

How to find Sustainable Accommodation

Finding sustainable accommodation is not always easy and it is not always clear what is actually sustainable. Being responsible in your accommodation choice does take more time and critical thinking, but a bit of extra effort on your part can go a long way. Here are some tips that can help you in the right direction:



Tip #1: Look for sustainability credentials

Before booking, you can look for sustainable tourism certifications. Certifications provide guiding on this journey and is a communication tool to allow sustainable service providers to stand out from the crowd. Here are some examples:

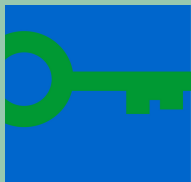


GOOD TRAVEL SEAL

You might know about our Good Travel Seal, which is especially created to serve small, family-run enterprises. The program offers a simplified version of the internationally recognised Global Sustainable Tourism Council Standard (GSTC). Through a publicly available scorecard in the Good Travel Guide we show customers exactly in which aspects accommodation facilities perform well and in which they can do better.

TRAVELIFE CERTIFICATION


Travelife is an internationally recognised accommodation sustainability programme. Containing a range of criteria that assess accommodation performance in the areas of human rights, labour practices, cultural- and environmental impacts. Ultimately, when a company meets the requirements, it will receive a Travelife award. This is also a GSTC-recognised standard.



Green Key

GREEN KEY CERTIFICATION

Green Key Certification is an ecolabel for hotels, hostels, campsites, holiday parks, small accommodations as well as conference centres, attractions and restaurants. The Green Key award is based on compliance with strict criteria in the areas of environmental management and sustainability education.

A red pushpin is pinned to the top of a red, cloud-like shape.

Unfortunately, many regional and national bodies issue certifications based on voluntary qualifications and very loose standards. Before you choose an accommodation based on its certification, check out the requirements for that type of recognition.







Tip #2: Use major booking platforms to find sustainable options

You probably know your way to popular booking platforms such as Booking.com, Tripadvisor and Airbnb. Though their main goal is not to be sustainable, there are still sustainable options to be found if you know how to look.

BOOKING.COM

It is possible to find sustainable accommodation there. When searching for responsible options on Booking.com, check the following filters:

-  Guest Houses
-  Homestays
-  Bed and breakfasts
-  Farm stays
-  Country houses



The results won't be perfect, but using these filters will help you find options that are more likely to be locally-run.

AIRBNB

Airbnb is known to cause problems for locals in cities, including inflated rental prices and accommodation scarcity. However, Airbnb also makes marketing more accessible for small business owners in many places, which is an important part of sustainable tourism. So use Airbnb for more remote or unique searches if you want sustainable accommodation that does not cause problems for locals.

TRIPADVISOR

TripAdvisor now has a GreenLeaders program where they clarify if a hotel is eco-friendly. Search for the Eco-Leaders Badge on the listing page of the hotel and click to see the eco-initiatives. Important to note that hotels are the ones responsible for requesting the classification, and they're not very transparent about the process nor whether they check to validate claims. Use at your own discretion.

B'N'TREE

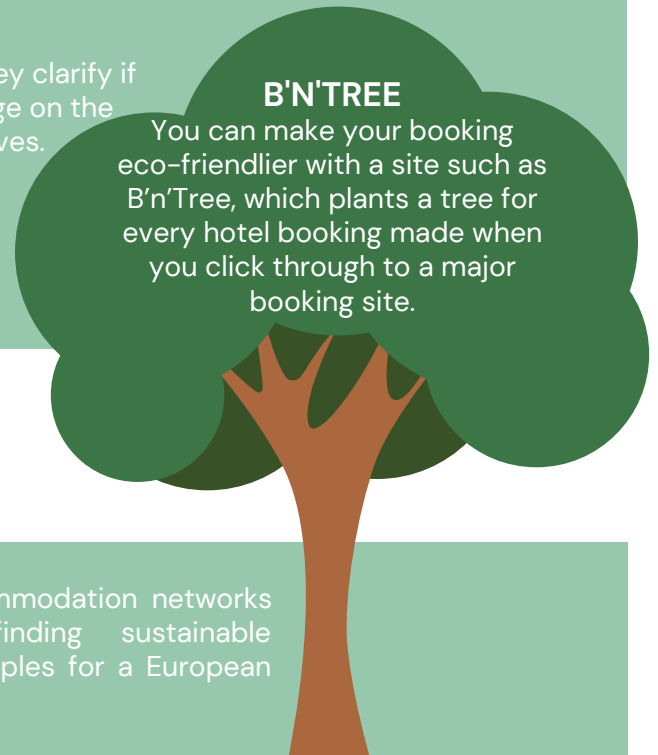
You can make your booking eco-friendlier with a site such as B'n'Tree, which plants a tree for every hotel booking made when you click through to a major booking site.



Tip #3: Use regional websites

A lot of countries have lists or accommodation networks that you can tap into for finding sustainable accommodation. Here are some examples for a European getaway:

- Netherlands: Nature House – <https://www.naturehouse.co.uk/> → Holiday homes in nature
- Italy: Agriturismo – <https://www.agriturismo.it/en/> → Farm stays
- France: Gites de France – <https://www.gites-de-france.com/en> → Homestays and farm stays
- Austria: Farm Holidays – <https://www.farmholidays.com/> → Farm stays
- Slovenia: Farm Tourism – <https://www.farmtourism.si/> → Organic farm stays
- Spain: Ecoturismo – www.ecoturismo.com → Eco accommodation





Tip #4: Use booking platform that are dedicated to sustainability

There are several booking platform which could help you to find a sustainable place to stay. They use various criteria to assess the sustainability of different accommodations. Some of the well-known platforms include:

ECOHOTELS.COM

Is a tool for the sustainability-conscious traveller, who values commitment and responsible actions equally to a good experience and a comfortable stay. They only cooperate with hotels that are truly committed to sustainability and have the trustworthy certifications to prove it. In addition to this, they have committed themselves to supporting reforestation, increase of biodiversity and removal of plastic waste from oceans for every booking made on their site.



bookdifferent

BOOKDIFFERENT

They assess their hotels on the basis of ecolabels. So hotels on this site have been certified by respected programs or organisations. Bookdifferent.com then assigns a staygreen check score for each hotel, based on four different factors: effective sustainable management and compliance with law, fair and equal treatment for employees and destinations, respect for local traditions, and taking care of nature and the environment. The greener the checkscore, the better the hotel is in terms of sustainability.


ECOBNB

They assess the hotels on their website based on 10 sustainability criteria. These are specific targets including: 100% renewable energy, organic or local food, more than 80% waste recycling, solar panels for hot water, and energy saving lighting.



FAIRBNB

This is a social enterprise in Europe. It donates half its income to local environmental (and social) projects, such as community gardens and food waste recovery centres.



Although these are great tools, they do have their limitations. One of the main limitations which is common to all of them is a lack of choice. Therefore, it could be fruitful to do your own research.



Tip #5: Do your own research




Keep in mind, however, that certification is often so expensive and time-consuming it can exclude smaller accommodation types that may be just as sustainable. Some types of accommodation are naturally sustainable, without needing to be certified. When looking for sustainable travel accommodation, it might also be worth thinking about something a little different to the usual hotels and hostels. Tiny house stays, cabins, wilderness huts, and glamping set-ups, for instance, all have small, often temporary, footprints. Homestays are a fantastic alternative and a great way of learning about local cultures. These are more likely to target the cultural and the natural side of sustainable accommodation. Homestays benefit the livelihoods of local communities and contribute to the local economy.



Tip #6: Beware of greenwashing

While choosing an accommodation for your travels it is important to keep the practice of greenwashing in mind during your search. If you are not familiar with the term; "greenwashing" an accommodation is implementing measures which only look good from the outside, but essentially is an empty promise of sustainable activity. It is the deceptive use of marketing or public relations to promote the perception of environment friendliness. The rise of greenwashing can make it difficult to separate hotels striving for best practices from those that do not have much substance behind their sustainability commitments.

Signs of greenwashing could include:

-  **Vague language:** They use words or terms with no clear meaning (e.g. "eco-friendly").
-  **No proof:** They don't provide any specific examples of how they are acting sustainably.
-  **Use of technical jargon:** They try to hide behind information that only a scientist could check or understand.



If in doubt, get in touch with them, consider to contact them directly to ask about sustainability. The more we all do this, the more we normalize sustainable practices and the better off the planet will be.

How to support your sustainable accommodation after your trip?

Supporting sustainable accommodation owners doesn't stop once your trip is over! There are many small but impactful things you can do to support local businesses from the comfort of your own home:

Leave them a review: Reviews on platforms like TripAdvisor, Google, and hotel booking websites can make enormous difference for small businesses. Nearly all travellers read hotel reviews online from other travellers while making decisions regarding their accommodation.



Share your photos: If you stayed in an accommodation that could use a little boost with their digital presence, consider emailing or messaging the owner with some of your photos.

Recommend them to other travellers: Word of mouth is the most powerful form of marketing. If you come across a particularly sustainable business, tell people about it!



Consider compensate your carbon footprint effectively: Support a project by donating to a carbon effective compensation program. Check out our article on the topic [here](#).