

Grounded For Good by Shanna Jones

For many, cheap flights overseas are a guilty pleasure. Aircraft currently produce 4% of Europe's CO2 emissions and recent research by Jeff Gazzard, of the Aviation Environment Federation, has found that aircraft emissions have up to 2.7 times more impact on the air than ground emissions due to the delicate nature of the upper atmosphere.

SCOTLAND - When planes were grounded across Europe last spring, due to the ash cloud from Iceland's volcanic eruption, people were looking for alternative routes home over land and sea. During this period, Tom and Lorraine McMillan witnessed a 700% increase in visits to their website. Although visitor levels normalised after the cloud passed, Tom believes people are falling out of love with flying.

"It used to be a luxury form of travel, but now all the focus is on cost, and not on customer service," he explains. "With increased security checks and baggage restrictions, flying is becoming more and more of a drag."

The McMillans were inspired to create the website after attempting to return home to Scotland with as little environmental impact as possible following 18 months abroad. They managed to get all the way from Singapore without taking to the sky; a journey across 14 countries that took 85 days, using 22 buses, 14 trains, 11 boats and numerous tuk tuks (rickshaws).

Tom and Lorraine's interactive website is a one-stop travel resource where members can add their own flightless travel itineraries and give a rating for different routes, while exchanging tips and information with other users. On the website, I type in my start location and not only does it tell me how I can get to various far off destinations, but it also shows via which routes, how long the journey will take and how much it will cost.

Tom explains: "We're working on the bottomup approach by providing as much information as possible on flightless travel routes, making it quick and easy for people to access the information they need and details of which agents to use."

However, Tom believes, there also needs to be a top-down approach from governments. "The simple fact is that it's never been cheaper to fly, and it's often cheaper to fly than get a train or a boat, so until aviation is taxed more heavily, it's always going to be difficult to wean people off their flying addiction."

When it is so easy to book that package holiday, what is going to persuade people to choose a more 'real' and ethical one? 'Slow-travel' is clearly better for the environment but Tom feels that it has many other benefits: "It's a great way to watch the world go by - to try out local food, to savour the moment and get lost in your thoughts. It will take you to places that you have never heard of and you'll meet a most wonderful and strange

array of people along the way.”

The McMillans say they have had many positive responses to their website from people who have been inspired to go on flightless trips. Keen to gradually change travel habits one person at a time, Tom and Lorraine envision tens of thousands of routes being logged online by members in the future. “Hopefully, one day, we will get a critical mass, where people begin to move away from air travel on a large scale.”

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