

Fresh perspective

Sustainability is more than just a buzzword, with clients increasingly concerned about the health of our planet. **Charlotte Flach** takes a look at bookable options for agents

As COP26 came and went, and G20 reiterated its commitment to reversing climate change, the world turned its gaze towards the travel industry. With a global goal of halving emissions by 2030 and achieving net-zero by 2050, the travel and tourism sector is rallying around ways to operate in a more sustainable way.

"The industry has started to shift from looking at minimising the impact that travel can have on the planet and its people to proactively looking at how it can have a positive impact instead, covering both environmental and social challenges," says Brian Young, Managing Director at G Adventures.

Alongside industry action, consumer behaviour is evolving too. "G20 and COP26 have shone an even brighter light on our plight," says Hannah Methven, Sustainability Specialist at Explore.

"This has made our customers more discerning about the type of holidays they are taking. This is a good thing."

Agent action

Sustainable travel encompasses many different subcategories, including ethical, green, eco and responsible tourism, focussing on both safeguarding the environment and indigenous communities. So why should agents be promoting these options?

"That's a bit like asking why should dentists tell us how and why to clean our teeth!," says Karen Simmonds, Founder of Travel Matters and the Make Travel Matter campaign. "If we don't get into the habit of talking about sustainability in travel, our natural resources and beautiful world will be depleted and no longer be fit for purpose."

She continues: "It's important to engage with travellers as well as our suppliers. We are all stewards of the planet and have our role to play, but travel agents play a pivotal role in helping customers decide how they travel, so increasing their knowledge of sustainable options and understanding how and what to sell is vital."

Trending trips

According to the recent ABTA Travel in 2022 report, sustainable accommodation has now become mainstream, and 'nature positive' holidays, which actively benefit local ecosystems and leave the lightest carbon footprint possible, are increasing in popularity.

Recent research carried out by G Adventures has also shown that 68% said that ensuring their money was benefitting local people was important to them and 46% said protecting wildlife while they travelled was high on their list.

The pandemic in particular has shifted client behaviour. "Covid has



CONSERVATION IS A PRIORITY IN COSTA RICA



► minimised the carbon footprint, rather than clients seeking to minimise their carbon footprint," says Simmonds. "The 'Staycation' revolution swarmed Britain and it made people question how they wanted to travel going forward."

Walking holidays have increased in popularity, as have trips by rail and avoiding unnecessary flights.

"We've had customers book land-only packages with us and ask us to recommend how they can offset their own flights," says Methven.

Operator support

Many operators are trying to limit the effects of over-tourism and pollution through initiatives such as offering smaller group sizes or cutting down on harmful methods of travel within a destination. "Our itineraries can involve trains, public buses, metros and rickshaws, plus we minimise unnecessary domestic flights," adds Methven.

Smaller group sizes enable access to places bigger parties can't go, as well as spots that are lesser-known or favourites with locals. And encouraging walking holidays cuts emissions, with an added physical and mental health boost.

Some are taking things a step further. Travel Matters' campaign 'Make Travel Matter', which was originally established to encourage people to view travel as a privilege and inspire them to make more conscious decisions, aims to protect the environment and the communities travellers encounter.

"All we ask is for future travellers to band together and follow criteria encompassing the durability of local economic growth and stability and the ethical and social equitability for local communities in a destination," explains Simmonds. "After all, we are all global citizens and want to encourage best practice for the generations to come."

Far-reaching benefits

Working with local communities can have a positive effect on both people and the planet. "Educating local communities and offering them an alternative source of income is an important part of tackling negative environmental and wildlife practices," explains Young.

"A number of the communities we work with now offer positive environmental projects such as reef conservation and reforestation." There is also a pay-off for

human beings when money is pumped into local economies and jobs are created.

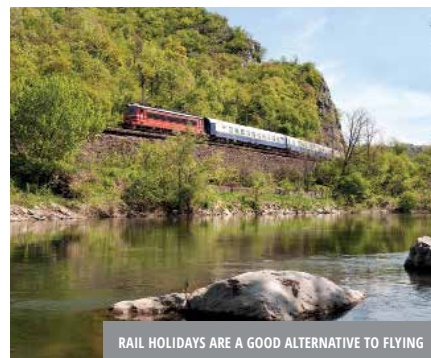
Explaining the benefits of sustainable travel for everyone involved can also help. "Customers have a more varied experience when they stay in locally-owned accommodation, travel with locals and eat in local restaurants," says Methven. "All of these experiences add to the authenticity of a customer's trip, and will create lasting memories."

Where to book it

 **G ADVENTURES - 020 7313 6938**

A seven-day Hiking Northern Greece trip includes a two-day hike to a mountain refuge and dining in local tavernas.

Priced from £934pp. [gadventures.com](https://www.gadventures.com)





A FOCUS ON BEING GREEN

Cruise: A-ROSA River Cruises' new E-Motion ship A-ROSA SENA, which will make a splash in May 2022, will feature new onboard technology to reduce the line's environmental footprint. The ship combines a diesel engine and a separate electric motor, which is powered by batteries, meaning it can switch to battery power when approaching a port, enabling it to arrive silently and emission-free, in addition to other emission-reducing features. A seven-night Rhine Discovery – Amsterdam, Floriade Expo 2022 and

Antwerp cruise departs June 11 2022 and September 17 2022 is priced from £2,499pp based on two sharing. newmarketholidays.co.uk

Hotel: From encouraging biodiversity to sustainable practices, The Khaolak Merlin Hotel in Thailand has a green focus with its multifaceted eco-friendly approaches. Organically treated water is reused to nourish the gardens and fill the resort's streams and the hotel is partnered with multiple organisations to preserve the trees and wildlife on its grounds. It also supports the local community, providing jobs; buying from local suppliers; organising beach and temple clean-ups, and making regular charitable donations. A seven night stay is priced from £799pp departing September 12 2022, staying in a Superior room, including flights and private return transfers. goldmedal.co.uk

Destination: Churchill, Manitoba, in the heart of Canada,

is considered a leading destination for ecotourism and sustainable initiatives. Rolling prairies and forests join 100,000 lakes stretching from Winnipeg in the south to Churchill in the north. Canadian Affair is offering a five night holiday to Manitoba for £5,213pp based on two adults sharing, with a departure date of July 29, 2022. Includes beluga whale Zodiac tour on the Churchill River, full-day adventure on the new zero emissions Electric Vehicle Tundra Buggy in the Churchill Wildlife Management Area, and a boat tour of the Churchill River and more. canadianaffair.com



A TUNDRA BUGGY IN MANITOBA DOESN'T DISTURB WILDLIFE



KHAOLAK MERLIN RESORT

Where the Rainforest Meets the Sea

Immerse yourself in a magical jungle at our eco resort. Khaolak Merlin Resort is set on the preserved tropical forest of Southern Thailand where you can discover ancient trees, 4 lagoon-like swimming pools, with direct access to 190 metres of Khao Lak Beach. We are committed to take care of the environment where we received Travelife Gold for our dedication to sustainability.

We also have a partnership with Love Wildlife Foundation to protect the vulnerable slow loris population that live on the ancient trees within the resort.



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