



10 OF THE Best SUSTAINABLE SWAPS

Turn these classic holidays into responsible stays, writes Meera Dattani

Sustainability, eco-tourism, green, responsible, eco-friendly, community tourism... agents keen to promote best practice in responsible tourism will find many companies using these terms, but what do they really mean, and how do you choose between them?

Downplay the 'S word', advises Xavier Font, lecturer at Leeds Beckett University, and director of Respondeco, which helps organisations to better communicate their sustainability practices. "Tell clients about the product and how it will benefit them," he says. "If it's fun and happens to be sustainable, they'll respond more positively. You can't expect customers to have a 'green' agenda. It's down to the industry to identify and prioritise products that are better for the planet, then present them as better for the customer."

There's certainly no shortage of product promoting itself as sustainable, but the key to a happy customer is showing them how they can still have their chosen holiday – whatever it might be – but go away leaving the community, environment or both better off.

1 WORRY-FREE WILDLIFE Look for companies that take principled decisions. In 2014, Intrepid Travel became the first operator to scrap elephant rides, but its Chiang Mai and Elephants trip offers feeding and bathing opportunities instead. A host of resort operators also get guests involved in looking after wildlife. Peruvian

company Inkaterra encourages young children to become 'conservationists' through visits to the Spectacled Bear Sanctuary and local communities. **Book it:** Seven nights at an Inkaterra property starts at £2,945 (£1,745 for under-12s) including flights, transfers, excursions and accommodation. coxandkings.co.uk

2 FEEL-GOOD SPAS Spa breaks are all about feeling better about yourself, so why not spread those good vibes around? A pioneer in its field, Chiva Som resort in the Thai coastal town of Hua Hin set up the community collaboration Preserve Hua Hin, which employs local staff and educates local children. The resort features solar-powered heating, water purification and an organic farm where produce is made into meals and spa treatments.

Alila Soori Bali also makes organic spa products, using local ingredients such as volcanic sand and rice milk in its treatments. It is the first Indonesian resort to receive Green Globe's highest certification for eco-design. **Book it:** Seven nights' full-board at Chiva Som starts at £3,610 in an Ocean View Room, including flights and transfers. westernoriental.com

3 BETTER BEACH BREAKS Families who want to kick back on the beach might not have sustainability at the forefront of their minds – sun and sand are more likely top of the list – yet with a little

research, you can direct them towards a resort that takes its responsibilities seriously.

The Sarojin in Thailand is a luxury beach resort with a community focus. Its Community Fund, set up after the 2004 tsunami, ensures locals benefit from tourism. Initiatives include sponsoring a full-time vet, training older children from a local orphanage, and offering holidaymakers a Glimpses of Local Life package to help them understand the area.

Adventure specialist Green World Holidays takes a hyper-local stance on its active Croatia holidays too, favouring locally built, environmentally friendly apartments on Brac Island, employing local guides and staff, and travelling, where possible, by foot, bike or kayak. **Book it:** Seven nights' bed and breakfast in a spa suite at The Sarojin starts at £4,276 for a family of four (two adults, two children; no under 10s), including flights and transfers. kuoni.co.uk

4 CRUISE CONTROL Cruise ships regularly come under fire for poor waste management, damaging coral reefs and their impact on local economies, while their carbon footprint is increased as many passengers fly to their embarkation point. Yet Carnival's new social impact cruise line, Fathom, focuses on off-shore interaction with people everywhere from schools to chocolate-making factories, immersing them in local culture

and encouraging them to pick up souvenirs in markets, not malls.

Adventure line Hurtigruten uses local produce in its Norway's Coastal Kitchen menus, and its Hurtigruten Foundation supports initiatives such as 'Clean up Svalbard'. In April, its Young Explorers Programme will start on Norwegian cruises, offering beach clean-ups and educational activities for seven to 13-year-olds.

In the river cruising sector, G Adventures' new Mekong River Cruise Experience visits small communities and its Planeterra-supported New Hope project. **Book it:** Hurtigruten's six-day Classic Voyage South from Kirkenes to Bergen starts at £565, with flights from £330. hurtigruten.co.uk

5 PURE TOURING Multi-centre holidays might let visitors tick off their top wish-list destinations, but all that flying and driving takes its toll on the environment. Yet escorted tours using public transport are both eco-friendly and experiential, and take the hassle out of getting around.

Explore's Highlights of Portugal uses trams, ferries, trains and walking trails, while Intrepid Travel's Scenic Vietnam travels on the Reunification Express train, as well as motorbikes, basket boats, dragon boats, junks and buses.

Walking and cycling holidays are also a low-impact alternative while offering a different perspective on the local terrain. **Book it:** Explore's 20-day Walking in New Zealand

→ starts at £3,495, including accommodation, ferry/boat trips, breakfasts, some meals and a guide, but excluding flights. explore.co.uk

6 SUSTAINABLE SAFARIS

"Would the area be protected if the camp wasn't there?" asks Mohanjeet Brar, commercial director of Gamewatchers Safaris and Porini Camps. "If it wouldn't, then tourist dollars benefit the environment and communities."

By their very nature, safari camps are duty-bound to take sustainable tourism seriously. They rely on a healthy natural environment and wildlife population to draw in visitors, with most following a small-scale model to limit the number of tourists – and the amount of disruption to the local area.

Some go a step further, working with local communities to make sure tourism brings as many benefits as possible to the area. In Kenya, the Saruni camps lease land from local communities; in South Africa, Ulusaba Private Game Reserve has a charitable arm, Pride 'n Purpose, which helps disadvantaged communities; and Great Plains Conservation, which has opened a Mara Expedition Camp in Kenya, works with community stakeholders such as Maasai ranch owners.

Book it: Five nights at Ulusaba Private Game Reserve starts

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at £4,460 in a Safari Lodge Elephant Room, including meals, activities, and international and domestic flights.

african-pride.co.uk

7 SWEET HONEYMOONS

Responsible and romantic are the aims at Soneva Fushi's Kunfunadhoo island resort in the Maldives. As well as being an idyllic hideaway for newlyweds, 80% of staff are local, there's extensive recycling, and it teaches locals to swim, after the 2004 tsunami claimed lives on this tiny atoll. It also helped ban shark-fishing in the Maldives – a collaborative approach with other Baa Atoll resorts that was rewarded with protected Unesco Biosphere Reserve status in 2011.

Eco-lodges are also popular with honeymooners. Costa Rica's Lapa Rios in the Osa Peninsula uses habitat protection to keep monkeys, macaws and more in the rainforest, and measures such as feeding organic waste



to pigs to produce methane fuel.

Book it: Carrier offers a week's bed and breakfast in a Crusoe villa at Soneva Fushi from £3,760, including honeymoon extras, a dolphin cruise, candlelit dinner, flights and seaplane transfers. carrier.co.uk

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ENGAGE WITH ALL-INCLUSIVE

All-inclusive resorts have gathered bad press for their negative impact on local economies, but some are taking steps to reverse the trend. Ikos Resorts in Halkidi, Greece, and Saint Lucia's Bay Gardens Beach Resort feature local restaurants in their dining options. Tenerife's Sandos San Blas Nature Resort & Golf takes an eco-friendly stance, encouraging guests to explore the San Blas Nature Reserve, practising water and energy-saving, and promoting nature-focused activities in the Santos Kids Club. In the Dominican Republic, the five-star Zoëtry Agua Punta Cana serves organic meals using locally grown ingredients, and spa treatments use local fruits and flowers. Guests can take part in coral reef and sea turtle protection programmes and beach clean-ups.

Book it: Seven nights' all-inclusive at Sandos San Blas starts at £904, including flights and transfers.

thomson.co.uk

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CITY SWAPS

Consider rail or ferry travel instead of flights, when they save time

or money. Rail Europe has an integrated booking system, Irish Ferries offers rail-and-sail deals from Holyhead to Dublin and Stena Line connects to Holland from Harwich. For domestic city breaks, Shearings uses luxury, environmentally friendly coaches. Alternatively, opt for socially-minded sightseeing such as Urban Adventures' collection of In Focus tours, which collaborate with NGOs and not-for-profit organisations.

Book it: Shearings offers a four-night trip visiting the Cotswolds, Warwick Castle and Stratford-upon-Avon from £229, including accommodation, breakfast, four dinners and three excursions.

shearings.com

10 ECO-SKI

International conservation group Mountain Wilderness once described skiing as the 'cancer of the Alps' thanks to noise pollution, wildlife disturbance and energy-consuming snow cannons. Cross-country skiing and ski touring are gentler options, as are eco-aware resorts. In Lech, Austria, a Biomass Communal Heating plant links 100 hotels, 200 homes and other businesses, while an environmentally friendly chairlift generates energy to power a smaller lift.

Book it: A week at Chalet Hilde in Lech with Crystal Ski starts at £625 in January, including flights and transfers.

crystalski.co.uk



TOP:
Lapa Rios,
Costa Rica

LEFT:
Bush walk
in Kenya