

# How Green is Your Airline?

Offset carbon emissions even as you fly.

By Gillian Kendall



Even as a too-frequent flyer who cares more about the earth 30,000 feet below than the human beings seated around her, I'll admit that when I'm planning a trip, an airline's environmental record is not utmost in my deliberations. My primary concerns are price, legroom and convenience of schedule. (A gay-friendly culture helps, too: see "How Gay-Friendly is Your Airline?" next issue.)

But once I'm strapped in, an airline's green policies do affect my trip. I once choked on fumes on a Garuda Indonesia trip to Bali because the flight attendants sprayed gray plumes of toxic insecticide into all the overhead bins. That measure was after a long flight from Australia, when the air quality was already execrable, and the heavy cloud of toxic fumes made my partner and I sick.

I was grateful on recent British Airways and American Airlines flights to have my own water bottle filled—and refilled, and refilled—instead of using a new plastic container every time I wanted a drink. I was also heartened to hear—while checking out the leg rest, the extra leaning-back room, and the entertainment facilities in the World

Traveller Plus service of a 777-300—the pilot promoting the airlines' recycling measures, which substantially reduce landfill at many ports.

British Airways' sustainability efforts also include the One Destination Carbon Fund, which provides sustainable energy for housing, wind turbines for schools and solar panels for community pools.

American Airlines is also lightening its load with new designs (drink carts have been redesigned for less heft, though unfortunately it won't be any easier to squeeze past them in the aisles!) and taking measures to reduce fuel consumption, for instance using tractors instead of jet engines to taxi down runways. Between 2005 and 2011, AA cut fuel consumption by 139 million gallons, saving \$371 million and untold emissions. Also, AA, along with Finnair and aircraft maker Boeing, is installing "winglets" on large aircraft: those are the upward-turned tips of the wings that make it look as if the plane is politely extending its pinkies. These funny-looking devices reduce the vortex drag.

The carbon-offset (should be guilt-offset!) programs are now offered as an option with ticket purchase by many airlines, including British Airways, Air Canada, Japan Airlines and QANTAS.

Here's how it works: Passengers can choose to pay a set price to offset carbon emissions for their share of a flight. For a round-trip on Air Canada from Toronto to Miami, for example, that costs about \$7.80.

If you'd prefer to invest your travel dollars in a company that is making green efforts without yourself paying additional bucks, you might choose your next carrier from the scorecard at climatecounts.org (currently, Delta, Northwest and American are high fliers).

For folks travelling on airlines that don't offer offsets, or for offsetting other kinds of emissions (such as car, train, even house or event emissions), check out carbonfund.org, which proffers offset possibilities alongside the heartening motto "Reduce what you can; offset what you can't."

Although flying will never be the greenest means of travel, it's good to know everyone can make small but positive choices by simply considering the environment when selecting their airline. Now sit back, relax and enjoy your flight. ■



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