

Reduce Your Carbon Footprint While Travelling

Lloyd learns that changing the way you travel saves CO2 emissions, lots of money and is more fun too.



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I travel to New York a couple of times per year to meet my associates at Planet Green, and use the opportunity to try out ways to reduce my carbon footprint. The last time, I [came by train](#), it took a full day. This time I tried a [different approach](#)- I would ride a bike.

I bought a Strida folding bike, a new design that one can fold up in ten seconds. It was supposed to come with a carrying case, which was out of stock, so I had to improvise, using an old snowboard bag. It didn't quite fit, so I had to remove the seat and carrier, a five minute job, but then all of my clothing and the bike fit in the bag

I cycled to Toronto's City Centre Airport to catch a [Porter Airlines Bombardier Q400](#). This is one of the most fuel efficient planes in the air, using 60% of the fuel per person of a jet, and it also flies at a lower altitude where the exhaust does less damage. I folded the bike, removed the seat, packed it all up, and checked it without a problem.

I won't go into how great the waiting room is, or how fast the security and check-in is when only 70 people are in the entire airport, or how comfortable and well-designed it all is (Tyler Brulé, founder of Wallpaper, put together) but it is a throwback to a more comfortable era of flying. Arriving in Newark, I had planned to take the train to Penn Station (not being certain how to get from Newark on a bike) but shared a cab with a lovely couple I met at the luggage carousel. I got out at their hotel, unfolded the bike and suddenly there I was in New York City, on a completely jammed 40th Street with every car and truck leaning on their horns, pedestrians everywhere, and delivery cyclists weaving in and out like maniacs. What have I gotten into?

What I had gotten into was a cliché- that was about the only time that New York lived up to its image. The cycling experience in New York was not that bad at all; while drivers are not particularly respectful of cyclists, they don't aim for them either, and they don't get to drive so fast that one cannot see what is coming, mainly "hooks"- where cars turn in front of you, and "door prizes" where cab passengers just throw open their doors in your path. Fortunately I was on a Strida, which moves at a stately pace because of its small wheels and low gearing, and is incredibly nimble. I can honestly say that there was never even a near miss with cars.

Pedestrians are another story; they are absolutely crazy in New York, they play chicken with cars all day and night, and traffic lights mean nothing to them. They are highest on the pecking order and demand that you defer to them. At every intersection, no matter what colour the light, I had to keep my eyes open for them darting out from between cars and running around buses. The only thing that saved me from taking a few out was the speed of the Strida and its amazing maneuverability.

I then spent five days rediscovering and completely falling in love with New York City, which I realize that I had really never seen, but had just popped up out like a mole from the subway stops, or walked short stretches of main streets. Now I was seeing everything, everywhere. I never had to hail a cab, wait for a train, but could just go where I wanted to go when I wanted to. I have cycled through the Rocky Mountains and over the Golden Gate Bridge, but my Saturday morning ride from 50th [down Broadway](#) to the Brooklyn Bridge was as exciting and had me singing as I rode. (It also dried my wet clothing from the horribly wet previous day- next some rain gear!)

I was sorry to leave yesterday, and the departure was not uneventful. Buying a train ticket to Newark at Penn Station reminds you of how badly the American Rail system is managed (I missed a train because the ticket line was half an hour long, they don't tell you what track it is on until five minutes before departure and you get trampled) and the allen key, normally in a socket under the seat, had disappeared so I could not remove the seat and close the bag over the bike. I was wandering around Penn Station trying to buy a tool with my clothing falling out of the bag and fearing that they would not let me on the plane with it like this.

But I needn't have worried; the Porter Check-in person just said "hey, nice bike!" and asked a porter to carry it down to the plane separately from the luggage. Arriving home in Toronto it was first off the plane, and I had it unfolded and was on my way home before anyone else had even hopped into a cab.

So, in the end, did I save fossil fuels and reduce my carbon footprint? Definitely, I was in a cab once the entire trip. Did I save money? Lots- just the airport cabs to Pearson in Toronto are a hundred bucks round trip, and I had free transportation for five days in New York.

But most importantly, you see the world differently on a bike, and you see a lot more of it. I biked in New York to save fossil fuel, but I came back with memories of a completely new experience, a new New York. I will never travel without my Strida again.