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You don't need to forsake your fun in the sun to help combat climate change

Going green isn't just about the number of flights you make, it's also the type of holiday you choose and how you behave on it.

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What's to be done? In the week that the UN Secretary General Ban Ki Moon visited Antarctica to be told that an ice sheet covering a fifth of the continent may crumble, we also hear that more travellers are balking at spending extra on holidays to help curb climate change.

And who can blame them? If dinner-table chatter is anything to go by, my friends are sick of hearing that they should forsake their fun in the sun to reduce their carbon footprint. No one wants to feel guilty about taking those well-earned holidays. And why should they, asks a colleague pointedly, when livestock generates more harmful emissions through – er – excessive flatulence than aircraft do?

Already faced with hefty fuel surcharges, passengers are reluctant to shell out more, even if it does help the environment. A study by the travel industry marketing specialist BLM Media showed that 35 per cent of respondents would not pay an extra £20 a holiday to offset carbon emissions, while an even greater 59 per cent would not cut down on the number of times they go abroad. Which is why Qatar Airways' announcement this week that it aims to be the first airline to be powered by a gas-based fuel could be revolutionary. It may not happen – an in-depth study is first needed – but at least this shows that airlines are doing something more than passing the green buck on to passengers. Virgin Atlantic has already announced plans to run a plane on biofuel next year.

Going green, though, isn't just about cutting the number of flights you make or offsetting your carbon emissions. It's also about the type of holiday you choose and how you behave on it. I've lost count of the number of hotels that trumpet their "green" credentials by encouraging you to recycle your bath towels, then change your towels twice daily anyway. I prefer to stay in small lodges or hotels where locals form part of the workforce and where hoteliers become involved in the local community, the kind of place you'll find on the useful website responsibletravel.com.

Eco-tourism doesn't have to be the oxymoron that the wildlife advocate Richard Leakey says it is. But as he points out in this issue, it does need international standards. We know how environmentally friendly washing machines are when we buy them, so why can't tourism be rated in a similar way?

Above all, responsible tourism is about awareness, not necessarily at increased cost. Ten years ago, recycling your rubbish in England was almost unheard of. What we need today is a similar change in attitude towards how we holiday.

The message is starting to trickle through. Just minutes after the New Forest this week took three accolades in the Virgin Holidays Responsible Tourism Awards, organised by Responsibletravel.com, Jamaica's tourism chiefs invited the man behind it all to their country, so they could benefit from his wisdom.

Responsible tourism doesn't have to cost more, and it doesn't mean we have to stop travelling, but if we want our children, and our children's children, to benefit from travel as we do, we need to start thinking in a slightly deeper shade of green.