

How The Flying Shame Movement Got Off The Ground

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AILSAL CHANG, HOST:

All right. Listen up folks. We're about to talk about flygskam. That's right. You heard it - flygskam. It's the Swedish word for the shame some travelers feel about flying because of all the greenhouse gases flying emits. This summer, there's been a lot of shaming around flying, like, for instance, the outcry over Google's exclusive gathering in Sicily when all these A-list guests flew in on more than 100 private jets to discuss, of all topics, climate change. And then Prince Harry and Duchess Meghan are getting some heat for jet-setting around Europe on Elton John's private plane. Umair Irfan wrote a piece about flying shame for Vox, and he's here with us now to talk about it.

Welcome back.

UMAIR IRFAN: Thanks, Ailsa.

CHANG: All right. So you wrote about how this flying shame movement got off the ground a few years ago in Sweden of all places because of a Winter Olympian there. What's that story?

IRFAN: Yeah. This was a Swedish biathlete named Bjorn Ferry, and he announced publicly a few years ago that he was going to give up doing press junkets and traveling around the country. Being a Winter Olympian, he is very in tune with nature and particularly winter and was deeply concerned that warming was going to harm the future of his sport. And he decided to lead by example by trying to mitigate his own emissions.

CHANG: Wow. OK. And then there was another Swede, a Swedish teenager environmentalist, Greta Thunberg, who had made this big splash, and now she's actually crossing the Atlantic by sailboat to attend a U.N. climate summit in New York. But then that trip generated controversy. Why?

IRFAN: The controversy around that is that, well, one, people think it's a stunt and that it's dangerous to put a 16-year-old girl on a trans-Atlantic journey. She is accompanied by her father and skilled sailors. But the other part is that also some of the crew that's going to be relieving the crew on the way back is flying to New York. And so that kind of seems to negate the whole point of this to begin with.