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## MORE ECO ADVENTURES



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**"I'm a naturally rootless person,"** says UK-based travel writer Rhiannon Batten, whose inherent wanderlust led her to begin traveling at an early age. Her journeys have allowed her to see both the positive and negative effects tourism can have on a local ecosystem and culture. With the publication of her new book, *Higher Ground: How to Travel Responsibly Without Roughing It* (Virgin Books, \$12.95), Batten is sharing her knowledge about how to make your next trip environmentally and socially responsible.

**In the book, you write, "[R]eal luxury today doesn't mean having a personal pool attendant or ... a penthouse suite." What's your definition of real luxury?**

Real luxury today means embracing unique moments and experiences, not simply flashing as much cash as you can. A friend told me about a recent trip she'd taken in Italy. She stayed at an upscale villa with Frette sheets and an on-call masseuse. But the highlight of the trip was a late evening hike up to some antique cinema seats someone had carted up a hill. They were there so that anyone could sit and watch fireflies sparkling in the dusk in utter decadence—and it didn't cost a thing.

**What are some tips on finding an ethically run vacation destination?**

It's astonishing how thick the greenwash can be sometimes. I've seen places marketing themselves as eco-lodges when they have a golf course and helipad attached. So the first thing is to ask lots of questions. What is the hotel management doing to reduce carbon emissions, energy and water use, and waste? Do they employ local people and buy food and other supplies from local producers where possible? Above all, avoid all-inclusive hotels and resorts where there is little incentive to interact with the local culture and where around 80 percent of your money will go to international airlines, hotel companies, and other global businesses rather than to local people.

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**Does flying halfway around the world to go to an eco-lodge nullify the benefits of eco-travel?**

Yes. If your main concern is environmental responsibility, you would be better off staying home. Aviation is the fastest-growing cause of climate change, and the carbon emissions produced by air travel will have a far greater impact on the environment than any other aspect of your trip. [To get an idea of the footprint your journey will leave, see [carbonresponsible.com](#).] Having said that, these days the concept of "green" travel is generally taken to mean responsible travel in a wider sense—environmentally responsible travel is only one part of that package, along with socially responsible travel. In many parts of the world, impoverished communities depend on tourism. If an eco-lodge has embraced sustainability and generates employment for local people, both within the lodge and in the local supply chain, visiting it can be a positive thing.

**What's the one thing everyone can do to be a greener traveler?**

Fly less. Save the flights you do take for longer trips and instead opt for a walking, cycling, or canoe holiday. And remember to do on holiday what you would do at home: Avoid unnecessary packaging, don't use disposable cups or plates, recycle, use public transport, rein in your water use, switch off heating and lighting when not in use.

**Food is a big part of vacationing and traveling, but we rarely think about our meals ethically. What are some things to keep in mind when you look at a menu while on vacation?**

From fish-market-fresh sushi in Tokyo to English cream teas, food instills a sense of place better than any travel guide. For guilt-free gluttony, it's best to avoid imported brands in favor of locally produced food and drink. Similarly, steer clear of traditional "delicacies" made from, or including, endangered species.

**Do you have a favorite responsible-vacation destination, or is there someplace you think does the eco-lodge experience exceptionally well?**

Can I have three? Tiamo Resort [[tiamoresorts.com](#)] in the Bahamas was the place that first "converted" me, because it proved that you don't have to pack a hair shirt in your suitcase to be a green traveler. Another life-changing trip was a walking holiday in the foothills of the Himalayas with a company called Village Ways [[www.villageways.com](#)]. The organization's aim is to generate sustainable local employment and halt the migration of young villagers to the cities, but it's also brilliant fun. Finally, one of my favorite destinations is Sweden, and, as an outdoorsy kind of girl, I'm drawn to pretty much all the trips run by Nature Travels [[naturetravels.co.uk](#)]. I've done two so far and have loved them both.

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