

Can Travel Ever Really Be Sustainable?

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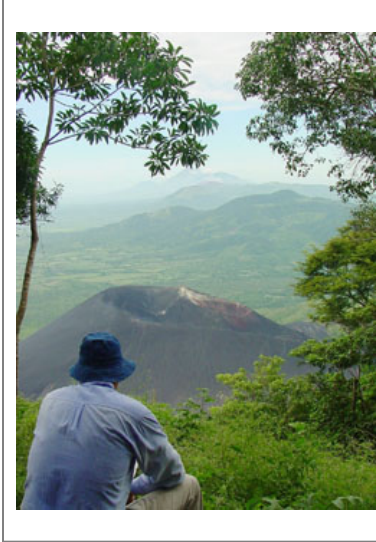
Unless you're traveling on foot, tourism inevitably has an impact on the environment. Though cars, buses, trains, and planes have made leaps and bounds in recent years in terms of mitigating environmental impact, they still use gasoline and yes, often release harmful emissions into the atmosphere. This has led some to call for people to stop traveling altogether and to ask, "What's the point of sustainable tourism, when any kind of travel is still bad for the environment?" We'll attempt to answer this question and leave it to you to decide whether sustainable travel does more harm or more good.

900 million people travel each year, making tourism a major global industry and an important source of income for many countries and communities, many of which are located in extremely biodiverse and fragile areas. Some communities that once turned to poaching or cutting down trees in order to support themselves have realized that they can earn a more sustainable living by conserving their natural surroundings and promoting their communities as a sustainable tourism destination.

However, not all tourism businesses support local communities. This is why sustainable tourism is so important: because it ensures that travelers' money goes to businesses that have made a commitment to supporting local communities and protecting the environment. There are sustainable hotels and tour operators of virtually every type and price range; it just takes a bit of research to find them. The SustainableTrip.org [directory](#) is a great tool to help travelers find sustainable businesses in Latin America



and the Caribbean. To be listed on the site, businesses must be: 1) certified by an independent, third-party sustainable tourism certification program or 2) verified by the Rainforest Alliance. In countries where a certification program is not available or the Rainforest Alliance is not currently working, we accept recommendations from reputable organizations. These guidelines ensure that all businesses listed on SustainableTrip.org have met rigorous environmental, social, and economic standards and travelers can rest assured that they are truly "green."



Travel is also just as (if not more) beneficial for the traveler--it broadens your horizons by giving you the opportunity to learn about new cultures, meet people whose lives are entirely different from your own, and explore nature in all of its diverse splendor. In addition, people who get to discover and enjoy nature firsthand are far more likely to feel passionate about protecting it. Similarly, those who experience other cultures are more likely to be open-minded and tolerant as well as conscientious when it comes to their purchasing choices. For example, someone who spends time with a small forestry community in the Amazon is more likely to buy sustainable wood products from a company that treats its workers fairly and protects the ecosystem from which their product is derived.

While we can learn about other countries on the internet and in the classroom, it doesn't have the same effect as first-hand experiences. In fact, many believe that travel is vital for cross-cultural understanding and peace. We posted an entry a while back that explains more on [how cultural travel can be a force for good in the world](#).

Have we convinced you that sustainable tourism is a positive thing? Let us know your thoughts in the comments!