

Preliminary evaluation of the Climate Perks initiative

January 2023



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Published January 2023.

This report details headline findings from an evaluation of the Climate Perks initiative undertaken by Dr Claire Hoolohan, as part of work undertaken in ESRC Centre for Climate Change of Social Transformation.

Funding

Funded by Economic and Social Research Council (via the Centre for Climate Change and Social Transformations [CAST]), Grant/Award Number: ES/S012257/1

Citation

Hoolohan (2023) Preliminary evaluation of Possible's Climate Perks initiative. Working Paper. Centre for Climate Change and Social Transformation (CAST), Tyndall Centre for Climate Change Research, University of Manchester.

NB

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Climate Perks is a project by climate action charity Possible.

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Introduction

Climate Perks is an employee benefit scheme which empowers employees to take low carbon holiday travel instead of flying. By providing paid 'journey days' on top of annual leave, the scheme allows employees to choose slower, cleaner, travel without losing hard-earned leisure time. Climate charity Possible is working with companies to implement the initiative and unlock clean holiday travel for workers across the UK and beyond.

As of January 2023, there are 65 employers offering Climate Perks, including charities, travel agencies, architects and legal firms. To find out more about the scheme see www.climateperks.com.

Climate Perks was initially launched in December 2019. However, the coronavirus pandemic halted international travel, and as such the scheme was paused and reporting data for Climate Perks was not collected. With travel beginning to open up in 2022, this qualitative research was undertaken so that Possible and the Climate Perks network can gain an understanding of how, and to what extent, this employee benefit is impacting travel choices.

Methods

This evaluation was undertaken by online survey and interviews, with additional data collected on reported trips in a small number of cases when volunteered.

Employers

Surveyed (12) and interviewed (14) Climate Perks employers (total 17) to understand how effective the initiative is in facilitating flight free holiday travel and identify areas for improvement. Questions included:

- Why do employers sign up to Climate Perks?
- How widely known and used is Climate Perks within the organisation?
- What sorts of journey is it being used to support?
- Who is (and is not) using Climate Perks?
- What, if anything, could be done to improve Climate Perks?
- What, if anything, could be done to increase uptake?

Travellers

Surveyed and interviewed Climate Perks employees (total 21, of which 8 were also employers) to understand how effective the initiative is in facilitating flight free holiday travel and identify areas for improvement. Questions included:

- What sorts of journeys is it being used to support?
- How typical is flight-free travel for the traveller?
- Who is (and is not) using Climate Perks?
- Experiences (positive and negative) of flight-free travel?
- What, if anything, could be done to improve Climate Perks?
- What, if anything, could be done to increase uptake of flight free travel?
- To what extent does the traveller support a variety of policies and interventions to decrease flying?

Who participated in the research?

Climate Perks employers were initially approached by Possible to register interest in participating and to share an invitation to interview with travellers.

Employers

A range of employers by size, nature of business and length of involvement. A high number of environmental organisations was expected given the signatories, but some diversity was achieved:

Nature of business	Employees (Num)	CP Implemented
Environmental Consultant	~25	(unknown)
Environmental Communications	~50	2020
Architects	~80	Pre-2020
Environmental Campaigns	~30	(unknown)
Charity	<10	Pre-2020
Accountants	11-20	2020
Healthtech	~130	2022
Renewable electricity supplier	~80	2020
Financial Services	~30	Pre-2020
NGO - digital democracy	~30	Pre-2020
Marketing	100+	2022
Charity	~60	2021
Sustainable Aviation	~50	2021
Medical Communications	~90	2020
Not for Profit organisation	<10	2022
Policy Thinktank	<10	(unknown)

Travellers

Note only 15 of 21 travellers provided this information. Travellers included a mix in terms of age, gender, employment and income, a range in terms of frequency of flights for leisure, and some with and without children. Limited ethnic diversity:

Holiday flights/yr	Age	Gender	Ethnicity	Parent	Employed	Approximate hh income
1 - 2	48	M	White	Yes	Full-time	£50 - £79,999
5 - 6	35	F	White	No	Part-time	£80 - £99,999
< 1	38	M	White	Yes	Full-time	£50 - £79,999
1 - 2	45	F	White	No	Full-time	£35 - £49,999
< 1	28	F	White	No	Part-time	£35 - £49,999
1 - 2	29	F	White	No	Full-time	£35 - £49,999
3 - 4	34	M	Multiple ethnic groups	No	Full-time	£35 - £49,999
1 - 2	42	F	White	No	Full time	£50 - £79,999
1 - 2	52	M	White	Yes	Part-time	£80 - £99,999
< 1	25	M	White	No	Full time	£50 - £79,999
< 1	44	F	White	Yes	Part-time	£20 - £34,999
1 - 2	26	F	White	No	Full time	£35 - £49,999
< 1	35	M	White	Yes	Full time	£80 - £99,999
< 1	41	F	White	Yes	Full time	£50 - £79,999

Findings

Why do employers implement Climate Perks?

Climate Perks focusses on holiday travel, so falls outside the usual scope of organisational emissions accounting and environmental concerns. So why do organisations sign up?

- Possible provides guidance that makes it easy to implement and share Climate Perks, without organisations having to design a bespoke policy.
- Climate Perks is seen to be an inexpensive way to do something beneficial for people and the environment.
- Climate Perks provides an educational initiative that raises awareness of travel emissions, starts a conversation about alternatives, and provides a tangible reward for staff who make a change that reduces emissions.
- Climate Perks helps convey the ethos of the organisation and helps attract and retain staff that share similar values.
- Climate Perks is unusual in its scope, covering a gap that other initiatives (like salary sacrifice for bikes and electric vehicles, or discounted deals with renewable energy suppliers) don't and therefore allows companies to stand out as leading by example on emissions reduction.
- Taking action to reduce the impact of holiday travel seems more straightforward than changing than business travel, so provides some compensation for staff who have to fly for work.
- The boundaries on work-related emissions accounting have become more blurred since Covid-19. While working from home was enforced, there was an argument that staff's residential energy consumption became in scope for organisational accounting, and then as work returned to offices, there were discussions about commuting. Some employers described Climate Perks as a way to recognise and act on the way that working routines affect holidaying.

In employers' own words

"We wanted employees to feel like you were working for a company that gave a s*** about climate change. So we were looking for visible policies that show staff that the company cares about climate and so they should care too."

"Employees are looking for that value alignment between who they are and where they work, making decisions beyond their top line salary. So it's part of a benefit package that shows how much thought we have put into you as a person."

"We have science-based targets and are committed to reducing emissions. We're increasingly aware of the size of Scope 3 emissions, but some of our work is overseas and difficult to avoid. Climate Perks was felt to compensate for some of that travel."

"Our organisation asks others to take ambitious action on climate, so it's a bit rich if we're not looking at our own carbon footprint and our own activities ... and we would like to see our workforce lessening their impact on the climate."

How well is Climate Perks recognised and is it being used?

The answer to both these questions is mixed. Organisations that committed to the initiative more recently, and particularly post-Covid typically indicate that awareness and uptake are good. Those who signed up pre-Covid indicate that awareness and use has tailed off and work is needed to revitalise the initiative and increase uptake.

What is being done to increase awareness:

- Most organisations include Climate Perks in onboarding information for new employees, alongside other workplace benefits.
- Induction handbooks, workplace Wiki's and other central means of communication are often used.
- Many share stories about journeys made either in team meetings or emails.
- "Water cooler chat" is an important way to raise awareness and encourage use of Climate Perks (and low-carbon travel in general) and has been difficult to replicate while working from home to the detriment of the initiative.

Recruitment and induction is an important opportunity to introduce Climate Perks to new employees. How can their participation be encouraged early in their career at the organisation?

Who is using Climate Perks?

A mixture of people are using Climate Perks in terms of age, gender, employment and income. There is also a good mix of people travelling in different company (solo, with friends, family, with and without children), and in terms of their existing commitment to flight-free travel:

- Some Climate Perks travellers have already committed to not flying, for others this was a new experiment in low-carbon travel.
- Some Climate Perks travellers are frequent travellers (and some are frequent fliers), others holiday outside the home country infrequently.

This sample does not reflect all Climate Perks travellers.

Concerns about widening participation in Climate Perks

Some questions and reflections were raised about accessibility:

- Is it unfair to offer extra days leave to those who can afford to travel abroad?
- Is it elitist if only more established members of staff are accessing the scheme (and how to encourage participation from less established team members)
- The costs of rail travel are high, making it easier for solo travellers than families. Is there a way of strengthening the benefit for families.

What sorts of trips are travellers using Climate Perks for?

Most reported trips made were to France and travelling by train, with other destinations including Eurostar destinations (Netherlands, Belgium), UK destinations (England, Scotland, Northern Ireland), Ireland and Spain. The furthest trip made was from Caernarfon in North Wales to Belgrade, Serbia (more than 2,800km one way).

When	Origin - Destination	Who with?	Mode of transport	Had Climate Perks not been available, I would have ...
2022	London – Chambéry, France	Partner/spouse,	Car (EV, private)	Travelled by a different mode
2021	Tunbridge Wells, – Tarbet, Scotland	3 children (4-13)	Bus, Train, Other	I would have flown
2021	Tunbridge Wells – Belfast	Partner/spouse,	Ferry, train (one-way)	I would have flown
2022	Bristol – Arnhem, Netherlands	Brother	Cycle, train, ferry	Travelled by a different mode
2021	London – Toulon, France	Alone	Train	I would have had a shorter holiday, and travelled by train
2022	Caernarfon – Belgrade, Serbia	Alone	Bus, Train	I would have flown
2022	Bristol – West coast Ireland	Alone	Ferry, car (diesel)	Done the same
2022	London – Barcelona	Alone	Train	I would have flown
N/A	London – La Rochelle	Partner,	Train	I would have flown
2022	Edinburgh – Winchester	Sister + 1	Bus, Train	I would have flown
2021	London – Glasgow	Alone	Train	I would have had a shorter holiday, and travelled by train
2022	London – Doudeville, France	Friends	Train	Don't know
2022	Totnes – Hyeres, France	Partner/spouse	Train	I would have flown
2022	Edinburgh – Annecy, France	Partner/spouse	Train	Travelled somewhere closer / I would have flown
2020	Edinburgh – Paris	Friend	Train	I wouldn't have gone

When	Origin – Destination	Who with?	Mode of transport	Had Climate Perks not been available, I would have ...
2022	Blaenau Ffestiniog, Wales – Cambrils, Catalonia	Partner/spouse, Children (4-13)	Train	Don't know
2021	Birmingham – Orkney	Other adults	Car, Train	Travelled by a different mode
2019	London – Aalborg	Partner/spouse	Train	Done the same
2021	London – Broughty Ferry	Partner, Children (U4,4-13)	Train	Don't know
2019	N/A – Bruges, Ghent	Partner & friends	Car share	Probably wouldn't have gone
2022	N/A – Normandy	Partner & friends	Car share	I would have flown
2022	N. Portugal – S. Portugal	Partner	Train	Don't know
2022	N/A – Bordeaux	Partner, kids	Train	Taken a shorter trip perhaps
2022	Amsterdam – French Alps	Family	Train	Done the same

Does Climate Perks positively impact emissions?

Climate Perks is being used to replace flights for other modes of transport, and not only for people that are otherwise motivated or committed to doing so.

- Many of the reported trips would have involved a flight if not for Climate Perks. In these cases the replacement of a flight for any other mode of transport (including a car, if shared with multiple others) is beneficial in terms of emissions.
- In some cases trips would have occurred anyway, and Climate Perks merely offers a reinforcement reward for low-carbon travel by granting extra days leave.
- Some of these trips would not have happened if Climate Perks wasn't available. In these cases the initiative has less clear benefits in terms of emissions. However, the initiative enables experimentation with alternative means of holidaying, sometimes extending to companions that would not have otherwise travelled in this way. It also contributes to raising the profile of flight-free travel within the traveller's social networks.

In travellers' own words

"Climate Perks sort of solidified it [not flying] as a behaviour for me yeah because now, I get the extra days I just I wouldn't even consider a flight I don't think was before just might have done just because it is a bit quicker."

"This was the first time I had been abroad without flying, and I wouldn't have without Climate Perks."

"Now I think about possibilities for travel without flying so that I can get those days. Since i've done these trips i've been like oh like it's definitely possible to get train and if i'm going somewhere in Europe, then there's like not really any reason why I couldn't get the train."

"Would you have made these trips without Climate Perks?"
Traveller: "Probably not. I'd have considered it, I am actively trying not to fly, and so it very much aligns with that and gives you that extra push. I would probably not done both trips."

How could Climate Perks help reduce flying further for travellers who continue to fly?

What can we learn about increasing participation from those travellers who have used Climate Perks and also taken a flight in the last year?

More days, a tiered approach to claiming the additional days based on distance travelled. Poor connections between destinations means that the extra days don't get travellers very far. For example, it would take most of the day to get from Edinburgh to Paris, and that's restrictive in terms of destination.

A plus-one scheme. One of the main reasons people continued to fly was that travel companions did not have access to an equivalent scheme, making it more difficult to use the days as to travel by land would have impacts on the length of time 'on holiday'.

A means of off-setting financial cost. One employer interviewed offers £150 contribution to the cost of the trip in addition to the annual leave days. Others discussed whether salary sacrifice of other mechanism could be used. Even if as a one-off for first time users of Climate Perks this could be considerable incentive.

In travellers' own words

" So before [Climate Perks] I probably wouldn't have, I would have probably jumped on a plane, but because I've got climate perks, then I thought, why not stop off and see Paris and just make a bit of an adventure. Again that's a solo trip, and only one-way because it takes so long to get anywhere in Europe and the days don't get you very far when the infrastructure doesn't map out and you're having to overnight in places and take overnight buses, your days are maxed out really quickly."

"We flew to Romania in May, me and my partner as he doesn't have Climate Perks and it's pretty miserable to start a fun holiday not together and also financially, it does make more sense to fly particularly when there's two of you."

Lessons learnt and ideas for the future

Some of these ideas could be for employers to decide, but guidance from Possible would likely be beneficial.

Clarification on the level of evidence required

- Can some trips just be a tick box with standardised claim time (e.g. Eurostar destinations) or is the same level of evidence required for every trip?
- What level of detail on the counterfactual is needed (e.g. is a Rome2Rio example sufficient or does the traveller need to identify a specific flight?).

Activity to reinvigorate the initiative post-Covid

- New promotional material for mailing lists.
- New website content with examples of how people have travelled.
- Ideas on other things employees are doing to support their staff.

Design a plus-one scheme (as a way to introduce the scheme to new organisations)

Advice on integrating Climate Perks within an organisation

- A conversation guide and resources for travellers' companions to introduce the initiative to their employer.
- Examples on website of how organisations implemented and promoted Climate Perks.
- Advice for linking with popular Annual Leave logging software.

High level impact assessment of Climate Perks for members

- Total number of people able to access the scheme, through their employer.
- Number of trips and traveller.s
- EDI type reporting travelling on who uses the initiative.
- Tonnes CO2 saved.

Building and maintaining a catalogue of trips taken and advice for new travellers

- Easy trips for first time travellers.
- Unusual destinations and how to get there.
- Tools for travel – list of booking sites, apps, etc.

Designing a parallel scheme to address business travel

- How to arrange hub and spoke conferences to reduce delegate travel.
- Guidelines for reducing travel overseas.
- Organisational targets and levels of best practice.

Increasing the Perk and reducing the cost

- Option for employers to offer contribution towards additional expense (e.g. for first time Climate Perks travellers).
- Partner with UK holiday providers to offer discounted rate?

Could salary sacrifice be used?

- Any way to make it more accessible to families where the costs could be much higher.

Clarification on qualifying trips – more examples on inclusions and exclusions. Which of the following would qualify for example:

- Travelling by EV? Would it make a difference if it were private or hired? What about occupancy?
- Does it have to be overseas? What about travelling from Devon to Outer Hebrides? What about London to Edinburgh?
- A car full of people when otherwise two cars would be taken?
- Travelling within the destination country, having flown there?
- One way train and return flight? Split trips?
- Cycling.

