

Flying in the face of wisdom

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Flying in the face of wisdom: the "greenest" among us are more likely to be frequent flyers

They are among the greenest consumers in Britain. They take on board the message about protecting the environment...yet they take more flights than the rest of us, and therefore contribute more to carbon emissions. These are the findings from an independent report "Can fly, will fly" by the British Market Research Bureau (BMRB).

BMRB identified this group as "Active Environmentalists" - these individuals display a commitment to the environment through their purchasing behaviour, reading interests, and membership of groups concerned with environmental issues. But for all their good intentions, they are more likely than the rest of the population to be frequent flyers.

Who are the Active Environmentalists?

The majority of Active Environmentalists do not fit the stereotype of the radical young activist. They tend to be well educated, affluent, middle class (ABC1), and aged 35 or over.

Consumer behaviour and attitudes

Their daily product consumption shows that they do indeed practise what they preach. They buy "green"™ and "ethical" brands, and products that use recycled materials, for example:

- 23% buy "green"™ brands of washing powder, in contrast to just 1% of the overall population.
- 49% use recycled or non-chlorine-bleached toilet paper, compared to just 5% of the overall population.

They understand the green message and they express concern about a range of environmental issues:

- 90% say they are prepared to pay more for environmentally-friendly products
- 87% say they buy free-range products whenever they can
- 93% are worried about traffic pollution and congestion
- 97% believe people have a duty to recycle

They see themselves as ethical consumers too - they are five times more likely than the average adult to say they are vegetarian, four times more likely to visit the Body Shop, and three times more likely to buy Fair Trade products as well as saying they would pay more for organic food.

Damaging behaviour: air travel

Yet they also take more than their fair share of flights. They are 55% more likely than the average British adult to have taken three or more trips by air in the last year.

It could be argued that the affluent middle class are always likely to be more pre-disposed to fly frequently, because they are more able to afford foreign holidays and trips. However, if we look exclusively the affluent middle class (ABC1 aged 35+), the Active Environmentalist component within this group are just as likely to fly 3 or more times a year as the group as a whole.

Despite all the care they take to be green in many aspects of their lives, they contribute far more to carbon emissions than people who take much less care. All the good intentions of the Active Environmentalists are neutralised by their love of travel.

Co-author of the report Nicholas Gilby said "with the current spotlight on air travel playing a key role in the contribution of CO2 emissions it will be interesting to see if the Active Environmentalists are willing or able to change their flying behaviour over the next 12 months".

Sue Welland, Founder & Creative Director of The CarbonNeutral Company said "CO2 footprinting is about a total lifestyle, of which air travel is one element, but it would be interesting to know how many of these flights had been offset".