

Editor's Picks

How Conservation Will Define The Next Generation Of Travel

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What encouraged travelers to book a flight twenty years ago as compared to today couldn't encompass a larger disparity. While the idea of escapism once caught the attention of many weary wanderers, the concept of solely basking in a beautiful paradise and sunbathing at an all-inclusive resort no longer assuages this generations' worldly desires. With a growing number of travelers set to chart a new form of exploration worldwide, the yearning for deeper meaning in travel is evident: Whether connecting to cultures different from their own, seeking more meaningful experiences shedding light on a destination's history, or interacting with the tangible, natural environment of a place, today's travelers continue to evolve into more thoughtful, considerate global citizens who care deeply for the world they traverse.

Perhaps the largest component of this shift in thoughtful travel is conservation. The United Nations' decision to declare 2017 the International Year of Sustainable Tourism for Development proves this, ultimately putting conservation and sustainable tourism practices in the spotlight. According to the World Wildlife Fund, the total number of international travelers is expected to grow from 1.2 billion to 1.8 billion by 2025 alone, making the rise of the conservation traveler imperative to conscious development as tourism infrastructures increase. Further, the Center for Responsible Travel estimates over 150 countries rank tourism as one of the top five export earners, and The World Bank reports every one dollar spent on travel and tourism can yield upwards of \$10 Dollars in economic benefits to local communities. With such immense power to change the global landscape for the better, will tourism providers and travelers rise to the occasion?

World Wildlife Fund's vice president for travel, tourism, and conservation Jim Sano believes conservation travel pushes the envelope a step further than sustainable travel due to its centering pillar to provide communities, governments, and private business incentives to conserve their natural and cultural capital. "Conservation travel dates back to 1870 when John Muir began guiding travelers in what is now known as Yosemite National Park," says Sano. "The travelers included the likes of Ralph Waldo Emerson and Theodore Roosevelt, who, in turn, inspired future generations to advocate for the creation and protection of America's National Parks." From conservation's origins, Sano anticipates this shift to increase in years to come. "Conservation travel must continue to grow. If it doesn't, destinations will be trashed, the quality of visitor experiences will decline, and the livelihoods of 284 million workers and their families will be affected."

Sano believes encouraging destinations to create tourism management plans must include setting a carrying capacity to protect resources for future generations. Countries like Norway, Costa Rica, Bhutan, and Namibia already do this, says Sano, and companies like Virgin America pledge to reduce greenhouse gas emissions in aviation, while Natural Habitat Adventures provides comprehensive sustainability programs as a tour operator.



For executive vice president of travel at National Geographic, Lynn Cutter, hotels hold a pivotal key to the conservation travel movement by providing travelers with thoughtful lodging options. "Our National Geographic Unique Lodges of the World collection was established to further the cause of sustainable tourism and promote travel that helps instead of hurts the planet," says Cutter.

The 55 lodges in the collection combine an incredible vacation with a chance for travelers to engage with local cultures and environments in a rich and meaningful way. To join the collection, each property is carefully vetted based on its commitment to sustainable tourism, along with other factors like uniqueness and authenticity of the property, its design and character, the quality of the guest experience and service.

"Travel is a rapidly growing industry that can have a significant positive or negative impact on the destinations people are visiting," says Cutter. "It's important now more than ever for travelers and members of the travel industry to be invested in helping protect our planet and ensuring the places we love are well cared for so they remain intact for generations to come."

Part of National Geographic Unique Lodges of the World is Nimmo Bay Wilderness Resort in the Great Bear Rainforest of British Columbia, Canada, and General Manager Fraser Murray continually focuses on reducing and improving processes to set the standard for sustainability. "Because we are off the grid and remote, we weigh every decision. We bring in sustainably-sourced supplies, products, and food to the lodge, and then take out all our waste where it is sorted so it can be composted and recycled," says Murray. "Everything is sourced locally – from our furniture to our art work."



Similarly, Whitepod in the Swiss Alps proves hospitality and environmental conservation can coexist: Perched over 4,500 feet above sea level, each of the 15, dome-shaped pods blend effortlessly with the natural surrounds, and everything at the property is managed – from recycling waste to locally sourcing ingredients – culminating in a minimized footprint on nature. At SUJÁN, a boutique hotel group in India, conservation defines the preservation of both natural heritage and the rich cultural traditions of India. Every property is a microcosm of the community in which it is located, showing the positive impacts tourism can have on sustainable principles and practices at the local level. At Awasi Atacama in Chile's San Pedro de Atacama Desert, sustainability means getting back to the basics. Each of the 10 suites were built entirely out of local materials sourced within 60 miles of the property, furthering director general, Matías de Cristóbal's vision to immerse guests in the natural environment. The same rings true for Inkatererra, a sustainable tourism pioneer and the first carbon-neutral travel organization in Peru. For over 34 years, the hotel group has created authentic exposure for guests in areas of great importance to Peru like the Amazon Rainforest and Machu Picchu.

A continual thread in each lodge is the emphasis on awakening a growing consciousness in travelers they attract. At Fogo Island Inn in Nova Scotia, "eco-consciousness is inextricably linked to the wholeness and resilience of our community," says founder and innkeeper Zita Cobb. "The world seems to be waking up from a big sleep and slowly emerging from the iron grip of consumerism. For every traveler, this awakening brings about a growing consciousness about the impact of their actions."

