

Changing Landscapes: A different approach

Having reviewed his carbon footprint, Ted Leeming decided to act – by adopting a ‘want or need’ approach and radically overhauling his business model. As painful as the transition was, the change proved hugely rewarding

In 1950 the number of tourists that visited Iceland was 4,383. By 2018, that number had risen to a staggering 2.34 million, in a country with a population of some 375,000. A great success story in one regard, but as with anything and everything, nothing comes for free. The rise in global tourism mirrors that of many other indicators including GDP, motor vehicles, technology, energy use, fertiliser consumption and the number of McDonald’s outlets, which together form what has become known as the great acceleration. The combined result of these and other indicators is that half of all the gases leading to climate change have

been emitted into the atmosphere since 1990.

For many years, I confess I was bewitched by the lure of exotic travel, always assuming that if I offset my carbon footprint and did my recycling, governments and industry would deliver promised solutions as the invisible carbon noose tightened around the planet. But as we researched the issue, it became increasingly obvious that many of the promises were not being delivered (governments committed to addressing climate change way back in the early 1990s yet emissions will continue to rise into the 2030s), so in 2016, we reviewed our carbon footprint using various online calculators

(Giki Zero is but one friendly way to start) and concluded that we had no option but to act.

It was certainly a challenge (aren’t all the best things in life), as we had become accustomed to so many conveniences in our lives. Our biggest single contributor was flying, especially as we ran photography workshops to various exotic destinations, posting images on social media and actively encouraging others to join us. We had been offsetting our associated emissions and planting trees for years, but we didn’t need to dig very far to learn that justifying our images as necessary and paying to offset our impacts simply wasn’t sustainable and was, in reality,



Don't Worry, I'll be Gone Soon (previously titled 'The Icefields').



Minded Towards Oblivion (previously 'The Tourist').

little more than a convenient justification.

It took a while to figure it out, but our solution turned out to be quite straightforward: we simply adopted a ‘need or want’ approach to every purchase, flight or decision we make. We decide whether each item is really necessary, or just a ‘nice to have’ (for instance, do we ‘need’ the extra money we could earn?). We haven’t stopped flying, for example, but we did commit to stop running exotic photography workshops and taking casual holiday flights, giving ourselves three years to fulfil existing work commitments and transition our business. As our main income source, this was a big pill to swallow and I loved working with our clients (I still miss you all) as much as I did the places we went, but the stark reality was that our lifestyle was the problem (the richest 10% of the global population creates half of all global emissions; the wealthiest 50% cause 86%; the poorest 50% cause just 14%).

The decision forced us to think both laterally and creatively as we redefined both lifestyle and business. It made us contemplate every element of our lives, but having redefined our purpose, it unexpectedly became both cathartic and revelatory as opposed to a penance. From a photographic perspective, we started to relax, consider and become more aware. And somewhere along the way, we found ourselves working within the landscape rather than simply passing through, discovering that all around us was an ‘extraordinary local’ we’d spent years travelling to find.

Of course, there are things I will always miss, but I honestly believe that what we have gained is spectacularly more rewarding. We undoubtedly earn less but are less stressed, more creative in both our thinking and practice, and appreciate the things we have and the world around us far more. We also recognise how lucky we are in being able

to make the decisions we have, as many do not have the same opportunities we do. But with that privilege, we now realise, comes responsibility.

Reimagined landscapes

For COP27, I reimagined a series of Icelandic images we once posted online to sell workshops, adopting an alternative approach in post-production and changing the title of each. Creating the series – which I see as a set of alternative postcards home – has raised many questions for me, including the significance and responsibility of the photograph in society and its role as both a positive and negative force.

For further information and ideas, visit [Wanderings of a Photographic Duo at leemingpaterson.com](http://WanderingsofaPhotographicDuo.com), the website Ted shares with his wife Morag, who has her own approach to exploring local environments.