

TRAVEL AND HOSPITALITY

## Deep, meaningful experience is the future of travel

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*Earlier this year, Rosewood debuted new wellness retreats and techniques to help people cope with the physical and mental challenges of the COVID-19 pandemic. Image courtesy of Rosewood Hotels & Resorts*

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By NORA HOWE

While travel was beginning to shift toward more fulfilling experiences prior to the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic, connecting deeply with a destination as the primary goal of luxury travel is a relatively new phenomenon.

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Gone are the days of superficial travel dipping in and out of communities, seeing the highlights or sticking close to a familiar travel group. During a session at Cond Nast Traveler's Points of View Summit on Nov. 16, travel leaders discussed ways to find deeper connections with a destination through its people and culture, from taking part in authentic activities and eating and buying local to simply engaging with the residents.

"Part of our frustration has always been travelers who want to do multiple countries in a short amount of time, which does not allow for deep, immersive experiences because we have their attention for only a moment," said Beks Ndlovu, founder and CEO of safari service [African Bush Camps](#).

"As a result, we are now looking at requiring minimum stays because, simply, there is no way we can offer the level of experience needed for meaningful engagement in such minimal time frames."

### Experiential travel

Before the pandemic, people were interested in experiential travel as an idea but were mainly hypnotized by the need to check off boxes and see, eat and experience what was primarily promoted on social media. Some panelists believe COVID-19 has shifted perspective and values and created a lasting impression on how people approach travel.

Consumers are increasingly interested in traveling as a means to better themselves and those around them.



*Hot air ballooning at Four Seasons Safari Lodge Serengeti. Image credit: Four Seasons*

With this new generation of travelers, or a new outlook on travel, comes an altered appreciation for health and wellness. The pandemic has taken both a physical and mental toll on people, and wellness has emerged as a top priority.

While spa treatments and wellness activities like facials and yoga have become mainstream, with the added mental stress of the pandemic, demand for low-touch, private mental health and COVID-19 recovery programs will likely accelerate.

"People want to feel good, but not in a way that risks their safety or their comfort level right now," said Kari Molvar, beauty and wellness writer. "I expect this trend to develop in the wellness space."

Earlier this year, hospitality group Rosewood Hotels & Resorts unveiled a new wellness retreat idea designed to enhance one's ability to recover from life's adversities.

The elements of the retreat address the physical, emotional and mindful aspects of each participating individual, focusing on four main behavior elements to resilience: positivism, purpose, resourcefulness and compassion ([see story](#)).

To maintain authenticity within these experiences, Ms. Molvar suggests that travelers seek out services at the point of origin. For instance, although saunas are ubiquitous now, one can travel to Scandinavia and experience saunas the way they were originally and traditionally done.

Authenticity becomes slightly more difficult with regards to cuisine, according to Adam Sachs, director of the Sea and Land Taste initiative at [Silversea Cruises](#).



*Silversea Silver Explorer in the Northeast Passage. Image credit: Silversea Cruises*

"You can go to any local restaurant to get authentic food, but you may not necessarily get why the food matters or how it fits into the cultural landscape," he said. "If you are talking to people who are really passionate and can channel why what they are doing is compelling, then the experience is authentic."

#### Benefitting communities

Another major element of experiential travel is education. Travelers are looking to gather new ideas, skills and perspectives beyond touring the hotspots, accelerating the participation in citizen science projects.

Citizen science, which can also be referred to as crowdsourcing science, engages the public in scientific projects that have scientific questions to produce reliable data that is then put through a scientific peer-review.

"In Antarctica, these kinds of programs really depend on collaboration between private sector travel and scientists to develop programs, which can be easily done on board a tour vessel, for instance," said Allison Cusick, biological oceanography Ph.D. candidate at [Scripps Institution of Oceanography](#) and founder of citizen science project [Fjord Phyto](#).

Projects take a number of shapes, including photography-based identification catalogs to hands-on programs where tourists help collect data from physical environments.

In April, hospitality group Fairmont Hotels & Resorts celebrated the 30th anniversary of its sustainability strategy by setting more ambitious environmental goals and offering guests environmentally-focused experiences.

The group's Fairmont Mayakboa property in Mexico encouraged guests to make a \$20 donation to the nonprofit Oceanus A.C.

Those who chose to donate received the coordinates for coral planted in their honor after their stay. Visitors were also invited to join snorkel tours for a firsthand look at the efforts of the coral restoration program ([see story](#)).

Ultimately, this creates opportunities for destinations worldwide.

"We have guests who want to slow down, move around less and be able to change the narratives of dinner conversations back home because of experiences they have had here [while traveling]," Mr. Ndlovu said.

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