

# Five ways you can save the world on your summer vacation

June 25 2014, by Steve Hockensmith

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Sharon Daraphonhdeth, sustainability strategist at SF State's Cesar Chavez Student Center.

Summer is traditionally the time for hitting the beach, catching a baseball game or two and generally chilling out. But according to San Francisco State University's sustainability experts, you can add a pretty huge goal to your warm weather to-do list—helping the planet stay healthy—without spoiling the laid-back vibe. The livin' is easy in the summertime, the steps you can take to live a more eco-friendly life can be pretty easy, too.

## 1. Get your water from a tap

Of course it's important to stay hydrated when you are out in the summer sun. But what's not so important—or even necessary at all—is paying to drink your water from disposable bottles that require oil to produce and ship, and ultimately add more plastic to landfills. It's not like that expensive bottled water is any more pure than the kind you would get from of a water fountain or kitchen sink, either. "In the Bay Area, our water is sourced from Hetch Hetchy Reservoir, and it's the cleanest tap water in the nation," said Sharon Daraphonhdeth, sustainability strategist at SF State's Cesar Chavez Student Center. The University recently retrofitted a dozen water fountains on campus to make filling reusable canteens and bottles more convenient, and more retrofits are in the works.

## **2. Dust off your bike**

In just one month, a person with a 10-mile roundtrip commute in a midsize car will burn more than 10 gallons of gas and add more than 80 kilograms of CO<sub>2</sub> emissions to the atmosphere. Someone riding a bike to make the same commute, meanwhile, won't be burning anything except thousands of calories. So why not pull the bike out of the garage while the weather is nice? "You get a big personal health boost while reducing greenhouse-gas emissions," Daraphonhdeth said. SF State encourages students, faculty and staff to bike to campus by providing free parking for up to 350 bicycles in a "Bike Barn" located underneath the gymnasium.

## **3. Think global, eat local**

Biking to the store for your groceries would be a great choice. But that doesn't mean you would have eliminated fossil-fuel emissions from your dinner's carbon footprint. The food you are buying had to travel to the store, and often it's shipped in huge, CO<sub>2</sub>-spewing trucks driving

hundreds of miles. The more you can buy fruits and vegetables grown closer to home, the more you can cut carbon emissions from your menu. SF State promotes that notion through its annual Farm to Fork event, which makes a vegetarian, locally grown meal available to all.

#### **4. Cut down on the bratwursts**

For some people, a summer cookout is not the same without meat sizzling on the grill. But as tasty as a burger fresh off the barbecue might be, there's a price to pay for it. A single cow can guzzle down as much as 30 gallons of water in one day, and that same cow will release up to 120 kilograms of methane annually. That's why a guide to vegetarian and vegan restaurant options was recently added to the Cesar Chavez Student Center website. "More restaurants are adding vegetarian and vegan options, so it's definitely getting easier to find fun choices," added Daraphonhdeth.

#### **5. Give bees a reason to buzz on over**

As bee populations decline, worries grow that important plants will lose the pollinators that allow them to flourish. So why not do the bees a favor and grow some of the plants they like best? At SF State, groundskeeping crews have put out a variety of plants beloved by bees, adding to their habitat and food supply. According to SF State biologist Gretchen LeBuhn, anyone with a green thumb can do the same. Seven years ago, LeBuhn started the Great Sunflower Project, a national effort to recruit volunteers to track bee populations. LeBuhn says adding Lemon Queen sunflowers, cosmos, purple coneflower, coreopsis or bee balm to your garden will encourage bees to get busy.

#### **Bonus step for the ambitious**

Of course, summertime isn't all fun and games. Someone has to mow the lawn. But if you want to do Mother Nature (and the drought-stricken state of California) a favor, don't mow it. Replace it.

That's what SF State has done at several locations on campus, swapping small lawns for native meadow grass and hearty, drought-resistant plants. The University has also installed bioswales—shallow channels in the ground that collect and retain rainwater for nearby plants—while making improvements to its irrigation system. The result: SF State has reduced its water use by a third over the last seven years, saving California hundreds of thousands of gallons of water. You might think the water you could save would be a mere drop in the bucket compared with that, but every drop counts in a drought situation—or when you are simply trying to contribute to a more secure, sustainable future.

Provided by San Francisco State University

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