

# Future proofing

As the UK emerges from the pandemic, there is likely to be higher demand for responsible travel and businesses with sustainability credentials in place

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**F**or agents without a sustainability strategy already in place, now is the perfect time to start creating one.

Reams of surveys have been showing that the pandemic has driven interest in a more responsible way of travelling. Research released by Abta in October found the sustainability credentials of a holiday provider were “important or essential” for nearly half of the 2,000 people surveyed, up from a fifth in 2011.

Consumers are keen to spend their money wisely too, with an American Express survey in March discovering that 72% of global respondents were passionate about travelling to destinations to help boost tourism revenue and the local economy.

With all this in mind, Karen Simmonds, founder of London agency Travel Matters, believes a dramatic change is coming. “I anticipate everyone’s attitudes will have

changed when bookings start again. The idea of taking the train won’t be an anathema anymore, and I don’t think it will be as hard to convince people about [sustainable travel] as it has been in the past. They may not want to stand in an airport for hours, and with the shift to working from home, people could travel for longer and work while away, if needed,” she explains.

Responsible travel has been a cornerstone of the agency’s ethos since it launched its Make Travel Matter campaign in 2009. Last year the WTM World Responsible Tourism Awards commended the business for its fundraising, as it supports a wealth of charities and projects. Following each booking, clients hear how the agency has made a donation to the Travel Foundation and planted a tree via Trees for Cities.

During the pandemic Simmonds published Travel Matters’ sustainability vision for the next 10 years, which outlines its current work

and goals. Customers can download a copy online, and Simmonds says: “We wanted to amplify this message and bring people on a journey with us.”

## Team effort

For fellow agents building their sustainable travel policy, Simmonds recommends networking with travel companies who share the same principles. In 2020, she built new relationships through LinkedIn and The Future Of Tourism Coalition.

Collaboration is also highly praised by Henry Comyn, co-founder of agent and operator Joro Experiences, who says the start of a sustainability journey can be “daunting” for small companies.

To help share best practices, last year he co-founded The Conscious Travel Foundation, which brings like-minded businesses together, has created a mentoring programme and raises money for charities.

Earlier this year Joro Experiences was also certified as a B Corp, following an audit of its socially and environmentally responsible work. Comyn says working alongside the UK’s five other travel B Corps has proved invaluable: “B Corp is an amazing community, and there’s a huge amount of really positive collaboration.”

Joro Experiences is carbon neutral and clients receive an impact report after their trip. It outlines the carbon spent, how it was offset and how the suppliers or hotels involved support local projects.

Comyn stresses however that carbon “is just a piece of the puzzle,” and believes every client’s trip should also make a positive impact on the local community.



## 5 ways to become a greener travel agent

### HONEST APPROACH

Joro Experiences’ approach to sustainable travel is explained on its website and to customers. Henry Comyn explains: “If you publicly have a statement with facts about what you are committing to doing, and acknowledge that it is a tricky subject but that we are all finding our way and learning, then that resonates well with clients.”

### GUIDING CLIENTS

To help customers choose sustainable travel options, the Swords Travel team plan to share a list of the top 10 things clients can do in each destination to help support the local community. A sustainable travel logo will also appear alongside relevant holidays on Swords Travel’s website.



### LEARNING FROM OTHERS

Travel Matters’ Karen Simmonds recommends The Travel Foundation’s online training and resources hub. Iain Weir praises the resources produced by The World Tourism Organization and Sustainable Travel International, which helped frame Swords’ Pledge. Hattie Seal suggests reading other business’ plans on the Tourism Declares website.



"It's our job as the advisor and gatekeeper to put the right choices in front of clients," he says. "Small tweaks can ensure it's a great experience for the client, and that they leave a positive legacy as a traveller, rather than just taking from a country."

### Fresh start

Hattie Seal is co-founder of new online agency and operator Travelling Whale, which made its debut last year with an ethos of being completely focused on helping customers make responsible changes to their travel habits; its strapline is "small ripples make big waves – travel as a force for good".

"We suggest options that clients may not otherwise think about. So if someone typically

flies to France, we show them how accessible it is to go by train, and how it often takes a similar amount of time when you factor in hours spent at the airport," Seal explains.

All suppliers are asked to complete Travelling Whale's sustainability form, which asks detailed questions about their ethos, core values, responsible travel policy and their economic, environmental and social responsibilities. "We are looking to work with companies that go above and beyond," she adds.

Like Joro Experiences and Travel Matters, Travelling Whale is a signatory of Tourism Declares. The body launched in January 2020 and asks organisations to declare a climate

emergency, publish a Climate Emergency Plan and advocate for change.

The Travelling Whale team's plan involves clearly labelling the carbon emissions of each trip and comparing each one with alternatives.

When one of Swords Travel's luxury travel associates Ian Weir recently set out to create the agency's sustainable travel policy, it had to meet two key requirements. He explains: "We wanted it to be fairly easy to put in place quickly. It also had to be something that would be easy to communicate to clients."

The result was the Swords Travel Sustainability Pledge, which the agency launched on Earth Day in April. As part of the pledge, clients are told about sustainable travel options, such as choosing electric hire cars and smaller, local hotels.

Carbon is a key focus, and the agency now measures the carbon its own activities produce, reducing and offsetting to become carbon neutral. "All of this work has to start in-house," Weir advises.

The agency will also help clients with their carbon footprint, calculating the amount their trip produces, and suggesting offsetting projects. Separately, the agency will donate £5 for every booking to its own offsetting fund, choosing a project to support each year.

While the process was more complex and lengthy than Weir anticipated, he says he relished the challenge. He believes education is key to helping consumers make better travel choices, explaining: "In the eight years I've been in travel I've only had a couple of clients ask about [sustainable travel]. It's not been at the forefront of people's minds, but I think that is changing. It's important to make your sustainable travel policy visible, promote it and really talk to clients about it."

### Pictured

1. Suggest train travel to clients as an alternative and more sustainable option to access destinations
2. Travelling Whale's ethos is "small ripples make big waves"

### HOTEL INSPIRATION

Talk to clients about the impressive green credentials of the luxury hotels you work with or are suggesting for them. Seal suggests The Scarlet, a luxury eco-hotel in Cornwall, which has a sustainability policy detailing 111 ways it is sustainable. Comyn praises Peru's Hotel Sol y Luna, which runs a charitable foundation supporting local communities (right).



### CALCULATING CARBON

Agents agree carbon offsetting can be incredibly complex. To start measuring, reducing and offsetting the carbon footprint of a trip or your business, Comyn suggests using a tool such as Choose. Swords Travel adheres to the Oxford Principles of Carbon Offsetting and often funds community development projects through ClimateCare.