

RESEARCH

52pc of global consumers will factor sustainability into travel plans: report

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Marine life around Four Seasons Resort Seychelles

By JOE MCCARTHY

As consumers become more aware of the negative impact of their travels, they are increasingly favoring environmentally and socially responsible alternatives, according to a new report by Booking.com.

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The impacts of travel are myriad, direct and indirect, and compound over time. As consumers see first-hand or learn about the cumulative effect of easy travel, they are turning their qualms into action.

"Sustainable travel is more than just 'going green,'" said Todd Dunlap, managing director of the Americas for Booking.com, Bellevue, WA. "It's also about helping to support and retain local cultures, economies and environments while traveling.

"Most people don't know how easy it is to weave sustainability into the types of trips they already want to take," he said.

"There are many ways to be a conscientious traveler in 2015 without having to sacrifice comfort levels or relaxation. Guests may not realize that as they sleep on organic cotton sheets, washed with water heated by energy generated from the hotel itself, they are

staying sustainably. Or that when eating a meal made from ingredients sourced within 20 miles of their accommodation, they are a sustainable traveler supporting local business."

Booking.com surveyed 32,000 travelers across 16 countries for this report.

Changing minds

Ten percent of respondents took explicitly sustainable or ethical trips in 2014 such as an eco-tour, a voluntourism trip, a farm stay, a camping trip or a trip to learn about new cultures. In other words, 90 percent of consumers did not take such a trip.

However, the edges of traditional travel are being reshaped by sustainability. Minor, rational changes are adding up to create tangible improvements.

While only a fraction of consumers took a trip based on sustainability, the majority of respondents took trips that sought to incorporate some aspect of sustainability.



Shanti Maurice - A Nira Resort

Terme di Saturnia Spa & Golf Resort

Leading Hotels of the World farms

A majority of respondents said that they consider the environmental impact and effect on local societies when traveling. Oftentimes, simple choices such as staying at a hotel that prioritizes green initiatives or buying food from a farmer's markets to support local business can be influential and play a reinforcing role.

Brazilians polled as the most concerned with sustainability, with 74 percent saying that they factor these concerns into their trips.

Danish and Dutch respondents were the least likely to consider sustainability, at 36 percent and 39 percent respectively.

Fifty-nine percent of Australians and 53 percent of Americans agreed with the purpose of sustainability.



Leatherback turtles

Some contradictions arise when zooming in on the details. While respondents want to travel more sustainably, they are unwilling to forego luxury accommodations.

However, hotels are finding solutions that combine ecological concerns with luxury, by using products from sustainable companies, designing buildings that better conserve energy and handle waste and buying food from local purveyors.

Changing paradigm

Hotels have recognized the changing consumer sentiment toward sustainability and are adapting accordingly.

For instance, hotel chain Shangri-La expanded its environmental awareness far beyond Earth Day with an initiative that embeds sustainable ways in the hotel's daily culinary efforts.

"Rooted in Nature" was a month-long celebration of Shangri-La's food purveyors from around the world. Releasing the year-round campaign near Earth Day drew attention from fair-weather environmentalists and those looking to expand sustainable living ([see story](#)).

Also, Four Seasons Hotel Vancouver has been advocating for cleaner oceans and sustainable fish cultivation through the Chefs for Oceans initiative.

The initiative is led by the property's executive chef Ned Bell and aims to leverage the influence of top Canadian chefs to incite change across the country. Oceans are under significant pressure in many ways and will likely be irrevocably altered if they continue to be exploited at their current rates ([see story](#)).

"Many of the world's best accommodations already provide these stealthily sustainable amenities to make sure their guests can enjoy all the luxuries of a vacation guilt-free," Mr. Dunlap said.

"In fact, you might already be a sustainable traveler and not even know it, that's how seamless sustainable choices in accommodation can be," he said.

Final Take

Joe McCarthy, staff reporter on Luxury Daily, New York

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