

Set up sustainably

Thanks to Greta and her army of students, the message has landed: our ‘house’ is on fire. While that might not sound so great, the good news is that the average Berliner has plenty of options to decrease their environmental footprint. Starting with general life admin, there is the obvious question of electricity. If you’re still using local monopolists Vattenfall, it’s time to switch to a renewable provider. A safe bet is [Greenpeace Energy](#) which, unlike cheaper providers, uses certified renewables in Germany and Austria. Hamburg startup [Enyway](#) goes a step further, linking home consumers with small-scale green suppliers, including wind turbines right outside Berlin. Switching is easy, but expect to pay around a third more than non-green power.

Next, consider putting your (unspent) money where your mouth is. The big German banks fund multinational mining companies and dirty energy, so it’s high time you said ciao to Commerzbank & co. Dutch entrant [Triodos](#) and established German player [GLS Bank](#) both offer a more ethical place for your money, investing in environmental and social projects such as sustainable furniture makers and training providers for refugees. But is the switch worth it? Firstly, the accounts cost money: GLS charges €8.80 a month (€1 if you’re under 28) and Triodos €4.50. And while neither has a real branch network, the Triodos credit card offers free cash withdrawals worldwide – handy for your next (train) trip to Thailand. Another drawback is the banks’ clunky online services, which have all the design appeal of mid-90s accounting software. But these eco-banks’ ethics mean they’re worth making the sacrifice. Let your *Geld* do some good for once.

Unfortunately, it’s not just your bank account that could be funding corporate baddies: insurance companies also invest your money in ethically questionable ways. At your rescue is Munich-based startup [ver.de](#), which uses your premiums to fund green energy projects and social housing. Founded in 2018, for now the insurer offers just bicycle insurance, with monthly premiums starting at €13.50. This is more than the market average of €7-10 a month, but [ver.de](#) sets itself apart by promising to replace your stolen bike with a model costing up to 20 percent more. There are no plans to offer car insurance, but then you wouldn’t dream of driving around on four wheels, would you?

Surf the green web

Our thirst for digital data is causing a massive expansion in power-hungry data centres, with scientists forecasting that the internet will consume one-fifth of all electricity by 2025. Luckily, there *are* low-carbon ways to surf, including search engine

[Ecosia](#). Set up in 2010, the Berlin website runs its servers on renewable energy, and by planting one tree for every 45 searches, it’s even carbon negative. It uses Microsoft’s Bing, which although works pretty well, means you’ll generate just 3.37 million results when you type in ‘eco-warrior’, compared to Google’s whopping 27.1 million.

A huge share of your online emissions are caused by streaming. According to French non-profit think-tank The Shift Project, the annual carbon impact of online video streaming is equivalent to that of Spain. One startup trying to tackle this is Berlin streaming newbie [Shelfd](#), which has a built-in CO2 calculator showing the carbon footprint of your viewing. You can offset this impact via reforestation NGO [Primaklima](#), where a 90-minute film costs around 18 cents to compensate. While it’s nice that Shelfd recognises streaming as an environmental issue, the implementation isn’t great. Streaming on the site isn’t directly carbon neutral; instead, you have to report how much you binge on films and series, and who’s honest about that?

There are also ethical alternatives when it comes to email, and one of them is Berlin-based [Posteo](#). Like many green options, an account costs money – €1 a month for a meagre 2 GB storage, with each additional gigabyte costing 25 cents. But for that you get email with POP/IMAP support plus end-to-end encryption, all powered by 100 percent [Ökostrom](#). But that’s not Posteo’s only green virtue. On its website, it proudly claims to offer its employees a “free, organic-vegetarian lunch”. We’re sold.

Travel scot-free

Let’s face it, air travel these days is just trolling the environment. But what if you have no choice but to fly? Can carbon offsetting make your flight greener? This topic is hotly debated, but most observers agree that if you are going to fly anyway, it’s better to compensate than not. The offsetting experts at [Atmosfair](#) are your first stop here. This Berlin NGO calculates the emissions from your flight and lets you offset (€87 for a Berlin-NYC round-trip) by investing in a carbon-reducing project of your choice – from cooking stoves in rural Rwanda to initiatives making renewable energy from crop waste in India. But this isn’t your Get Out of Jail Free card; you’re still better off swapping air for rail.

Done grappling with the decision of plane versus train? It’s time to book accommodation. And yes, there’s a green option here, too. With [Bed’n’Tree](#), the idea is simple: access one of the big-name online travel agents via the site, book your room, and Bed’n’Tree will use the referral fees it receives to fund reforestation projects. Since their launch in 2018, they’ve planted 100,000 trees across four continents, and while the true benefit of this reforestation is difficult to measure, the site is a solid green choice if you’re booking with the likes of Expedia and Booking.com anyway. ■

GOING GREEN FOR THE NEW DECADE



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From sustainable search engines to peer-to-peer power, there are countless services promising to reduce your environmental impact. But is it worth switching?

We weigh up some options.

By Benjamin Haughton