

Making Ripples

by Amanda Bancroft

Summer is on its way! For those lucky enough to get a vacation, have you decided how to spend it? If not, consider sustainable travel options. Bicycle adventures, ecotourism, camping in the national parks, thematic train tours...the list is as long as your imagination! But if you've already chosen an activity or location, that's ok too – anyone can still make a difference by reducing how much trash they generate on their trip, eating more plant-based meals, and so on. There are hundreds of small choices that add up to a big impact, even if the trip's been planned for months.

The Razorback Greenway trail is popular for recreation and commuting, but did you know people also take vacations along this route? A few bed & breakfasts even offer a discount for travelers who arrive by bicycle. If yours doesn't, suggest they start doing so in the future to encourage more bicycle tourism. Instead of watching the world wiz by through the car windows, set a slower pace and immerse yourself in the local area. You may see more wildlife, flowers, and art, while also having the opportunity to meet more people, grow healthier, and save gas money. However, inclement weather will impact travel more than it would in a vehicle, so plan buffer days into your route.

Many places to stay in Arkansas and around the world participate in eco-friendly practices that range from reduced waste, the use of solar panels, offering plant-based meals, or even a completely sustainable experience in a green building. As you shop around for options that match other criteria (such as comfort and affordability) scan them for sustainability, too. It's often hard to find a place that's fully "green," but even mainstream chains are changing to more eco-friendly practices.

Train travel creates fewer emissions than cars or planes, and Amtrak offers themed tours that revolve around a certain region, city, national park, or history. Don't forget that many settlers arrived to Northwest Arkansas via the railway now used mostly for freight and tourism. The Arkansas & Missouri Railroad offers a "Window Seat to History," a chance to travel in the style of a bygone era. It's very popular during holidays and peak fall color, so reserve your seats well in advance. The route covers Springdale to Van Buren. Find pricing and tour details on their website at amtrainrides.com

Ecotourism is a type of nature tourism, but includes respect for the environment and the local people. It's based on principles of cultural awareness, sustainability, and support for local economies. There are a wide variety of relaxing or adventurous opportunities in Arkansas, the nation, and abroad. Search online for options based on wildlife, outdoor recreation, culture, and more.

A more budget-friendly option might be a road trip or train travel to go camping in our national parks. A Parks Pass costs \$80 and lasts for one year's admission to all national parks, battlegrounds, and monuments. This option could be the most fun, sustainable and affordable of them all, depending on a person's style and preferences. And what says summer more than s'mores?

Amanda Bancroft is a writer, artist, and naturalist living in an off-grid tiny house on Kessler Mountain. She and her husband Ryan blog about their adventures and offer tips to those wanting to make a difference at www.RipplesBlog.org.