

Making Sustainable Choices on the Road

I recently returned from a week-long road-trip with my boyfriend in which we packed up his jeep and trekked from Vancouver to Calgary, stopping at almost every single lake, waterfall and viewpoint we could find along the way. Both lovers of the outdoors, we worked carefully to ensure that we would leave each place as beautiful as it was when we found it.

1. Making choices about accommodations

We were lucky to be on the road in late August, when the sun is warm and camping is still very much on the radar. At every campground we stayed at, we paid minimal fees to pitch our tent and tarp. We took care to organize and repack the car each night, throwing away all food and waste as we went so as to protect the wildlife, and ensure everything was neatly packed away for the night. We washed dishes as soon as dinner was finished and we left our campground in a better state than when we had showed up the night before.

On road-trips, you can opt for the more luxurious campervan travel – an option that requires water and electricity hook-ups at campgrounds and will cost slightly more at each place you stay. For those seeking even more comfort, roadside motels and hotels are usually around in each local town. But for those consciously seeking to reduce their traveler's footprint, a simple tent will keep you safe and a couple sleeping bags will keep you warm.

2. Making choices about food

Everything we ate, we brought along with us. We made a big pre-trip shop at Walmart and Costco to gather what we thought we would want for the road – we cooked bulk oatmeal and instant coffee for breakfast, threw together bagel sandwiches on the road somewhere each day for lunch, and whipped up some sort of rice dish for dinners. The only thing we purchased on the road was coffee – driving 300-500km a day in combination with jumping out of the car every few seconds was an energy drainer.

We stopped to refill our “cold” and “dry” coolers every other day. Our cold cooler held a new bag of ice each morning, and kept our fruits and vegetables as fresh as they could be. Our dry cooler held roadtrip snacks and granola bars and rice to keep us fuelled throughout the day.

3. Making choices about packing

The heavier your car is, the more fuel you're going to need to keep it going on long stretches. We put thought into each item of clothing and campgear that we brought. Our packing list is as follows:

Each: 1 duffel bag worth of clothing, including swimwear, warm sweatpants, 2 sweaters, a rain jacket, workout attire for hikes, a couple pairs of underwear and enough dry socks to for the week, 5 shirts of varying thickness, one nicer outfit, towel

Shoes: hiking boots, running shoes, shower flip flops, sandals

Campgear: 1 tent with poles, 1 tarp with rope, 1 air mattress with manual foot pump, 2 sleeping bags, 2 blankets, 4 pillows, 2 lanterns

Cooking gear: 1 portable stove with 3 gas tanks, 1 pot, 2 mugs, 2 plates, cutlery, a jug of water for cooking and washing, washcloths, 24 pack of waterbottles, food

Extra: toothbrush and toothpaste, phone battery pack, notebook, book, hairbrush, sunglasses, camera, tripod, charging gear, laptop, AUX cord for the car

4. Making choices about waste disposal

There was a plastic bag in the car for all our waste, and we left waterbottles and other containers in recycling bins as we found them. Each night, we made sure our campsite was clear of garbage and was safely disposed of in bear-safe bins so as not to attract wildlife to where our tent was pitched. Of course, a reusable waterbottle was in both of our packs, but with the amount of water we were drinking on the road, one bottle was not going to get us through the day until we found a new stop to fill up at. When you have to work with situations, it's just about finding the right way to deal with it.

5. Making choices about activities

As avid hikers and outdoor lovers, we focused our energy on finding pit stops that involved no additional money or commercial/industrial infrastructure. We looked for lakes, waterfalls, viewpoints, and mountains, that existed naturally either roadside or required a hike up. These places are free to visit, and if you are cautious where you tread, will leave little impact.

“Take nothing but pictures. Leave nothing but footprints. Kill nothing but time.”