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Getting Away, the Green Way

Or at least greener. Tips for travelers who want to reduce their carbon footprint on the road.

By **MELISSA KORN**

For travelers, there's no question: It isn't easy being green. But that doesn't mean they shouldn't try.

We're not talking about walking across the country instead of flying. But a host of changes, such as booking direct flights, staying at hotels that employ Energy Star appliances or opting for public transit, can have a big impact on your carbon footprint.

A caveat: Tallying a trip's carbon footprint can be complicated. No single calculator exists to add up every element of a vacation, down to the breakfast buffet. Still, a combination of tools, from Carbon Fund's car calculator, which lets you input the exact make and model of your vehicle, to [TRX Inc.](#)'s Airline Carbon Emissions Calculator, which gives detailed information for more than 5,600 routes, can help track many of the important numbers.

Here's a look at how travelers can cut their carbon footprint each step of the way.

AIR TRAVEL

Aviation is responsible for some 2% of global carbon-dioxide emissions, says the International Air Transport Association. And while Virgin Atlantic Airways Ltd., [Continental Airlines](#) Inc. and Deutsche Lufthansa AG, among others, are testing biofuels, they're years away making from regular runs on coconut oil or algae.

Instead of staying grounded until then, consider the two biggest factors in a flight's emissions—whether it runs nonstop and the age of the aircraft—when booking travel.

A nonstop flight is generally less harmful than one with intermediate stops, in large part because planes use more fuel for takeoff and landing than when cruising at high altitudes. Nitrogen-oxide emissions are also more troublesome at lower altitudes, says Billy Glover, managing director of environmental strategy at [Boeing Co.](#)'s Boeing Commercial Airplanes, so the more time the plane spends low to the ground, the worse for the air around it.

Even flying on a self-described "green" airline may not help if you're traveling the one route for which they still use an old clunker. To see emissions for your individual flight, rather than a fleet estimate, check out carbon.trx.com, from TRX, an Atlanta-based travel software company. While many other calculators, such as those from Sustainable Travel International and the International Civil Aviation Organization, are helpful for people interested in basic comparisons, they average emissions for a given airline, or even the whole industry, on various routes.

Emissions vary greatly among individual flights. For example, a New York-San Francisco trip on [Delta Airlines](#)

emits 595 pounds of carbon dioxide in a 737H (a 737 with "winglets," which minimize the aircraft's drag), according to TRX. The same flight in a Delta 757 craft emits 38% more carbon dioxide.

GROUND TRANSPORTATION

Though emissions from one car are nothing compared with those from even the best airplane, they add up. So instead of renting a car to get around the city you're visiting, try researching public-transit options. Public transit is often cheaper and faster, offers a great way to sightsee, and is almost always more earth-friendly.

Take Stockholm. Visitors often opt for the 20-minute Arlanda Express train from the main airport into center city. When full, the electric train emits just over a pound of carbon dioxide per round trip per person. Hiring a car for the 54-mile round trip, on the other hand, can add 37 pounds of carbon dioxide to the atmosphere, according to Sustainable Travel International. And that's with Taxi Stockholm, a company that claims half of its cars are "environmentally friendly."

Travelers who need to rent cars might consider agencies like Enterprise Rent-a-Car Co., which has bulked up its "green" options. Enterprise, which also owns National and Alamo, has about 9,000 hybrids in its fleet, available at 100 locations nationwide. That's a tiny portion of its 750,000-vehicle rental fleet, but the company also offers 448,000 cars that are certified by the Environmental Protection Agency to get at least 28 miles per gallon on highways.

Hybrid cars do have a price premium. Costs range widely, depending on location and date, but Enterprise says they generally cost \$10 to \$15 a day more than similarly sized vehicles; Avis Budget Group Inc. prices its hybrids (of which it has about 2,200) \$15 to \$25 higher than standard units.

LODGING

It takes a lot of energy to heat or cool an inn with a dozen guest rooms, and even more to keep the temperature pleasant in a resort with a restaurant, conference center and event hall for 200. That's why facilities with soaring ceilings and large atriums often rank lower on the "green" scale than more modest properties. Smaller hotels can also retrofit their guest rooms more quickly and cheaply, as it's easier to add 30 low-flow shower heads than 10 times as many.

For example, Austin's Habitat Suites Hotel, which has 96 rooms, says it gets 20% of its energy from solar panels, serves organic food and uses nontoxic fertilizers and pesticides in its herb and flower garden. The Hilton Austin, with comparable starting rates, says it gets 10% of its energy from "green" sources and is working to cut waste significantly by 2014. But the hotel has 800 rooms, two ballrooms and kitchens, a health club and spa, and three restaurants. While a guest is responsible for just 4.23 pounds of carbon dioxide over a four-night stay at Habitat Suites, he or she will rack up 115.5 pounds at the Hilton Austin, according to Sustainable Travel International, based on electricity consumption at the hotels.

To be sure, many major hotel chains have made headway in shrinking their carbon footprints. But posting signs reminding guests their towels don't need to be washed every day only goes so far in a 500,000-square-foot Las Vegas casino resort. Ask your potential host about concrete steps it's taking to help the environment, such as using low-flow shower heads and toilets, green cleaning products, or even having buildings certified as energy and water efficient under the U.S. Green Building Council's LEED standards.

No matter what size establishment you prefer, you might also want to check Energy Star's Web site to see the top 25% of U.S. hotels in terms of energy efficiency, as compared to their peers by square footage.

DINING

Assessing the carbon footprint of a meal is perhaps the hardest part of calculating one's emissions. You have to consider the restaurant's energy consumption, but also the source of your food (an organic farm down the street, or one across the country?), how it traveled to your plate (by air? truck?) and how it was packaged in transit (Styrofoam? cardboard?). Because so many elements go into measuring a meal, it may be best to pick a few

factors that matter most to you and find restaurants that fit those values.

Looking for "local" foods can be a great way to curb your meal's impact, but, warns Dawn Sweeney of the National Restaurant Association, "this term of 'local' is really relative." For instance, some restaurants stay close to home only during harvest season. Similarly, stick to restaurants that serve native dishes—a seafood restaurant in landlocked Luxembourg shouldn't be your first choice.

Another difficulty in finding environmentally friendly restaurants: Standards for various "green" certifications are rather low and definitions quite murky. Until last December, dining establishments could become members of the Green Restaurant Association if they committed to four environmental changes, such as going Styrofoam-free or recycling. The standards are now stricter, but all the old restaurants will still make the cut. The National Restaurant Association's Conserve initiative also has a list of greener restaurants, mostly focused on energy and water efficiency. You can find the list at conserve.restaurant.org.

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