



Lighter footprints

Operators are increasingly adding carbon ratings to their trips. **Clare Vooght** finds out what they mean – and how agents can sell the benefits



Whether it's calculating how much carbon a wish-list Japan tour generates or measuring the impact of a wellness weekend in Wales, a growing number of operators have been busy crunching the numbers to work out carbon labels for trips they sell.

The latest operators to release labels for their trips include Intrepid Travel, flight-free operator Byway

and Responsible Travel – joining Explore, Wilderness Scotland and Pura Aventura in publishing how much carbon packages generate per person in kilograms.

LOWERING FOOTPRINTS

The idea behind carbon labels is to help travellers understand the impact of the trips they're booking, and many operators describe them as being like ➤

PICTURE: Adventure Tours UK

DESTINATIONS

SUSTAINABLE TRAVEL | CARBON LABELS

HOW ARE CARBON LABELS CALCULATED?

There's no industry standard yet for how these numbers are worked out, so operators vary. However, generally speaking, to calculate a carbon label each holiday is broken down into individual aspects, including everything from meals and activities to the tour leader's travel to and from the start and end of the trip.

Transport calculations are based on the type of transport and distance travelled. In order to measure the carbon footprint of the accommodation, some operators are led by averages based on the country or the star rating, while others will also try to adjust the numbers wherever possible to be more specific, based on a particular property's sustainability rating, taking into account aspects such as energy use.

Explore has added a proportion of its head office emissions into the numbers too. Intrepid also takes local office emissions into account, as well as including a 15% 'uplift factor' to account for anything unintentionally missed in calculations.



PICTURE: Shutterstock/Christian Horz



CLOCKWISE FROM LEFT: Walking in Wales in winter with Adventure Tours UK; Byway's Copenhagen city break; Glenfinnan Viaduct, Scotland PICTURE: Shutterstock/fotorath



a nutrition label. "Most people use that calorie comparison: although I want to, I can't eat sticky toffee pudding every day," says Explore's sustainability lead Hanna Methven.

Of course, the intention isn't to stop people having a holiday, she explains. "But it's about saying here's what you've got, and we do need to change our behaviour a bit. Perhaps you do a high-footprint trip one year, and perhaps the next year you do a lower footprint trip."

Carbon labels don't only help clients make decisions about which trips to book. Cat Jones, founder of Byway, says that showing sustainability data to customers helps them make better-informed choices about certain aspects of those trips too.

"For example, there's a very popular journey in Scotland, on the West Highland Line, over the 'Harry Potter' viaduct [Glenfinnan Viaduct]. You can take a beautiful heritage steam train, but you also have a local ScotRail service, which is an electric train and does exactly the same route with exactly the same views. The carbon impact of this is much less and you're supporting local infrastructure," she says.


When it comes to getting there, carbon labels can help clients compare the difference between rail trip and the same trip taken by car or plane. For example,

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Byway's Copenhagen city break – travelling from London to Copenhagen by train – has a carbon label of 156kg CO₂. If a client chose to do the same trip by car the emissions would increase to 488kg CO₂, while flying would mean the carbon footprint was 1,012kg CO₂.

GREATER GOOD

Jones highlights that adding sustainability data is also a way to encourage Byway's accommodation partners to help them improve their sustainability ratings, while Methven says that measuring the carbon impact of each trip is intended to help Explore reduce its overall emissions going forward too. A big part of this, says Methven, is by replacing internal flights on its tours with trains and ferries.

The hope is that the impact could also reach further. Dr Susanne Etti, Intrepid Travel's global environmental 



ABOVE: Carbon labels enable clients to make informed decisions about the carbon footprint of trips PICTURE: Shutterstock/J.M. Image Factory

impact manager, says: “Carbon labels could be even more effective if it became a standard practice across the travel industry. If more companies start measuring and transparently informing the customer about the impact, then I think there’s great power in that.”

HOW TO SELL

Etti is keen to highlight that it doesn’t mean missing out on a great travel experience. “Just because a trip is lower carbon or sustainable, it doesn’t mean that a customer has to lose anything from their holiday. If anything, it’s more authentic and immersive, because we’re visiting local suppliers and staying in local accommodation,” she says.

Methven suggests talking to providers to ask them how they’ve worked out their carbon labels, and exactly what the numbers include. Then they can talk about the positives, and how the numbers can bring different

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aspects of a trip to life – for example if the carbon footprint of a trip to, say, an idyllic vineyard near Bordeaux has been lowered by introducing an e-vehicle.

“It’s about looking for those things that add value for customers, so they can say ‘I’ve picked a trip with a slightly lower environmental impact but I’m still going to have a great time,’” she says. “It’s about finding out which part of the holiday has been enhanced by looking at the carbon footprint.” **TW**

WHAT’S THE FOOTPRINT?: SAMPLE CARBON RATINGS



55kg WELSH WINTER WELLNESS

With yoga, mindfulness walks and hikes in the rolling Welsh landscapes, this January wellness-focused trip is for clients seeking a relaxed escape with a very low footprint. Other activities include winter wreath-making, while added sells include a tree planted for every guest and an optional trail clean, for those interested in regenerative tourism.

Book it: Adventure Tours UK’s four-day Winter Wellness Retreat in mid-Wales costs from £645, based on a January 4, 2024, departure. Price includes accommodation, activities and most meals.

adventuretoursuk.com



138kg SWISS RAIL JOURNEY

This tour starts in London, goes through France to Geneva and on to some of Switzerland’s iconic routes, including the Golden Pass – where the train hugs the hillsides as it climbs away from Lake Geneva’s shores en route to Interlaken, with its icy blue glacial lakes. Chug through glacial valleys and canyons to Chur, then home via Lucerne through Germany.

Book it: Byway’s eight-day Golden Pass and Lake Lucerne trip costs from £1,015 based on a February 11, 2024, departure. Price includes accommodation and trains from London.

byway.travel



1259kg FOODIE MEXICO (337kg tour + 922kg flights)

Clients can taste their way through some of Mexico’s famous food regions on this Intrepid trip, touring Oaxaca’s markets with a local chef, learning to cook seafood in Huatulco and trying tacos in Mexico City. Between meals, they’ll explore the country’s culture, from Mexico City’s Mitla ruins to the Monte Alban pre-Columbian architectural site.

Book it: Intrepid’s nine-day Mexico Real Food Adventure costs from £1,373, based on a departure date of April 20, 2024. Price includes accommodation, transport, experiences and some meals, but not flights.

intrepidtravel.com



1287kg WISH-LIST JAPAN (499kg tour + 788kg flights)

This trip covers both Tokyo’s modern side, such as the Shibuya Crossing, and the city’s traditions, with a fire ceremony at Fudo-do temple. Groups then head to the samurai district of Kanazawa and on, via Hiroshima, to Kyoto’s Zen gardens. To keep carbon footprints low, clients use public transport and there are stays in family-run ryokans.

Book it: Explore’s 14-day Simply Japan trip costs from £3,144, based on a February 18, 2024, departure. Price includes accommodation, some meals, bus, train and ferry tickets, plus a guide, but not flights.

explore.co.uk

Figures are CO2 emissions per person. Source: Tour figures are suppliers’ own; flight figures (Heathrow-Mexico City and Heathrow-Tokyo) from International Civil Aviation Organization.