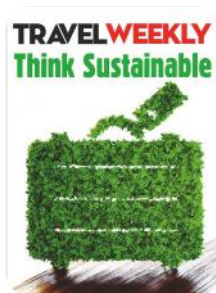


# TAKE



## Low-impact travel doesn't have to cost the Earth, finds **Alice Barnes-Brown**

Whether it's a jaunt in the Mediterranean, a cool city break or a trek through lush rainforest, there are sustainable alternatives to most trips. Clients keen to reduce their carbon footprint can travel with an extra spring in their step knowing they're supporting local businesses, cutting down on waste and slashing emissions.

However, many travellers are concerned about higher costs with sustainable getaways – the 2023 Booking.com Sustainable Travel Report revealed that almost 50% of respondents believed sustainable travel options were “too expensive”. However, an eco-conscious holiday can be brought within all budgets.

While destinations such as Scandinavia are often praised for their sustainability credentials – with abundant natural beauty and forward-thinking environmental policies – there are also well-priced (and equally gorgeous) alternatives to be found closer to home. In fact, eco-conscious clients may not even need to leave UK shores.

Although flying may be the only practical way to reach warmer climes from the UK, carbon offsetting as well as supporting tours that make a point of ensuring profits are shared fairly with local communities can help reduce the impact of tourism while emphasising all the positives. Perhaps it really is that easy being green.



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## SPAIN

With up to 15 million visits from the UK every year, Spain is Britain's favourite getaway, and the mountainous Mediterranean country is easy to see sustainably. An extensive national high-speed rail network means you can get almost anywhere in the country in less than three hours on public transport. And for a true no-fly trip, Barcelona can be reached in as little as 14 hours by train.

## MOROCCO

Just across the Strait of Gibraltar is Morocco, which has a similarly striking landscape and just as vibrant a food scene as Spain – but much lower living costs. Intrepid is launching four new tours in Morocco this year, including a Mount Toubkal Long Weekend – a small-group tour that spends five days in Marrakech and trekking up the country's highest mountain.

In the space of a morning, the group ascends from arid valleys to snowy peaks with the help of local guides. At the top, it's possible to see the Atlantic on one side and the Sahara on the other. Down in the village, the trip stays in a family gite, where hearty homecooked tagine is on the menu.

Besides giving a much needed boost to places impacted by the December 2023 earthquake, the tour can be made even more sustainable thanks to a recent partnership with flight-free operator Byway, which allows clients to reach the start point, Marrakech, by train and ferry via Spain.

**BOOK IT:** Intrepid's Mount Toubkal Long Weekend leads in from £395 per person, including ground transportation, selected meals and local guides. Flights are extra. [intrepidtravel.com](https://www.intrepidtravel.com)

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## GALAPAGOS ISLANDS

The original wildlife destination – just ask Charles Darwin – Ecuador’s Galápagos Islands are 97% national park and a bucket-list favourite for sustainably minded travellers. The islands are a hotspot for expedition cruises, but boat trips are strictly regulated so as not to overwhelm the population (both human and animal). Excursions visit sanctuaries and conservation projects, and many operators encourage tourists to patronise local businesses.

## THE AMAZON

The largest rainforest on Earth is a precious resource, and tours that kayak along its winding rivers, trek through its dense vegetation and connect with Indigenous communities can help to preserve this awe-inspiring natural environment.

G Adventures has a community-focused non-profit, Planeterra, which features a week-long adventure in Ecuador that starts and ends in the vibrant capital, Quito. The small group then travels by public bus into the Amazon, where they stay in comfortable wooden huts owned by a Quechua family and get to know what life is like in the region.

Activities include canoe tours to animal rescue centres, medicinal herb walks in the rainforest and a cacao tasting. Indigenous cultures are paid the utmost respect, with travellers encouraged to participate in their traditions, from blowgun contests to biking with a Quechua guide.

**BOOK IT:** The seven-day G Adventures Local Living Ecuador – Amazon Jungle trip starts from £619 per person. Includes breakfast and most lunches and dinners, experiences listed on the itinerary and local transport, but excludes flights. [gadventures.com](http://gadventures.com)

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## NORWAY

With around 1,200 spectacular fjords cutting into the Nordic nation’s coastline, water is omnipresent in Norway. Cruises are a popular way to explore the fjords, but starting from 2026, only ships powered by alternative fuels will be able to enter these green-blue valleys – which will make environmentally friendly travel a no-brainer. In cities such as Oslo and Bergen, fascinating and eclectic museums provide cultural stimulation.

## NORTHERN IRELAND

With a rugged coastline of sheer cliffs, interlocking basalt columns and castles that overlook sandy coves, this UK region packs a big punch. Plus, it’s hot on Scandinavia’s green heels, with capital city Belfast placed 10th in Tripadvisor’s most sustainable destinations in the world for 2024 – Oslo is eighth.

Besides being an affordable place to visit, getting here doesn’t require flying. Shearings sells a coach trip that takes in the best of Belfast and Northern Ireland; clients are picked up from their local coach station, before crossing the Irish Sea on a short two-hour ferry from Cairnryan.

Guests explore Belfast using the greenest transport of all – walking. A highlight is Titanic Belfast, which is both a fascinating museum and an eco-friendly feat of engineering. Coach journeys then wind around the coast road to the Giant’s Causeway, before the last day is spent at leisure in Belfast. **BOOK IT:** Shearings’ four-night Titanic Belfast and Giant’s Causeway leads in from £529 per person, based on two sharing. Includes breakfast and dinner, local pick-up, ferry fare and select excursions. [shearings.com](http://shearings.com)

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