

Travel

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'We took our pick from a stable of 40 glossy Lusitano horses and rode out across the fields'

Mary Lussiana explores a starry corner of Portugal

The 30 best eco escapes

Book ahead

Chris Haslam looks at the rise of green travel — and offers plenty of inspiration for that first escape

T TIMES Earth

When and where we take our summer holidays this year is still uncertain. But one thing's for sure: as the world emerges from the pandemic, travel is going to be significantly greener. In the past two decades cheap flights, ever-larger cruise ships and the siren call of Instagram accelerated the locust-like march of mass tourism, with little concern for the social and environmental costs. Covid-19 has applied the brakes to that, with the World Tourism Organisation calling for "recovery plans which contribute to sustainable development goals and the Paris Agreement".

In the very short term we'll indulge in sun, sand and sangria, but when the post-prohibition party is over the planet will still be getting warmer. To stop travelling isn't the answer. Tourism accounts for up to 10 per cent of global GDP. In many countries it contributes more than 50 per cent, and not only are millions of people dependent on the industry for their survival, but as the pandemic-driven hiatus has shown, so are habitats and species; once wildlife stops paying its way, the pastoralists and their cattle move in. Extracting tourism from this interdependent tower could bring societies and ecosystems crashing down.

The solution begins with the acceptance that leisure travel is a responsibility rather than a right. That two-night New York shopping spree or long weekend in Rio have become unconscionable.

The business of responsible travel is about balancing profit and the planet. It's not just about planting trees — although that helps. It involves examining every aspect of every trip to minimise the carbon cost while maximising the benefits to the environment and population in the places we visit. Imagine, then, a future in which every trip came with a sustainability rating, like a nutrition label on foodstuffs.

It's an idea that the holiday and accommodation providers listed here would welcome. It may mean pricier trips, but responsible travel is like buying tomatoes: organic, Fairtrade ones will be less uniform and more expensive, but they're better for the planet in the long run.

3 A cabin at Wild Nurture in the Highlands



1



Green Hill Farm in the New Forest

BRITISH ISLES

1 Getaway in the New Forest

You'll see the term "Certified B Corporation" popping up a lot over the next few years. It's a badge of honour for businesses committed to reconciling the triple-bottom-line principles of people, planet and profit. So far fewer than 4,000 companies worldwide and only 361 in the UK have passed the rigorous certification process — one of those is the holiday park operator Lovat. Its newest park is Green Hill Farm Holiday Village in the New Forest, a mix of lodges, camping pods and safari tents with wood-fired hot tubs.

Details Seven nights' self-catering in a hot-tub safari tent from £1,909 for six, arriving July 23 (lovatparks.com)

2 Off the beaten track on the Llyn peninsula

Overcrowding isn't exactly great for sustainable tourism so this summer we should spread the love — and spend our cash — in lesser-trodden locales. Wales's Llyn peninsula is one such place. Imagine Cornwall as it was in the 1950s: uncrowded and undeveloped with narrow lanes and wide beaches. Bert's Kitchen Garden — named after a camper van — is an eco-campsite on 13 acres five minutes from Trefor Beach, on the sunset side of the peninsula. There are 15 camping pitches, a converted American school bus called Otto and two fully equipped glamping tents.

Details Seven nights' self-catering in a glamping tent from £840 for four in August (bertskitchengarden.com)

3 Highland retreat

Climate-friendly, carbon-neutral eco-tourism is not incompatible with unashamed, self-indulgent luxury. Yes, you can have cold showers, compost lavatories and recycled sackcloth blankets if that's your thing, but equally you can have a designer log cabin powered by a micro-hydro plant with high-speed wi-fi and offering self-guided yoga, mindfulness and intimacy retreats in a sacred grove above the River Lochy. It's called Wild Nurture and the mountain at the end of the garden is Ben Nevis.

Details Seven days' self-catering for five from £2,980 in June (wildnurture.co.uk)

4 Back-to-basics Devon

If you want to know just how much the Devon Den owners, Jo Henderson ▶

“That two-night New York shopping spree has become unconscionable”

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► and Ben Ranson, care about the environment, ignore the open-plan, timber-framed, solar-powered, off-grid cabin sleeping six in the woods at Lower Brockscombe on Devon's frontier with Cornwall. Look instead in the ponds, where you'll find they've installed little ladders to make life easier for the frogs and the newts. The nearest beach is Bude Summerleaze — half an hour west. **Details** Four nights' self-catering for six from £740 in June (canopyandstars.co.uk)

5 Cornish cabin

Just west of Plymouth, under the fort along Military Road, there's a longstanding community of shacks that have morphed from being cheap and shabby to becoming increasingly chic little earners for their owners. The Edge is one of them: a one-bedroom, sea-view eco-cabin for two that's won a Green Tourism gold award. Depending on the weather you could stay put here for the duration, loafing on the deck and watching for basking sharks and dolphins in the bay. **Details** Four nights' self-catering from £2,650 in September (uniquehomestays.com)

6 Get on your bike and explore Wales

Discover Carmarthenshire has just launched some impeccably green cycling holidays, exploring the beaches and back roads of southwest Wales. The Coast and Castles and Conquer the Mountains weekend breaks cover 97 and 128 miles respectively, but it's the week-long itinerary we like best, in which you pick seven circuits from a choice of 23, combining gentle rides on which you stop for tea with thigh-melting tests of endurance. Or not. Download the routes and book accommodation through the website. **Details** Seven nights' B&B at the Plough in Llandeilo in June from £490 for two (discovercarmarthenshire.com)

7 Dingle on foot

A green holiday in the Emerald Isle is easy if you take the ferry to Dun Laoghaire, the train to Tralee and set off on shanks's pony for a nine-day tour of the Dingle peninsula. You'll take the long way around from Camp back to Tralee, walking between 10 and 18 miles a day and rounding Ireland's westernmost point at Sleat Head on day four. Your bags will be waiting at a family-run B&B at the end of each day. **Details** Eight nights' B&B from £805pp in June (wildernessireland.com)

8 Scotland under sail

It's often said that the cruise industry's eco-credentials leave a lot to be desired, but it depends who you're sailing with. Plymouth-based Bessie Ellen is one of the last seaworthy West Country sailing ketches, built in 1904 and, with seven sails aloft, capable of nine knots and zero emissions. Life aboard is more Poldark than P&O, with accommodation in bunks in the cargo hold, watches to keep and entertainment dependent on the wit of the guests. **Details** Seven days' full board from Oban to Mull, Iona and Staffa from £1,020pp, departing August 7 (venturesailholidays.com)

9 Little Comfort in the Caen Valley

That's not an assessment but the name of a 70-acre Soil Association-certified

18 The Southern Carpathians in Romania



organic farm outside Braunton in Devon's Caen Valley. It's run by the ecologists Jodie and Jeremy Ward, who raise sheep and cattle in a pesticide-free pocket of England at its most natural. There are four self-catering cottages here — one of which is dog-friendly — accommodating from four to ten, a therapy room, a farm shop and a lake full of carp, rudd and bream. The nearest beach is Woolacombe, six miles west.

Details Seven days' self-catering in a two-bedroom cottage from £1,204 in June (littlecomfortfarm.co.uk)

10 Go wild in Norfolk

Kelling Heath was winning sustainability prizes long before other holiday parks had even thought of going green, collecting four gold awards from Green Tourism. Set in 300 acres of coastal wood and open heathland between Blakeney and Sheringham in Norfolk, the park offers accommodation in cabins and static caravans and has 300 tent and caravan pitches. All the usual holiday park facilities are here, but what stands out is the environmental programme, ranging from guided walks and wildlife hides to red squirrel, bat and butterfly conservation programmes.

Details Seven nights' camping for four from £300 in July (kellingheath.co.uk)



Camino Frances in Spain

SHORT HAUL

11 Alentejo retreat

The Portuguese architect and designer Miguel Cancio Martins, who has spent 25 years making other people's hotels look nice, now has his own eco-resort in the village of Carvalhal, 90 minutes' drive south of Lisbon in the Alentejo region. Repurposing an agro-industrial landscape for tourism, he has turned an old rice farm into Quinta da Comporta, a 77-room, solar-powered, water-recycling, five-star hotel with sustainability at its core. There's a restaurant serving locally sourced food and a spa in a barn, and it's a ten-minute bike ride to the beach.

Details Seven nights' B&B from £1,165pp (quintadacomporta.com). Take the train to Lisbon

12 Mountain living in central Portugal

Rural life moves to the rhythm of the seasons in Portugal's Centro region, and the teeming birdlife and flora offer proof that humanity in this part of the world is doing something right; sustainability in tourism seems to come naturally. The Casa de Sao Lourenco, in the Serra da Estrela, is a slick, five-star design hotel with huge views down the Zezere Valley and a

commitment to celebrate the cultural and natural heritage of its spectacular location. The food is as local as the staff and the blankets are woven in their own factory using the local burel wool. **Details** Seven nights' B&B from £980 (casadesaolourenco.pt). Take the train to Lisbon

13 Bear essentials in northern Spain

Steppes Travel is a pioneer of transformative travel, selling holidays that maximise social and economic benefits in local communities, enhance cultural heritage and nurture the environment. It sounds dreadfully dull, but on a six-day search for bears and wolves in the Cantabrian Mountains of northern Spain — led by Duncan Grossart, a former director of the European Nature Trust, and accommodated in locally owned, low-key guest houses — you may find otherwise.

Details Seven nights' full board from £1,995pp (steppestravel.com). Sail to Santander with Brittany Ferries (brittany-ferries.co.uk)

14 Minimum-impact Camino pilgrimage

For all its spirituality, the Camino de Santiago has a huge environmental impact, especially in years such as 2021 when St James's Day (July 25) falls on a Sunday and pilgrim numbers are