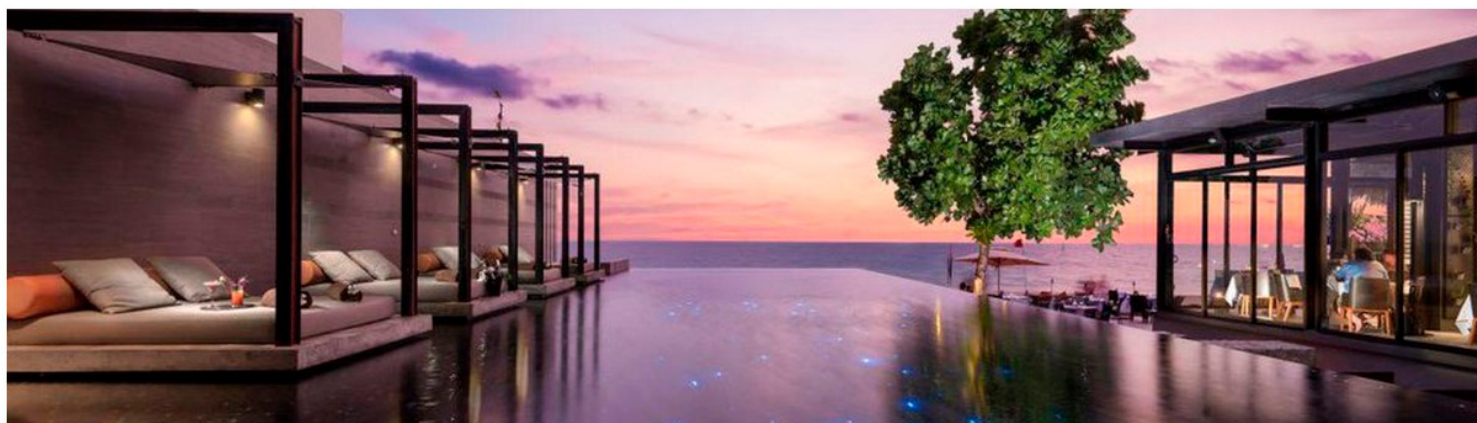


ECO TRAVEL: WHY LUXURY TRAVEL IS BECOMING GREENER

Travel's role in the climate crisis is impossible to ignore. According to the European Commission, aviation accounts for two per cent of total global emissions. By 2020, they're expected to have soared by a massive 70 per cent since 2005. Despite growing calls for compulsory carbon levies on flights, jetting off remains more popular than ever. A change in approach is needed. And that's where eco-friendly luxury hotels come in.



"Whilst sustainable travel used to be a niche concept, there has been a positive shift, with the luxury market bringing sustainable luxury travel to the forefront of the industry," says Anchalika Kijkanakorn, Managing Director and Founder of Thailand's AKARYN Hotel Group (AHG).

AHG is a pioneer in the sustainable luxury hotel space. After an initial trial at its akyra TAS Sukhumvit Bangkok property, AHG has now stopped using single use plastics in all six of its hotels across Thailand, in popular locations include Chiang Mai, Phuket and Hua Hin.

"We offer all guests stylish stainless-steel, refillable water bottles on arrival, as well as refillable, organic toiletries and amenities using essential oil products, with biodegradable packaging," explains Kijkanakorn.



The approach has won AHG a Responsible Thailand award. Kijkanakorn says that prospective tourists are increasingly weighing their visit depending on a hotel's eco credentials.

Simply put, luxury travel has an onus to ensure that it leads the way in the fight against climate change. At the industry level, it's becoming clearer that high-end properties no longer have an excuse for not managing their impact, with a clientele that is increasingly eco-educated.

"Sustainable travel is not only a source of inspiration, but the most effective way to raise awareness of our planet's natural resources," says Joaquin Escudero, Resident Manager at Inkaterra Hacienda Urubamba in Peru.

Inkaterra has been pushing an eco-friendly agenda since 1975. At Hacienda Urubamba, Inkaterra has pioneered a new 'Earth To Table' concept, allowing guests to harvest carbon-neutral crops grown on site and to sample ingredients grown at the Inkaterra Asociación Andean Farm Project, an associated NGO.

"Only when travelling do we get to know local cultures and their natural environments," says Escudero. "We can learn about their uniqueness as well as their fragility and, as a result, we leave that destination more engaged in the idea of conservation for future generations."

Inkaterra's approach tallies with a wider movement within the luxury travel sector around the globe. Properties such as Volcanoes Safaris' Bwindi Lodge in Uganda and Ngorogoro Crater Lodge in Tanzania are actively engaged in conservation efforts within the fragile ecosystems that they call home.



However, it's becoming clearer that trips to such special places need to be eked out for longer, with travelers advised by operators and hotels to take one major holiday a year rather than numerous short ones, in order to reduce their impact on the environment via long haul flights.

Reduction is fast becoming more important than offsetting. In fact, offsetting has been discredited in recent years, with Fern claiming trees require between 15 and 35 years' growth to reach their average carbon storage capacity. With the climate emergency so urgent, the suggestion is that offsetting cannot mitigate the effects of flying fast enough. The EU has said that offsetting will not be used against its climate reduction targets from 2021.

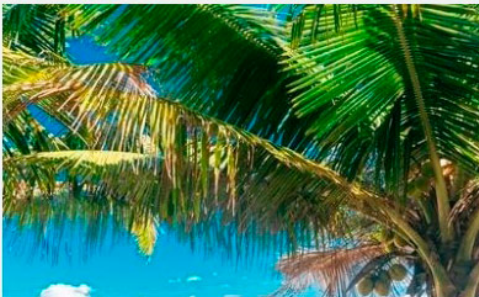
The good news is that such concerns are being heard by sustainable luxury hotels. With groups like AHG and Inkaterra leading the way, there's growing hope that the luxury sector can be a catalyst for broader, greener change.

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