

Anna Om/Shutterstock

## Going on holiday? Here's how to make sure your trip is sustainable

Published: July 18, 2025 2.35pm BST

### Sayed Elhoushy

Senior Lecturer in Marketing, Queen Mary University of London

### Xavier Font

Professor of Sustainability Marketing, University of Surrey

### DOI

---

<https://doi.org/10.64628/AB.d9c65kjh>

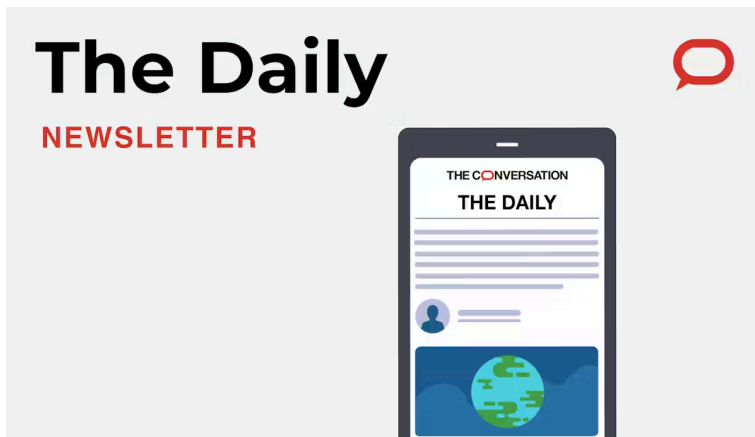
<https://theconversation.com/going-on-holiday-heres-how-to-make-sure-your-trip-is-sustainable-255037>

With the rise of sustainable tourism (travelling in a way that minimises harm to the environment, and benefits local communities), words such as “sustainable”, “eco” and “green” appear on countless holiday brochures. From five-star hotels promoting “eco luxury” to airlines pledging to reduce carbon emissions and destinations making various green claims, sustainability is increasingly being used as a marketing tool.

But with so many green claims floating around, it's hard to know who is really providing sustainable travel and who is just greenwashing. A recent report shows that 53% of green claims are vague, misleading, or unfounded – and half of all green labels offer weak or non-existent verification.

So, how can travellers distinguish genuine sustainability from greenwash that exaggerates environmental claims to attract eco-conscious travellers?

---



**Get your news from actual experts, straight to your inbox.** [Sign up to our daily newsletter](#) to receive all The Conversation UK's latest coverage of news and research, from politics and business to the arts and sciences.

---

Sustainability certification is a voluntary, third-party assessment that verifies a product, service, or organisation meets certain environmental, social, or ethical standards. These certifications provide a structure to manage, improve and communicate sustainability performance.

More than 100 sustainable certifications promise that they have vetted tourism businesses so you can have a satisfying and guilt-free holiday.

Yet, not all certifications are made equal, as our recent [research](#) shows. Most certification schemes audit actions taken, rather than assessing how effective these are.

They assure you that the hotel you are staying in has an environmental policy or that it is progressively reducing some of its negative effects on the environment, but not that their energy or water consumption is well below that of its competitors, for example.



Choosing a sustainable holiday involves more than just travel to your destination.  
PhotoSunnyDays/Shutterstock

One major challenge is that consumers are not using these labels to inform their buying decisions. Next time you travel, select businesses certified by an organisation with a proven track record of verification and transparency. There are several things a strong certification should do:

First, it should be third-party verified. This ensures that the green claims are independently checked.

Second, it needs specific and clear criteria. Beware of vague sustainability claims, such as “eco-friendly”. Look for certifications that require transparent reporting on performance for specific environmental actions, such as waste management, or responsible sourcing.

Third, it should go beyond eco-savings. Reducing energy and water consumption saves the hotel money. They should not get a prize for that. Seek evidence of the certification promoting best practice in complex issues like biodiversity conservation and dignity in the workplace.

Examples of sustainable tourism certifications to keep an eye on include [Green Key](#) (the largest label in Europe); [B Corp](#) (which measures a company’s entire social and environmental impact); [The Long Run](#) (a promoter of nature conservation); and [Fair Trade Tourism](#) (a promoter of fair working conditions). These certifications require businesses to undergo regular audits to maintain them.

In case you are thinking it’s not your responsibility to find out who is any good – you are right. The [EU Green Claims Directive](#) (due to be implemented by 2026) is a new legislation that requires companies to prove their environmental claims and labels, and ensure they are credible and trustworthy. This directive recognises the greenwash problem and will require certification to be based on assessment of actual performance – in tourism, and every other sector of the economy. The directive applies to any business anywhere in the world that sells to consumers from the EU. Expect fewer, but more respected and recognisable labels, that reduce consumer confusion.



Buying locally produced souvenirs supports artisans. [studiolaska / Shutterstock.com](#)

## **Beyond eco-labels**

Certification is only part of the picture. Your next holiday can make a greater contribution to local communities while minimising its harm to the environment. Take the time to consider how your trip can be part of a larger, positive contribution. Here are more ways to ensure that your holiday supports local communities and the environment:

Make sure you travel shorter and stay longer. [Research shows](#) that transport is a major part of the carbon footprint of your trip. Fly less (if at all). Choose flights with lower carbon footprints – various booking sites now tell customers the carbon footprint for each flight at the time of purchase. And stay longer so you spend more locally, for that same flight.

---

***Read more: [Five ways to make aviation more sustainable right now](#)***

---

Choose tour operators that prioritise locally owned and small suppliers. Buy souvenirs that are made locally, and you can only find in that country. Travel slow – soak in where you are. Hike, cycle, use local transport. You will see more of the real place you are in.

Choose buses and trains over private cars. Rent electric vehicles and select accommodation that provides charging facilities. And enjoy local and seasonal rather than imported food. Eat everything in your plate, rather than create food waste.



---

***Don't have time to read about climate change as much as you'd like?***

*Get a weekly roundup in your inbox instead. Every Wednesday, The Conversation's environment editor writes Imagine, a short email that goes a little deeper into just one climate issue. Join the 45,000+ readers who've subscribed so far.*

---