

VACATIONS' CO2 FOOTPRINT - THE CASE OF GERMANY



Climate change makes many people look at travel differently. Even though if the effect of the CO2 footprint caused by vacations seems negligible in terms of global greenhouse gas emissions and thus global warming: it does exist.

If you want, you can calculate and offset the amount of greenhouse gases emitted during your trip. This way, you can travel with a better conscience.

To put this into perspective, each German produces an average of around eleven metric tons of CO2 equivalents of greenhouse gas emissions per year. As an industrialized nation with a high level of consumption, Germany is well above the global average. According to the Federal Environment Agency, a global per capita emission of less than one ton would be climate-compatible. Thus, there is a long way to go. Climate-friendly travel can be a part of that.

Travel by Bus or Train

This is especially true for trips within Germany: It's better to travel by train or long-distance bus, as the CO2 footprint of the trip is much smaller than in a car - at least if you're traveling alone - or by plane. An example? Anyone traveling from Hamburg to Munich and back by bus or train saves at least 239 kilograms of CO2 equivalents compared to flying or driving (alone), according to the non-profit consulting company co2online.

Longer distances, however, are hardly feasible without flying. Based on more than two dozen criteria, expertise shows the comparatively "most environmentally friendly" flights for the connection you are looking for. The criteria include factors such as load factor and modernity of the fleet. However, experts make it clear that every flight is environmentally harmful, including those listed there.

Vacationers pay quite a lot into their own CO2 accounts when they go on a cruise. The German Federal Environment Agency's CO2 calculator gives a flat rate of just over one ton for ten days on a sea cruise, i.e. around one-tenth of the average annual per capita emissions in Germany. This does not include possible travel by air.

In detail, of course, the balance for cruises also depends on factors such as the size of the ship and the propulsion technology. Liquefied natural gas (LNG) is somewhat lower in CO2 emissions than marine diesel, and LNG ships emit virtually no particulate matter or sulfur oxides. However, LNG ships are by no means climate-friendly due to their equally high CO2 emissions.

The Choice of CO2 Calculators Is Wide

In Germany, if you want to calculate the CO2 footprint of your trip, you can use the CO2 calculator of the Federal Environment Agency. Here you can get a rough idea of the CO2 footprint for air and sea travel, among other things.

Using a comparison table from the authority, which gives average values for emitted greenhouse

gases in grams per person-kilometer for cars, buses, trains and domestic flights, the footprint for a travel route can also be calculated manually.

The German Energy Agency (dena) also offers an intuitive online CO2 equivalent calculator. In addition to the CO2 footprint, it also shows suggested routes. According to dena, the map service Google Maps is used for this function.

CO2 calculators are also available from compensation providers such as Atmosfair, Klima-Kollekte and Myclimate. Their business model: You pay a voluntary offset for the greenhouse gas produced by the trip. The money is then used to finance climate protection measures.

Travel agencies and online booking portals often offer the possibility of such compensation directly along with the booking.

The Cost of Compensation

For flights from Berlin to London and back, the amount is still quite manageable, if you follow the information provided by the non-profit consulting company co2online: With 13 Euros, the 526 kilograms of CO2 caused on average are already compensated.

The further away it goes, the higher the costs: Flights from Frankfurt via Los Angeles to Wellington in New Zealand cause 13396 kilograms of CO2 per person - anyone who wants to offset this completely would have to pay 309 Euros in compensation.

The travel industry has long recognized that the carbon footprint of a vacation is becoming more important. According to a report published by the German Travel Association (DRV) in the fall of 2021, there is a discernible trend among customers toward a more conscious approach to the product "travel", which is likely to increase significantly in the coming years.

Standards for Compensation Projects

Rainforest protection and biogas plant construction: These two examples already show that the type of compensation can be very diverse. **Travelers can hardly assess in detail how sustainable and purposeful the compensation projects are.**

A first good sign is at least when the climate protection projects meet certain quality standards: The Federal Environment Agency lists the Clean Development Mechanism (CDM), the Verified Carbon Standard (VCS) and The Gold Standard, among others. Accordingly, they ensure above all that greenhouse gas emissions are actually offset at the targeted level.

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