

**It's not where you're going,
it's how you're getting there.**

8 things your peers are doing to achieve sustainable travel.

THE BEST RUN



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Travel will never be the same again. Thankfully.



A year spent working on couches and at kitchen tables has taught us we are still capable of great change. It showed us we can do what was once thought improbable, if not impossible. And now, as we slowly take to the road, rail, and sky again, we must refrain from going back on autopilot.

We must make another great change and do the impossible once again: We must reshape how we manage travel and expenses by rethinking our programs and making them sustainable.

This guide will get you started. And while this will be an ongoing, always-improving effort, the tips you'll find here are working across industries and around the world. This input is based on a series of interviews with travel managers and procurement directors from the SAP Concur global customer community. Their insights will show you where to start, how to make progress, and what it takes to keep going.



Tip #1

Take it to the top.

Nothing succeeds without the C-suite. So engaging them and getting their buy-in – early – is critical to any endeavor, let alone one as significant as sustainable travel. Their endorsement lends credibility to your efforts, but to get it, you'll need to demonstrate that *your* goals for sustainability match *their* goals for the organization.

Like your peers, you'll need to have difficult conversations about hard costs – because environmentally sound travel often costs more. So you'll want to bring them the data that demonstrates why it's worth it.

You'll have to work together to shift the mindset about when to travel – because sitting across the table isn't the only way to do business. As we've all seen this year, remote work works. And what works even better is making sure each trip is a *purposeful* trip.

You'll also need to establish clear and measurable objectives in an era of unknowns. Currently, there aren't well-defined standards for tracking airline emissions, for example, so you'll have to be diligent in finding ways to be accurate.

Actionable Advice:

Examine your corporate sustainability goals and make friends with the people who are heading them up. Then talk to the senior execs with the most travelers on their team, and get them on board, as well. These will be the sponsors of sustainable travel, and you won't get anywhere without their full engagement.

Tip #2

Think bigger.

Sustainability is an enormous undertaking, but doing it right takes even bigger ideas and the ability to see a much larger picture. It is, in fact, about more than traditional environmental measures and more than travel itself: Truly sustainable companies cover issues like diversity and inclusion, equality, and accessibility.

For example, your peers' programs include and support:

- **Diverse and inclusive suppliers, including minority- and women-owned companies, small businesses, and other suppliers that need to be on your radar and a part of your program.**
- **Accessibility measures that meet the needs of any and all travelers.**
- **Human rights, ensuring that every supplier in the system is committed to fair and equitable employment.**
- **Green awareness, working with suppliers who have clear environmental strategies – ranging from carbon-neutral commitments to their approach to single-use plastics.**

Plan on thinking big with your initiatives, but like companies with more seasoned sustainable travel and expense practices, plan on the long term. It's going to take months to get your strategy together, months more to get your message out, and you may not start seeing results until your second or third year.



Actionable Advice:

Get ready to be in the spotlight. As your organization makes progress on other sustainability initiatives, travel will become a bigger piece of the pie. One tech company, for example, shifted all of its data center to renewable energy, and afterwards, travel became a much bigger focus for the business and its constituents.



Tip #3

Avoid greenwashing.

Planting trees is good, but it won't save the world. And if your sustainability strategy isn't focused on real change – if you're merely shouting "Look at us! We're green!" – it will do more harm (at least to your reputation) than good.

Make sure your organization is devoted to actual improvement, and commit to a science-based approach with targets based on measurable impact. Then show the numbers: Provide data on what you're doing and how it's working. That way, you can gauge – and prove – the effects of your efforts, all across your organization and along your supply chain. And be certain you're seeing real results before telling your sustainability story – either internally or externally.

Because while planting trees to offset emissions is a great place to start, it's no replacement for a legitimate sustainability strategy.

Actionable Advice:

Don't go it alone. Start by working with your TMC – they'll have insight, ideas, and recommendations for building your program and measuring its success. Then check out the [Science Based Targets initiative](#), [LEED](#), [Green Key](#), [Green Globe](#), [EU Ecolabel](#), and other organizations that create and gauge climate-protection goals.

Tip #4

Make the most of employee momentum.

If your travelers aren't already talking about sustainability, they will be, and you're going to hear it.

Your colleagues and competitors are getting an earful from new hires and road warriors alike, and it's a frequent topic in travel forums, where employees are asking difficult questions and demanding answers.

People want change, and the passion your employees have for this issue will help drive your initiatives. Tap into their energy and insights, use their ideas to fuel your program, and show the C-suite that the entire organization is behind the effort.

Here's proof. According to [The SAP Concur Corporate Travel Sustainability Index \(2020\)](#):

- 97% of travelers are prepared to invest extra journey time in pursuit of more sustainable options.
- 67% still expect to fly much less in 10 years' time because of environmental concerns.

Actionable Advice:

Listen to what your travelers have to say, and ask as many questions as you can: What does sustainability mean to them? What matters most? What "tradeoffs" are they willing to make to ensure their trips are more sustainable? Do they want tools to measure their footprint or prompt sustainable choices? Their answers will help you understand your audience and measure your progress.





Tip #5

Talk it out.

Employees want to know your perspective, understand your approach, and see how your strategy works. They want to know what impact they're having and how they can strengthen your program. Again, show them the data regarding your company's carbon footprint, the amount of water saved by switching hotel providers, the impact of taking non-stop flights. Show them everything, because the more they know, the more they can help.

Your peers are using multiple communication channels to deliver a steady stream of sustainability information and education – demonstrating what it means to their business, how they're measuring its impact, where they stand, and where they're headed. They're also sharing details on what's expected of employees and the impact of their contributions.

Consistent communication keeps your teams together and keeps them focused, even when the message means compromise. You can't all fly first class and still meet sustainability goals, but open and honest communication keeps employees committed to the cause.

Actionable Advice:

Bring employees along with you. Create a pilot group that can offer feedback as you evaluate your program, consider tweaks, add incentives, and create policies. Their input will make your efforts more efficient and will help sharpen your communication.

Tip #6

Recruit HR.

In the words of one of your peers, “If you don’t tackle the problem alongside HR, you’re only going to be half as good as you can be.”

Sustainable travel starts with a company culture that values, encourages, and rewards sustainable decisions and behaviors. And culture is what HR leaders do best. Additionally, HR is the company hub for employee experience, education, and communication, so they’re a critical ally in engaging and educating travelers. Finally, HR leaders can help you define how senior leaders can role model and encourage sustainable travel as a priority for the organization.

Follow your colleagues’ example, and go to HR early in the process. They are likely to be enthusiastic partners, because being a socially responsible, sustainable company is not just good for the environment. It is also valuable for attracting and retaining high performing, skilled talent.



Actionable Advice:

Travel sustainability can help improve recruitment and retention. 79% of travelers aged 25–39, in fact, would be more inclined to work for a company that prioritizes sustainability.* To engage HR, show them how your efforts will help achieve their goals.

*SAP Concur Corporate Travel Sustainability Index, 2020

Tip #7

Start with sourcing and policies.

The concept of sustainability is great, but how do you make it reality? You make sure it's part of every policy and embedded in every supplier relationship. It must be included in your initial negotiations and quarterly reviews with suppliers, and both sides must be clear on the goals and the ability to meet them.

As part of this effort, you'll want to write sustainability into your contracts. One of your peer companies, for example, offered financial benefits to a key airline if that airline hits carbon-saving thresholds.

You can also work with suppliers to help engage your own employees. For instance, some suppliers have programs that help travelers track their sustainable choices and share the results through social channels.

Finally, you can follow your peers' example and look at each type of supplier to see where you can improve.

Airlines: Set policies that promote direct flights, as they burn less fuel than multiple landings and takeoffs. Also, work with air carriers to get a clear picture of their sustainable-aviation-fuel (SAF) initiatives, and consider that in your contracts.

Hotels: Make sure your contracted hotels follow high sustainability criteria, are certified by their industry organizations, and use credible sources of measurement, such as LEED ratings.

Car Rentals/Fleet Services: Put emissions caps and mileage ratings on the rental cars your travelers use. If you have your own fleet, apply the same guidelines and work toward purchasing hybrid or electric vehicles.

Rail: Identify key city pairs in the regions where you do business, then encourage or even require rail travel instead of flying. And don't be afraid of making it a rule: One company mandated rail on certain routes, and after some initial skepticism, the behavior became normalized – with 100% of travelers taking the train. This wouldn't have happened if it wasn't mandatory.

Actionable Advice:

Take advantage of a new era of travel. COVID-19 broke the cycle of “what we've always done,” and as you start traveling again, it will be easier to adapt your policies and establish new habits. Also, employees are thinking more and more about the impact of their travel, and they're ready for a new approach.



Tip #8

Point
travelers
in the right
direction at
the point of
purchase.



People want to do the right thing, but often they need guidance on what the right thing actually is. And with so much information to sort through – from timing, to costs, to sustainability issues – travelers can get confused during the booking process.

Guide them through these variables with clear choices and simple tips *while* they're booking, and you'll help create long-term shifts in their behavior.

Then don't forget to reward their actions: Show them the results of their efforts at both the individual and team levels, so they can see how their choices benefit the business and the environment.

▶ Actionable Advice:

Use guilt to your advantage. If you're not putting mandates in place regarding sustainability, consider using messaging and alerts within your booking experience to remind travelers of the impact of their choices – and that they have other options. This “visual guilt” can change their behavior.

A background image showing three business professionals walking and smiling on a city street. On the left, a man in a light blue shirt and dark tie. In the center, a woman in a beige blouse and glasses holding a folder. On the right, a man in a dark suit and striped tie.

Keep the sustainability conversation going.

Talk to your peers, see what they're up to, ask them the difficult questions, and bring them your challenges. Bring SAP Concur into the conversation, as well, to see how their solutions can keep you moving forward.

To get started:

- Talk with your client engagement executive regarding your organization's sustainability goals.
- Engage in the sustainability conversation within the [SAP Concur Community](#).
- [Visit the Resource Center](#) for more information.



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