



*Better
Places*

Impact Report 2021



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Never doubt that a small group of thoughtful, committed citizens can change the world; indeed, it's the only thing that ever has.

- Margaret Mead



About Better Places

Better Places was born back in 2014 with the idea that which each of our tours we can contribute to a positive development of the world we live in. We endeavour to limit the environmental damage of our trips as much as possible and to make the **greatest possible positive contribution** to nature, wildlife and the people at the destination we visit. We are determined to increase our commitment to these goals. We use this report to show what we've achieved over the past year.

We are a social enterprise built on sustainability principles with a mission to transform tourism into an industry that creates a better world for people, nature and the planet as a whole. Each year, we donate 10% of our profit to positive initiatives that drive sustainable development. We continuously work on improving ourselves and share our experiences and findings publicly, in order to inspire other tourism businesses to follow.

Sustainable Development Goals

By the end of September 2015, the United Nations adopted a global agenda to end poverty, inequality and climate change. Seventeen [Sustainable Development Goals](#) were set to make the world a better place by 2030. The first and most important goal is to end extreme poverty, which according to the UN, this is the greatest challenge of our time. Other goals are improved health, better education and clean drinking water, as well as goals on sustainable energy, less inequality and tackling climate change. Better Places contributes to [nine of the seventeen SDG's](#), with the trips we organise and through our annual donations to foundations.

Tourism Declares Climate Emergency

In January 2020 Better Places, together with fourteen international travel organisations, declared a climate emergency. By signing the Tourism Declares Climate Emergency declaration, we promise to **reduce 55% of our CO2-emissions by 2030**. The plan is to reduce the daily CO2 emissions per person by 5% each year. We published our [climate action plan](#) as a roadmap to achieving these reduction targets.

Glasgow Declaration

The Glasgow Declaration was launched during the COP26 in November 2021. In alignment with this declaration, Better Places commits to act now and accelerate climate action to cut emissions by at least a half over the next decade to **reach Net Zero emissions as soon as possible**, but latest by 2050.

Carbon Offsetting

We measure and offset 100% of [all CO2 emissions](#), including local transport, accommodation, activities and our clients' independently booked international return flights. At the same time, we acknowledge that **offsetting is no solution and reducing is the only way forward**.

We do not view carbon offsetting as the quick fix that others in the industry perhaps do. While we think offsetting emissions is important, we see it as just one part of a bigger picture in terms of our climate action activity. We have the impression that many tour operators now consider offsetting as the best or even only solution, while [we believe it is the last resort](#). It is more important to actively reduce carbon emissions and thus our climate impact across all aspects of our businesses. That includes [emissions in scope 1 and 2](#) (resp. direct emissions and indirect emissions generated from the company) and - most importantly - scope 3: indirect CO2 emissions that occur in our value chain.

Many travel companies that claim to offset the CO2 emissions of their trips only look at the pollution that occurs in the office and in the customer's travel arrangement. In the latter case, it concerns local transport, accommodations and excursions. We choose to include the CO2 emissions of the individually booked flight in the calculation. After all, that airfare is necessary to carry out our trip and accounts for up to 90% of the CO2 emissions. The pollution caused by flying is the most relevant for travel companies and should therefore always be included in the calculation of the total CO2 emissions.

Voluntary Flight Tax

We impose a [voluntary CO2 tax](#) on ourselves of €12,50 per customer traveling outside of Europe and €5,- per customer traveling within Europe. We raise the amount with respectively € 2,50 and € 1,- each year and invest it in renewable energy projects through Lendahand. This crowdfunding platform offers sustainable investment opportunities in emerging markets. After a project is finished we re-invest the amount including the interest we earn.

Partnerships

We recognise the need to work together towards our goals for sustainable traveling (SDG 17). In recent years, we have formed the following partnerships:



Colleges and universities

We see it as our responsibility to train the new generation of tourism professionals in sustainable tourism. We offer internships for both college and university students. In particular tourism students from Wageningen University get the opportunity to learn about and support us with the impact measurement of our trips. We prefer to work with international students, value new perspectives and their personal experiences and backgrounds. Furthermore, we give lectures on sustainable tourism and impact measurement at universities and colleges.



The Train Traveller

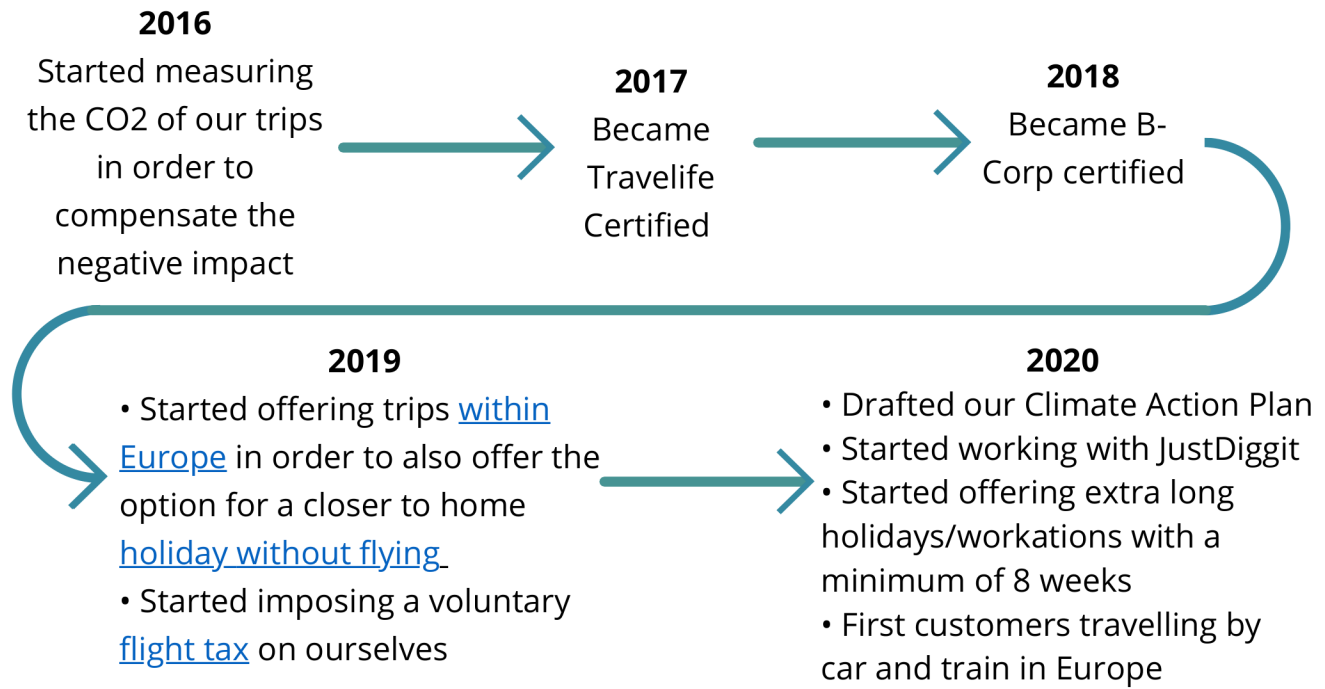
As part of our mission to reduce CO2-emissions of our total operations (including scope 3), we started adding destinations in Europe. We encourage customers to travel by train rather than by air. Since planning and booking a long train journey can be quite complicated, we started a partnership with The Train Traveller. They are specialised in composing the best train routes and share their advice through blogs on our website. We also suggest them as the go-to platform for booking train tickets.



Just DiggIt

In addition to the offsetting that Better Places offers, we ask customers to add a voluntary donation towards Just DiggIt projects. Their mission is to inspire and empower millions of subsistence farmers to restore their degraded lands, using proven sustainable land management techniques.

Highlights in Previous Years



Effects of COVID

The consequences of the pandemic had a direct effect on the results that we publish in this report. Due to the corona crisis, we had to cancel most of the trips booked in 2020 and did not reach our full potential in 2021. Therefore, some results in this report will be skewed. For instance, we see a massive decrease in the total amount of CO2 emissions caused by flights to and from our destinations. Of course, the main reason for this decrease are lockdowns and restrictions due to the COVID-19 pandemic.



Milestones of 2021

Recognition of our Efforts



In 2021, Better Places won the [Responsible Tourism Award](#) for [Decarbonising Travel & Tourism](#). The judges were impressed by the wide range of ways in which we actively reduce the environmental footprint of the organized trips, as well as the transparent and easy-to-understand communication about the positive and negative environmental impacts of our trips.

Impact First

- In December 2021, Better Places admitted to the register of [Code Sociale Ondernemingen](#). The code is committed to the recognition of social enterprises in the Netherlands. With our admission, we can show the world we put impact first.
- We calculated the [climate impact of the return flight to all our destinations](#).
- We started measuring and explaining the positive and negative [impact of our trips](#) on people and the planet.
- We joined Expedition Impact, where we made a Theory of Change for our three most important stakeholder: the [destination](#), our [customer](#) and our [local partners](#).
- For measuring our impact, we received support from [Social Enterprise Nederland](#) as well as [Avance Impact Consultancy](#).

Reporting on Progress



Our [Climate Action Plan](#) has been established in 2020. Part of this plan is to annually report on our progress such as this sustainability report. Due to COVID-19 and other challenges we faced during the pandemic, we haven't managed to publish on our progress earlier.

This 2020 sustainability report will set our baseline to measure and compare our progress each year.



Results: Our Offers

This sustainability report forms our baseline, from where we can draw adequate conclusions and actions stated in our Climate Action Plan.

For every example itinerary we put on our website, we check whether it is in line with our [checklist for sustainable travel](#). We ask our local partners to use this checklist when putting together individual trips.

We always work on improving our offer. For instance by: adding [closer to home destinations](#), creating [longer itineraries](#), encouraging customers to travel in [low season](#) and helping them choose alternative and more [sustainable transport](#). Our positive impact trips are especially designed to [showcase how our travels contribute to the SGD's](#).



New Destinations

In 2021 we added two new countries to our portfolio, one of which is divided by three regions. We also added two new regions to destinations that are already in our offer.

New Countries:

- Spain (3 regions)
- Czech Republic

New Regions:

- Region Eastern Sweden
- Region Active Albania

Sample Trips

When creating the baseline, we have indicated gaps when it comes to the **minimum trip duration** of 17 days for destinations outside Europe. We have started to adjust the itineraries accordingly. We have reviewed all itineraries that include one or more domestic flights. In cooperation with our local partners, we have **replaced all domestic flights** with alternative transport where possible. We are still working on **aligning all trips with our goals** set in the Climate Action Plan.

We have the following baseline of our offer:

- **27** [positive impact trips](#)
- **8** trips [without flying](#)
- **5** extra [long trips/workations](#)

Inspiring & Informing Customers

Sustainable Blogs

The flight to the destination accounts for up to 90% of the total emissions of a long-haul holiday. Although our customers book their flights independently, we do inform them how to pick an airline and route that causes the least emissions. For example, we inform them about the advantages of taking a direct flight. Within Europe, we encourage customers to travel with alternative modes of transport, like (electric) cars or trains.

We also create a lot of resources in order to help clients make more sustainable choices when planning their trip, also to help them when signing up for a **pledge**. As we didn't have it yet, we created a baseline for the sustainable blogposts contributing to our sustainable actions:

- **17** posts on [train travel](#), accounting for all of our European destinations as well as Morocco
- **11** posts on [travelling by car](#), including electric car possibilities for **9** blogposts
- **28** posts on how to travel [plastic-free](#)
- **26** posts on [vegetarian food options](#)
- **28** posts on [impact measurement](#) at the destination
- **8 blogs** on CO2 emissions and other effects of flying



10% of Profit Donated

Donations 2021

Better Places [donates 10% of its profits](#) to initiatives making the world a better place. At the end of 2021 the following donations were given:

- [Artsen zonder Grenzen](#): €5000
- [The Hunger Project](#): €5000
- [Give Well](#): €5000
- [IDFA](#): €1500
- [Stichting HoPe](#): €500
- [HoverAid Madagascar](#): € 1070,-
- Trainings weekend guides/drivers Madagascar: € 1500
- [Voedselpark Amsterdam](#): € 1000
- [REEFolution](#): € 1000

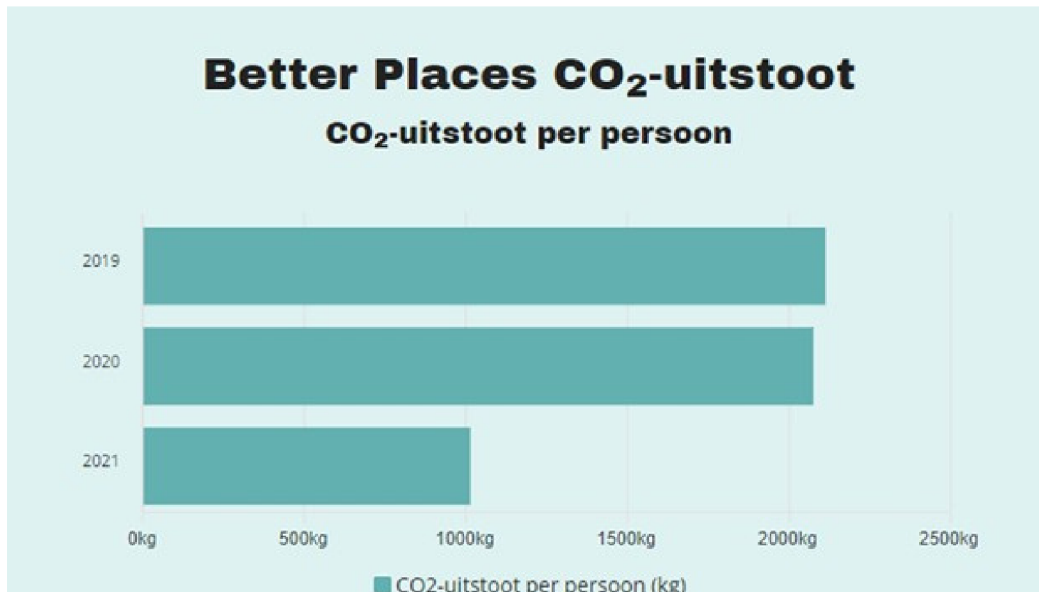
Looking back at 2020, we had a year of practically no travels due to COVID-19. We didn't get the chance to make donations. However, in cooperation with travel experts in seventeen countries, we launched a [relief campaign](#) and raised over € 85.000,- . The funds were used for various relief actions (e.g. food packages or financial support), to help the people hardest hit by the effects of the pandemic.

CO2 Offsetting & Taxes

South Pole Compensation

Since 2016, we calculate the CO2 emission of all of the trips that we organize, including the independently booked flights. In 2021, the total amount of kilograms compensated through South Pole was **860,754**. In 2020, the number was **1,541,138** kilograms, meaning the trips in 2021 on average were more sustainable.

We also look at the amount of CO2 per passenger. In 2021, we had an average CO2 of **66,05** kg per person per day. Comparing this to 2020 (129,39 kg) and more importantly 2019, the average CO2 per passenger per day was **129,57 kg**. So as a result, our CO2 emissions per person per day were **approximately halved**.



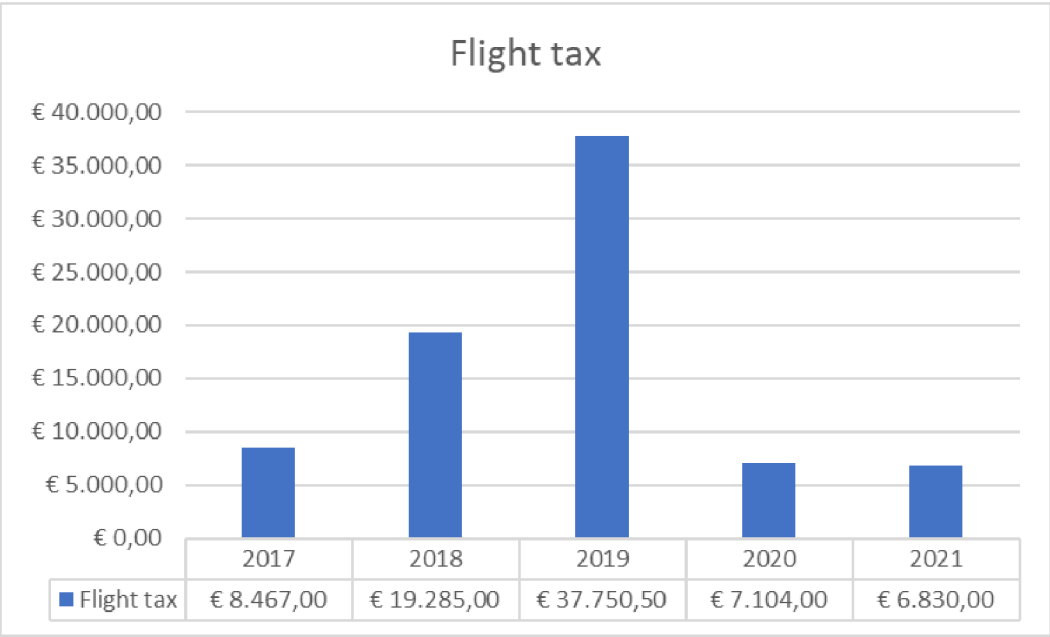
We value transparency and are always on the lookout not to inadvertently contribute to green washing. We do not claim to organise CO2 neutral trips, just because we compensate the CO2 emissions. We challenge other tour operators to start measuring, compensating and reducing CO2 emissions caused by flights that are not included in the itinerary, but are needed to travel to the destination.



Flight Tax

Since 2017, we impose a voluntary [flight tax](#) per customer on ourselves and invest the proceeds in renewable energy projects. The tax deducted from our financial budget and not charged to the customer!

Between 2017-2021, we have invested mainly in clean energy projects in Africa, through crowdfunding platform Lendahand, but also in wind energy & solar panels. The total amount of tax generated was **€79.436,50**.



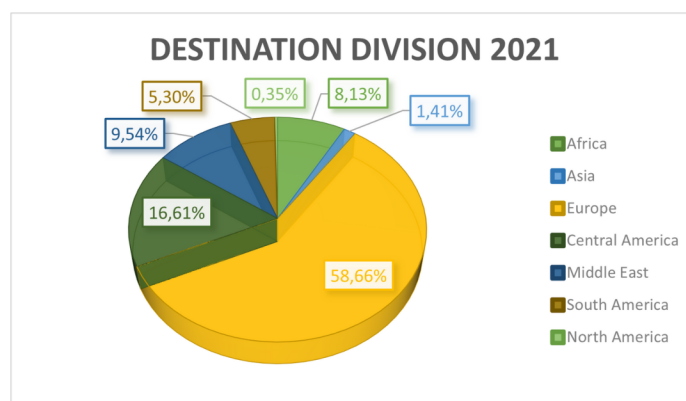
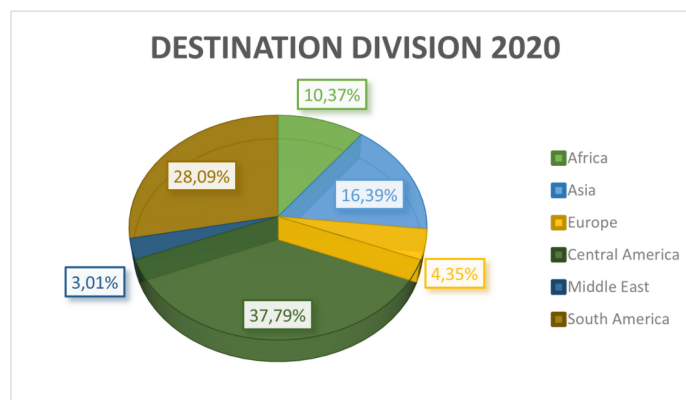
Year	Where	Amount
2017	Europe	€ 1.00
	Far	€ 2.50
2018	Europe	€ 2.00
	Far	€ 5.00
2019	Europe	€ 3.00
	Far	€ 7.50
2020	Europe	€ 4.00
	Far	€ 10.00
2021	Europe	€ 5.00
	Far	€ 12.50
2022	Europe	€ 6.00
	Far	€ 15.00

Customer Trends

Making sustainable choices is not only beneficial for the destination and its people. It also benefits our customers, since it offers them more authentic and memorable experiences. Of course, it should be kept in mind that 2021 was a year that might not be exactly representative due to COVID-19.

Choice of Destination

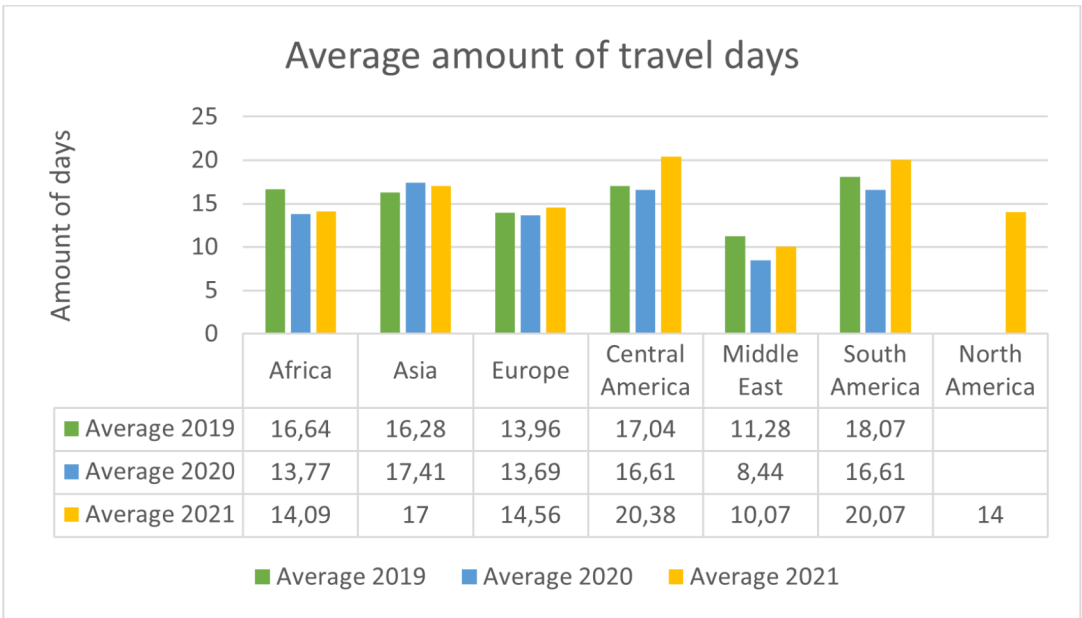
In 2021, we see a clear shift in trips within Europe compared to 2020. As opposed to 4,35% Europe trips in 2020, we had 58,66% of trips taking place in Europe in 2021. The amount of trips in 2021 was also a lot bigger compared to the year before, when the effects of COVID-19 were much bigger.



Trip Duration

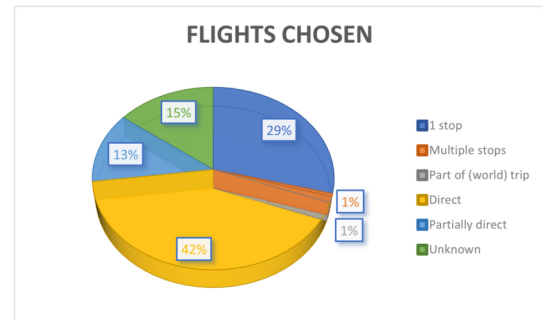
In 2021, the average duration of our trips was **15 days**. In 2020, the average trip reduced to16 days. We aim to increase this again by 2022.

The difference in the travel duration is mainly due to the big increase in Europe trips and the decrease of far-away trips, due to COVID-19. Trips in Europe tend to be shorter in general. Also, a high percentage of trips went to Jordan, where the average travel duration generally is a bit shorter compared to destinations in Asia, Africa or Central and South America.



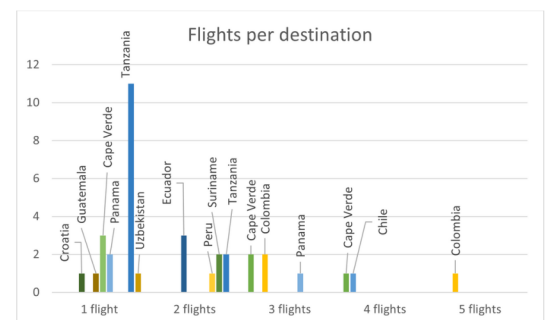
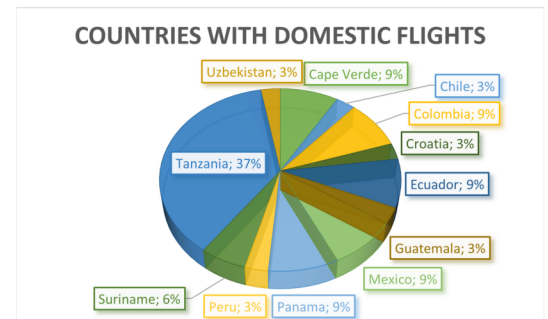
International Flights

Out of all customers who flew to their destination, **42% booked a direct flight** both ways. 29% booked a flight with a stopover in both directions. 12% of our flying customers choose to take a return flight that included one direct flight and one with a stopover (e.g. KLM flying directly to San José in Costa Rica, but returning with a stopover in Liberia). For 15% of all flights it is unclear which route the customers choose. We since changed the way we collect data to have more complete and accurate insights by next year.



Domestic Flights

We encourage our customers to use ground transportation instead of taking domestic flights. Looking at the amount of **domestic flights**, certain destinations are more flight-intensive than others. Even though, we measure the flights sold, we realised that in some of our trips flights were booked independently. We hope to find a better solution for monitoring these cases. Taking the total of all bookings including 1 or more domestic flights, the division of destinations with domestic flights included can be seen in the pie chart. Also the division of the amount of flights taken per destination is displayed.

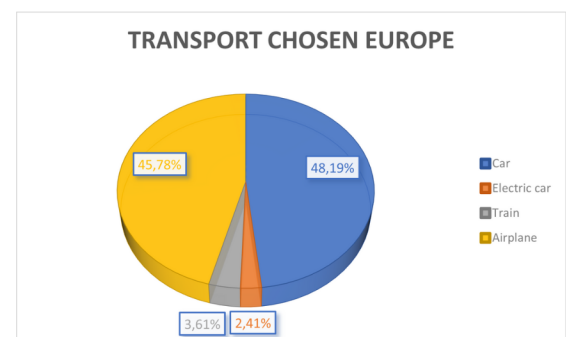




Europe Transportation Choices

With regards to transportation within Europe in 2021, all trips can be roughly divided into half of customers flying and the other half taking their own car. With the limited amount of customers traveling in 2020, it is hard to compare yearly figures. In 2020, 85% of customers traveled by car, 8% by train and another 8% took a plane.

We can see quite a clear line in the destinations chosen in combination with the transport. For Albania, Georgia, Kosovo, Moldova, Montenegro and North-Macedonia, everyone travelling chose to fly to the destination. Also countries like Romania & Sicily were popular for choosing flights. For Czech Republic, everyone chose to travel by either car (except 1 train Sweden). Other destinations with high percentages of car trips were Slovenia (97%), Sweden (92%), Spain (85%) and Croatia (65%).



Pledges

In 2021, we started a pilot with people [taking a pledge](#) to help achieve a more sustainable trip. These pledges are about using less plastic, less CO2 emissions, supporting locals, eating vegetarian, respecting animals and conservation of nature.

Due to the ongoing uncertainty of COVID-19, we only started communicating about the pledges in the second half of the year. One of the biggest challenges was the limited time between booking and the departure date. Due to COVID-19 customers often choose to book a last-minute holiday. We anticipated on inspiring people earlier in the process. As a result, only 2,1% of our travellers this year opted for a pledge. We made some adaptations and collected customer feedback, so that more customers sign pledges in the coming year!

Donations JustDiggit

From all people travelling in 2021, we received a total of **€1642,50** as a donation for JustDiggit. This donation originates from both people that cancelled their trip, but also from people that travelled. Out of all people that travelled by plane, around 34% of the people made a donation (on average about €7,50 per booking).

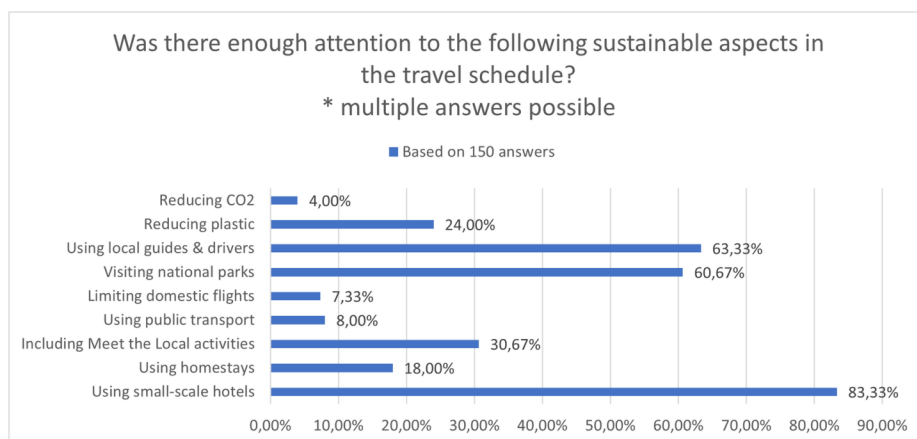
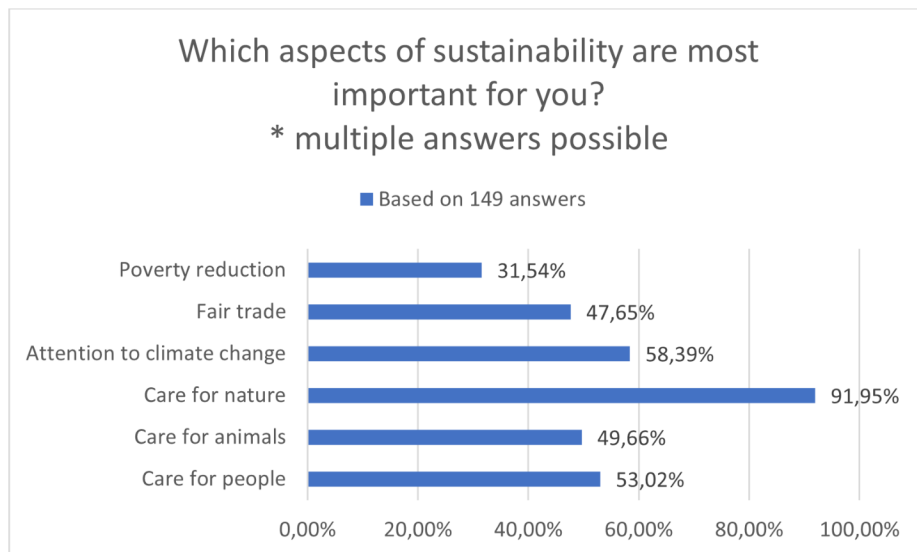
In 2020, the amount was €1740. This also came from both people that cancelled their trip, but also from people that travelled mainly in the beginning of the year. From all people that travelled by plane, around 10% of the people made a donation. However, the amount of bookings that indicated they travelled by plane roughly doubled compared to 2021.

The fact that more people chose alternative modes of transport might have to do with the (slight) decrease in the amount, as only people travelling by plane receive the invitation to make a donation to JustDiggit. You can however see the percentage of people that travelled and donated increased.

Customer Surveys

After every trip, we send out a survey to the customers. Besides questions on the trip itself, we also ask them about some aspects around the sustainability of their trip. A total of **182 customers** filled out the survey in 2021.

As we feel that the views of people on sustainability for European and far-away trips might differ, we will try to change the survey next year so that we can validate whether there's a difference.



Other Results

Employees

Better Places offers a range of employee benefits, including Climate Perks.

Employees are rewarded with a maximum of two additional free days when travelling by train to their holiday destination.

In 2021, we had a total of 6 people with a fixed contract. All of them took at least one trip, but not everyone was able to travel to their destination by train. In the end, **2 people** made use of this arrangement meaning a total of **33,3%**. In 2020, we had 12 people working on a fixed contract and 2 people travelling by train (16,7%). Even though the number of people who used it remained the same, the % of people using the arrangement has grown.

Interns

Better Places offers internship opportunities to support the team, but also to gain new insights from different perspectives. In 2021, we had a total of 4 (female) interns

Universities:

- InHolland
- Wageningen University & Research 2x
- Breda University of Applied Sciences

Studies:

- Tourism management 2x
- Rural innovation
- International development

Nationalities:

- Dutch 3x
- Romanian



Our Local Partners

Travelife

One of our returning goals is to have our partners join [Travelife](#) as a standard of understanding sustainability. Twice a year, we organise webinars to support our partners in the certification process.

- Local partners who have attended our Travelife trainings: 11 in total
- Local partners who are partner: 7 partners for 8 countries
- Local partners who became certified: 2 in total
- Local partners under audit: 6 in total
- Local partners with other GSTC certification: 2 in total

Tourism Declares

In 2020, Tourism Declares a Climate Emergency started with fourteen founding signatories, one of which is Better Places. One of our goals is to inspire our partners to sign the declaration and formulate a climate action plan. We have managed to get **8 partners to sign the pledge** and work on a climate action plan. In the next years we are aiming to get more partners to join the declaration.

Glasgow Declaration

After the Glasgow Declaration was launched during the COP26 in November 2021, Better Places committed to act now. Together with us, **3 partners signed the Declaration**. Starting 2022, we will host sessions to get more partners to join.



Glasgow Declaration
Climate Action in Tourism



Roadmap for 2022

Returning Goals

- By 2030 we aim to lower emissions per person per day by 55% with respect to 2019 levels
- Hosting webinars for DMC's on Travelife
- Yearly DMC survey

Goals 2022

- Analyze positive impact of trips booked
- Start a pilot with experts of 3 destinations who will add a sustainability score to the proposals
- Write an impact blog for at least 50% of our destinations
- Start a pilot with True Price to investigate the externalities of our holidays.
- Start a climate fund
- Write ethical marketing guidelines
- Send a specific survey on sustainability to our travellers
- Host webinars for partners about how to draft a Climate Action Plan
- Have a minimum trip duration for all example trips of 17 days for outside of Europe, as well as 9 days for destinations within Europe & Middle East
- 75% of all booked trips outside of Europe & Middle East have a minimum of 17 days
- Reach at least an average length of 17 days for all trips booked
- 25% of trips take place within Europe
- For 5% of all booked trips to a destination inside Europe, people chose to travel to the destination by train
- For 80% of all booked trips to a destination inside Europe where people chose a flight, the flight was a direct flight
- 70% of our trips take place outside peak season (peak season being departures between 1 July-20 August & 20 December-2 January)
- Maximum 25% of the trips contain a domestic flight
- Maximum 10% of the trips contain more than 2 domestic flights
- A minimum of 50% of our overnight stays are in a small scale/ sustainable accommodation or homestay/ farmstay
- A minimum of 2 meet-the-local/ guided excursions in all travel plans and sample itineraries
- 70% of our destinations have hotel pages with a sustainability score
- Support our DMC's to get a Travelife or GSTC certification, in order to get at least 10 additional certified DMCs
- Support our DMC's to join Tourism Declares, in order to get at least 8 additional DMC joining Tourism Declares
- Support the DMCs who have joined Tourism Declares to write a Climate Action Plan, in order to have 12 DMC's with a finalised Climate Action Plan
- A minimum of 6 guest lectures given on sustainable travel



More info?

Additional resources

We strive to be as transparent as possible on our climate actions. We share developments on both our website as well as our social media. Some examples (in Dutch) can be found below:

- [Checklist voor duurzaam reizen](#)
- [Over reizen met een positieve impact](#)
- [Waarom CO2-compensatie geen oplossing is](#)
- [Reizen zonder plastic](#)
- [Ons beleid voor verantwoord toerisme](#)