



TO FLY OR NOT TO FLY

The Swedish anti-flying movement 'flygskam' is gathering pace across Europe, but what is the philosophy behind it and can it make a similar difference in other parts of the world?

'Do you need to fly – can't you take a train?' If you've been on the receiving end of a comment like this after excitedly telling your friends about your holiday plans, you're not alone. Making people feel embarrassed for flying is part of a growing movement called flygskam, a Swedish phrase that translates as 'flight shame'.

Flygskam was born after singer Staffan Lindberg wrote an article encouraging people to give up flying for environmental reasons in 2017. His bold stand, and the idea of advocating more eco-friendly travel to others, was supported by fellow Swede Greta Thunberg, the teenage climate change activist who, rather than fly, crossed the Atlantic in a racing yacht to take part in the United Nations Summit in August 2019.

It's important to note here that the word 'shame' is misleading. Flygskam advocates aren't suggesting everyone should be booed or slow-clapped as they get off a plane. But they do feel that people need to become more aware of their own choices. The point of the movement is to turn off the autopilot (LOL) when it comes to booking flights, instead asking yourself: 'Is there another way to get there – could I get a train, coach, boat or even cycle instead? And if not, should I go somewhere else?'

Is flygskam really necessary?

'Please fasten your seatbelts and return your tray table to its full upright and locked position.' How many times have you heard this instruction while sitting on a plane? Chances are you've heard it a lot – especially if you're British or American. In 2018, British people flew abroad more than any other nationality, taking a staggering 126.2 million flights, equating to roughly one in 12 of all international travellers. Americans were close behind, leaving the country via plane a huge 111.5 million times in just 12 months. More shocking still, US airlines carried 777.9 million passengers on domestic flights across America in 2018.

Flying is still one of the world's most popular forms of travel, yet it's also one of the most polluting. A study by UK newspaper *The Guardian* found that one long-haul flight generates more carbon emissions than an average person does in a whole year. Even a relatively short return trip from New York to Miami carries a carbon footprint of over 234kg of CO₂ per passenger, which is more than the average produced by a person annually in 17 countries.

But what difference can one person make?

Lots! A survey of more than 6,000 people in July by Swiss bank UBS found that one in five travellers is flying less as a direct result of 'flight shaming'. The respondents, from the US, Britain, France and Germany, said they had reduced their air travel by at least one flight in the past year because of climate concerns. If these trends continue, the expected growth in passenger numbers could be halved, the report said. Fewer passengers means fewer flights, which means fewer emissions.

Scandinavian airline SAS AB saw a 2% decrease in all flights this year, while Sweden said it had dealt with 9% fewer passengers for domestic flights. Companies are also jumping onboard, with Swedish bank Klarna Bank AB banning all employee air travel within Europe and discouraging long-haul flights.

Flygskam is having a real and tangible effect, making people conscious about their own responsibility to the planet. But if you do have to fly, there are a few things you can do to make your flight more eco-friendly.

Have to fly? Here's how...

- ▶ **Carbon offset your flights** – many airlines now have an option for paying to offset the emissions of your flight. You just pay an extra fee on top of the flight cost, which is donated to a carbon offset scheme. Ask the airline about it when you book your flight.
- ▶ **Choose an environmentally-conscious airline** – one with a newer fleet of planes (that are lighter and burn less kerosene), that uses more eco-friendly materials, limits the use of single-use plastic, has paperless cabins and serves healthy meals.
- ▶ **Always choose a direct flight** – stopovers can increase a flight's total emissions by up to 35%.
- ▶ **Pack light** – if everyone aimed to pack 0.9kg less than normal, it would be equivalent to removing over 10,000 cars from the road annually.
- ▶ **Fly economy** – reducing space per passenger means less emissions per passenger.
- ▶ **Bring your own reusable bottle for drinks** – and why not bring your own snacks too, to reduce waste?



Flygskam is changing the way people think about the ethical, practical and emotional ways they travel – and there's no shame in that

It becomes an ethical choice – if you can choose alternative means of travel, why wouldn't you? And you won't just be helping the planet, a brilliant and unforeseen benefit of flygskam is the way it changes how you view journeys.

Small change, big impact

There are numerous mantras and mottos about learning to 'savour the journey' within life, rather than just focusing on the destination. The point being that too often people set their sights on a goal and don't stop to enjoy the process of achieving it.

In choosing not to fly and having to find alternative routes to wherever you want to end up, the journey itself becomes part of the adventure. Instead of jumping on a plane and zoning out for a few hours, you can watch breathtaking scenery from a train window, marvel at the size of the ocean while on a ferry or play a game of cards with a stranger on a coach.

Do what you can. It's near-enough impossible to have zero carbon impact but small changes, such as swearing off domestic flights, can make a big difference – and sharing what you're doing in a positive way will encourage others to do the same. Search #flygskam on Instagram or Twitter and feel inspired by all the amazing posts from people who've discovered new places, new routes and new friends through choosing to go flight-free. Look into what your government is doing regarding the issue. Are they following the Swedish government's plans for an eco-tax on aviation? If not, why not?

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