



We love our wild, outdoor places. The problem is, we're loving them to death. Flying to visit the distant ones is contributing carbon dioxide to the ever-growing greenhouse gas overload; all the clobber we take with us demands greater extraction of diminishing resources both to manufacturer and to reach us in our homes; and when we arrive at our beloved open-air domains, our combined weight is directly impacting already fragile ecosystems. Take, for instance, the mountains.

"Like the earth's oceans and rainforests, mountains are crucial to life. Mountains are the source of freshwater for half of humanity. They are storehouses of genetic diversity that help feed the world. Yet, mountains are under threat from climate change, overexploitation and environmental degradation. Mountain people are among the world's poorest and hungriest: a disproportionate number of the world's 840 million chronically undernourished people live in mountain areas. Although covering only 3% of the earth's surface, they contain an astonishing 10,000 species of plants, the highest biodiversity per unit area of any ecosystem in the world. They are also critically important to millions of people in the lowlands as sources of fresh water for drinking, agriculture, and hydropower.

So, in this guide we consider outdoor adventure sports such as surfing, sailing, kayaking, skiing, snowboarding, backpacking and camping to see how they might be made greener. (For the most part we leave biking for a whole separate guide.)

Top 10 Tips

Here are 10 highly effective ways to go greener. Hit it.

1. Get out there - Being in the forest, the desert, the mountains, the rivers, the ocean is more likely to invigorate your green passion and your innate sense of place than being stuck in that manmade artifice, the city, that most of us now know as home. You might call them holidays, vacations, weekends, but in reality it is simply playtime. Just like when we were kids. The sheen on the water, the warmth of the rock, the smell of moss after rain, the taste of dirt. It connects us not only to our childhood, but also to our origins. And the longer we dwell there, the greater our sense of stewardship. So do your part to fight nature deficit disorder and get out there.

2. Travel wisely - But how you get there is probably the biggest environmental decision you have to make. For most of us, no other choice will have as much impact on the planet as our mode of travel. If at possible, avoid the plane. Think global, play local. Look for exotic, exciting places nearby. Be creative, like the guys in Montreal, Canada, who go surfing on their local river. Of course if the breaks are local, there are many racks available for toting your board by bicycle. For many jaunts into the wilds, especially in Europe, New Zealand and South America, it is possible to train or bus to a trailhead or 'put-in,' and in many cases this will allow you to complete an A-to-B trip without having to retrace you path. But if you desperately have go by car, there remain plenty of options. Hitch-hike (best if you're with a buddy and don't have a kayak in tow!), carpool with mates (have fun, save both fuel and CO2 emissions), rent a hybrid, or fill the tank with a biofuel blend.

3. Share and share alike - You know you're going to have a fantastic time under the open sky, so why not share it. Once in a while, soften the hardcore approach a little—take your friends, family, work colleagues, or fellow students out there with you. Watch 'em swat a few mosquitoes, shake the sand from their wetsuit, or get a sunburned nose, all the while knowing that you are introducing someone anew to the blue sky joys that give you so much pleasure. Chances are, someone did the same for you once. Return the favor by paying it forward. If you're feeling really gallant, volunteer with the Scouts, surf club or for summer camps. It's not only good for the soul and the planet, it now seems to be good for the brain.

4. Support those who support - The Surfrider Foundation is famous for its work for the benefit of both surfers and the environment in which they play. For climbers, the Access Group plays a similar role, and there are plenty others, some of whom we note below. Financial and moral support for such bodies ensures that outdoor arenas in which we cavort will get the thoughtful environmental recognition they deserve.

5. Play hard, land lightly - There is a tendency when playing outside the boundaries imposed by concrete, glass, and societal norms to think that we can just go for it. And while that's true when shooting through a pressure wave on a whitewater river or pushing yourself to the end of a hundred mile wilderness run, it doesn't mean we can just drop our other responsibilities. As Climbing Magazine put it in a piece about 'eco-bouldering', "Just remember: skankous tape wads, cigarette butts, and energy-bar wrappers do not constitute local flora." And choose fuel stoves over fires from downed timber—those boughs create habitat for local critters and humus for soil replenishment. But improper use of stoves has its own issues. The stove of an illegally camped Czech backpacker set off a wildfire that decimated 12,000 hectares (29,652 acres) of Chile's iconic Torres del Paine National Park. The Leave No Trace Center for Outdoor Ethics has a comprehensive set of guidelines for minimizing such environmental tragedies.

6. Buy consciously - In Europe they use a phrase, 'ecological rucksack,' to measure the volume of nature that was disturbed to generate a given product or service. And it seems appropriate here as a reminder that the foam block in a typical surfboard, a kayak hull, or snowboard jacket is usually made of a finite fossil fuel by-product and will be with us for at least another 500 years. Obviously it's important to select outdoor gear for its ability to perform -- your life may depend on it -- but these days there are many products that offer identical function (and flair) with fewer of the environmental flaws. Bamboo snowboards, hemp surfboards, recycled plastic underwear and fleece, organic energy bars, recycled rubber-soled walking boots, organic cotton climbing pants and oodles more. Check below for companies that deliver both high tech and low impact.

7. Powered by the sun - With all this talk of gear and equipment it is important to remember that the greenest outdoor pursuits are those undertaken without the aid of gas guzzling engines. Hear the crunch of snow under your backcountry skis or snowshoes rather than the screech and grind of the skidoo's motor. The dip of your paddle into the river, or the flutter of the sail as it is trimmed can bring your soul more peace than the whine that emanates from a seadoo, jetski, or motor boat. More and more snowboarders are discovering the delights of back bowls and leaving energy-consuming, lift-assisted resort boarding behind, as telemark skiers did a generation before them. With an organic diet in your belly, fuelling your human-powered activities, you could almost be considered to be running on solar energy.

8. Less is more - [Ray Jardine](#), who turned the climbing world on its ear by inventing 'Friends,' the iconic camming protection device for climbers, later rediscovered the delights of simple backpacking. He went on to inspire an entire cadre of long distance travelers who traverse mountain ranges with a rucksack not much larger than a daypack. In turn, the industry responded with a plethora of featherweight, minimal equipment. But the real point here is that the gear should never become more important than the experience. Do we have more fun now with our multi-thousand dollar mountain bikes than that the all-terrain pioneers did, careening down hills of Marin Country on their ancient cruiser bikes? Less stuff often means more fun, yet with less demand on the world's diminishing resources.

9. Reuse, repair, rejuvenate - High-grade outdoor apparel and equipment can readily be obtained secondhand. Freecycle, Ebay and Craiglist are just some of the online places to try. But there are also bricks-and-mortar stores selling pre-loved sports goods, such as the US franchise chain with the wonderful name, 'Play it Again,' what has a wide range of snow sports gear. And don't forget many rental shops sell off their end of season's stock. Buying a secondhand climbing rope or mountain bike helmet, however, is probably not the wisest move. Another way of reducing unnecessary production and distribution environmental woes is to repair the gear you already have. Patch the ding in your surfboard, the rip in your tent, replace the frayed rigging on your Hobie Cat. Either doing it yourself or via a repair service will greatly extend the useful life of your beloved gear. As will a bit of a tender loving care. Wax your skis, rinse your grit-filled climbing ropes, sharpen your snowboard edges, wash your down sleeping bag, clean the jets and fuel lines on your camp stove. It will make your kit seem like new and certainly give it extra seasons or years of faithful service.

10. Higher and hire -

Of course there will always be times when you want the latest stuff. Work out how often you're really going to use it. It might prove more economically (and certainly more environmentally) sound to rent it. That way you can always ski in the latest gear each season. Do you really need to own a sea kayak if it only sees the waves one week a year? With the advent of online services like Hire Things, chances are you can even hire activity specific equipment. Got stuff gathering dust in garage yourself? Make some pocket money rather than let it sit idle.

This is an extract from Treehugger.com

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