



Responsible Travel and the Impact of your Habitat Canada Global Village Experience

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Many of us have joyfully embarked on numerous Habitat Canada Global Village experiences over the years. But some may be a little conflicted between the difference we make for local families and the impact we have on communities and the global environment. *Responsible* travel and tourism can create many benefits to local communities and the conservation of natural and cultural heritage.

There are many ways we can at least attempt to limit our travel footprint, both culturally and environmentally, whether for Global Village builds or our own personal travel. Here are some things to consider:

Start small

Sometimes the little things make a big difference in our impact. Our clothing, toiletries and food choices can vary greatly depending on our desire for convenience or fashion sense.

- Bring a **reusable water bottle**. Actively search for water sources that do not require single use bottles; ask your local Habitat host if/how single use bottles can be avoided (sometimes it's just not practical).
- **Reduce laundry and landfill** - purchase clothing that is easily hand-washed while on the build (i.e. not heavy cotton, jeans, etc.), and that will last for many builds to come! Consider purchasing at a local thrift store before you leave home, thus reducing the need for "new" items (think manufacturing, transport, etc.).
- **Pack using fabric or multi-use packing cubes**, not zip-lock bags. Try to eliminate all single use plastic in your luggage.
- If you must use plastic containers, be sure they are **reusable and refillable** with consumables from home (i.e. shampoo, cotton swabs, moisturizer, sunscreen, etc.) Try to avoid purchasing travel-sized containers of what you already have at home.
- Consider **dressing more modestly** than you might at home. Being respectful of cultural differences goes a long way toward breaking down barriers and inviting more social interaction.

Getting bigger

If your Global Village experience takes you to places that are far from home, **consider taking an extended vacation** alongside your actual build. If you are already making the trek across an



ocean or a continent (or both!), capitalize environmentally on your already-spent **carbon footprint** and reduce the need to travel a long distance again for a separate holiday.

When we travel we need to realize we are a visitor in someone else's home environment. Our very presence has an impact on them and we are the determinants of whether that is positive or negative. Treating local people and places with **respect** is the right thing to do, and opens up possibilities for more authentic experiences (but you already know that!).

The elephant in the room (or, in this case, the air)

The UN World Tourism Organization has warned of tourism's impact on climate change, stating that tourism is behind approximately five percent of worldwide carbon dioxide emissions, with air travel being the main culprit in tourism's contribution to global warming.

With this in mind, many travelers now consider purchasing carbon-offsets. Carbon offsetting is a way to "cancel out" carbon emissions that have been spewed into the atmosphere. It works by letting emitters (including individuals, governments or businesses...or airlines) fund and take credit for greenhouse gas reductions from a different project or activity elsewhere.¹

Here's what to look for:

- **Fly economy.** Extra legroom comes at more than a financial cost — a first-class ticket can generate two to four times the emissions of an economy class ticket because packing more passengers in each plane increases efficiency. Some airlines, like Sunwing and U.K.-based EasyJet, offer only economy seats.
- **Take direct, non-stop flights.** Proportionately, more fuel is burned during takeoff and landing, so non-stop flights are more fuel-efficient.
- **Take daytime flights, where possible.** Contrails and cirrus clouds generated by aircraft trap heat, causing extra warming — but mostly at night. That's because during the daytime, they also reflect sunlight back into space, counteracting the heat-trapping effect.
- **Choose a greener airline or plane.** Generally, larger and newer planes are more efficient. Among smaller, regional planes, turboprop planes generate fewer emissions than jets on average. You can usually see what kind of plane you'll be flying when you book. The International Council on Clean Transportation also issues reports on which airlines have better fuel efficiency for Canada-U.S. and transatlantic flights.

1. ¹ <https://www.cbc.ca/news/technology/faq-carbon-offsets-1.5008339>



Consider buying offsets

Many airlines give you the option to buy offsets — that is, invest in projects that reduce carbon emissions, such as tree-planting or green energy. In theory, that can help counterbalance the impact of your emissions. But experts warn that offset programs are not always effective and may inadvertently encourage people to fly more.

There are many companies who now offer carbon offsets for purchase, basing the amount of purchase on the distance traveled. Some programs are definitely better than others, and actually contribute positively to both environmental and cultural needs worldwide. If you do want to buy offsets, be sure that they are classed as “Gold Standard”. Many standards focus on ensuring not just that the project is real but that it's:

Additional. The greenhouse gas reductions wouldn't have happened if they weren't funded by offsets. The European Commission study found this usually was the case for landfill gas capture projects, but not for most energy-related projects, such as wind power, hydroelectric or heat recovery.

Permanent. This is a bigger risk for projects that involve forests or other land use-based carbon storage, as the forests could be cut down or destroyed by pests or fires before all the emissions reductions have been generated. They need to be insured against that.

Not subject to "leakage". That's where emission reductions in one area result in greater emissions somewhere else, such as if forest protection in one area leads to logging in another area.

A lot to think about!

This is just a short list of things to think about in an effort to be a more responsible traveler, both as a Global Village volunteer and for your personal travel. None of these things are compulsory, but are offered as a starting point for you to consider.

If you'd like to learn more, Susan has provided a list of further resources for you to read.



Further Reading and References

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