



Horwath HTL

Hotel, Tourism and Leisure

INDUSTRY REPORT

Traveling with Intention

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Traveling with Intention

The tag line of AFAR Magazine says it all: “Travel Deeper”. The magazine was created after the pair of founders returned from a six week visit to India in 2009 and capitalized on a white space they saw in the market for travel publications. Immersive travel with authentic cultural exchange was sparsely covered by the major travel magazines.

After a few years of fairly thin issues that featured small ads from rustic tour operators promoting trekking and other less-than-luxurious transport through exotic locations, this niche travel market became increasingly mainstream, especially to luxury travelers.

AFAR now has four distinct businesses in the travel and education fields, and more recent issues of the magazine are filled with ads from major long-haul airlines and the most luxurious hotel brands in the industry.

This article traces a pathway through the various trends and movements that have simultaneously been the result, and the champions, of the rise of purpose-driven travel.

Just as the number of hotel brands has flourished during the past two decades, so has the naming of traveler segments or “dash tourists”, such as adventure-tourists, eco-tourists, cultural-tourists, gastro-tourists, eno-tourists, extreme-tourists, wellness-tourists, spiritual-tourists, New Age-tourists, etc.

While the names can be a bit confusing and individuals may identify with more than one of these segments depending on the motivation to take a particular trip, the underlying thread is that travelers’ expectations are increasingly complex, including the expectation to have enough information at their fingertips to validate or verify that the suppliers they patronize conduct business with a moral code that is compatible with their own.

The following evolutionary path is not strictly chronological. People have been traveling with motivations of everything from survival to treasure seeking to curiosity throughout recorded history. However, the following focuses on the convergence of multiple considerations, constraints and desires that have come to the forefront of luxury travel in recent decades.



Indulgent Travel

The evolution of luxury traveler expectations had its foundation in “indulgent travel”, as frequently depicted in movies about the voyage of the Titanic and other transatlantic cruise ships that offered various classes of service from steerage class to first class, with the most luxurious class of travelers dining under chandeliers to the music of a live orchestra while dressing in formalwear in the middle of the ocean.

In the early 20th century, such activities could be comfortably referred to as indulgent. Through much of the following century, luxury hotels and resorts provided much of the same product: aspirational lifestyle and surroundings for those not easily impressed.

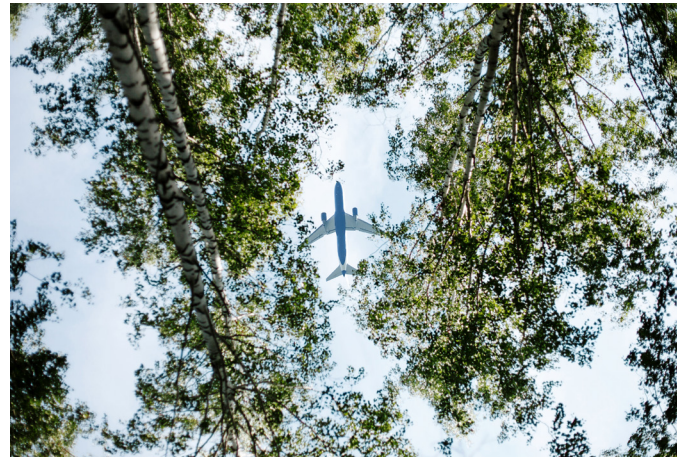


Experiential Travel

“Experiential travel” became the first step in the evolution of the purpose-driven travel spectrum. Rather than just going to Acapulco to lay by the pool or on the beach for rest and relaxation, the idea of a horseback ride along deserted beaches, for example, became an experience that

was more memorable and more exclusive, and therefore became more sought after.

As international travel became more accessible in recent decades and social media allowed for instant sharing of photographs, Facebook, or Instagram moments of the family ziplining in Costa Rica or swimming under a waterfall became more thrilling than the previous generation’s photos of just posing at the destination: portraits of the family relaxing by the pool at the Fontainebleau or on the pink beaches of Bermuda.



Sustainable Travel

Simultaneous with the rise and identification of the trend of experiential travel, the idea of sustainable travel gained prominence. In practice, sustainability broadens the definition of return on investment from a strictly financial measure to one that measures all three components of sustainability: economic return, environmental impact, and social impact.

As the study of, and concern for sustainability spread from educational institutions to society at large, attitudes toward travel began to register related changes. Some individuals began to question whether or not the carbon footprint of traveling was indulgent in and of itself.

Carbon offsets became available for purchase by a growing number of travel and transportation providers to plant a number of trees for example, that would consume as much carbon dioxide as one passenger seat’s share of a flight would produce. Travelers began to question how hotels in environmentally sensitive areas as well as in urban centers were minimizing their negative impacts on the environment or maximizing their potential social impacts in their neighborhoods or regions.

The term over-tourism came into use as the world's traveling public increased in size and overwhelmed many popular destinations and sites.

As studies of energy consumption proliferated in the past decade, it became well documented that hotels, relative to other building types, are exceptionally large consumers of electricity and generators of waste. A collaboration of the company Greenview and Cornell University now provides indexes of consumption patterns and progress in decreasing the same by hotel operating companies and individual hotels globally.

Now that measurement systems are commonly agreed upon, monitoring information has become more readily available, both to hotel ownership and management companies. Consumers are now finding more and better information with which to evaluate the sustainability practices employed by the hotels and resorts they are choosing to patronize.



Some hotels, such as Punta Islita in Costa Rica, now a Marriott Autograph Collection hotel, became known for their social sustainability efforts to convert employees to entrepreneur/vendors who would then sell their services to the hotel and to other clients.

Others became well known and favored for their contributions to local infrastructure. Nihi Sumba, an award-winning remote hotel in Indonesia, established a foundation partly funded by resort guests' wagers on weekly pony races on the beach. The resort and foundation take pride in having installed wells in dozens of local villages, so that 27,000 people in the region now have access to clean water.

Health & Wellness travel as well as Health & Wellness facilities and resorts are typically leaders in integrating sustainable practices in their operations. The principles of the two fields are well aligned with a difference only in scale. That is, health and wellness are directed at maximizing the vitality of the individual, while sustainability applies the same principles to the vitality of the project or organization, group or community, or potentially to a region or the planet.



Transformational Travel

Just as the concept of experiential travel was permeating the industry as a new preference of luxury travelers and others, the next step in this evolution of traveling with intention emerged, and was termed "transformational travel". The core of transformational travel is using travel "as a catalyst for personal transformation and new lifestyle choices." (Source: [transformational.travel](https://www.transformationaltravel.com/))

In transformational travel, the "experience" is augmented to include a challenge for the traveler, a learning process or solution to the challenge, and a catharsis, or change in perspective as a result of having overcome the challenge in an unfamiliar destination or setting. As stated on the Transformational Travel Council website, their definition is "intentionally traveling to stretch, learn and grow into new ways of being and engaging with the world."

In keeping with the experiential travel example of the horseback ride on the beach, two transformational equine activities offered at resorts come to mind. First are the "horse whisperer" exercises offered at Miraval, a destination spa resort in Tucson, Arizona and at Carmel Valley Ranch, a family resort near Monterey, California.

Participants are challenged to direct the horse to do certain things that the horse will only perform if the participant establishes a relationship of trust and respect/leadership with the horse.

Another transformational equine afternoon can be spent at Nihi Sumba (where the activities book is approximately 60 pages long for a resort with 27 villas) swimming on horseback. After working up body heat from a beachfront horseback ride, the horses enter the ocean and as the water gets deeper, they begin to swim with riders still on their backs. The interaction between rider and horse can range from panic to partnership, again depending on the unspoken “vibe” established between horse and rider.

An important element of the process in both of these equine activities is the participants’ reflection on the experience, often focusing on how we establish rapport, how others perceive our presence, and whether we tend toward individual or communal support in our lives.

This desire for self-examination and openness to change in how we relate to those around us is what differentiates transformational travel from experiential challenge, which can be just as thrilling, but typically less introspective in nature.

The Transformational Travel Council’s efforts are focused on both hospitality suppliers and on travelers directly. They recently released *The Transformational Travel Journal*, a “how to” guide for enriching an individual’s journey with tips and planning tools as well as extensive space for journaling.

The book serves as an accelerator for one of the many quotations it contains: a Chinese Proverb that translates to **“One who returns from a journey is not the same as the one who left.”**

The four-page foreword by Phil Cousineau traces the promise and motivation for traveling throughout written history. It serves as a good reminder of why many of us have devoted our careers to this industry.



Source: Morgan’s Rock Hacienda & EcoLodge, Nicaragua

Regenerative Travel

The spectrum of purpose-driven travel has reached a point of convergence in what is being referred to as “regenerative travel.” Similar to the link between wellness and sustainability, where wellness embodies similar principles at the level of individual as sustainability does at the level of community, destination, or planet, regenerative tourism combines the principles of transformative travel with a focus beyond sustainability.

That is, via regenerative travel, the individual traveler is open to challenging how they relate to the world around them, while at the same time they are not only conscious of protecting the travel destination from deterioration in social, environmental, and economic health, but strive to improve it for both residents and future visitors.

As seen through the three-sided prism of sustainability, in the environmental realm, regenerative travel can be evidenced by participating in reforestation efforts, donating to funds that purchase land so that it can remain in its natural state, or patronizing local businesses that promote anti-poaching causes, etc.

In the social realm it can mean having your children play soccer with the local children, and on the next trip bringing along child-sized sneakers to give to barefoot villagers. And in the economic realm, regenerative travelers like to know that the profits from tourism investments in less developed destinations are distributed in an equitable manner with a “reasonable” share remaining in the destination.



Source: Playa Viva, Mexico

From the perspective of owners and investors, catering to travelers in search of regenerative travel consists of “making it easy and accessible for those who love to actively make a positive change in the world do so, knowing they are creating lasting impact for generations to come all around the world.” (Source: *regenerativetravel.com*)

Regenerative travel goes beyond care for the environment to the aspiration of improving conditions in the host country. While the “travel for good” or voluntourism trend is not new and has been embraced by boutique hotels in various regions of the world, it is gaining wider acceptance and being formalized through classification and marketing systems.

Luxury resorts are embracing this trend, which allows the ownership or operating hotel brand to connect with their guests’ values and provides them with a sense of empowerment.

David Leventhal is a founders of *regenerativetravel.com* and the owner of Playa Viva, a boutique property on Mexico’s West Coast. Playa Viva’s core principles include using cleaner and more abundant water and energy, promoting and creating biodiversity, promoting meaningful community, and creating a living legacy. The resort operates entirely on solar power and encourages volunteering programs.



Source: : Rockhouse Hotel, Jamaica

Another example of a hotel that is committed to regenerative tourism being available for its guests is the Rockhouse Hotel in Negril, Jamaica. Since its establishment in 1994, Rockhouse was built on a commitment to sustainable tourism and playing an active, positive role in the community. The hotel, which is Green Globe Certified, encourages guests’ interaction with the social community and operates a local foundation to help childhood education.

From a recent Regenerative Travel White Paper:

***“Travel cannot continue to be measured by infinite growth. We need to collectively draw upon tourism to holistically make net-positive contributions to the well-being of all stakeholders in the ecosystem.*”**

This can only be accomplished by understanding the value in expanding our knowledge, presence and relationship with a given community, and the ecosystems that support those communities.”

Implications for a Sustainable Regeneration of a Post-COVID Enlightened Traveling Public

Some of the organizations that support purpose-driven travel appear to not only reflect travelers' changing preferences, but to educate travelers regarding what their preferences ought to be.

Eric Weiner's recent article in AFAR magazine titled *The Traveler's Manifesto*, reads like a list of New Year's Resolutions for post-COVID travel. He writes, ***"I can't guarantee I will adhere to my Travel Manifesto religiously, but this is what I aspire to, and aspirations matter."***

Excerpts from his five aspirations:

- **Travel Selectively:** "when we collect places, we're in 'getting' mode. When we experience them, we're in 'being' mode."
- **Travel Purposefully:** "When we travel with purpose – even if that purpose is as simple as traveling with an open mind and a kind heart – we fill ourselves and ideally, consider our impact on a destination."
- **Travel Slowly:** a quotation from the *Transformational Travel Journal*, attributed to the Roman philosopher Horace, "They change their sky, but not their soul, who rush across the sea."
- **Travel Empathetically:** when interacting with others in new destinations, do we only see differences or do we also identify commonalities, a shared humanity?
- **Travel Joyfully:** "Expectations are the enemy of happiness."

Many of the suppliers of services to these "travelers with intention" are independent, rather than branded, hotels of fewer than 50 rooms and are located further from major airports than mainstream travelers may find to be convenient.

This sized lodging facility typically struggles to find the right balance between the extra marketing expense needed to effectively reach its target customer base and the desire to keep the operation relatively affordable in order to capture a sufficient amount of demand to ensure economically sustainable operating efficiency.

Many such hotels also fund less typical expenses such as employee housing and transportation, local community relations programs, and other educational and environmental work in excess of such line items in typical hotel income statements.

A thorough search for organizations such as those mentioned here, among others, can offer hoteliers and other travel service providers many benefits, such as:

- Increasing exposure to a like-minded traveler segment through alliance marketing
- Sharing of best practices between lodging facilities from many destinations and world regions.
- Providing "third party" validation that consumers desire but cannot easily find, that the facility does employ practices that align with or increase all three branches of sustainability (economic, environmental, and social).
- Periodic webinars and live events to hear from industry experts and share the latest research and success stories related to their organizations' mission statements
- A substitute for "soft branding" with membership plus per-reservation fee structures

For the cost of some web research, it can be fruitful for hoteliers to behave as consumers do on social media and find their "tribe", either in the form of an industry association, social change advocacy group, as well as in research organizations, such as the Global Wellness Institute, which has created a strong network of industry advocates while focusing on the economic impact of the ten or so wellness sub-economies, such as spas, wellness travel, wellness communities, etc. in its history of less than 20 years.

Many individuals, organizations and business ventures have experienced isolation and struggle in the past year and have questioned whether pursuing their passions as travel industry suppliers would remain feasible in both the short and long term.

Remaining connected, creating community and learning from each other may not guarantee success, but these activities are sure to make the road less traveled a path littered with sparks of hope, joy, and energy.

Author



Andrew Cohan MAI REV ISHC
Managing Director
Horwath HTL Miami
acohan@horwathhtl.com
+1 305 606 2898

Andrew Cohan is the Managing Director for Horwath HTL primarily serving the Sunbelt States and the Caribbean Basin, based in Miami. Horwath HTL has been operating for 100 years in the hospitality consulting space with expertise in valuation and feasibility studies, resort hotel and resort real estate consulting, asset management and tourism and leisure consulting.

A seasoned hospitality professional with extensive real estate, marketing and account management skills in North America and Latin America, Andrew has consulted for projects with leading branded management companies such as Canyon Ranch, Six Senses, Montage, Auberge and Alila.

Andrew has extensive experience in the wellness and sustainability space, especially as it pertains to resort properties. He especially enjoys working on ground-up projects, teaming with land planners to determine the optimal resort configuration to fit market demand with destination and site attributes, and helping land owners assemble their development teams.

As health and wellness have moved from the margins of the industry to become important components of mainstream hospitality projects, Andrew's expertise has been in demand to conduct an increasing number of assignments for proposed sustainable wellness resort properties, particularly as the industry continues to strengthen in Central America, the Caribbean, Mexico and the "sunbelt states" in the United States. As the focus changes from the hotel product to the hotel experience, "property personality sharpening" through programming rather than capital expenditures has become one of the consultancy's strengths. He has written numerous articles on topics ranging from Miami's continuing growth to topics of interest in eco-tourism, active adventure tourism, and wellness tourism.

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Horwath HTL Miami

1815 Purdy Avenue,
Miami Beach, Florida 33139



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