mug for your morning coffee and a reusable shopping bag.

Sleep sustainably

Even if you're not spending the night in an eco-certified hotel, you can make your stay greener by keeping the same habits you have at home.

- Conserve water with short showers and by shutting off the water while brushing your teeth.
- Turn off the air conditioning, heat, television and lights when you leave your room.
- Let the housekeeping staff know you want to reuse your sheets and towels.
- If your hotel doesn't recycle, take your empty bottles and used magazines home to recycle.

Photo: The SkyCycle, at [Hidden Worlds Cenotes Park](http://www.hiddenworlds.com.mx/) (<http://www.hiddenworlds.com.mx/>)

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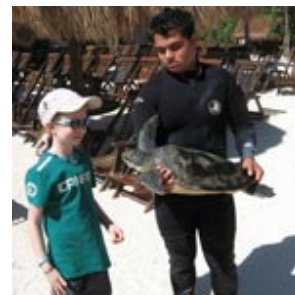
Encourage the management to become greener by letting them know what is working and how they can improve. I like to fill out the little comment cards on site and also try to follow-up with an email when I get home.

Get around with care

When you can, choose a hotel that will let you walk to popular destinations. Also consider using local transit or sharing a cab with another hotel guest. I've found the concierge can often help arrange for a shared cab.

Sight-see responsibly

Research your activities ahead of time and choose ones that promote and protect the local environment. In Mexico, we skipped the activities that were ecologically damaging and enjoyed things that were unique to the region. At [Hidden Worlds](http://www.hiddenworlds.com.mx/) (<http://www.hiddenworlds.com.mx/>) we explored the jungle with a local guide and swam in the well-protected underground cenotes. And at [Xcaret](http://www.xcaret.com) (<http://www.xcaret.com>) we released an endangered turtle back into the ocean and participated in a shark education program.



Shop smart

Stick to local products from small vendors or co-ops and avoid buying stuff that has been flown or shipped in. Skip any souvenirs made from endangered animals or plants – and remember to use your own bag.

Love the locals

Learn a few words in the local language, educate yourself about cultural differences and enjoy all the fabulous regional cuisine – because really, isn't this what travel is all about?

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1100 Boulevard René-Lévesque Ouest

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