

London Trip: Airport Sustainability Audit

This 'tour' was for one concert only—possibly the worst example of an unsustainable travel practice—but on a positive note, this allowed me to have the time to fully document it every step of the way.

Day 1: Travel day

I left my house at 2:30pm, having eaten lunch at home.

DOING THIS
ALREADY

Saved one meal from being served to me in potentially non-recyclable, non-renewable plastic packaging.

FIRST TIME
DOING THIS

Took my non-BPA plastic water bottle, filled it with water... and a few drops of chlorophyll. This is the latest 'Liz thing', or 'voodoo' as my friends call my occasional—OKOK, more than occasional—attempts at some kind of 'healthy' or 'do-good' regimen. I am *not* a good water drinker, and I never have been, but if I put something in my water, I am 100% more likely to drink my doctor-recommended daily amount. So if you see me drinking green water, please keep the snide comments to a minimum...

Travel to airport: I was given a lift by a friend to the bus station.

DOING THIS
ALREADY

I will always take a friend up on the offer of a lift to the airport. Could I have taken an Uber or Lyft, using their share-a-ride option, and would this have been better? Frankly, I didn't even consider this, as my friend offered and I prefer the company of friends and the added benefit of saving money on cab fare...

MORE
INFORMATION
NEEDED

Taxi vs. friend lift? Which is better? How much does this really impact my overall carbon footprint?

Bus station: I stood in line for the bus for about 30 minutes. In that time, I used the bathroom (flushed a non-automatic toilet, so thankfully one flush), washed hands (used water), and read a local paper which I returned to the pile. I did pitch a ripped-up old tag off of my suitcase, a band-aid wrapper, and the bottom half of my ticket because it was printed at home (a requirement of the bus company) and the bus driver won't accept it with the bottom half of the paper still attached. Weird, I know. There were only two trash bins, one for trash and one for bottles, so the paper had to go in the trash.

REQUIRES
TOP DOWN
CHANGE

A CHALLENGE

Bus station needs more recycle bins, not just two for glass and trash.

What about other options than just accepting printed paper tickets?

Bus journey:

**MORE
INFORMATION
NEEDED**

What kind of footprint did I make by taking the bus? Bus travel works out as a better option than having someone drive me the hour and fifty minutes to the airport in a single car that has to go back home again with one less passenger. The bus was 3/4 full which, I think, puts me over the edge in terms of justifying the gas used to get us all there. (It was returning to Portland with other passengers as well.)

**MORE
INFORMATION
NEEDED**

I used the bathroom on the bus (see above where I drank what felt like (to me, the camel) my body weight in green chlorophyll-water). There is no water on this bus so I have no idea what kind of evil chemical I might have committed to the environment by flushing, but there was no other option. **What does a bathroom on a bus like this produce in terms of waste, what kinds of chemicals are we flushing? Are there better options?**

Airport ticket and check-in: I checked in and got a printed ticket.

**REQUIRES
TOP DOWN
CHANGE**

For this itinerary, because it was done through a travel agent linked to the concert presenter, **I was unable to check-in online or get a boarding pass sent to my phone.**

A CHALLENGE

I was not able to ask the presenter in advance to cover carbon offsets as I was not in touch with the presenter directly. For this gig, I was a part of an ensemble whose interests were being negotiated through another person. This is an important piece of information for touring artists. As an environmentally concerned artist, I am not always present to intercede for these interests when deciding travel arrangements—the contract rider, the accommodations, and various other aspects of the tour that could be modified to accommodate more environmentally—friendly options. In this case, I would have liked to have asked for carbon offsets.

Certainly, I could have pursued buying these offsets on my own on my own dime. I chose however not to buy offsets for two reasons: 1) I assumed that without flight information, I could not do this. This is my own ignorance about carbon offsets, being a newbie, and having never purchased them before on my own.

**MORE
INFORMATION
NEEDED**

In fact, I had no idea if I needed to know the flight plan or information before purchasing the offsets. I plan on adding this to a list called 'Things I don't know and should'.

**FINANCIAL
CHALLENGE**

2) The other deciding factor for me on this particular gig was, quite simply, money. **I had no idea what fee I was getting for this gig and without this information, I frankly didn't know if it was feasible to spend the money on offsets.** This is not always the case, this gig being a rather unfortunate example of the rare occasions where I don't get all of the information up front.

**DOABLE BUT I
DIDN'T DO THIS
TIME**

In fairness, I have yet to buy a single offset for my own tours either. Add this to another list: 'Something to change immediately'.

Airport Water: The water bottle is working out great. Every bathroom at Logan, at least in the international terminal, has a water fountain with filtered water spouts for refilling bottles.

THINGS THAT
THWART THE
BEST
INTENTIONS

An interesting and depressing observation: when I went to refill my bottle for the first time after eating dinner, I walked up to the water fountain and found the water spout for drinking was stuck, spewing water out in a strong constant stream while no one was there. This waste of water has to be cancelling my use of a reusable water bottle, right? I thought, 'This is a disgrace!'

:(

While I stood there, feeling indignant, I tried to snap a photo of the fountain to use in this post and a man came up and drank from the fountain, fussed with the button on the spout and managed to get it to stop. Me, the fearless reporter of 'environmental disasters on tour', just wasted gallons of water while standing there taking a picture of this thing instead of trying to fix it... Who is the fool now?! Note to self: Just do something about it!

Airport Food: I could have gotten myself together and brought something from home to eat for dinner.

DOABLE BUT I
AM UNWILLING

Yes, I could have contributed to the pack-horse vibe I have spent a lifetime developing (yes, I was that nerd in school from age 7-22 with the oversized backpack full of books AND a violin) by adding a tupperware container full of something to eat, and silverware, to my already bursting carry-on bag. But I didn't. And to be honest, I probably will rarely do this on overseas flights. A small part is laziness, but most of it is that added weight and lack of space.

CHOOSING
COMFORT OVER
SUSTAINABILITY

My body is feeling the effects of years of carrying bags weighed down with the necessary items I must take on board. My bags are not filled with extras, they are filled with an instrument, a set of contact lenses, my phone, a book, my computer, glasses, lip balm, house keys, (now) a water bottle, chargers for the phone and computer, and headphones.

MORE
INFORMATION
NEEDED

SO, I ate dinner at Legal Seafoods. There aren't many options in the airport, let's face it: just chain restaurants like this one offering full meals, most likely supplied by a Cisco truck, and overpriced snack foods from who-knows-where at book and magazine shops like Hudson News. I chose this one based on what was on offer. There isn't any 'locally sourced' food at Logan airport that I am aware of so I chose 'healthy' as my guide. I had salmon and rice with spinach and kimchi.

FINANCIAL
CHALLENGE

It tasted fine and wasn't ridiculously expensive—cost being my other guide. I could have waited for the airplane dinner but honestly had no idea if the agent had sprung for the meal and frankly I think plane food is kind of awful.

DOABLE BUT I
DIDN'T DO THIS
TIME

I did buy a bag of nuts for later in the 6.5 hour flight as I forgot to pack nuts from home. They came in a plastic bag and cost an exorbitant \$7.00. Another strike-out for budget and purchasing single-use non-recyclable plastic packaging.

Plane Food: On the plane, though I wasn't planning on eating, I was pleasantly surprised to notice that Norwegian Airlines seems to use less plastic food packaging than most airlines. (On Aer Lingus, for example, the sound of crinkling plastic when dinner is served is almost deafening.) There was a piece of poundcake for dessert and this was the only thing wrapped in plastic. *The (plastic) silverware was in a paper-like bag like it might have been half plastic and paper?* The dinner came in a paper box like a salad to-go box from a grocery store. The coffee cup was paper but if you wanted water, it came in a plastic cup. *Can we find out which airlines use plastic vs. paper vs. compostable service items before flying with them? Are any airlines using compostable service items? FU: How do we know they are really recycling?*

**MORE
INFORMATION
NEEDED**

Day 2: Arrival day

Water:

Still had water in my bottle from the night before.

**NOT
PRACTICAL**

Travel/Taxi to the hotel: This was London after all and the trip from Gatwick to our hotel near the Barbican was a trip of 32 miles if you take the route through town, or 54 miles if you take the highways. Our taxi took the highway and it took nearly two hours. There were two of us in the car with the driver. *It would have been, at minimum, an hour by public transport, and because of gear and bags, this wasn't feasible nor was it offered as a choice.*

**CHOOSING
COMFORT OVER
SUSTAINABILITY**

There are some things on the road that are about health and well-being and *after an overseas flight and no sleep, having a car drive you to your destination in preparation for a tight schedule is not just luxury, it is necessary.*

Food/Breakfast:

**THINGS THAT
THWART THE
BEST
INTENTIONS**

Not being able to check-in to the hotel meant that we were on our own for several hours. I chose to get something eat a local breakfast eatery. *I had porridge and a coffee, both housed in paper cups and no recycle bin available.*

Hotel:



We were housed at a Travelodge near the Barbican. Great to be so close to the venue, within an eight-minute walk.

The hotel was basic, wifi was terrible and came at an extra charge. A win for walking, but strike one against the hotel...

Walking: A long nap was needed after checking in and then I had a walk around the area. People in London are walkers, largely because they have to be in this incredible bustling city of mostly terrible traffic, but it is the great English pastime too! One of the greatest pleasures of being a traveling musician is the experience of having an hour or more to just walk in the place you have landed.

CULTURE
DICTATING
CHOICES

Walking is one of the easiest activities and it both benefits the earth and one's well-being. The bulk of the wonderful memories I have of touring for the past 25 years are of walking in new places and returning to some of the same places again and again, all over the world.

Food/Dinner:

MORE
INFORMATION
NEEDED

I ate at a Sichuan restaurant across from the hotel. Nothing to report here. A decent meal, not too expensive (by London standards), but **no obvious way to determine where this food came from except to watch it arrive on a dumbwaiter from the basement kitchen.** I went with a green bean side dish and a pork main dish which was mostly made out of egg. The pork was in such small pieces that it was nearly invisible. **One of the things we accept as traveling musicians is that sometimes, maybe many more times than is acceptable, you must simply eat without knowing where the food came from, and in some cases, without a full ingredient list.**

(Side note: I was having a conversation years ago with a professional acrobat who had retired from touring. When I asked why she had retired, she replied that it was because of food. I was much younger then and this reason seemed a bit extreme to me but I must say, many years later, I am starting to get it...)

Hotel room:

REQUIRES
TOP DOWN
CHANGE

European hotels tend to have a lot less plastic packaging on things like shampoo, soaps, and cups and glasses in the room. More and more I find that showers have shampoo dispensers and there are real coffee cups in the room. The US has a lot to answer for in this regard and though I see more hotels in the US trying to put the environment front and center as a selling point, they seem to do less to get rid of this infernal packaging on everything.

REQUIRES
TOP DOWN
CHANGE

Investigate this more fully; find out how our hotel and food standards and codes differ from other countries.

Hotel towels and service:



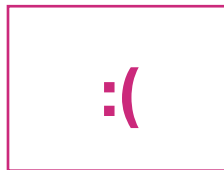
This hotel had the sign in the bathroom about opting out of new towels every day and the maid staff was good about honoring the 'Do Not Disturb' sign. I was able to use the same towels and sheets for my whole stay of three nights. This does not happen everywhere.

Day 3: Rehearsal



Water: Used my own bottle. Filled it up at breakfast.

Food/Breakfast: Crappy hotel breakfast, second day in a row. I ate this mostly out of sheer desperation: lack of sleep, being frugal, and time.



The breakfast was really not great and I daresay *none* of it was locally sourced or that any environmental concerns were considered on any level. There was a shocking amount of electricity used to keep the kibbled scrambled eggs and shriveled bacon and sausages that looked like mummies' fingers heated, under lamps with wattage that could have given you a tan if you left your hand under it for very long. I saw a lot of food waste (clearly others felt the same way I did about the quality of the food...). I saw no recycling bins, but then again, nothing on the buffet except the odd yogurt container was recyclable. There were real plates and silverware and glassware which was a nice change from the US budget hotel service ware that is mostly plastic and disposable.

Travel/Taxi: On to rehearsal, a taxi ride away.



Four of us in the car. Felt like we justified the gas..

Food/Lunch: There was a lovely cafe offering raw foods salads as well as some cooked foods that all said 'healthy'.

**THINGS THAT
THWART THE
BEST
INTENTIONS**

We had to get take-away in order to get back to the rehearsal on time. The boxes were paper, the silverware was compostable, but the drinks were in plastic bottles, ostensibly recyclable. We disposed of our garbage at the rehearsal space but as they did not have a recycle bin except for glass, our 'minder', an assistant to the producer, said he would find a way to dispose of them properly. I have no idea whether he did this or not. Another moment of hoping that a single person does what they say they are going to do.

**FOLLOW-UP
NEEDED, NOT
ALWAYS
POSSIBLE**

We simply give over or are asked to give over this responsibility sometimes and it is rare that any of us can follow up on it to confirm results.

Travel/Taxi: We took a taxi for five people to get to the BBC radio spot. We spent a lot of time in traffic, did the radio spot, and got a taxi back to the hotel.

Water: We were offered water during the live broadcast and were given plastic cups of water, not bottles. Pretty sure the glasses were recyclable. No time or option to ask for something different. The irony of it is that during the live broadcast, at least two of those water glasses were knocked over, spilling water on a floor covered with mic and power cables.

THINGS THAT
THWART THE
BEST
INTENTIONS

Cups of water vs. bottles of water: not efficient and not practical for use in this setting.

A CHALLENGE

Food/Dinner: Went to the Sichuan restaurant with two others. Shared dishes and enjoyed it much more than the night before. Same issues of not knowing where the food came from but it was close to the hotel and relatively inexpensive. Barely any waste as we ate it all!

Day 4: Concert day



Water: Used my own bottle. Filled it up at breakfast.

Food: Hotel breakfast AGAIN—gadzooks. Spent the entire day in the venue (a ten-minute walk from the hotel) beginning just after breakfast. There was a cafe backstage that had coffee and tea throughout the day and various nibbles, fruit, nuts, hummus, and that sort of thing. Lunch was a vegetable lentil soup which was delicious. Dinner was brought in for us as well; some healthy options there too. (I rarely eat before a concert if it is too close to showtime so I saved mine for after.)

FOLLOW-UP
NEEDED, NOT
ALWAYS
POSSIBLE

I have no idea where this food came from but it certainly tasted more homemade than mass-produced.



At one point, I found myself with three paper cups from coffees and teas throughout the day. Not pleased with myself over that.



There were recycling bins for paper cups and plates.

Power and electricity:

**MORE
INFORMATION
NEEDED**

Just wondering if anyone has quantified what theaters consume in energy? We spend our lives as artists being in theaters from morning to night, using lights, bathrooms, power for stage lighting and sound, heat and air conditioning, etc. How many of these venues are carbon-neutral? How many of these buildings are attempting to make changes toward lessening their carbon footprints?

Day 5: Travel day:



Water: Used my own bottle. Filled it up at breakfast. Filled it again at the airport.

Food: Up for breakfast. NOT in the hotel. I went to a local restaurant which had a smashed avocado that everyone was raving about. It was just OK. Very salty. You can't win them all...

Taxi/Food: Taxi to the airport.

**NOT
PRACTICAL**

Just me in the car and it wouldn't have been an option to take other transport. It was a journey of 1 hour and 45 minutes with an Italian taxi driver from Sardinia. He regaled me with his life story, his marriage to a Polish woman, and his love of Italian food and how simple and good it is. Unbelievably great! His views on what food should be are very much in line with mine: good ingredients, preferably homegrown, food should be flavorful and prepared simply with no additives needed. As an Italian, he doesn't understand the stodginess of Italian food he finds outside of Italy. 'It should be light, it should be only a few ingredients, and it should taste amazing'. He said his Polish wife wasn't raised with an attention to food in the same way.

**CULTURE
DICTATING
CHOICES**

She believed that every meal should involve potatoes, sometimes in at least two forms. He still couldn't understand this, even after being married for many years. He misses the attention to food that his family had and the idea of the family dinner table was the center of all family life. I loved this conversation. It kind of puts in perspective one of the downsides of a traveling life—eating out all of the time. Eating in someone's home—which happens rarely and which comes with its own pitfalls too!—is the only way to truly know what you are eating, the quality of the ingredients, and how it is prepared. And for me, though I have eaten in some great restaurants, this is one of the great disadvantages to this life. Restaurant fatigue is a thing—trust me.

Airport food: Had a Stouffer's instant oatmeal in a paper cup with a plastic spoon, some nuts in a plastic bag, and a coffee in a paper cup with a plastic lid before boarding.

**BEST THAT I
CAN DO**

All paper products put in the recycling bin, and the expense was minimal. Filled my water bottle after security.

**FOLLOW-UP
NEEDED, NOT
ALWAYS
POSSIBLE**

I can't tell you how many times I have seen misused recycling bins in airports. Is someone actually monitoring this and redistributing the trash to its proper bins? And is it really being recycled at the other end?

Airplane food: Had the lunch on the plane this time. Yes, this was my third meal of the day. Having been up since 6am, I felt it was time for an early dinner... at 5pm...



More plastic containers in this meal than I had witnessed on the flight over.

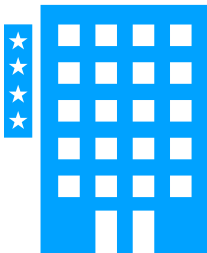
Bus travel: I took the same bus from Logan back home. The bus was about half full.

**MORE
INFORMATION
NEEDED**

Was this considered full enough to be worth the gas required? I was picked up at the station by my husband and headed home.

Summing up:

Hotel thoughts:



Where does the food come from?

Who manages the quality?

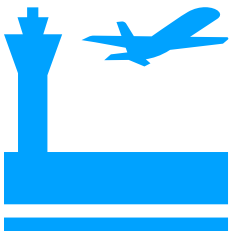
Do they actually care about the standard of food or is it simply a money-based algorithm?

Is there any attention given to the issue of food waste disposal by the higher-ups in corporate hotel chains?

How can we as consumers who care about sustainability be aware of and thereby do anything about the rules and regulations of various hotel chains?

What if maids are paid by the number of rooms cleaned? As a customer, this means if I choose the environment, I take a persons' wages.

Airport thoughts:



As consumers, do we ever really think about the food choices that are made available to us while traveling?

Who gets to decide what food is on offer in the airport?

What determines the particulars of food manufacturing, packaging, and presentation in airports?

Is food packaging simply subject to a long list of governmental regulations?

Is a restaurant location in an airport just given to the highest bidder?

Could we as patrons of these public spaces insist on better food, healthier food, less non-recyclable packaging, and reasonable prices?

And what if water bottles were not sold in every shop? When does the universal availability of something directly affect our desire to use it?

Clear and present 'top-down' issues:



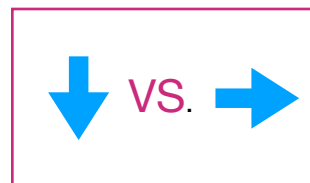
- Food and restaurant choices at airports
- Hotel room cleaning policies
- Recycling bins, always present and properly maintained?
- Food waste disposal
- Design and regulation vs. sustainable good practices.

The things we cannot follow-up on (yet):



We can't confirm that restaurants, hotels, airports, airplanes, bus stations, and venues do what they say they ARE doing in terms of disposal of food waste, recycling, energy saving practices, etc. How do we hold them accountable for this? Certainly, I learned that I as an individual don't do all the things I have said I do, could do, or would do. I will be starting here!

Thoughts about reducing rather than offsetting:



There was very little on this trip that I could have *reduced*. Yes, I reduced the number of plastic water bottles to zero by using my own. The reality is that touring simply causes a lot of consumption of outside resources.

Things I discovered on this trip that I don't know and should (and want) to know:

- Can I buy offsets for itineraries that are being planned by someone else? How and where do I do that?
- And do I need that exact itinerary to do so or just an origin and destination?
- Are bus and airplane toilets using toxic chemicals?
- How do I call attention to lack of recycling bins in bus stations, hotels, venues, airports?
- Can I as an individual be effective as a corporate mind-changer?

Things I want to and can change immediately:

- Carrying a water bottle on ALL tours.
- Do not EVER buy plastic water bottles.
- When time is available and food is decent, ORDER IN at the airport, using plates and silverware rather than plastic.
- ASK MORE QUESTIONS when the gig is not arranged and booked by me. STATE MY INTENTIONS for saving gas, buying carbon offsets, considering sustainable options for food and travel.

