

Travel eco friendly, budget friendly

Sustainable tourism will not burn a hole in your pocket.



by Rimme Dirchi

If you're a nature lover and ardent traveller, chances are, you've also considered sustainable tourism. But like many others, you may have been wary of the additional costs. For a long time, sustainable tourism has been inextricably linked with extravagant experiences or deemed as something that would require a compromise of personal comfort. But this is largely a misconception. "Sustainable practices don't necessarily call for higher expenses and compromise on comfort is a subjective matter," says Karan Anand, Head, Relationships, Cox & Kings.

A Booking.com survey reveals that the perceived extra cost is the main obstacle for global travellers wanting to travel more sustainably. About two thirds (67%) of travellers would be willing to spend at least 5% more on their travel to ensure it had as low an impact on the environment as possible.

Sustainable tourism respects resources, focusing on optimum utilisation, and therefore zero wastage. "A sustainable travel provider can offer the same services as a non-sustainable one. The source, treatment and model are what differ. If it is a sustainable luxury hotel the tariffs might be around ₹15,000 per night, whereas an eco-budget one might cost up to ₹3,000 per night," says Anand of Cox & Kings.

Chandni Aggarwal, Founder, Transforming Travels, and also an experiential traveller herself, believes that sustainable travel can be achieved with a limited budget and swears by homestays. "Barring a few upscale ones, most decent homestays cost between ₹300 and ₹1,500." There are also luxury hotels and resorts that have adopted sustainable practices, but luxury always comes at an extra cost.

TIPS TO MAKE YOUR TRAVEL SUSTAINABLE

- Research and plan ahead to figure out the best sustainable options.
- Shop and eat local to promote small businesses and try out new cuisines.
- Try riding a bicycle wherever possible. It's cheaper than taking a cab and causes no pollution.
- Skip destinations at peak season.
- Avoid single-use plastic cutlery, bags and bottles. Carry reusable ones.

According to Sharat Dhall, COO, Yatra.com, the crop of eco-tourists in India is already on the rise. "Nature lovers tend to visit national parks and wildlife reserves. Eco tourism forms 10%-15% of our holidays. We have also witnessed a significant growth in bookings for tourist huts and rest houses and vehicles for safaris."

"For the conscientious traveller, not changing the bedsheet or the towel every day in the hotel room is not a matter of discomfort as we don't do that at home either," says Neha Arora, Founder, Planet Abled. Eco hotels tend to shun the usage of disposable water bottles and toiletry containers in favour of reusable options.

Another golden rule of sustainable travel is avoiding destinations that are reeling under mass tourism during peak season. This is not only sensible, as the heavy inflow of tourists results in shortages and infrastructure failures, but is also easier on the pocket. Sustainable travel with its focus on minimising wastage and optimising usage, can therefore be achieved even on a shoe-string budget.

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