

Eco travel – the truth about carbon offset



You may have heard of [carbon offsetting](#), one of the phrases that became popular with the advent of the “green revolution.” As environmentalists increasingly emphasized the importance of adopting eco-friendly habits in an effort to curb global warming, carbon offset companies came into being. These companies employ different methods to reduce greenhouse gas emissions from different locations: they have been hailed as innovative heroes, especially by travel and tourism companies.

How does carbon offsetting work, and how can you put it to use?

The principle behind carbon offsets is quite simple. You and other environmentally conscious citizens pay for steps or services that are supposed to help get rid of an amount of atmospheric carbon equal to that which you emit. This works very well for those who do not have the time or are unwilling to take the necessary steps to reduce their personal carbon footprints. Carbon offsetting has been widely embraced by the tours and travel industry with hotels, airlines and even booking sites making it easy for their guests or passengers to participate.

Nowadays, thanks to technological advances, you can plan your eco-friendly vacation from the comfort of your home. Travel sites have developed innovative tools, such as [Expedia's interactive infographic](#), which give you the option of comparing different aspects of two cities as you plan where to travel next. Other than comparing the usual tourist attractions, you can also find out how two cities stack against each other with regards to temperature, rainfall and even air quality. This makes it simple to avoid cities with poor air quality due to heavy air pollution.

However, if travelling to such destinations is completely unavoidable, you can choose one of the many carbon offsetting measures available. These days tourism and travel businesses offset their clients' carbon emissions by calculating their overall travel-related emissions during a trip, then making financial contributions to carbon offset companies or projects that address climate impact mitigation. Airline companies may give travelers the option to purchase offsets together with their tickets, while hotel guests can choose to pay a small additional fee in their bills to cater for their offsets. You can also opt to make a private donation to a carbon offset company of your choice.

What methods do carbon offset companies employ?



You may be wondering where your money goes to once you pay a carbon offset company. These companies use various methods to reduce greenhouse gasses. The most common include:

- **Reforestation.** The companies help to plant more trees in various locations around the world. Trees clean up the air by absorbing harmful carbon dioxide and releasing more oxygen into the atmosphere.
- **Investing in clean energy research.** They look into new ways of improving solar panels, wind turbines, hydroelectricity generators and biogas plants. All these use clean and renewable sources of energy, reducing overreliance on the use of fossil fuels.
- **Reducing sources of personal greenhouse emissions.** Some carbon offset companies choose to work with different communities, encouraging them to adopt environmentally friendly habits such as using energy saving cooking stoves.
- **Improving energy emissions in industrial plants.** Other companies involved in carbon offsetting work with several industries to find cost-effective ways of reducing their carbon emissions.

Selecting a carbon offset company

When selecting a carbon offset company to donate your money to, you should take steps to ensure that the organization is legitimate. This may require research to find out if the agency is doing what it claims and whether their efforts are yielding any fruits.

In order to make your evaluation of these companies easier, you should familiarize yourself with the different carbon emission calculation methods or standards. These standards help to promote credibility and reliability among the different carbon offset companies. Two frequently used standards are:

- **The Gold Standard**. This is an international certification standard awarded to certified carbon mitigation projects. The certification assures you that the companies really do bring about greenhouse gas reduction using renewable energy and energy efficient carbon offset projects.
- **The Climate, Community and Biodiversity Standard**. This assists organizations and governments to roll out quality programs in the fight against global warming. It also helps developers to design and implement credible projects to mitigate climate change.

How effective are carbon offsets?

Critics of carbon offsets argue that they merely assuage people's guilt while giving them an excuse to continue creating more emissions. Supporters, on the other hand, state that what really matters is the effect these programs have on overall global warming.

However, most people feel that more effort should be directed towards convincing individuals to reduce their carbon footprints and emissions instead of relying on carbon offset organizations. There are simple things that you can do to contribute to this goal. For instance, you could start by increasing the energy efficiency of your home by installing LED lights, thermostats or solar panels.

When used as stand-alone strategies to combat global warming, carbon offsetting projects are bound to fall far short of their mark. In order to derive the most benefits, such projects should be employed as part of a wider mix of strategies aimed at reducing greenhouse gas emissions.

Climate change and watershed systems



Whether you support carbon offsetting or not, you have to agree that a sustainable and suitable eco travel solution needs to be found. Climate change affects different aspects of the world and can have devastating consequences. Already, several places around the globe are experiencing adverse weather changes ranging from heat waves and drought to super storms and floods.

Recently, scientists discovered that climate change could also affect watershed systems worldwide. Their studies predicted that changes in the weather could have significant effects on the networks of rivers and streams that feed into lakes and oceans, altering their streamflow, as well as their sediment and nutrient loads. Other than resulting in major alterations in water quality and supply, these changes can also be harmful to aquatic ecosystems in the watershed. The migratory habits of fish and the world's supply of clean drinkable water could all be disrupted thanks to global warming.

Due to this, climate impact mitigation measures should be encouraged and taken seriously. Your personal efforts, coupled with those of big organizations and corporations, can go a long way towards reducing carbon emissions in the atmosphere.