



travel

It's time to limit how often we can travel abroad – ‘carbon passports’ may be the answer

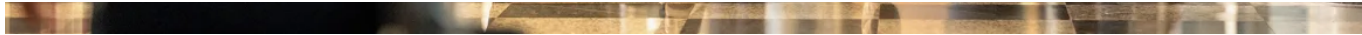
Analysis by Ross Bennett-Cook

THE
CONVERSATION

🕒 4
minute
read ·

Published 7:45 AM EST,
Mon November 27, 2023





simonkr/E+/Getty Images

The "carbon passport" concept centers on travelers being assigned a yearly carbon allowance.

Editor's Note: The views expressed in this commentary are solely those of the writer. CNN is showcasing the work of The Conversation, a collaboration between journalists and academics to provide news analysis and commentary. The content is produced solely by The Conversation.

(The Conversation) — The summer of 2023 was very significant for the travel industry. By the end of July, international tourist arrivals globally reached 84% of pre-pandemic levels. In some European countries, such as France, Denmark and Ireland, tourism demand even surpassed

This may be great news economically, but there's concern that a return to the status quo is already showing dire environmental and social consequences.

The summer saw record-breaking heatwaves across many parts of the world. People were forced to flee wildfires in Greece and Hawaii, and extreme weather warnings were issued in many popular holiday destinations like Portugal, Spain and Turkey. Experts attributed these extreme conditions to climate change.

RELATED ARTICLE When people move out, wildlife moves in: 10 abandoned places reclaimed by nature

Tourism is part of the problem. The tourism sector generates around one-tenth of the greenhouse gas emissions that are driving the climate crisis.

The negative impacts of tourism on the environment have become so severe that some are suggesting drastic changes to our travel habits are inevitable. In a report from 2023 that analyzed the future of sustainable travel, tour operator Intrepid Travel proposed that “carbon passports” will soon become a reality if the tourism industry hopes to survive.

What is a carbon passport?

The idea of a carbon passport centers on

each nation being assigned a yearly carbon allowance that they cannot exceed. These allowances can then “ration” travel.

This concept may seem extreme. But the idea of personal carbon allowances is not new. A similar concept (called “personal carbon trading”) was discussed by UK Parliament in 2008, before being shut down because of its perceived complexity and the possibility of public resistance.

The average annual carbon footprint for a person in the US is 16 tons – one of the highest rates in the world. In the UK this figure sits at 11.7 tons, still more than five times the figure recommended by the Paris Agreement to keep global temperature rise

pre-industrial levels.

Globally, the average annual carbon footprint of a person is closer to 4 tons.

But, to have the best chance of preventing temperature rise from overshooting 2

Celsius, the average global carbon footprint needs to drop to under two tons by 2050. This figure equates to around two roundtrip flights between London and New York.

Intrepid Travel's report predicts that we will see carbon passports in action by 2040.

However, several laws and restrictions have been put in place over the past year that suggest our travel habits may already be on the verge of change.



AaronP/Bauer-Griffin/GC Images/Getty Images

The average annual carbon footprint for a person in the US is 16 tons.

Targeting air travel

Between 2013 and 2018, the amount of CO₂ emitted by commercial aircraft worldwide increased by 32%.

Improvements in fuel efficiency are slowly

But research from 2014 found that whatever the industry's efforts to reduce its carbon emissions, they will be outweighed by the growth in air traffic.

For emission reductions to have any meaningful effect, ticket prices would have to rise by 1.4% each year, discouraging some people from flying. However, in reality, ticket prices have been falling.

Some European countries are beginning to take measures to reduce air travel. As of April 1, 2023, passengers on short-haul flights and older aircraft in Belgium have been subject to increased taxes to encourage alternative forms of travel.

Less than two months later, France

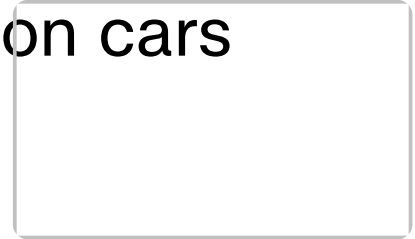
the same trip can be made by train in two-and-a-half hours or less. Spain is expected to follow suit.

A similar scheme could also be on the horizon for Germany. In 2021, a YouGov poll found that 70% of Germans would support such measures to fight climate change if alternative transport routes like trains or ships were available.

Cruises and carbon

It's not just air travel that's being criticized. An investigation by the European Federation for Transport and Environment in 2023 found that cruise ships pump four times as many sulphuric gases (which are

respiratory conditions) into the atmosphere than all of Europe's 291 million cars combined.



Statistics like these have forced European destinations to take action against the cruise industry. In July, Amsterdam's council banned cruise ships from docking in the city center in a bid to reduce tourism and pollution – an initiative that has shown success elsewhere.

In 2019, Venice was the most polluted European port, due to large numbers of cruise ship visits. But it dropped to 41st place in 2022 after a ban on large cruise ships entering the city's waters reduced air pollutants from ships in Venice by 80%.



Westend61/Getty Images

Slovenia may grow in popularity as travelers seek out European destinations with cooler temperatures.

Changing destinations

Intrepid Travel's report also highlights that not only how we travel, but where we travel will soon be impacted by climate change. Boiling temperatures will probably

destinations, prompting European tourists to search for cooler destinations such as Belgium, Slovenia and Poland for their summer holidays.

Several travel agencies reported seeing noticeable increases in holiday bookings to cooler European destinations like Scandinavia, Ireland and the UK during 2023's peak summer travel months.

Whatever the solution may be, changes to our travel habits look inevitable.

Destinations across the globe, from Barcelona to the Italian riviera and even Mount Everest are already calling for limits on tourist numbers as they struggle to cope with crowds and pollution.

their travel habits now, before this change is forced upon them.



Ross Bennett-Cook is a visiting lecturer, School of Architecture + Cities, University of Westminster

Republished under a Creative Commons license from The Conversation.

MORE FROM CNN



After years of delays, wait times for US passports are back ...



23 of our favorite travel wallets for



26 expert-approved
travel essentials you
can get for \$10 or ...



Paid Links





Log In

Live TV

Listen

US



World

Politics

Business

Markets

Opinion

Health

Entertainment

Tech

Style

Travel

Sports

Watch

Listen

CNN Underscored

Coupons

Weather

About CNN



FOLLOW CNN TRAVEL



[Terms of Use](#) [Privacy Policy](#) [Cookie Settings](#)

[Ad Choices](#) [Accessibility & CC](#) [About](#) [Newsletters](#)

© 2023 Cable News Network. A Warner Bros. Discovery
Company. All Rights Reserved.

CNN Sans™ & © 2016 Cable News Network.
