

TRAVEL AND HOSPITALITY

Mindfulness, responsibility are key to sustainable luxury travel industry

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Puget Sound, Washington. Image credit: Cond Nast Traveler

By NORA HOWE

The travel and tourism industry has notoriously stunted sustainability efforts in the past, but businesses and travelers can significantly reduce their carbon footprints by implementing environmentally and socially conscious systems of behavior.

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During a panel at *Cond Nast Traveler's* third annual Points of View travel summit on Dec. 3, moderated by *Cond Nast Traveler* global editor in chief Melinda Stevens, industry experts discussed how the industry has acted as a problem within the realm of sustainability, and how it can become a solution. Panelists examined how a shift in behavior, on the part of both businesses and travelers, can ignite positive change for biodiversity and the human condition.

"It is incumbent upon us to do everything we can with our designs to become a part of the solution moving forward," said Alberto Aliberti, president of luxe cruise company *Atlas Ocean Voyages*.

Mindful travel

Before the onslaught of the COVID-19 pandemic, overtourism was becoming a widespread and destructive issue. While the union of cultures and intermingling of people from different parts of the world is not inherently negative, the ways in which people were traveling increasingly threatened biodiversity and local communities.

"It's a great thing, cultures coming together, but travelers must practice responsibility which is actually not that difficult," said Jaisal Singh, founder and chairman of expedition brand *Sujn*. "I really hope this pandemic has given us all time to reflect on the different ways we can travel responsibly."

Sujn has implemented various solutions to preserve its surrounding ecosystems such as the conservation contribution, a fee charged to guests, as well as initiatives like the Village Wildlife Volunteers program, which seeks to protect wildlife parks and arrest and persecute poachers.

Additionally, *Atlas Ocean Voyages* has advanced its technology using a combination of fuel and electronic conversions, bringing its fuel consumption down 20 percent.

"It's a snowball effect," Mr. Aliberti said. "When we use less oil, we produce less sulfur, ultimately creating cleaner fuel."



Klima, Milos, Greece. Image credit: Cond Nast Traveller UK

Many travelers have looked to larger hospitality companies for full transparency and are beginning to hold these companies accountable. **Hilton** has implemented programs and set goals for reducing energy consumption and is one of the only larger companies that has committed to science based target reporting.

"If hotels practice what they preach, it will make such a profound difference on the planet if they actually do what they say they do," Mr. Singh said.

"There is a whole new generation of people who are about to enter the workforce the Gretas' of the world, and they're not just working in hotels, but are significantly influencing travel habits," said Xenia zu Hohenlohe, founder and managing partner of hospitality consultancy **Considerate Group**.

Additionally, a large topic of conversation during the session centered on the effect tourism has on human life in addition to biodiversity and wildlife, as sustainability is all encompassing.

"It all comes down to values," said William G. Miles, president and CEO of **Hilton Head Island Bluffton Chamber of Commerce**. "We should be encouraging travelers to connect with a destination's residents.

"We strive to make sure every visitor understands the implications of their actions and commits to leaving a destination better than they found it," he said. "This could be as simple as knocking down sandcastles at the beach and leveling out the sand to protect turtle hatchlings."



Overtourism threatens biodiversity. Image credit: Cond Nast Traveler

As a final point of discussion, the panelists also provided their advice for committing to sustainability efforts as a traveler, all agreeing that researching and informing oneself were of the utmost importance.

"The first thing a person should do when selecting a destination is research what that place's needs are," Mr. Aliberti said. "Educate yourself on the local need and try your best to help a community's most primary needs."

Strides towards a healthier planet

Now more than ever, there is a sense of urgency to innovate, digitalize and embrace sustainability and businesses with a sense of purpose regarding social and environmental concerns are resonating with consumers and employees.

The Imagine Initiative seeks to combat climate change by promoting good travel behavior and best practices for companies and destinations through sustainable tourism, environmental education, gamification and corporate social responsibility.

According to a recent report by [Euromonitor International](#), the travel industry has the ability to achieve carbon neutrality, equality and social justice and shift toward a more sustainable world ([see story](#)).

Another Euromonitor report argued that the environment will be a major driver for investment within the travel industry, as 53 percent of travel brands are aiming to invest in energy-efficient initiatives in the next five years, and 57 percent are planning to invest in waste in the next five years ([see story](#)).

"Hospitality companies must ask: how do we want to impact the community, the traveler and the environment?" Considerate Group's Ms. Hohenlohe said. "When we take everyone and everything into account, sustainability will flow, as long as we create an inclusive narrative."