

Tourism and Climate Change

Tourism is affected by global climate change and at the same time is one of its causes. International tourism depends on a stable and unscathed environment, yet the industry also contributes to the greenhouse effect, in particular through emissions from air travel.

The greenhouse effect harbours terrible dangers for tourist destinations: Bathing resorts in the tropics, in the Caribbean for instance, will repeatedly fall victim to extreme weather conditions such as hurricanes and tornados and be destroyed. Increasing temperatures mean the melting of glaciers and whilst traditional skiing regions fight for survival as a result, whole island groups face the much more terrible prospect of being slowly engulfed by rising sea levels - a very real risk for the Maldives, Fiji and the Seychelles. But the melting of the polar icecaps is not the only problem: drought, heat waves and water shortages will affect bathing resorts such as the south of France and Turkey.

Tourism's share of emissions is not insignificant. The UN World Tourism Organisation (UNWTO) attributes 5% of all greenhouse gases to tourism. Environmental groups predict much more damaging climate effects. According to current economic studies, global tourism in general – made up of (1) air transport, (2) car transport, (3) other forms of transport, (4) accommodation and (5) activities at destination – accounts for up to 9% of all greenhouse gas emissions.

The Effects of Tourism on the Climate

For years, tourism has recorded high growth rates. At the beginning of 2008, the UNWTO recorded 900 million international tourist arrivals, 52 million more than in 2006. Should this trend continue, by 2050 air travel will account for 25% of all greenhouse gas emissions. Air travel is becoming increasingly popular and is responsible for a substantial part of the environmental burden. According to a study conducted by the German Aerospace Centre (DLR), travel by sea accounts for approx. 2.7 percent of annual global CO₂ emissions. In addition to this, ships account for ten percent of global sulphur emissions and up to a quarter of all nitrogen oxide emissions. Cruise ship tourism, which makes up part of these emissions, has seen strong growth. Although cruise tourism is much more climate-friendly than air travel, this sector of tourism bears growing responsibility for the greenhouse effect.

Air Travel and Global Emissions

Alongside the pure CO₂ emissions, other damaging substances are formed in the atmosphere at normal flight levels. These include nitrogen oxides, soot particles and steam emissions which at such heights make additional contributions to atmospheric warming. Steam and soot form roads of condensation and cirrus cloud cover which reflect heat back towards the earth thus intensifying the greenhouse effect. A large proportion of cirrus cloud cover is today caused by aviation. In order to quantify the effect of aviation, the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) introduced the Radiative Forcing Index (RFI) in its special report on aviation; a multiplier with which further climate effects can be calculated as CO₂ equivalent. The multiplier for CO₂ emissions at flight level was estimated by the IPCC in 2007 as between 2 and 5.8. The multiplication of CO₂ emissions by a factor of 2.7 (as recommended by the IPCC in 1999) should be considered a minimum. Airlines and travel companies often fail to take account of the RFI in their emission estimates therefore recording CO₂ emissions only. The effects of flying are thus being substantially played down.

Climate Protection in the Travel Industry – The TUI example

On its website, TUI Germany gives a comprehensive description of its commitment to climate protection and its drive for greater sustainability in tourism. At the International Tourism Fair, the ITB in Berlin in 2008, Germany's biggest tour operator announced its cooperation agreement with the Swiss provider, myclimate, for payments to offset climate damage. For each TUI client making a voluntary payment of just 2 Euros, TUI will add a further 50 cents. The climate protection contribution is all in all very small as 2.50 Euros makes up only a fraction of the CO₂ burden to be offset.

Environmental action and climate protection are part and parcel of TUI's company quality strategy. In place of new climate-friendly offers for the reduction of emissions, TUI relies on climate efficient technologies and the application of compensatory mechanisms to offset its burden. Critics of this approach see this as greenwashing by TUI, as TUI's product palette includes a number of especially polluting offers, as for instance, the luxury trip by private jet to Latin America. This trip produces around 22 tonnes of CO₂ per person. In order to fully offset these emissions, a payment of more than 500 Euros would be required. This raises the question as to how such travel offers can be reconciled with TUI's sustainability goals.

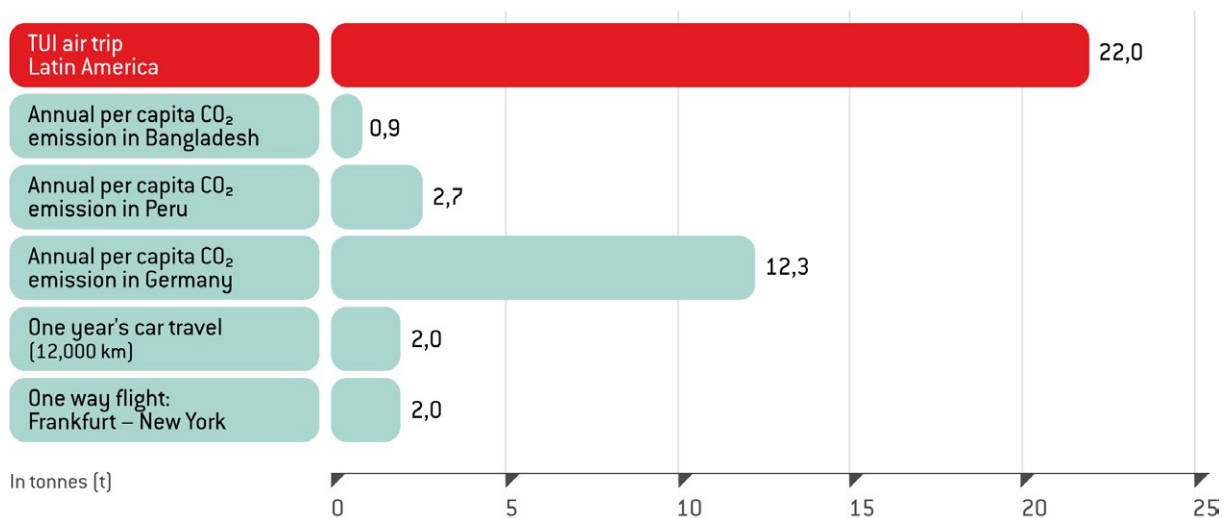
Tour operators must assume greater responsibility towards climate protection. In order to reduce emissions from tourism, travel offers must become more climate-friendly. A description of the company's own commitment to climate protection on its website is not enough, appropriate and efficient action must also follow. The effect of 2.50 Euros as compensation for 22 tonnes in CO₂ emissions is nothing more than a drop in the ocean; no more than a whole lot of hot air!



Erleben Sie die Welt
aus einem neuen Blickwinkel.
Auf einem Kreuzflug.

Source: 1. <http://www.hl-kreuzfluege.de/formular.php>
2. http://www.tuifly.com/de/destinations/kreuzflug_suedamerika.php?AD=HHNL&ATT=KW46_2_Kreuzflug_Button

Emissions from TUI air trip in comparison



Source: 1. Emissions calculated by Atmosfair
2. Emissions calculated by World Resources Institute - Per capita greenhouse gas emissions in 2000

International Climate Policy

Aviation and shipping

Aviation and shipping have received little attention within the framework of negotiations at climate conventions up to now. Art. 2 of the Kyoto Protocol states: „The Parties... shall pursue limitation or reduction of emissions of greenhouse gases ... and bunker fuels (that is, aeroplane and ship kerosene) by working through the International Civil Aviation Organisation and the International Maritime Organisation, respectively.“

Practice in recent years has shown that the ICAO and IMO have undertaken little in matters of climate change. According to the Kyoto Protocol, the ICAO is obliged to develop instruments for the reduction of greenhouse gas emissions from aviation and shipping. Up to now, it has presented no workable suggestion and in fact hinders states which do wish to progress in issues of climate protection. The tri-annual general meeting of the ICAO in 2007 rejected a global system for emissions trading on the basis of pressure from the USA. Instead, a resolution was passed which attempted to torpedo EU plans to proceed alone. EU member states had reached a joint agreement prior to the ICAO meeting. The 27 European member states supported by other countries have raised objection to this resolution thus destroying its legal force.

On 24th October 2008, the EU passed legislation that as of 2012, aviation would be included in the European emission trading system. The enactment of legislation by the EU Commission followed in pursuance of a decision by the European Parliament from 4th July 2008. Up to now, only CO₂ emissions were calculated and not the non-CO₂ emissions. The European Union now intends to extend the trading system to include international travel by sea in addition to air travel. The 14th UN Conference on Climate Change in Poznan, Poland, in December 2008 will set the path for the future. States attending the conference must draw up a basis text for the inclusion of aviation and shipping in a post-2012 agreement. The final decision on these matters is to be taken at the next conference in Copenhagen at the end of 2009. With respect to the negotiations in Poznan, it is important that the State Parties are first clear on their own positions in respect of climate protection and thus raise the bar on their achievements up to now. Environmental protection organisations, on the other hand, fear that the climate summit in Poznan will set insufficient targets. Future obligations to reduce emissions are negotiated in a working group under the Kyoto Protocol (Ad Hoc Working Group on Further Commitments for Annex I Parties under the Kyoto Protocol, AWG KP).

Tourism

International tourism as a CO₂ producing service sector is not included in any regulatory framework for the reduction of emissions. Neither at national nor at European or international level do statutory instruments exist compelling the travel industry to reduce or limit its CO₂ emissions.

Within the German Federal Government, responsibility for policy with respect to tourism lies with the Federal Ministry for Economics and Technology (BMWi). There is no separate ministry for tourism. In order to coordinate activities in this policy field, a Federal Commissioner for Tourism was appointed in 2005. The current Commissioner is the Bundestag Member, Ernst Hinsken. He represents the tourist-political concerns of the Federal Government and in Parliament. Another important role is that played by the Committee for Tourism of the German Bundestag. The Commissioner for Tourism is also member of this body.

In the EU, the EU Commission is responsible for support for tourism. On an international level, the UNWTO followed a call from the UN General Secretary, Ban Ki-moon, to take global action for climate protection in conjunction with strategies for the reduction of poverty and the millennium development targets. Instruments for obligating its member to reduce their emissions are currently not available to the UNWTO. The international body is merely able to inform and motivate its members to take action for climate protection.

Action taken by the UNWTO

In the field of climate protection and the fight against poverty in tourism, the UNWTO works in close cooperation with the UN Environment Programme (UNEP) and the World Meteorological Organisation (WMO). Since 2003, the UNWTO has presented the topic at international conferences as has challenged tourism's stakeholders to take action for climate protection:

09. – 11. April 2003,
Djerba, Tunisia

„First International Conference on Climate Change and Tourism“

The „Djerba Declaration“ recognised the complicated relationship between tourism and climate change.

01. – 03. October 2007,
Davos, Switzerland

„Second International Conference on Climate Change and Tourism“

In the „Davos Declaration - Climate change and tourism responding to global challenges“, the travel industry was challenged to take action in the field of adaption and mitigation, to use energy efficient technology as well as to make finance available to poorer countries.

23. – 29. November 2007,
Cartagena de las Indias,
Columbia

UNWTO – General Assembly:

Acceptance and enactment of the Davos Declaration.

12. December 2007,
Bali, Indonesia

UNFCCC COP 13: Presentation and promotion of the Davos Declaration.

27. September 2008,
Lima, Peru

World Tourism Day: Advertisement for the Davos Declaration; launch of the website ClimateSolutions.travel, an information platform for climate protection in tourism; launch of the first Global Compact Initiative in tourism „TOURpact.gc“ as new regulatory framework for corporate social responsibility in tourism. „TOURpact.gc“ unites the UN initiative Global Compact and motivates companies to assume greater social responsibility in connection with the UNWTO's Global Code of Ethics for Tourism.

Davos Declaration

The Davos Declaration calls on all tourism stakeholders to assume responsibility for climate protection. The Declaration provides a four point plan for the responsibility of the travel industry.

Firstly, emissions of greenhouse gases, primarily produced by transport and accommodation, must be reduced.

Secondly, strategies both for the travel industry as well as for the destinations must be developed in order to adjust to climate changes.

Thirdly, the use of both conventional and new technologies is recommended in order to increase energy efficiency.

Fourthly, finance must be made available to help poor countries and regions.

The Declaration includes commitments by the travel industry such as to use renewable energy or to make efforts to inform their clientele on means for saving energy and the protection of the environment. Although the Declaration concentrates on the reduction of energy use, it provides no concrete figures or temporal framework for this reduction.

Climate-Political Demands for Tourism

Inclusion of aviation and shipping in the post-2012 agreement

Climate protection requires obligatory targets for the reduction of emissions! Voluntary measures from the tourism industry itself have been rare. These include offers of a self-binding nature in relation to the reduction of emissions or the use of compensation mechanisms. Less than 1% of all air travellers use the compensation mechanisms. The global expansion in air travel and airports, the increasing number of air passengers and the growing selection of cheap flights on offer increase total emissions and their accompanying negative effects on the climate. International regulation is necessary.

Consistent climate protection requires the inclusion of aviation and shipping in any subsequent amendment to the Kyoto Protocol. Obligatory minimum targets must be defined; a generally applicable agreement will avoid possible distortions or imbalances in competitiveness. In calculating emissions, an RFI multiplier of 2.7 should be used as recommended by the IPCC.

Introduction of tradable individual emissions quotas in tourism

Extending the trading of emissions quotas to the tourism sector would represent a financial and therefore effective incentive for travel companies to invest in efficient technologies and to offer climate-friendly travel products. Travel companies would receive tradable emissions certificates which must be bought. Should the companies produce fewer emissions, they would require fewer certificates. These could then be sold. In the converse, if more emissions are produced, further certificates must be acquired at further cost. An example: Should a travel company exceed its quota in putting together its products, it could acquire certificates from a more climate-friendly travel provider which has certificates to sell. Coordination of this system could rest with the Federal Ministry for Environment (BMU) or the Federal Ministry for Economics and Technology (BMWi).

Product identification in tourism

The travel industry can make an important contribution to climate protection through providing information to travellers. Only properly informed travellers can make a climate-friendly travel decision. Up to now, the international travel industry has taken action only in isolated areas as far as providing information to their clients and motivating these towards making an effective contribution to climate protection is concerned. A statutory obligation to show the carbon footprint of every tourist product would be a decisive step in making this a generally accepted standard. Governments are called upon to create corresponding instruments in their respective countries which include proper identification of tourist products. These include indicating the carbon footprint or eco-balance of any single trip.

Outlook

Regulation by statute is a decisive but not the only contribution towards climate protection. In order to protect the environment efficiently and sustainably, more than mere adherence to the law is required, especially where applicable rules define mere minimum standards and fail to create climate awareness among producers and consumers. Climate protection in tourism requires a paradigm shift. Travel companies are called upon to take appropriate action in respect of climate protection on their own initiative. This includes creating climate-friendly travel products, using energy efficient technologies and sensitising clients to the issue of climate protection. After all, the customer can influence offers and the structure of the tourism sector by opting for more climate-friendly products and by responsible consumption. All tourism stakeholders are called upon to apply all means available to them for ensuring climate protection. After all, climate change won't wait.

Contact

TOURISM WATCH
Evangelischer Entwicklungsdienst
Ulrich-von-Hassell-Straße 76
53123 Bonn

Phone: +49 (0) 228 / 81 01 - 23 02 oder 8101 - 23 03
Fax: +49 (0) 228 / 81 01 - 150

E-Mail: tourism-watch@eed.de | www.tourism-watch.de

TourismWatch
EED-Informationsdienst Dritte Welt-Tourismus

eed
Evangelischer
Entwicklungsdienst