

# escape

...without hurting the planet

Colleen Friesen Photo by Scott Yavis

Your neck is tense and twisted from a serious lack of downtime. Words like vacation, travel, trip, adventure, and journey pop out from the pages of everything you read. You really need a break. >>>

Finally. It's time. You're going to book yourself that long-anticipated chance to relax. But wait! Commercial airlines are the biggest single emitters of greenhouse gases. An attack of global-warming guilt twizzles the rest of your spine into fancy new pretzel shapes to match your poor twisted neck.

Canadians, in a recent survey, placed the environment at the top of their concerns. We're replacing our light bulbs, supporting local food sources, refusing to buy overpackaged items. Just when we start to feel good, we find out how much carbon dioxide we'll be contributing to our atmosphere if we choose to fly.

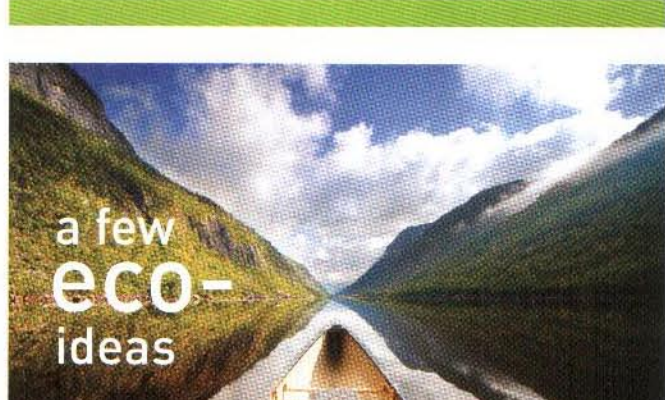
### What's a good Canuck to do?

Environmental groups offer to offset our carbon jet stream with imaginative ways to do penance. We can buy trees to be planted, fund wind and solar power plants, or support other net-effect conservation methods. Beyond assuaging our guilt a little, these worthy projects don't actually stop the emissions created by our need to hurry up and relax.

What makes sense out of the three Rs of reduce, reuse, and recycle is actually reducing our consumption; it has the largest effect.

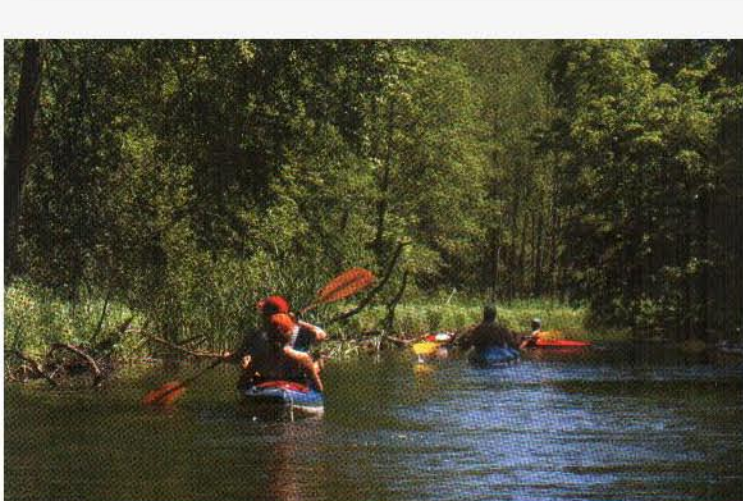
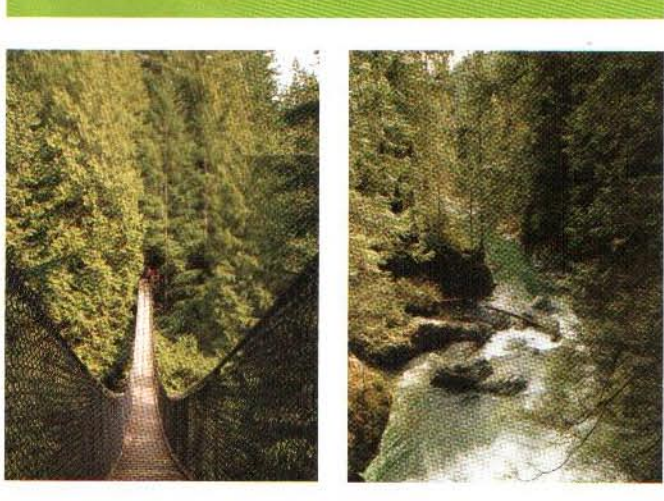
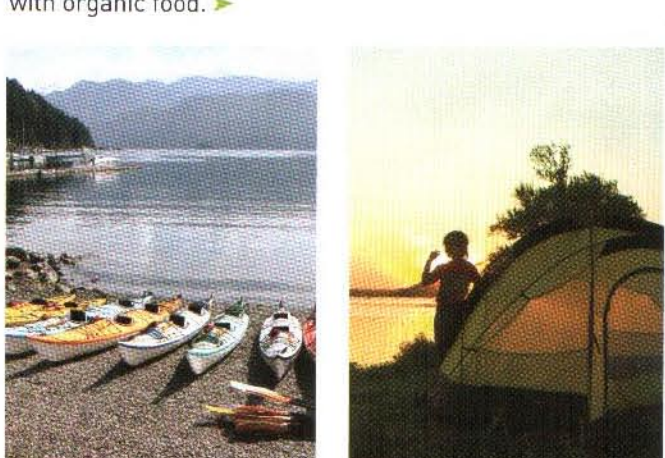
Alternative travel for Canadians is easy. According to United Nations statistics, nearly 80 percent of Canada's population live in urban areas. That places us among the most urbanized countries in the world, yet we are second only to Russia in geographical size. This means that our puny population of nearly 33 million citizens is surrounded by vast expanses of wilderness.

What good news! Most of us can kayak, canoe, swim, skate, hike, fish, run, and cycle not only in our urban centres but also in the wild and woolly world only an hour or two from the downtown core.



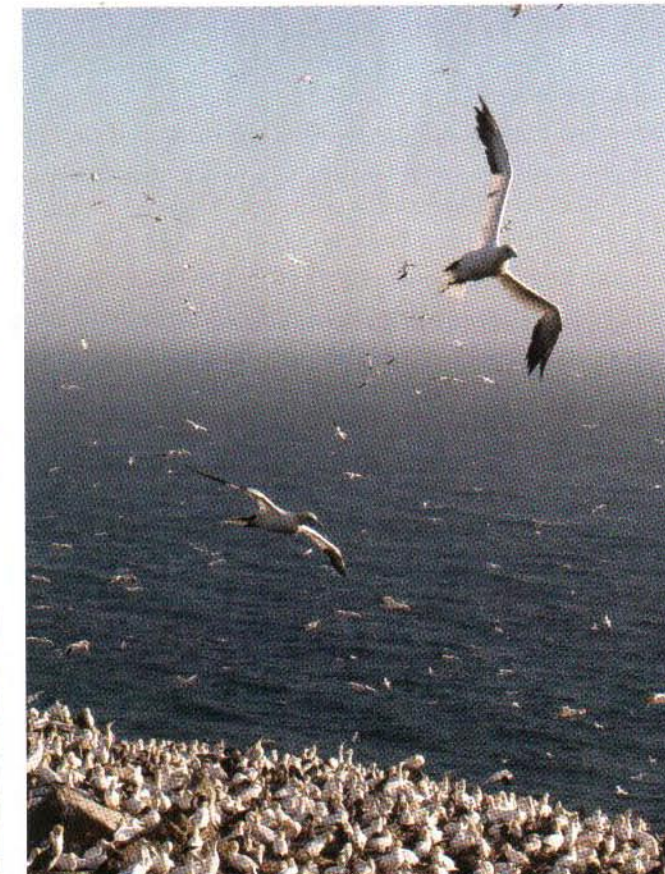
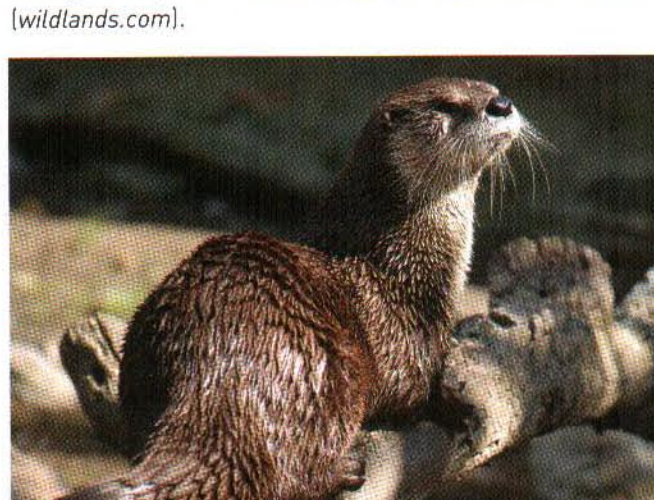
**Vancouver, British Columbia**, has no shortage of outdoor eco-travel opportunities. For something really unusual, get a local's perspective on the North Shore rainforest aboard a bus powered by recycled vegetable oil at North Van Green Tours ([northvangreentours.com](http://northvangreentours.com)).

Eating local never tasted so good. Visit the Edible British Columbia website ([edible-britishcolumbia.com](http://edible-britishcolumbia.com)) and sign up for a gourmet camping and kayaking experience. Slide through the sea with river otters. Camp on a Gulf Island beach under a canopy of stars while savouring BC wines with organic food. >

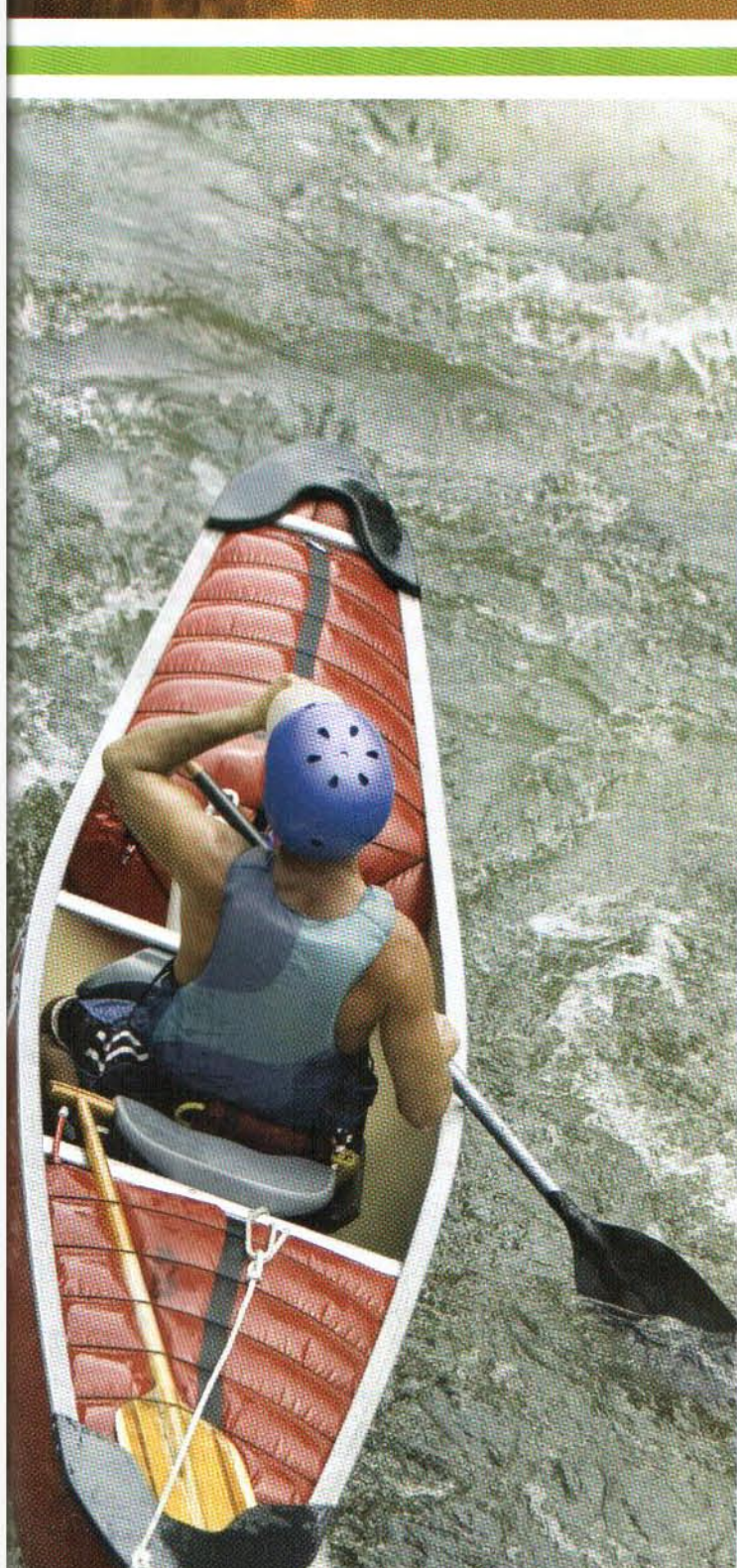
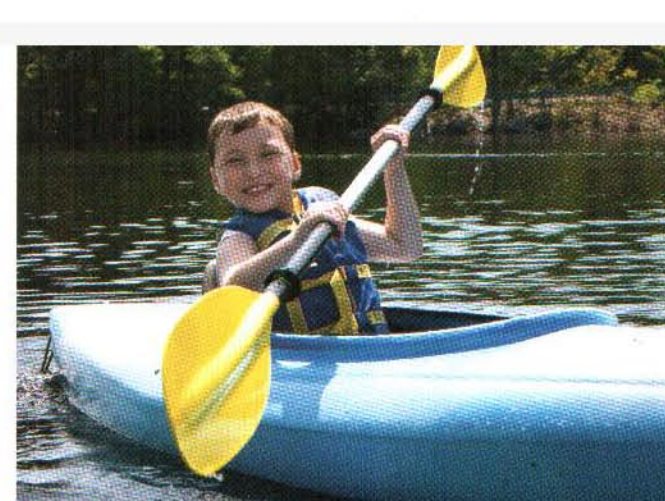
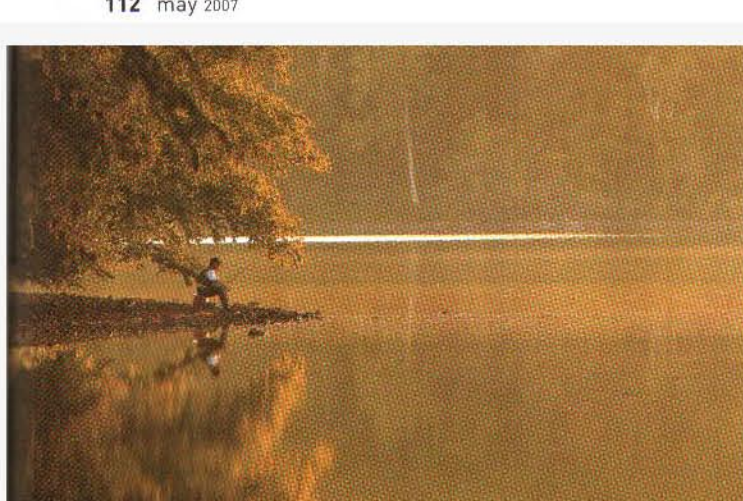


**Edmonton, Alberta**, has the North Saskatchewan River running right through the middle of the city, creating Canada's longest stretch of urban parkland. Edmonton's River Valley Park is 22 times larger than New York's Central Park. That's a fair bit of room to roam. Call up Edmonton Canoe ([edmontoncanoe.com](http://edmontoncanoe.com)) and release your inner paddler. Or phone Get Hooked Fishing Adventures ([gethookedfishing.com](http://gethookedfishing.com)) and connect to some reel action.

**St. John's, Newfoundland**, is only a two-and-a-half-hour drive from Cape St. Mary's Ecological Reserve, home to North America's most accessible seabird colony. Your stress will take flight along with the thousands and thousands of birds that surround you. Find the park on the Newfoundland and Labrador Environment and Conservation website ([env.gov.nl.ca/parks](http://env.gov.nl.ca/parks)). If you prefer getting out and intimate with humpback and orca whales, book your trip with the naturalist guides at Wildland Tours ([wildlands.com](http://wildlands.com)).



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**Winnipeg, Manitoba**, offers self-directed skiing, hiking, and cycling that incorporates local history and art through the Routes on the Red initiative ([routesonthered.ca](http://routesonthered.ca)). Or go birding along the Assiniboine River. Pierre Berton said a true Canadian is somebody who knows how to make love in a canoe, so why not embody the stereotype? With the Assiniboine, Red, and Seine Rivers right downtown, you have plenty of options. Some outfitters to consider: Northern Soul ([northern soul.ca](http://northern soul.ca)), Red River Outfitters ([redriveroutfitters.ca](http://redriveroutfitters.ca)), Wilderness Spirit Adventures ([wildernessspirit.com](http://wildernessspirit.com)), and Paddle Manitoba ([paddle.mb.ca](http://paddle.mb.ca)).



Going green does not have to mean suffering for your virtue. In fact, it's one of those cases where doing the right thing not only feels righteous, it is actually easier. No two-hour pre-arrival security clearance and no more stuffing liquids into tiny bottles for your zip-locked carry-on.

Eco-travel frees you up to start your trip sooner—leaving you calm, cool, collected, and maybe just a wee bit smug. Is that so wrong? &

Colleen Friesen hikes, bikes, and paddles on the West Coast, where she writes for various magazines and newspapers.