

Travel Agents

With increasing numbers of consumers bringing values of health and sustainability to their vacation planning, agents have an unprecedented opportunity to position themselves as "green travel planners" who organize responsible and cost-efficient holidays. This value-added service could set a visionary company apart from the field of traditional holiday-travel agents. Here are a few ideas on how to get started in this fast-growing niche-or how to simply green up your existing operation. Be sure to consult the other sections of this toolkit for advice on incorporating sustainable practices around your office.

Did you know?

According to a recent TNS Canadian Facts Study, 80% of travellers believe sustainable tourism practices can have a positive and meaningful impact on the world's future. When planning their trips, nearly half of respondents would make the effort to seek out a travel agency that caters to responsible tourism guidelines.

Quick Start



Begin building a list of sustainable tourism suppliers with websites such as [Green Traveller](#), [Responsible Travel](#), [The International Ecotourism Society](#) or [National Geographic's Center for Sustainable Destinations](#). Use other sections in this toolkit to help identify whether your current travel suppliers employ sustainable practices. Check their websites to see if they have information on their sustainability or environmental practises.

Choosing Destinations

As a responsible travel agent, you must consider the environmental and tourism impacts on local communities, as well as the activities that your clients will be involved in while visiting a destination.

Hotel Eco-Rating Programs

[Green Leaf](#)TM identifies lodging facilities in Canada, the US and Europe based on their environmental best practices, with lodgings rated on a scale from one to five.

[Green Key](#) by The Hotel Association of Canada is a voluntary, self-administered audit. This rating program is designed to recognize hotels, motels, and resorts that are committed to improving their fiscal and environmental performance. Green Key also gives hoteliers guidance on how to reduce environmental impacts and operating costs.

- ◆ Offer destinations that support local communities by providing jobs to residents and developing projects that improve the quality of life for locals.
- ◆ Encourage your customers to choose community-oriented destinations and familiarize them with tourism-sponsored projects in the host community.
- ◆ Consider "Fair Trade" in tourism-accredited destinations. The fair-trade concept of ensuring producers in developing countries receive a fair share of revenue is now being extended to tourism with the idea that local communities should benefit from tourism activities with fair wages and other long-term benefits. For an example, check out [Fair Trade in Tourism South Africa](#).
- ◆ If you know a popular destination is struggling with a sensitive or damaged environment, try to find an alternative to offer your clients.

- ◆ Beware greenwashing. Avoid tourism suppliers and operators that only pretend to be sustainable.

Greenwashing

Greenwashing occurs when organizations attempt to make themselves appear green by making environmental claims that are misleading, superficial or blatantly false.

Transportation

Your clients expect you to steer them to the best transportation for their money and time. Try to offer them options that benefit the planet as well.

- ◆ Consider whether a train could be used as an alternative to a car or plane. Offer your clients rail travel wherever possible-especially in areas where it is electrified-and explain how it can be a sustainable travel choice.
- ◆ If your clients require a rental vehicle, seek out a hybrid or fuel-efficient vehicle. Explain that it is not only eco-friendly, but also cost efficient, since they will save on fuel. Keep on hand a list of car rental companies that offer hybrids.
- ◆ Introduce your clients to the concept of carbon-neutral travel. Try to book flights on airlines that offer a carbon-offset option, or encourage clients to add the cost of offsets to their travel package.

Carbon offsets

The very process of travel-especially long-haul air trips-contributes significantly to global warming by releasing carbon dioxide into the atmosphere. Carbon-offset programs offer travellers an opportunity to "balance out" their individual negative impacts by financially contributing to projects, such as renewable energy development or reforestation initiatives, that will reduce carbon emissions elsewhere.

- ◆ Think about compiling a list of reliable, carbon-offset providers and encourage your clients to purchase carbon offsets when they book a flight or hotel.
- ◆ Try to find a provider who has a user-friendly, carbon emissions calculator for a travel package that includes transportation, accommodations and other activities.

Carbon Offsetting

Carbon offsetting involves financially contributing to a project that works to reduce emissions in an amount roughly equalling the quantity of carbon produced by a given traveller's plane or vehicle travel. Some airlines offer Web-based calculators to help consumers estimate their flight's emissions; others invite customers to purchase them at the time of booking. Collected funds are typically directed to a project chosen by the airline, or forwarded to a carbon offset provider to underwrite a variety of projects. Check out the [Becoming Carbon Neutral](#) section of this toolkit for more tips on carbon offsets.