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‘Conscious’ Travel Emerging as Yet Another Hot Luxury Trend



For at least the past year, the travel industry, and especially the luxury sector, has latched onto the idea of “transformative travel” as the new “experiential travel.”

First coined in 2016 by the founders of an adventure travel company, Jake Hauptert and Michael Bennet, who both lead the Transformational Travel Council, the term is meant to describe any travel experience that empowers people to make meaningful or lasting changes in their lives.

And while this concept originated in adventure travel, it soon became associated with luxury travel. Why? Because there’s no greater luxury today than personal fulfillment, as Skift’s 2018 Travel Megatrend of the same name pointed out.

During the most recent International Luxury Travel Market conference in Cannes in December, however, Skift spoke to a number of luxury travel executives who said they’d seen slight shifts in how luxury travelers perceive transformational travel.

“Conscious travel, I believe, is taking the idea of transformative travel to a new level,” Lindsey Ueberroth, CEO of **Preferred Hotels & Resorts**, told Skift. “It’s about human rights and sustaining communities, and not just about sustainability.”

With conscious, or responsible travel, travelers are seeking more than just a feeling of being transformed or achieving some sort of personal fulfillment. They want to know that their travels are, in some way, just as fulfilling for others, too. It's also an erosion of the traditional barriers of exclusivity that once defined luxury.

"We try really hard not to use the word 'luxury,'" said Neil Jacobs, CEO of Six Senses. "It's evolving into something that has a certain connotation around it that doesn't sit so well with us. There's this connotation of excess. I don't want to be about excess. I want us to be about community and connectivity. I want less to be more. It just makes more sense to me in some way. It is expensive and doesn't allow for everyone. There will always be segments with more than others but if there's a way to share more about it, that's good. It's about honesty."

Jacobs said, for example, that with some of Six Senses properties, the company is considering the idea of setting aside hotel rooms to be booked by locals "for an especially nominal amount of money," Said Jacobs, "We need to do something purposeful with them."

Not only that, but conscious travel has to be more than simply marketing to truly resonate with local communities, as well as travelers.

"Hotels can't just use conscious travel as a marketing ploy; we have a role to play in that space," Ueberroth added. "Our importance in the global economy is huge and we need to be playing a larger role in that. The World Travel & Tourism Council is trying to do that, but we often get overlooked on the importance and power that we have on economies. It's a missed opportunity because travel can change the world; it breaks barriers."

How conscious travel is defined or interpreted, however, varies. Rosewood Hotels chief marketing officer Thuy Tranthi Rieder said she viewed the concept of conscious travel as drawing from "People want meaning and purpose in travel, to create space in your life with time. It's reviving that notion of rebuilding relationships, about wellness, and self-discovery."

Oetker Collection CEO Frank Marrenbach, on the other hand, saw it more in light of corporate social responsibility and sustainability. "Travel needs to be more responsible," Marrenbach said. "Sustainability needs to be taken more into consideration. Equal rights for your team and more gender equality."

As did Hilton's global head of luxury and lifestyle, Martin Rinck. "As an industry, we have a responsibility since we are in the global travel business," he said. "We need to leave the world a better place and advocate for sustainability. We do a lot but we can do a lot more."

Mitzi Gaskins, global brand leader for Marriott's JW Marriott and The Luxury Collection brands said, "Sustainability is the perfect example of that and people want to feel like they're doing the right thing. So a lot of the things that we might not have looked at from a luxury perspective before, now we're having to really evaluate what those choices are and how we're giving our experiences, our amenities, to our guests and everything because of that focus."

Jenni Benzaquen, vice president of luxury brands in Europe for Marriott international, said that luxury travelers are increasingly looking to spend money with brands that sync with their value systems. "They don't just want a luxurious product or service. They want the brands that they are loyal to to have some element of something they identify with from a

value-driven point of view. So, whether that's women's rights or equality or sustainability, it's more and more important."

Other executives, including Ted Teng, CEO of Leading Hotels of the World, saw the individualism and personal nature of transformative travel extending into the concept of conscious travel.

"I think transformational travel exists and it's all still very individual, right?," Teng said. "I bet anyone who goes to a safari and see animals in their natural habitat can never go see a zoo again. You just can't. If it didn't occur to you, the cruelty of zoos after being on a safari, then you really weren't present in the safari."

And like Six Senses' Jacobs, he hoped that the luxury travel sector overall would be more inclusive, rather than exclusive.

"Having been in the business this long, I really see the missing ingredients. It's almost like luxury is a compensation for feeling inadequate rather than luxury is a sense of abundance. I would love for us to be industry of abundance and that we are spreading wellness, goodness, and kindness."

When asked if luxury really can be for all, Teng said, "Yes. It's about what people don't have enough of. Imagine if the luxury business stood for caring for the less fortunate, using our platform and maybe once a year, closing down for a week and welcoming others who may not have the opportunities to access. Wouldn't that be great? We share our abundance, rather than create exclusivity. It's like building a wall versus building a bridge."