

Greener Walt Disney World: An Earth Friendly Guide

by Beverly Carr and Craig Jackson, PassPorter Guest Contributor

The flights are booked, our Beach Club Villas studio is confirmed and the dining reservations are made. I am in Disney planning heaven! My husband and daughter share my passion and excitement for everything Disney. However, my excitement is tinged with a little guilt. I love my Walt Disney World annual trip. I love sharing happy times with my family and friends, but I'm not being a friend to the environment.

I am told that airline flights are among the fastest growing sources of global warming gases. Our trip in August will include a return transatlantic flight of 8,455 miles. Each one of us will add about a ton and a half of CO₂ to the atmosphere. Obviously, the greenest option is not to fly at all -- I could sell my Disney Vacation Club points and holiday much closer to home ... but I love Walt Disney World!

So, this year, part of my Disney-obsessed vacation planning took the form of investigating ways to help the environment in exchange for us taking those flights. A fitting choice seemed to be to offset the CO₂ from our flights, so I began checking out various web sites. It transpired that a friend and colleague of mine is a regular transatlantic Disney-goer too! He'll be in Orlando again this year and has already offset the carbon emission for his flights. He knows what he is talking about, too. He's an architect who specializes in environmental design, so he understands the issues behind carbon emissions and climate change and the effects that we can have on the environment in our day-to-day lives. I asked him to explain the technology behind my proposed solution.

In an ideal world we'd be able to hop across the 'pond' in aircraft that gave out no emissions, but we live in the real world so have to be a little bit more imaginative in our approach. Carbon offsetting is one of those imaginative approaches and one that a 'light' green like me can get behind. It's still a bit controversial because it doesn't stop harmful emissions taking place, but it does invest money in technologies and projects to counteract (or offset) those emissions.

Offsetting works like this. We know that a UK to Orlando flight produces around 1.5 tons of CO₂ per person. A simple online calculation estimates the monetary cost of preventing 1.5 tons being emitted somewhere else to balance things up. There are lots of ways in which CO₂ can be offset. Your money could be used to plant new trees to help absorb CO₂, or it could be invested in renewable technologies like

hydro-electric power stations or even something as simple as providing additional insulation in houses.

But before we all rejoice at such a simple solution let me sound a note of caution. Sites are springing up all over the web offering to stamp out your carbon footprint at the click of a mouse. "Deep" greens will tell us carbon offsetting schemes don't work and that all we're doing is lining the pockets of a few dot com entrepreneurs who appease our guilt at flying by taking our cash. So we need to be aware that not all carbon offsetting sites are necessarily the same.

It's very important to do your research before you part with your money and make sure that the measures you are paying for really are going to make a difference. They are using your money, so only give it to those who will use it wisely.

Look for sites with a wide range of carbon offset projects where your money can be invested. Make sure they have a strong verification processes and are regularly reviewed and audited independently. Good sites will have a clear Corporate Responsibility statement where you should be able to check these things out.

Another good sign is if the site follows the Carbon Neutral Protocol. This is currently a voluntary standard, but it's likely to form the basis of the UK Government's independently regulated Code of Practice early in 2008.

Once you've done your research, actually offsetting your carbon is easy. It's just like booking your park tickets online. You tell the site where you're traveling from and it'll work out the cost. All you need then is a credit or debit card! At the moment, we in the Western World are using up natural resources at such a rate that we need three whole Earths to support us. In the future we want our children to be able to enjoy their own visits to Walt Disney World and to introduce their own children to the magic. They have a much better chance of being able to do that if we all make a few simple changes now.

About The Author: Beverly Carr is the Finance Manager for a Housing Association in Sheffield, UK. She is Disney Vacation Club member and with her annual trip planned for August 2007 she's already getting rather excited. Craig Jackson works with Beverly in the Architects Department and is a Disney novice in comparison. His next visit in late August will be only his fifth since 2000!

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