

Learning to travel smarter

Which is responsible for more global warming: your international flight, your drive to the airport or the steak you eat on board the plane?

Believe it or not, it's the steak. According to the UN's Food and Agriculture Organization, the global meat industry generates roughly 18% of the world's greenhouse gas emissions, due to the nitrous oxide in manure and the methane discharged by cattle.

Road transport generates approximately 16%, while air travel contributes less than 2%.

As the world grapples with the stark new realities of climate change, industries everywhere are being forced to review their business practices. Travel and tourism is no exception and it is taking giant strides to protect the environment upon which it depends so heavily.

Greening flights

Many airlines, such as Australia's Virgin Blue, have implemented voluntary charges for passengers who want to offset the emissions generated by their flights. Government tourism boards, such as Tourism Vancouver, have committed to "greening" all their staff air travel with the purchase of carbon offset credits through Uniglobe Travel's Green Flight programme.

In recent weeks, the 21 APEC economies – which represent more than a third of the

world's population – have agreed to work together on practical measures to reduce greenhouse gas emissions.

"While there's a lot more we can do, it's encouraging to see how many industry players are rapidly embracing the need for change," says Pacific Asia Travel Association (PATA) President and CEO, Peter de Jong.

Debunking myths

However, as the travel industry's leading body in the Asia Pacific region, PATA believes it's also important to debunk some persistent myths about the linkage between travel and global warming.

"Airplanes generate emissions but they are not carbon-spewing monsters," says Mr de Jong. "If all air travel was banned, there would only be a 2% reduction in emissions and the impact on global economies would be catastrophic."

A simple but very effective way to reduce emissions is to allow airlines to fly between destinations in as straight a line as possible. For this to happen, governments need to start co-operating on new airspace agreements and "open skies" policies, something that PATA is advocating to its public-sector members across the region.

For travellers and the travel industry, the message is clear. It's not about staying at home. It's all about our responsibility to learn how we can travel smarter.