

News



Splash hits images of Fathimah Sim at Minnowhead, a fire eater at Stoke-on Trent and a competitor in the Malsdon Mud Race were entered in the Event Photography Awards



Airmiles calculator backed by Harry 'airbrushes' flight impact

Lucy Bawerman
George Greenwood

Prince Harry's environmental organisation is promoting an industry-backed carbon emissions calculator that has previously been accused of "airbrushing" the true climate impact of flying.

Representatives of the Duke of Sussex confirmed that he took a commercial long-haul return flight from Los Angeles to Shanghai to an event to promote greener travel, delivering a speech to the Asian tourist industry about the collective responsibility to reduce our carbon footprint.

He was speaking as founder of Travalyt, his organisation which promotes sustainable travel. Travalyt tells travellers that their "number one key action" should be "when choosing where to travel and taking into account your carbon footprint, consider destinations closer to home when you can".

Its central mission is to provide transparent, accurate and consistent estimates of the carbon emissions caused per flight on booking platforms, so that consumers can shop around for the most eco-friendly option.

A commercial flight from Los Angeles to Shanghai typically takes about 13 hours. According to the methodology used by the UK government, a typical business class return flight from Los Angeles to Shanghai causes about 4,750kg of greenhouse gas emissions — roughly the same amount it takes to melt 11.5 square metres of Arctic summer sea ice.

The model promoted by the duke's organisation has been created by



Prince Harry flew from Los Angeles to Shanghai to promote greener travel

Google in collaboration with some of the world's biggest travel and tech companies. When asked by The Times to calculate the carbon emissions caused by a typical business class return flight from Los Angeles to Shanghai, its estimate was much lower — at 2,600kg CO₂ equivalent. There is still no consensus on how best to calculate accurate carbon emissions on a flight by flight basis, with different organisations using different methods.

A Travalyt spokesman said the duke was "extremely judicious" in choosing when to travel, adding that in the six years since he set up Travalyt, he has "only travelled abroad for Travalyt business commitments three times". The other "hundreds" of meetings had been done remotely, the spokesman added. The duke was hosted

by Tripcom, a Chinese online travel company co-founded by the Chinese billionaire tech investor, Neil Shen, which is also a founding partner of Travalyt.

Founded by Prince Harry in 2019 and backed by 15 of the world's biggest travel and technology platforms, including Google, Skyscanner, Expedia, Booking.com and Tripadvisor, Travalyt is one of his lesser known projects.

It employs 20 and its aim is to promote sustainable travel. In its "five-year milestone report", published last month, just weeks before the duke gave his "heartfelt" speech in China, Travalyt outlined the "number one key action" for travellers wishing to help the environment — choosing options closer to home.

It also urged: "When considering how to get there, think about low-carbon transport options such as rail. And, if flying is your only option, look for the carbon emissions information when booking flights".

Travalyt's work revolves around the promotion of the "Travel Impact Model" (TIM), a carbon emissions calculator developed by Google, in collaboration with the booking platforms.

How to accurately calculate the global warming impact of individual flights remains a complex and disputed area of climate science. In addition to the distance travelled and the type of aircraft and fuel, there are other important factors, such as how full the plane was at the time and how much cargo it was carrying. In 2022, the TIM model was accused by Greenpeace of "airbrushing" the true impact of flying because it

was only factoring in CO₂ emissions caused by the jet fuel and ignoring all the other ways planes lead to global warming, such as the condensation trails that trap heat in the atmosphere.

Some experts said that, as a result, the estimates backed by Travalyt's coalition of travel and tech companies were "significantly understating" the real harm of the flights they were selling. "You could argue that it was the industry trying to make itself look better," one carbon emissions expert told The Times.

Travelling to promote good causes is a family practice. Prince Harry travelled to China the same week that his brother, Prince William, announced he would be travelling to the supergiant capital of Monaco to promote the Blue Economy and Finance Forum — an event committed to "restoring the health of the oceans".

Travalyt said on its website that the model has since "been refined to expand the type of greenhouse gas emissions it analyses and improve how it estimates emissions for aircraft that carry both passengers and cargo to gether. Over the coming years, it will continue to evolve".

A Travalyt spokesman said: "The TIM is a continuously improving model, based on the latest science. The TIM goes beyond just CO₂ by accounting for some life cycle emissions — specifically those associated with the production and transportation of aircraft fuel. The aim is to eventually account for the full climate impacts of aviation in the science mature".

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Mother, 69, on hunger strike back in hospital

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The mother of a British-Egyptian pro-democracy activist is in hospital for the second time on the 24th day of her hunger strike to press for her son's release from prison in Egypt.

Laila Soueif, 69, the mother of Alaa Abd El-Fattah, was taken to St Thomas' Hospital in central London after she had dangerously low blood sugar levels and blood pressure on Thursday night.

Soueif, who has not eaten food since September 25 last year, her sons scheduled release date, has declined glucose treatment as part of her hunger strike.

Instead, she chose glucagon treatment, which induces the liver to break down fat to produce glucose. The mother has lost 28kg (70lb), equivalent to 42 per cent of her body weight. Soueif's daughter, Mona, 39, posted on X (formerly Twitter) "This is not normal for my mother to be in this condition. But this is the only thing we can do so that those who hold the key to prison and refuse to release Alaa will feel something and reconsider their decision before it's too late".

Soueif was first admitted to hospital in February. In a letter shared by the family, a consultant at St Thomas' said she was at "high risk of sudden death with continued fasting".

Abd El-Fattah, 42, has been detained in Egypt since September 2019. He was sentenced to five years in December 2021 for spreading "false news undermining national security" after sharing a social media post about torture.