

Do your bit for the environ, even when you travel!



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I spent the most of Republic Day holiday in the Andamans. It was breathtakingly beautiful and amazing to even imagine we had places of such natural beauty in the country. There was a lot of talk though from those that had lived in Havelock that there is rapid 'commercialization' and many more tourists were arriving this season. While this is a fairly normal lament from places of natural beauty like the hills or the beaches, it really was sad to hear it again in the context of the Andaman beaches; because they should remain pristine for those discerning travelers who are willing to be responsible and respectful of all that it has to offer. Which begs the question — what is sustainable travel? Or rather, how can I be a sustainable tourist?

The word 'ecotourism', like 'sustainable tourism', is an oxymoron. Tourists travel by air, which carries a high carbon footprint. If we are willing to look past the air travel's footprint, sustainable travel can be defined as a trip where people interact with natural environments

while remaining socially and environmentally sustainable. Destinations with flora, fauna, and cultural attractions are usually primary attractions and hence vulnerable to abuse. Often these locations reveal the impact people have on the environment, which should foster a greater appreciation of our natural habitats. What really sets a sustainable tourist apart from the regulars is that he is sensitive and mindful of the environment and is willing to contribute to their overall sustainability and preservation.

Last year, the Government of India passed new rules by which it banned the manufacturing of plastic bags of below 50 microns as thinner bags are a major threat to environment due to its non-disposability. Manufacturers of plastic bags are to pay for its post-use disposal. Manufacturing and use of non-recyclable multi-layered plastic are also to be phased out in two years under the new rules. The Central Pollution Control Board (CPCB) has been mandated to formulate guidelines for thermoset plastic (the plastic difficult to recycle). Rural areas have also been

brought in the ambit of these rules since plastic has reached to villages. Responsibility for implementation of the rules is given to Gram Panchayats. So remember to reduce, reuse and recycle — whether it is less plastic bottles, or not picking up unnecessary brochures or maps, every bit reduced is every bit saved!

To drive home the back to nature ethos, travel attractions and resorts usually have a significant focus on their footprint. Natural environments such as forests and beaches are kept as untouched as possible with minimal infrastructure built into it. Typically a solid recycling program is in place with a big focus on garbage and management of litter.

Other parameters focus on the usage of resources — from pathway lights at night to the overall energy consumptions. Everything is monitored closely and nothing 'out of the nature' is adopted. The idea is to seamlessly coexist with the ecosystem! The next time you travel do your bit to save the environment during your stay. Be aware of your footprint, and avoid plastic bags!

