



Sustainability during Your Exchange

You're planning to study abroad? There are many different ways to get there and the mode of travel you chose has an impact on the climate. There are also many ways to lead a sustainable lifestyle abroad.

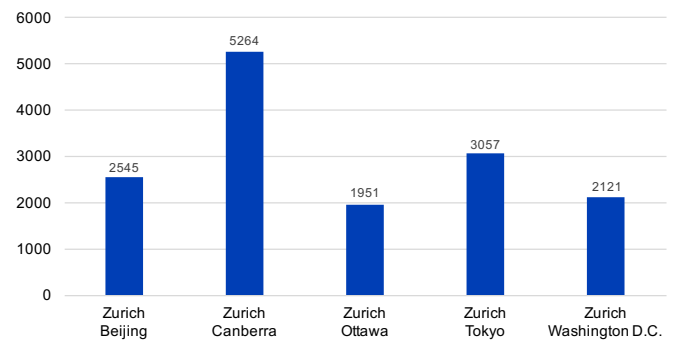
Outward and Return Journey

If your destination is in Europe, the good infrastructure will allow you to choose from various modes of transport. Example 1 shows the greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions in CO₂ equivalents (CO₂e) caused by return trips to selected European cities, by mode of transport.

Trips to countries far away are associated with a significant climate impact (see example 2). For example, a return trip from Washington D.C. to Zurich causes 2,121 kg CO₂e per person [1]. This alone exceeds the annual per capita CO₂ budget of one ton, which we should respect to keep global warming within acceptable limits [2].

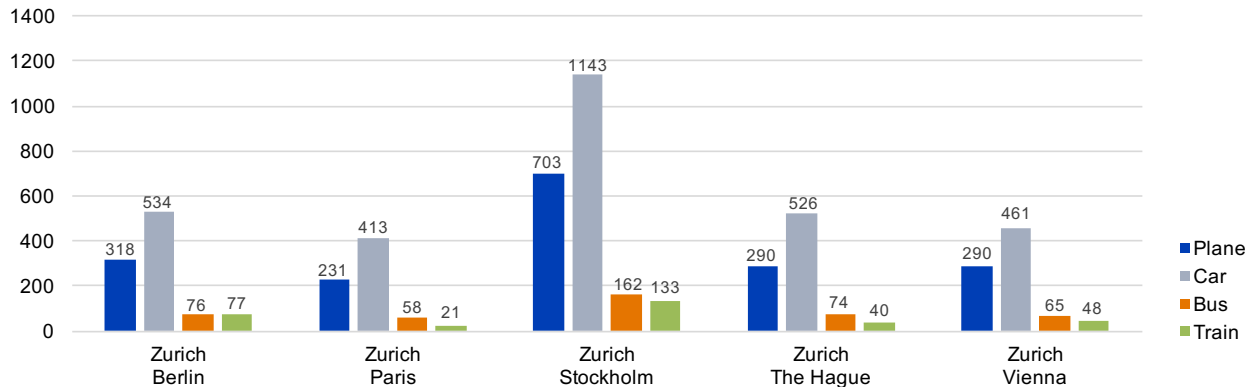
If you can't avoid flying, keep in mind that direct flights usually cause fewer GHG emissions than stop-over flights [3], unless the occupancy rate or plane efficiency of the stop-over flight is higher.

The second-best option after avoiding flights is to take part in a carbon offset scheme, where you pay to compensate the GHG emissions you cause. Providers of carbon offsets differ with regard to their project standards and how they calculate emissions. We recommend looking for high project standards (e.g. "Gold Standard") and the inclusion of further greenhouse gases besides CO₂ [5, 6].



Example 2: GHG emissions (kg CO₂e) of travelling to and from Zurich for intercontinental destinations

Calculation basis: Taking into account total life cycle. Occupancy rate: plane: 82%. Distances (there and back): Zurich-Beijing: 15,972 km, Zurich-Canberra: 33,031 km, Zurich-Ottawa: 12,242 km, Zurich-Tokyo: 19,180 km, Zurich-Washington D.C.: 13,307 km, Source: [1].



Example 1: GHG emissions (kg CO₂e) of travelling to and from Zurich with different modes of transport

Calculation basis: Taking into account total life cycle. Occupancy rates: plane: 75%, car: 1 person, bus: 44%, train: 30-55%. Distances (there and back): Zurich-Berlin: flight: 1,320 km, car/bus/train: 1,692 km; Zurich-Paris: flight: 958 km, car/bus/train: 1,308 km, Zurich-Stockholm: flight: 2,918km, car/bus/train: 3,622 km, Zurich-The Hague: flight: 1,202 km, car/bus/train: 1,668 km; Zurich-Vienna flight: 1,206 km, car/bus/train: 1,460 km. Source [1]. Differences to [4] are due to a more recent calculation basis.

Local Sustainability Aspects

Also when travelling locally, the environmental impact of different modes of transport varies. However, which mode of transport you can choose at your destination also depends on safety aspects. We therefore can't provide a general recommendation.

Similarly, the waste disposal systems differ from country to country. We recommend that you find out about how you can avoid and dispose of waste in an environmentally friendly manner at your destination. Avoiding waste is particularly important in countries which lack a well-developed recycling system.

Universities often have platforms where you can buy second-hand furniture or books for your classes. By using second-hand items, you can reduce your environmental impact.

Remember also that you can get involved in local sustainability initiatives - this is often a good way to get to know a country and its people.

Further information

The Sustainability Team at UZH is happy to advise you on sustainability issues affecting your day-to-day work:

www.sustainability.uzh.ch/en/tips.html

Recommendations

- Within Europe, travel by train or bus, if possible.
- If you cannot avoid flying:
 - Choose connections without long detours.
 - Consider offsetting the GHG emissions caused and select a provider with high project standards.
- Locally:
 - Find out about the local waste disposal and recycling system.
 - Find out about ways to buy second-hand furniture or books and how you can pass them on to others when you return home.
 - For local travels at your destination, check if there are environmentally friendly and safe alternatives to travelling by car or plane (e.g. train, bus).

References

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