

# Travel is Worse for the Environment Than We Thought

Thanks to climate change, the world is looking at previously accepted practices with a greater focus on sustainability and a new study finds one area that's a bigger problem than we thought – travel. Global tourism in the year 2013 was responsible for 4.5 billion metric tons of carbon dioxide, or 8% of the year's total emission. Previous studies have focused on the fuel costs associated with air travel, but newly published research in *Nature Climate Change* examined the impact that tourism-driven food, shipping, and hotels have as well. Unsurprisingly, the majority of the traffic comes from travelers to and from high-income countries. If travel trends continue, global emissions from tourism will amount to 6.5 billion metric tons by the year 2025. Climate-conscious travel might be harder to achieve than imagined.

## Running on Fumes

Planes are a major source of air pollution, which is the cause of an estimated 5.5 million deaths a year). While 92 percent of those deaths occur in lower or middle-incomes, plane exhaust and emissions are still causing significant casualties. Earlier in the decade, researchers found that those emissions kill more people than actual plane crashes, with annual deaths recorded at 10,000 and 1,000 respectively.

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Smaller trips are worse for the environment, as airplane pollution is highest at takeoff and landing. For the traveler who wants to save time, airplanes are the best option. But the question of how sustainable it is will increasingly take the forefront in discussions of tourism and

travel options. How much more serious would the climate change discussion be if Americans made chose airplanes instead of cars for the majority of trips from 500 to 1000 miles?

## Where Travel is Going

People are still trying to define ethical and environmentally-friendly travel. But that has butted against climate change tourism, otherwise known as visiting places where climate has or will change the landscape fundamentally. It's easy to take advantage of the current fear of missing out (FOMO) by promising trips to locales that will no longer exist in the future like Greenland, Venice, the Great Barrier Reef, and the Amazon rainforest.

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## Travel Options

The irony of climate change tourism is deeply upsetting from an environmental point of view. By seeing these wonders up close, we hasten their demise. But seeing them up close forges a connection, often times inspiring the traveler to do something about or inspiring deeper thought into the issues of climate change. Travel also brings knowledge and diversity, our best chances of future success. So is it worth it? And what will VR bring to the table?

### Sources:

- *Tourism is four times worse for the planet than previously believed – Science Magazine*
- *The carbon footprint of global tourism – Nature.com*
- *Plane Exhaust Kills More People Than Plane Crashes – National Geographic*
- *Here's Why Obama Is Cracking Down on Airplane Pollution*

– Mother Jones