

escapism

THE UK'S BIGGEST TRAVEL MAGAZINE

SUSTAINABILITY



BETTER BREAKS

From eco hotels to 'voluntourism', **Lydia Winter** rounds up trips that help make a difference. Plus, industry experts on how they're approaching sustainable travel

Aside from the obvious benefits of a holiday, there's another, more profound reason why we love travel: we believe it's the best way of learning about our planet, from its incredible landscapes to its people and cultures – and that's the first step to understanding why we should protect it.

With that in mind, we've rounded up a few of our favourite holiday ideas that prioritise sustainability and responsibility, from getting hands-on monitoring wildlife in a South African game reserve to kicking back and relaxing, knowing your money is going towards helping a good cause.

But this time we've done things a little bit differently: we've also spoken to key figures in the industry to find out what sustainability means to them, and what the future of better travel might look like. So read on, and get inspired...

Sustainable city breaks

1 Hotel Central Park

SUSTAINABILITY CREDENTIALS: Recycling is anything but boring at this swish new hotel that sits cheek-by-jowl with Central Park, New York, where the design team have used their skills to make everything from clothes hangers to room keys out of reclaimed materials. Feeling peckish? There's a lobby farm stand where you can grab just-picked seasonal fruit and veg from regional farms.

WHAT ELSE: The bathrooms have built-in timers that'll gently remind you that saving a few minutes of shower time can make a big difference, while the rooms were designed to maximise natural light and therefore reduce electricity usage.

HOW: Nightly rates start at \$330 per person per night, based on two sharing. [1hotels.com](#); Norwegian flies from London Gatwick to New York from \$259 return. [norwegian.com](#)

The Zetter Hotel, London

SUSTAINABILITY CREDENTIALS: Given The Zetter's edgy, contemporary aesthetic, you might be surprised to learn that being eco-friendly is at the core of what it does. The hotel was built with sustainability in mind from top to bottom – quite literally, as it sits above its own 1,500ft borehole that provides water for flushing the loos and cooling the fridges and bedrooms, as well as using energy-saving technology and eco-friendly materials.

WHAT ELSE: Even the luxurious toiletries were chosen for their environmentally friendly packaging and formulas. Oh, and they'll make you smell pretty dang good, too.

HOW: Rooms from \$200 per night. [thezetter.com](#)

Sustainability for... an airline group

Chris Goater, corporate communications, IATA

The International Air Transport Association represents, leads and serves the airline industry. Its 275 member airlines account for 83% of the world's total air traffic.

What does sustainability mean to airlines?

Aside from our desire to see a sustainable planet, it literally means our license to grow. In order to get permission to build the new infrastructure and the new air routes required to service the overwhelming increase in demand, we have to show that we are a sustainable business.

That's the most difficult thing as an industry: if you're trying to encourage carbon-neutral growth but that growth is so fast it's almost impossible to predict, how do you go about achieving that goal?

Ultimately, we don't want to deny people the opportunity to fly. We won't be able help people explore, trade and visit family and friends if politicians say we're unsustainable and then whack a huge tax on travel that will raise flight prices.

What initiatives do airlines have in place to become more sustainable?

Our members have two key targets that we're working towards: the first is our goal for carbon-neutral growth by 2020, which will largely come from carbon offsetting. The second is to cut CO2 emissions by 50% by 2050 compared to 2005. We're retrofitting old aircraft to make them more efficient, and building new models that cut fuel-burn by 20-30% in comparison to their predecessors; we're championing the use of biofuel that's made out of things like algae or plants grown on waste ground; and we're working to open up more airspace.

What's the future of sustainable air travel?

Everyone's talking about hydrogen- and solar-powered planes. Look at the progress we made in the 50 years between the planes of the First World War and the modern jet plane. NASA and others have already experimented with much larger **electric planes**, so

we're optimistic that technological solutions will be found beyond 2050 to develop more efficient, clean aircraft. iata.org

NASA has been developing piloted X-planes that will be powered by only batteries, making them more efficient, eliminating carbon emissions and reducing noise.



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TRUE BLUE: [clockwise from here] Lefay's incredible views; a meal at Lefay; the dining room; a geodesic dome at Whitepod



Sustainable short-haul getaways

Lefay, Italy

SUSTAINABILITY CREDENTIALS: Lake Garda's Lefay has a strict sustainability manifesto that ranges from minimising waste to social responsibility, and is run by the first Italian hospitality company to sign an agreement with the Ministry of the Environment for projects aiming to neutralise CO2 emissions.

WHAT ELSE: Italy is synonymous with seriously good grub and the LeFay resort doesn't buck that trend, serving up sunny Mediterranean produce like local extra virgin olive oil and the citrus fruit that grows around the lake.

HOW: Nightly rates start from around £260, including breakfast. lefoyresorts.com; easyJet flies from London Gatwick to Verona from £56 return. easyjet.com

Whitepod, Switzerland

SUSTAINABILITY CREDENTIALS: Get your Heidi on at this alpine escape, where you'll sleep in hillside geodesic domes. Be warned: transport onsite is limited to reduce emissions, so you'll be doing lots of walking.

WHAT ELSE: Go dog-karting or dog-scooting; play tennis; hike through 25km of trails... or rent an electric mountain bike to get up those hills. That's what we'd do.

HOW: Nightly rates start at around £230, based on two sharing. whitepod.com; easyJet flies from London Gatwick to Geneva from £52 return. easyjet.com

Landgut Stober, Germany

SUSTAINABILITY CREDENTIALS: You know you're onto a good 'un when your mattress is stuffed with caoutchouc (aka natural rubber), seaweed, and coconut. Don't be put off: Landgut Stober's mattresses are among the comfiest you'll find – not to mention being 90% organic. Elsewhere, the hotel uses a rainwater collection system, on-site solar panels, and a highly efficient heating system that runs on wood.

WHAT ELSE: Occupying a revamped manor house on a former estate 20km from Berlin, the hotel sits by a picturesque lake. **HOW:** Nightly rates start from around £116. landgut-stober.de; BA flies from London Heathrow to Berlin from £88 return. ba.com

Photograph by Michelangelo Princiotta (Lefay food); Micha Riedelsteiner (Whitepod)



Sustainability for... a tour operator

Michael Edwards, MD, Intrepid Travel
Intrepid Travel offers sustainable and authentic small-group tours and holidays in more than 100 countries around the world.

What are you doing to be more sustainable?

We've been **carbon offsetting** our trips for the last seven years, making us one of the largest carbon-neutral travel companies in the world, and we always focus on supporting local businesses. We set up The Intrepid Foundation, matching travellers' donations dollar for dollar and, over the past 14 years, the foundation has

Carbon offsetting involves compensating for carbon emissions by reducing carbon dioxide elsewhere, enabling companies to reduce their carbon footprints.

donated AU\$5million to global initiatives. And we're not afraid to take a stand; in 2010 we funded research by World Animal Protection into animal entertainment, which led to our decision to end elephant riding on all our trips – more than 100 other travel companies followed our example.

What's the future for sustainable travel?

People want to have a unique and authentic experience. This means doing local things with local people, whether it's cooking with village women in Macedonia, learning to weave in Peru or chanting with monks in Varanasi. This kind of traveller also wants their trip to benefit the local economy and have as little social and environmental impact as possible. In the future, more and more travellers will recognise 'greenwashing' when they see it and vote with their wallets. intrepidtravel.com



Sustainability for... a game reserve
Les Carlise, group conservation manager,
andBeyond

andBeyond is a group of South African luxury lodges and camps that has received multiple awards for its commitment to sustainability.

What are the biggest challenges when it comes to running an ethical game reserve?

Each reserve will face different problems in its local area, but one widespread issue at the moment is the shift in emphasis from state parks to more provincial and private sector populations that simply don't have the protection resources that have been applied to National Parks. This means the wildlife that resides in these local communities, where the majority of the population lives below the breadline, will continue to be exploited.

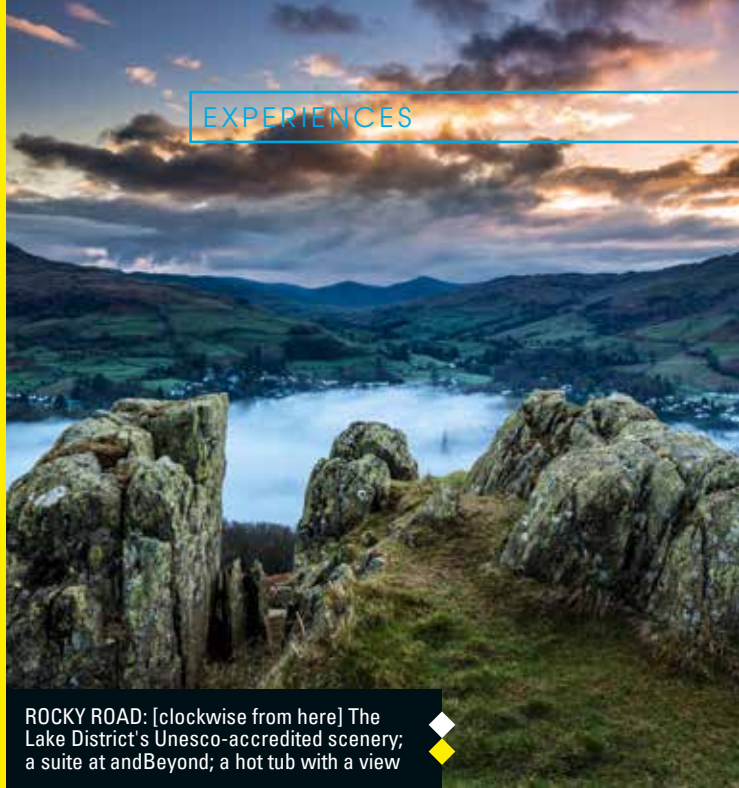
Have things improved in recent years?

Improvement has been slow, but park managers are increasingly realising that having a supportive local community can act as a first line of defence against the increasing levels of poaching.

That's why we believe that the only real, long-term solution to the problem is to work in partnership with local communities. This forms the basis of our '3Cs' conservation model – care of the land, care of the people and care of the wildlife – that's at the heart of everything we do.

Do you think tourism is helping or hindering conservation?

If it is planned and controlled, then it can be the foundation of sustainable conservation. At andBeyond we are heavily reliant on our '3Cs' model, and without the income we get from tourism, it wouldn't be possible to extend and sustain our green frontiers. However, when tourism happens without these things in mind, it can certainly have hugely negative impacts for both the wildlife and the local community. andbeyond.com



EXPERIENCES

ROCKY ROAD: [clockwise from here] The Lake District's Unesco-accredited scenery; a suite at andBeyond; a hot tub with a view

Sustainability for... a tourist board
Jim Walker, MD, Cumbria Tourism. One of the UK's most-visited counties, Cumbria welcomed 45 million visitors last year.

What challenges do you face?

In July, the **Lake District** was awarded Unesco World Heritage Site status for its inspiring landscapes and we recognise that this will be a draw – especially for international visitors. In 2016, more than 45 million people came to Cumbria, contributing more than £2.72 billion to the local economy and supporting around 63,000 jobs. Our main challenge is working to maintain this income while impacting minimally on the beautiful land that serves as such an attraction.

The Lake District is home to incredible scenery that attracts visitors from all over the world. Its new Unesco status means it's recognised as place of physical and cultural significance.

What sustainability measures do you have?

In recent years, we've worked with local authorities and transport providers to deliver sustainable tourism schemes, encouraging visitors to use public transport or cleaner cars to reduce emissions and traffic on the roads around some of Cumbria's most popular areas.

And it's working: Cumbria's annual visitor survey showed an impressive shift in the use of transport to get around. In 2015, 58% of visitors said the car (or other private vehicle) was their main mode of transport, down significantly from 73% in 2012, and 77% in 2009, while walking has increased from 15% to 31%. visitcumbria.com

Photograph by Charlie Dalley (Les Carlisle); John Finney Photography/Getty (Cumbria);



Volunteering vacations

Responsible Travel's Thailand trip

SUSTAINABILITY CREDENTIALS: You'll visit the sustainable, ethical **Elephant Nature Park**, where you'll spend the day with rescued elephants in their natural habitat, and even join the gentle giants for bath time.

WHAT ELSE: Responsible Travel is a tour operator dedicated to being, er, responsible, working with local people and treating them with respect and fairness, reducing its CO2 impact, and supporting local community programs and development.

HOW: Nine-day tours of northern Thailand start from £895. Thai Airways flies from London Heathrow to Bangkok from £575 return. responsibletravel.com; thaiairways.com

LEO Africa, South Africa

SUSTAINABILITY CREDENTIALS: You'll help park wardens and ecologists in the Marakele National Park to monitor wildlife and take on vital tasks like road repair.

Chiang Mai's Elephant Nature Park is a rescue and rehabilitation centre that provides a natural environment for the animals. You can visit or sign up as a volunteer.

WHAT ELSE: It's not all work – there'll be forays to the Sun City adventure park and camping trips out in the bush.

HOW: From about £735 for a two-week-long stay, including food, accommodation and transfers from Johannesburg Tambo Airport. leoafrika.org; South African Airways flies from London to Johannesburg from £620 return. flysaa.com



DRINKING IT ALL IN: [from top] Locals working in the fields in Thailand; an elephant heads to a watering hole in South Africa



EXPERIENCES

Sustainability for... a resort group

Karl Thompson, MD, Unique Vacations UK

Unique Vacations UK is the market representative of Sandals and Beaches, with hotels and resorts located all over the world.

What are the challenges of running a sustainable, responsible hotel business?

It can be difficult, especially when you're looking after a company that has resorts in different countries around the world, to maintain a consistent environmental responsibility programme when the countries involved have differing laws and customs – and consistency is key to things like accreditation.

At Sandals, we take great care to ensure that all of our resorts are looking after their guests, but also looking after the environment. Hoteliers also need to ensure that their senior staff understand the importance of running a responsible, sustainable business and make it a priority, even if that means sourcing new suppliers or changing how they have done things in the past.

What sustainability measures do you employ?

We monitor the levels and usage of energy, water and waste at all the properties and regularly analyse the results to see how we can improve further – and our efforts have seen nine of our resorts achieve platinum status within the EarthCheck benchmarking and certification programme, which covers everything from recycling to conservation and ecological responsiveness.

Elsewhere, we have The Sandals Foundation, which has donated more than \$28m to a variety of different projects in our local Caribbean communities, including turtle hatching and conservation, coral reef restoration, managing population of lionfish in the Caribbean sea, holding regular beach cleanups and Reading Road Trips where our guests can go into nearby schools to help educate local children.

What's the future of sustainable resorts?

Guests themselves wanting to get involved with local projects. We have a high number of repeat visitors at our resorts and people often get attached to the places that they visit and ultimately want to give something back. A lot of people still want to have a luxurious, relaxing holiday but they also want to give back to the local community. sandals.co.uk; beachesresorts.co.uk

Photograph by Gianni Bianchini (locals); Julie Lomax (Karl Thompson); Picasa (South Africa)

Extravagant ethical escapes

Mashpi Lodge, Ecuador

SUSTAINABILITY CREDENTIALS: Fancy discovering a new species of tree frog in Ecuador's cloudforest? Now you can, sort of, at Mashpi Lodge, which is both a luxury resort and a hub for scientific research and conservation. There you can help the resident biologists with their investigations before relaxing upstairs on the open-air terrace, drinking in the view of the treetops – and excellent Argentinian wines.

WHAT ELSE: Although you'll be surrounded by lush, verdant vegetation, the lodge is actually located within the Metropolitan district of Quito, Ecuador's capital. Yep, really – so it's easy to get to and you'll be within reach of all the major sights. Winner.

HOW: Nightly rates start at \$681USD per person, including meals, guides and transfers from Quito airport. mashpilodge.com; Iberia fly from London to Quito via Madrid from £735 return. iberia.com

Soneva Fushi, Maldives

SUSTAINABILITY CREDENTIALS: The Maldives hasn't always had the best rep, but more and more of its stunning hotels are finally starting to sit up and take notice. Enter Soneva Fushi, located within the **Baa Atoll Unesco Biosphere Reserve**.

The luxurious hotel group is committed to reinvesting in its surroundings, helping to build local schools, science labs and playgrounds.

WHAT ELSE: Amble through dense tropical foliage to Soneva Fushi's observatory, where you can spend hours stargazing through the state-of-the-art telescope.

HOW: Nightly rates at Soneva Fushi start at about \$805, based on two sharing a Crusoe Villa. soneva.com; British Airways flies from London Gatwick to Malé International Airport from \$750 return. ba.com

Located in the central-western part of the Maldives, the Baa Atoll Biosphere Reserve is home to one of the largest and most significant groups of coral reefs in the Indian Ocean.



PEOPLE POWER: (clockwise from here) the Good Life Experience in Flintshire; Soneva Fushi is investing in education on the atoll



Sustainability for... a music festival

Cerys Matthews, co-founder, The Good Life Experience festival

The Good Life Experience is a Flintshire-based festival focusing on music, food, books, craft and the great outdoors.

What are the challenges of running a sustainable festival?

There's a balance to be made: we want to be green and plastic-free, but we also want to be sure all our guests have an unforgettable weekend. For example, plastic bottles are handy and light, so we have to ensure we have easy, reusable, cost-friendly alternatives like enamel mugs. Things like this impact our overall festival budget, but, for us as a festival, the bigger picture and ultimate cost to the planet will always take priority.

What sustainability measures does The Good Life Experience have in place?

Being green is at the heart of everything The Good Life Experience does, from the people on the lineup, to recycling and solar-powered lighting in the campsite. This year we're upping our game and taking big steps towards going plastic-free. Our own food outlets will not use plastic and we're encouraging other vendors to do the same. We will have enamel water beakers available to buy or borrow with a deposit for the weekend. We'll also be using compostable pint glasses in our bars. As a festival we're not perfect, but we're making a huge effort to achieve our sustainability goals. thegoodlifeexperience.co.uk

