

From choosing homestays and public transport to carrying your own cutlery and toiletries

Make your trips eco-friendly

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The year 2017 was designated by the United Nations as the International Year of Sustainable Tourism for Development. Two years later, in 2019, it became one of the biggest travel trends across the world. In August that year, Swedish teen activist Greta Thunberg refused to take an aeroplane, which contributed to atmospheric carbon pollution, and sailed across the Atlantic – she travelled by a sailboat from Plymouth, England, to attend a UN summit in New York, US – putting climate crisis and sustainable travelling in the spotlight. But according to a global survey conducted by a leading digital travel platform, 37% respondents agreed that they do not know how to travel sustainably. If travelling tops your new year resolution's list and you have started mapping your escapes, here is a ready-reckoner you can refer to make your trips eco-friendly.

AIM FOR A ZERO-WASTE EXPERIENCE

As a sustainable traveller, one should aim for a zero-waste experience. Using disposable tissues and toiletries at hotels and stays generate waste which eventually ends up adding to the garbage pile. "I travelled to Jageshwar Dham (Uttarakhand) and carried wood-



en tooth brush, shampoo and toothpaste. We asked the hotel staff to take away the disposable toiletries from the room," says Madhu Mittal, a member of a residents' group in Noida, which leads anti-plastic campaigns and promotes sustainability.

Rashi Grover, who leads an initiative in her locality in Green Park, which promotes waste-segregation and discourages littering, adds, "We carry our own hand towels in bags which we keep washing and reusing throughout our journey. Though paper tissues are considered eco-friendly, they still generate waste which we want to avoid."

'IN THE PAST 1 YEAR, QUERIES FOR ENVIRONMENT-FRIENDLY STAYS HAVE DOUBLED'

In order to ensure an eco-friendly stay, Nishand Venugopal, another Delhi resident, does an extensive research before embarking on a trip. He says, "I always look for a stay which incorporates environment-friendly practices and is constructed of mud rather than concrete. Being a birder, I also ensure that the location of the hotel or stay is not in hindrance with the natural animal habitat of the region."

Supriya Sardana, who promotes sustainability in her locality in Noida through campaigns and workshops, says that she opts for homestays rather than hotels. "I prefer homestays as they do not contribute to wastage of single-use plastics and other fancies which hotels do."

Prerna, who is also the founder of an eco-friendly travel agency, adds that there has been a rise in the number of people preferring to stay at environment-friendly stays. "All our stays are mud constructions and the areas have over 30% green cover. In the past one year, queries for environment-friendly stays have doubled, with many opting for places which indulge environment-friendly practices like rainwater harvesting, growing own veggies and avoiding use of single-use plastic products, among other things," she tells us.

Take public transport



Though a road trip with friends in your own car may entice you to have your own *Zindagi Na Milegi Dobara* moment, it is not the best option when you are trying to reduce carbon footprint. "Travelling by bus or train is an eco-friendly option for sustainable travellers. Though not all carbon emissions can be avoided, taking a public conveyance can at least distribute the emissions," says Vikrant Tongad, an environmentalist from Greater Noida.

Bring the trash back

Ensure that you bring back any trash that is generated while travelling and recycle it. "Even after trying our best, some trash was generated on our two-day trip to Dehradun. This included a couple of tissue papers, two paper plates and two chips wrappers, which my kids insisted on having. I brought them back home to make an eco-brick out of it," says Sameera Satija, a Gurgaon resident, who started a steel crockery bank in 2018.

An eco-brick is a concept which recycles plastic bottles and trash paper or wrappers. "We stuff the plastic bottles with all the trash until its full, so it becomes solid as a bricks. These eco-bricks have multiple uses. I have made some dividers in my lawn and a dog-house out of them," adds Sameera.



Use your own cutlery

Whether it is a cup of tea, a water bottle, or plates and spoons, carry your own cutlery whenever on a vacation. "Apart from cutlery and steel water bottle, I always carry home-cooked food to avoid eating in disposables. In India, the traditional *dhabas* are by and large zero-waste as they use stainless steel so we prefer to eat there," says Supriya.

Sameera adds, "I have my own set of stainless steel cutlery that I use whenever we eat at any place which serves food in disposables." Her cutlery pouch includes stainless steel straws, spoons and forks.



Travellers are keen on sustainable holidays



Source: Annual sustainable travel report released in 2019 by Booking.com



Go local

To have a holistic eco-friendly experience, you can opt for the local produce, try out local cuisines, explore local villages and mingle with the locals. "On our trip to Sikkim, we bought produce from local farmers at a village and also tried the local cuisine in reusable dishes at our homestay," says Supriya.

She also indulged in plekking with some local schoolkids while on a high altitude trek in Sikkim. "Plekking is similar to plogging – you pick up trash on your way while trekking. We were with a local guide who was very impressed with the idea. Some school kids also participated and we made some new friends!" she shares.