

Xavi Goodall - An Aldi Bus Soliloquy

To do my shopping on my year abroad, I walk to Aldi. The whole trip takes me about an hour and a half – thirty minutes there, thirty minutes in the shop, thirty minutes back. I could get the bus. I haven't done. I tell myself it's environmental.

Now, I know not taking the bus could never offset the plane. The "myclimate" carbon footprint calculator checked my exact airport-to-airport journey and suggested that my outbound study abroad flight produced approximately 0.904 tons of CO₂. The ideal yearly average is 0.6 tons.

Using "Our World in Data", the average bus produces 97 grams of CO₂ per passenger per kilometre, and it's a 5.4-kilometre round trip to Aldi. That's 485 grams of CO₂ per week: in other words, a little more than 1,863 weekly bus trips to Aldi to make up the 904,000 grams of another flight. Not accounting for the flight back. Or whether I go back for Christmas. With four flights, I'm suddenly up to 7,452 weeks.

So I avoid taking the bus, because if I do so every week for 143 years, I might just manage to make up the carbon footprint of four flights.

Put that way, it almost starts to sound a little bit silly. It hardly un-flies my flight – which, for the record, isn't really possible, since airlines' carbon offsetting schemes don't (according to "Friends of the Earth") meaningfully work.

So, knowing the ineffectuality of corporate net-zero initiatives, rationally I know that not getting the bus – that act of ever-so-gentle asceticism – is an act of guilt, burdening myself with the global climate fight. For the psychologically delicate amongst us, that eco-anxiety means positive actions – turning off lights, eating less meat, sustainable shopping – can spiral into neurotic, self-depriving irrationality. See the bus I'm avoiding, for example.

But if I'm going to exaggerate my negative impact, perhaps it's worth looking at my positive impact. For all those little sustainable actions I take, the "SDG Zone" website provides context and development for them in the scheme of larger contributions and ultimately the global scale of the 17 SDGs, clarifying the value of my little, well-intentioned actions. No, fervent recycling might not fulfil "responsible production and consumption" alone, but it's one step in a longer, more vital journey. Nice to know.

Alas, climate guilt doesn't appear an easy pastime to kick; young people do seem a bit prone to being crushed by the weight of a pessimistic existence. One "Scoping Review of Interventions for the Treatment of Eco-Anxiety", however, identifies themes like "taking action", "communing with nature", and – ah, here we go – "inner resilience" to combat eco-anxiety.

That might be the one for me, then. Resilience.

Resilience that might come from writing this. From knowing about SDGs and climate guilt and positive environmental impacts and – perhaps most crucially – consciously, rationally, genuinely knowing that buses actually have a pretty reasonable carbon footprint.

Maybe I'll try taking the bus next time.

Resources referenced:

1. https://co2.myclimate.org/en/calculate_emissions

2. <https://ourworldindata.org/travel-carbon-footprint>
3. <https://sdgzone.com/action/how-can-i-contribute/>
4. <https://friendsoftheearth.uk/climate/does-carbon-offsetting-work>
5. <https://www.mdpi.com/1660-4601/18/18/9636>