

How Green Is Your Travel? The Flight Debate

There is a real and growing recognition, that our heavy reliance on chemicals, is causing great harm to the Planet Earth. There are many dire predictions as to the outcome, with some believing that by the middle of the 21st century, sea levels will have risen, our coast lines will be affected, and our weather patterns wreaking havoc on our economic and social environment.

On 14 June 2007, The Independent headlined, 'Scientists challenge major review of global reserves and warn that supplies will start to run out in four years' time - A WORLD WITHOUT OIL' This comment was spurned by the BP review of oil supplies which apparently stated that it was 'proven' that there was another 40 years supply of oil left. There is a spirited debate between those who believe that the supply is steady, sustainable, and will see us through to the advance of new technologies, and the 'peak oil theorists', these being of the view that the exploration and extraction of oil, has now passed the point where such supplies can easily be extracted; such supplies are now limited by geographical and political frustrations. If the peak theorists are correct, then the advance of air travel will surely be halted in its tracks, with the environment being the winner?

On 9 May 2007, The Guardian published a review of the consequence of flights under its headline, 'Flights reach record levels despite warnings over climate change'. This remarkable fact stated that rather than the number of flights reducing, presumably on the basis of a greater consumer demand, globally they have increased. They wrote that the increase in global flights in May 2006 and May 2007 amounted to 113,827. European flights had increased by 5% (UK - 7% all flights, in the low cost sector it also increased by 7%). Flights in the US, Brazil, India and China showed increases ranging from 3 to 40%. The Guardian accepted that whilst the aviation industry contributed to only 2% of global emissions, campaigners considered that it was nonetheless, 'the fastest growing source of greenhouse gases, and there is no technological fix'.

Andrew Cooper, The Director General of The Federation of Tour Operators (FTO), recently commented in *Aviation and the Environment: A Tourism Perspective* (12 April 2007) that, 'Barely a day passes without a strongly worded article appearing in the press, demanding that some form of taxation be introduced on aviation to address its environmental impacts...The travel industry, and the Federation of Tour Operators in particular believe that this approach to be based on a fundamental misunderstanding or misrepresentation of the true environmental impacts of aviation'.

Perhaps he has reason to be concerned for his members, some of whom are aircraft operators for Package or DIY Holidays. They are faced with the debate of decreasing oil supplies, the conclusions of the United Nations Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change, and the comments of Mark Ellingham (Founder of the Rough Guide Travel Books) in the Guardian.

He stated the view that there was a need to introduce 'stringent' green taxes. He argues for a £100 tax on all flights within Europe and Africa, and £250 elsewhere. He has also called for a 'moratorium' on all airport expansion. He stated,

'The tobacco industry fouled up the world while denying it as much as possible for as long as they could. If the travel industry rosily goes ahead as it is doing, ignoring the effect that carbon emissions

from flying are having on climate change, we are putting ourselves in a very similar position to the tobacco industry'.

Tourism Concern in their recent magazine article 'Climate Change Debate' commented on changing consumer habits and how the travel industry was reacting. They reported that, 'The Tourism Investigation & Monitoring Team reported that IAG Inc, a consulting group hired by airplane equipment manufacturers, airlines and airports, is even portraying climate change scientists and environmental campaigners as anti-development agitators and 'eco-terrorists'".

In the middle sits the consumer, damned if they do, damned if they don't! Consumers are being encouraged to 'offset' their air travel, but now face the confusing debate between ordinary schemes versus gold standard schemes, and whether they actually create any benefit at all. We take the view that the average consumer will do what is right, all that is required is a courageous political and corporately responsible approach to guide them.

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If you have been affected by any of the issues raised in this article, and would like to receive advices, then please contact HolidayTravelWatch without delay.

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