

TRAVEL AND HOSPITALITY

Travel brands must emphasize values to reach consumers

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Travelers want sustainable but unique experiences. Image credit: Virtuoso

By SARAH RAMIREZ

NEW YORK Storytelling is essential for hospitality brands to share their brand values with guests, particularly as interest in sustainability and authentic travel grows.

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During a panel at *Cond Nast Traveler's* Points of View Summit on Oct. 7, industry experts discussed how travelers are increasingly concerned about the impact they have on different environments. With rates of travel continuing to rise exponentially, overtourism is becoming another problem for destinations with delicate ecosystems or landmarks.

"I think people are starting to understand that they as individuals can actually take some action and that they don't have to wait for governments to act," said Jodi Manning, director of marketing at **Cool Effect**, a platform that funds carbon-reducing projects.

"Overtourism and climate change are both global issues, but the solution is mostly local," she said. "There's definitely a desire [for travelers] to give back on a local basis or to places in the world that are the most hard hit."

Sustainable experiences

It is becoming more apparent among consumers how adverse of an impact travel may have on the climate.

Air travel is one of the biggest contributors to pollution worldwide. Using nonrenewable resources to build new hotels and attractions can also damage environments, without taking into account the impact of the widespread use of single-use plastics in the hospitality industry.



The panelists at the Points of View Summit. Image credit: Cond Nast Traveler

Luxury hotel brands are introducing more sustainability initiatives that prove hospitality does not need to sacrifice upscale experiences to achieve ecological and social responsibility. Many sustainability initiatives in hospitality revolve around eliminating single-use plastic such as straws and toiletries, or opting for more locally-sourced or organic ingredients for hotel restaurants.

Hospitality groups such as the Peninsula Hotel and Marriott International have been increasingly transparent with their guests about their newest sustainability efforts, which aim to benefit people and the planet. Environmental efforts do ultimately impact brands' bottom lines, whether through additional expenses or appealing to more travelers ([see story](#)).

In addition to implementing more sustainable policies, luxury hotels are also looking for creative ways to share their stance on the issue.

Through Nov. 15, Peninsula Hotels is welcoming a contemporary art exhibit to its Paris property which explores several themes including sustainability. For the Art in Resonance program, French artist Elise Morin created sculptural landscapes using recycled materials ([see story](#)).



SOLI by Elise Morin uses recycled materials. Image credit: Peninsula Hotels

While sustainability is a purchase factor, affluent travelers still desire unique experiences, according to Jade McBride, managing director at [Ted Turner Reserves](#).

"As suppliers of destinations, we're going to have to do a good job of providing those cool experiences with really meaningful connections, and we're going to have to do that with conservation values in mind," Mr. McBride said. "How do we make sure we tell our story so that [guests] know that they can come visit our property that has its sustainability values?"

This was reiterated by Petra Roach, U.S. director of [Barbados Tourism Marketing](#). She explained that travelers do not want "sanitized" experiences that feel inauthentic, particularly in more "boutique" destinations with smaller crowds of visitors.

Community-driven travel

Consumers are also drawn to brands that celebrate people-oriented values.

Many travelers, specifically affluent, want reassurance that local communities are enjoying a good standard of

living, per Ms. Roach.

Jerry Mpufane, president of North America at [South African Tourism](#), agreed that travelers want to interact more closely with locals than they have in the past. He also argued that the hospitality sector cannot talk about values without special attention to women, since approximately 70 percent of the industry's employees are female.

As female consumers become more prominent in the travel and hospitality industry, luxury brands must create a sense of community and safety to help empower them.

Whether traveling independently or in groups, however, safety remains an important consideration for female travelers. Even in upscale destinations, dangerous situations can arise quickly.

Established hospitality brands have been responding to travelers' desire for community, often offering tours or events designed to bring together women who are traveling independently ([see story](#)).

"I like to think of our industry as in the business of peace," Mr. Mpufane said. "The more people travel, the more people connect, we stand a chance at a better world."

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