

PURE  
LIFE EXPERIENCES

# HOW CAN EXPERIENTIAL TRAVEL BE A FORCE FOR GOOD?

A playbook by & for experiential  
travel's mavericks





# Contents



Foreword .....	3
The 2023 Innovators .....	4
Move from sustaining to regenerating .....	5
Create new ecosystems, economies & opportunities .....	8
Go where – and when – no-one else dares .....	11
Tell stories that inspire, not shame .....	14
Transform travellers into agents of change .....	17
Influence governments & public policy .....	20
Think collaboratively, not competitively .....	23

# Foreword

The world's problems have never seemed more pressing – or to be escalating at such a pace. Each week seems to bring another bad news story, with the climate crisis, natural disasters, war and displacement wreaking havoc in the destinations we operate in and hold close to our hearts.

We are all seeing the impacts of these challenges. And while the exact nature of the road ahead may be different for all of us, it's clear that the travel industry must look deeper, work harder and innovate smarter to turn our considerable resources towards creating positive change. To be a force for inspiration. A force for transformation. A force for good.

This is the topic we set out to explore at PURE Life Experiences' second Innovation Lab in September 2023. We brought our

PURE Awards shortlist together at La Sultana Oualidia in Morocco to share their stories, successes and challenges, in the hope of creating a playbook for experiential travel mavericks the world over to help them further their own innovations. What follows is the result of these conversations: seven answers to the question "how can experiential travel be a force for good?", set down to shape and inspire your own thinking, wherever you are on your journey.

Of course, these answers are only a starting point as we face an unknowable future. As this year's Innovation Lab drew to a close, a devastating earthquake struck our beloved Morocco, with tragic consequences for several of the communities and partners in the PURE family. Experiential travel's role as a force for good was immediately thrown into sharp relief.

And while we're proud of the way our global community responded with donations, on-the-ground aid and pledges of support to Morocco's tourism industry not just then, but for the foreseeable future, this crisis underlines the need for constant innovation and solidarity as we move through the challenges ahead.

At This is Beyond, we have always believed in business as a force for good. Our 2023 Innovators left telling us that they felt humbled, connected, and most of all, inspired by the work being done by their peers around the globe. We hope to continue this spirit of optimism at PURE 2024, when we'll return to Marrakech to fulfil our collective purpose: to unite a community of Change-Makers who together can forge a better future.



# The 2023 Innovators



**Agapi Sbokou**  
CO-OWNER & CEO,  
PHĀEA RESORTS



**Carlos Nuñez**  
CEO & FOUNDER,  
KONTIKI EXPEDITIONS



**Domenico Scordari**  
FOUNDER & CEO,  
NATURALIS BIO RESORT  
& SPA



**Hilda Van Der Wel**  
CO-FOUNDER,  
AVILA REIZEN & AVILA  
FOUNDATION



**James Haigh**  
HEAD OF SALES &  
MARKETING, LEMALA  
LUXURY COLLECTION



**Klaus Fielsch**  
PRODUCT MANAGER,  
MASHPI LODGE &  
METROPOLITAN TOURING



**Marc Tellio**  
OWNER,  
ENTRÉE CANADA  
& ALASKA



**Melita Koulmandas**  
CO-OWNER,  
SONG SAA PRIVATE ISLAND



**Marinella Coluccia**  
CO-OWNER,  
NATURALIS BIO RESORT  
& SPA



**Nicholas Priest**  
CMO,  
THE LUMINAIRE



**Nicolás Vial**  
VP OF CONSERVATION  
RESERVES, EXPLORA



**Sergio Costa**  
MARKETING & B2B  
MANAGER, LUXURY ACTION



**Serge Dive**  
CEO & FOUNDER,  
THIS IS BEYOND



**Tim Van Der Wel**  
MD & CO-FOUNDER,  
AVILA REIZEN & AVILA  
FOUNDATION



Image courtesy of Entrée Canada & Alaska.

HOW CAN EXPERIENTIAL TRAVEL  
BE A FORCE FOR GOOD?

# 1. Move from sustaining to regenerating

FOR THE LAST DECADE OR MORE, EXPERIENTIAL TRAVEL HAS BEEN INTERWOVEN WITH THE CONCEPT OF SUSTAINABILITY.

As an industry, we've made great strides towards normalising sustainability as no longer a nice-to-have, but a must-have. It's part of the stories we tell and the foundation that underlies our operations, and is beginning to become part of the conversation with travellers.

But this is no longer enough. Where previously we sought to sustain – to leave places in the same state as we found them and leave no footprint – today's travel brands must look to regenerate the places they touch. To not only protect what's already there, but also contribute to progress. To improve economies, communities and environments, and leave a positive legacy.

*The preservation of place, local culture and local economies: that is where the bar is now. When looking at hotels, lodges, resorts and experiences for myself and my guests, I will look to see what our choice of suppliers is doing (or not doing) for their local culture and environment. Is it just luxury at the expense of the environment, or does it actually contribute to a better space and place?"*

— Marc Telio

This move towards regeneration takes time, reflection and sensitivity, and depends on the context we operate in. We may all be at different points on our individual journeys – and this deserves acknowledgement and respect, not shame or judgement. However, it is incumbent upon the travel industry as a collective to change the conversation from whether luxury travel can be regenerative to the unified belief that it cannot be considered luxurious unless it is.

What this looks like will manifest in different ways for different travel brands. Some hotels and operators are now working towards – and even achieving – carbon negativity. Luxury Action, a luxury property in Lapland, is a carbon-negative property with -893 tonnes of carbon dioxide. As well as using green energy, drinking water from a local spring and locally sourced food, the property was built by a local Sámi architect using traditional methods.

Winter 2023 marked the resort's successful shift to providing all of its activities including snowmobiles and ATVs, without using gasoline. Luxury Action is also set to launch a new ecological area in Lapland this year and a new eco-luxury fishing lodge in Sweden later in 2024.

Sergio Costa, Luxury Action's Marketing & B2B Manager, acknowledges that these efforts are taking place in the context of the Finnish Sustainable Growth Programme, which is committed to moving Finland towards carbon neutrality in 2035 followed by carbon negativity, and may be harder to reach at the same pace in other destinations. Nonetheless, its success offers a blueprint and a beacon of hope for other businesses to follow.

Meanwhile, the carbon-neutral Chilean brand Explora has put regeneration at the centre of its reason for being, changing the company's purpose to exploring remote territories as a journey to conservation. Explora became a B Corp in 2021, meaning that it measures its success equally through a triple-impact strategy that takes financial, environmental and social factors into account.

This emphasis on measuring and accreditation can help keep brands not only accountable,



In a world where there's a lot of brainwashing and storytelling without substance, we wanted to embark on a journey of measuring pretty much everything and seeking accreditation. It pays off, especially internally, because it makes the whole ecosystem conscious of their actions. It helps you set and celebrate goals, and gets everyone engaged – which is a tremendous part of not only your journey, but also that of the local community.”

— Agapi Sbokou —



but also motivated towards regenerative goals that can feel intangible or hard to reach.

Naturalis Bio Resort & Spa in Puglia is also a B Corp, an accreditation earned through its “People & Planet First” philosophy, and has had a similar experience measuring its journey to regenerative success. Naturalis uses the B Impact Assessment to measure the company’s impact, raise awareness of what matters most, and guide its future actions, setting goals for the following year and reporting on the results in an annual impact report that can be shared widely to inspire all collaborators. Measurement is translated into meaning and becomes the basis of an ongoing roadmap.

---

*“In the end you have a tool that you can use. And it’s really helpful, because you know yourself better, and understand where you have to put your energy to reduce, or even better, your impact. There are things you’re not able to see, even if you are there every day. For example, we started to run a regenerative agricultural system, which is not only organic: it’s a completely different concept. The results are clear to everybody.”*

— Domenico Scodari

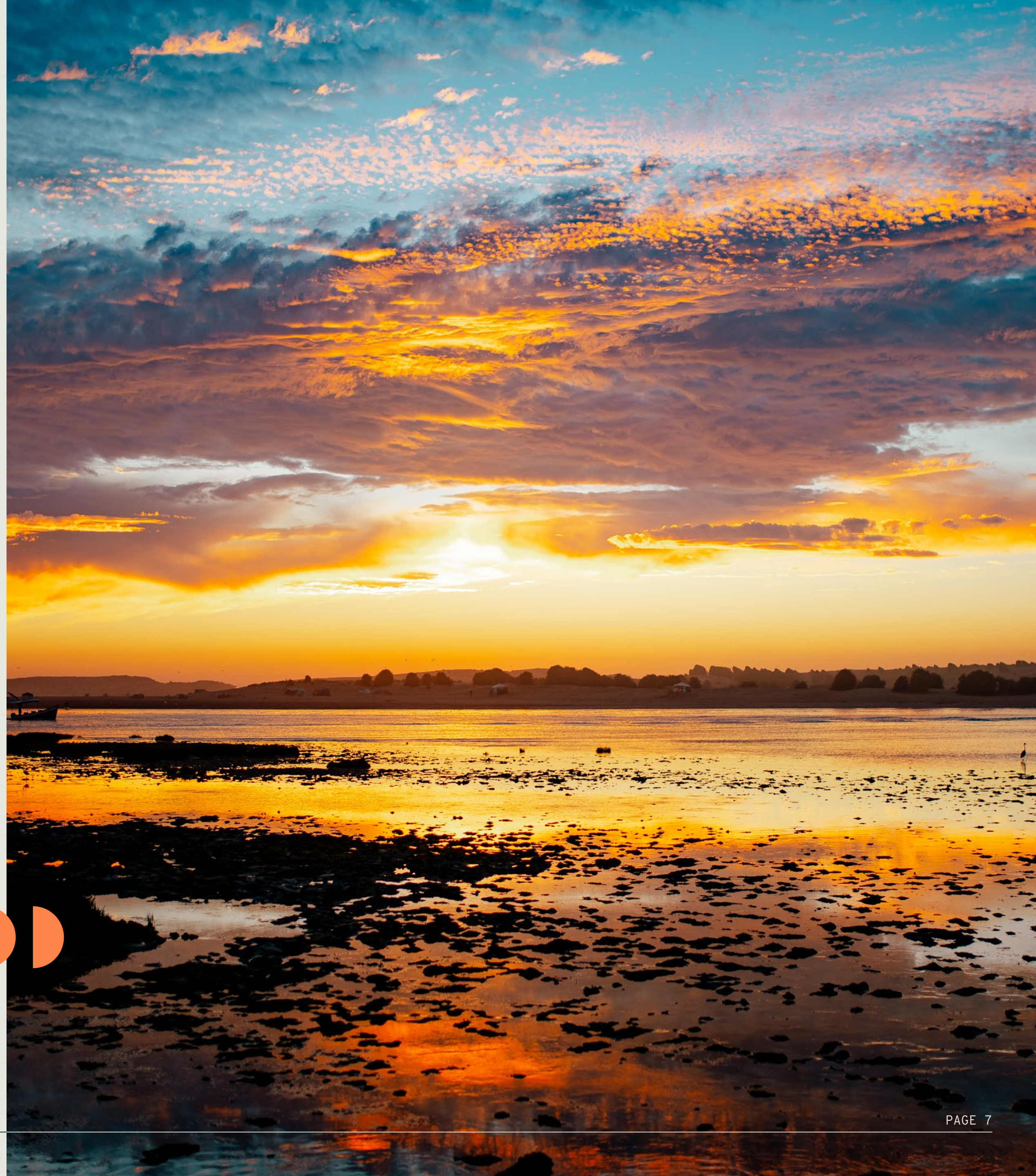
This also underlines the fact that the journey to regenerative travel reveals itself as you progress. What might have started as an environmental project can end up having

unintended, but welcome, impacts in the community, too. At Song Saa Private Island in Cambodia, the regenerative principles implemented by co-owner Melita Koulmandas have resulted in practical wins like food transparency programs, protected Marine Parks and the planting of 197,000 rainforest seedlings. However, they’ve also created jobs and opportunities for locals in remote places. And while the lasting sociocultural change that affects locals, staff, and travellers is more difficult to show, it is crucial to help rapidly evolve the organisations, communities and ecosystems Song Saa serves.

---

*“Being on a journey of regenerative practices and initiatives means going beyond the surface and asking deeper questions. It’s about taking a holistic approach that doesn’t just patch things up temporarily, but leads to profound change.”*

— Melita Koulmandas



HOW CAN EXPERIENTIAL TRAVEL  
BE A FORCE FOR GOOD?

## 2. Create new ecosystems, economies & opportunities

ONE OF THE PILLARS OF PURE LIFE EXPERIENCES IS THE BELIEF THAT EXPERIENTIAL TRAVEL CAN BE A TRANSFORMATIVE FORCE NOT ONLY FOR THE TRAVELLER, BUT FOR THE DESTINATION, TOO.

In 2023, this means pushing beyond creating experiences that merely showcase local culture – particularly if this vision is determined largely by what travellers want to see – Instead, you should actively work with communities to discover what they need and want to achieve, leveraging resources to turn their aspirations into reality.

When we put community first and design principally with and for them, tourism can transform economies and ways of living, leaving things better than before. This spirit of co-creation is the bedrock of Song Saa Private Island in Cambodia, which began life not as a luxury resort, but as a response to a dying reef system.



Image courtesy of Song Saa Private Island.





*“We wanted to look outside the boundary of the property. It was never about what we were doing spilling over and having some benefit: it was always community-led and focused on how we fit within this archipelago and this neighbourhood. We’ve got real scientists in the field doing real research. We’ve got community engagement people. We’ve got education programmes. We’re very place-based-needs focused. It’s what the community needs and wants. When it sticks in the community, it’s run by the community.”*

— Melita Koulmandas

Co-owner Melita Koulmandas co-created the first marine-protected area around the two islands in a community-led environmental regeneration effort – the resort came later as a means to sustain this work. Each new programme is co-created in consultation with the community, with assessments sometimes lasting up to a year to ascertain if an intervention is the right one. The ultimate aim is for the community – not the resort – to run these regeneration programmes in a self-sustaining ecosystem.

This thinking outside of the boundaries of the resort can also be seen in the move by some lodges to buy pristine land not for financial gain, but to create conservancies

that are open to the public and community to enjoy. By convincing the people who own the land to adopt this profitable business model by financing them for their efforts – often driven by contributions from investors and guests – brands can take an active role in the protection of ecosystems and culture and protect the land forever.

Explora’s Conservation Reserves project, for example, is transforming how it does business by aiming to protect a million hectares globally through the development of such reserves, achieved in alliance with partners such as The Nature Conservancy and Microsoft.

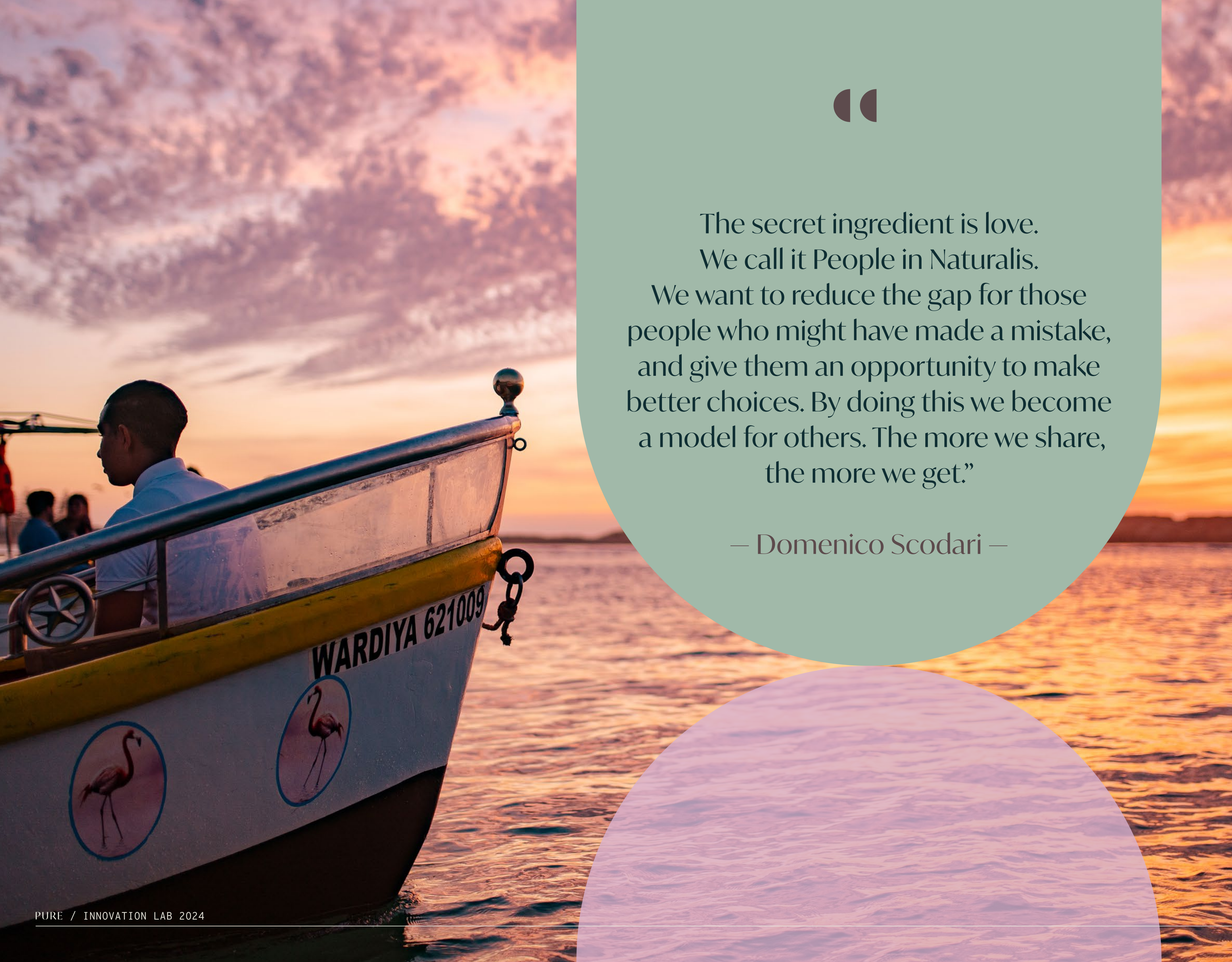
A wonderful ripple effect of working so deeply with the community is that you don’t know the impact your work might have until you start doing it. Unintended outcomes can unfold that might be even more important than your original intention. For Phāea Resorts in Crete, a Farmers Program has been created to support its employees’ incomes in low season, investing in their agricultural efforts by training them in organic farming methods and sustainable land use. Fruit, vegetables, herbs, olive oil and other fresh produce are used in the resort’s kitchens, and guests can embark on culinary experiences during their stay. However, for co-owner Agapi Sbokou,

the project’s biggest – and unexpected – success has come in moving beyond this scope to support the wider community and maintain a connection between younger generations and the land.

It’s a similar story at Naturalis Bio Resort & Spa. A “Regenerative Beauty” project developed with local farmers to cultivate aloe vera plants, preserve olive trees and improve local biodiversity has not only transformed the economy of the town, but also spiralled out to offer disadvantaged young people more positive opportunities for making a living by training them to grow the plants themselves and creating a product line with sales going back into the community.

*“You start contributing and discover you are actually helping with something totally different and much more important. When we started we thought we were supplementing our people’s income and giving our guests access to fresh, seasonal, organic produce. Later, we discovered that we were actually helping preserve local seeds and old cultivating methods, reconnecting the younger generation with the earth. This is much more meaningful to our community and destination and it has now become our main driving force. We’ve expanded to non-employees to increase our impact and we move like a tribe.”*

— Agapi Sbokou



The secret ingredient is love.  
We call it People in Naturalis.  
We want to reduce the gap for those  
people who might have made a mistake,  
and give them an opportunity to make  
better choices. By doing this we become  
a model for others. The more we share,  
the more we get.”

– Domenico Scodari –

---

*“The secret ingredient is love. We call it People in Naturalis. We want to reduce the gap for those people who might have made a mistake, and give them an opportunity to make better choices. By doing this we become a model for others. The more we share, the more we get.”*

– Domenico Scodari

And at Lemala Luxury Collection, a local male staff member's realisation that girls in the Maasai community couldn't attend school while menstruating sparked a reusable sanitary pad project to improve attendance rates. However, to their surprise, incidents of sexual assault also decreased, thanks to the need to distribute underwear alongside the pads. The surfacing of this issue has also allowed conversations to happen between staff and within the community that would never have happened before, changing their relationships with their female children.

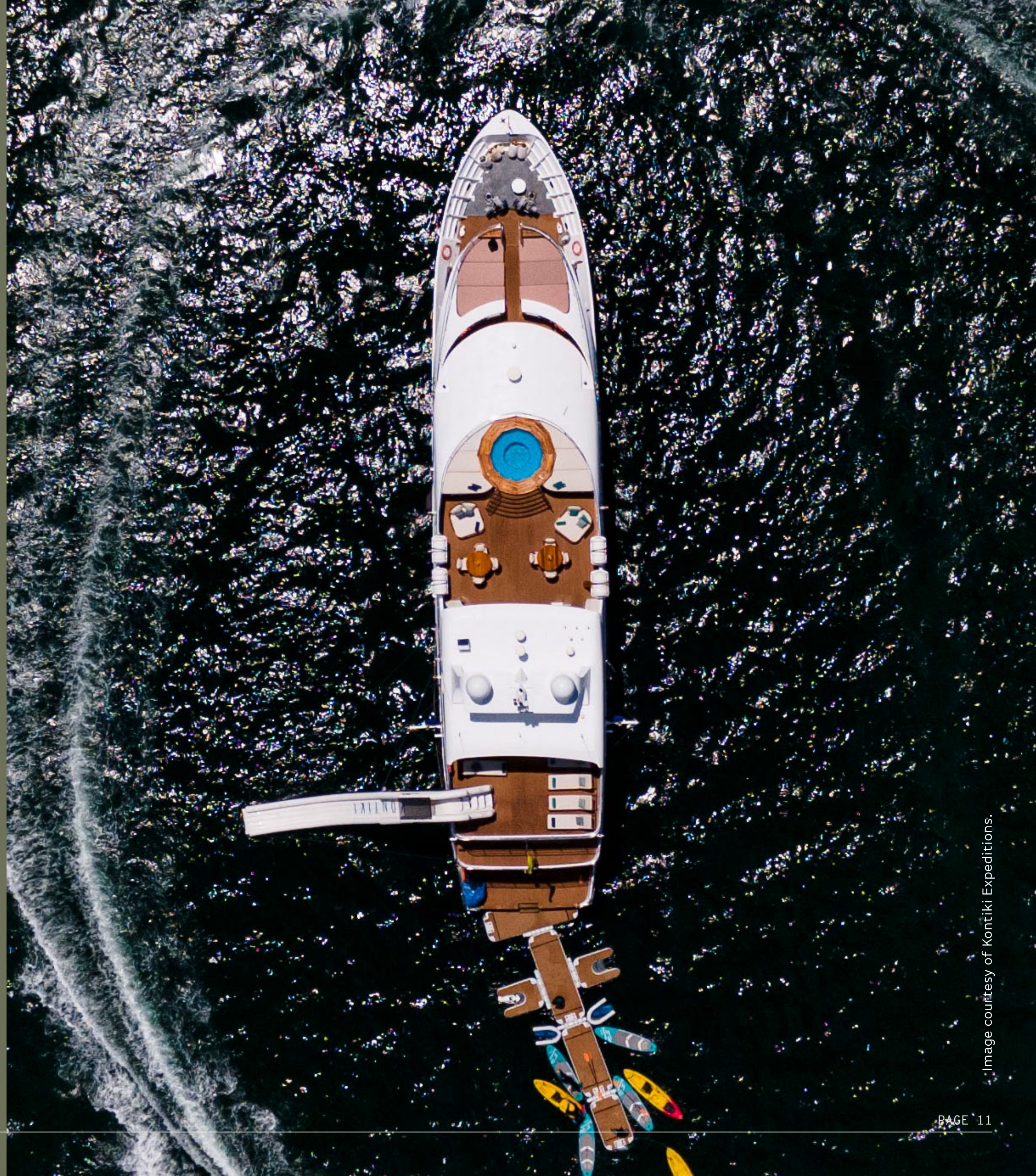
HOW CAN EXPERIENTIAL TRAVEL  
BE A FORCE FOR GOOD?

### 3. Go where – and when – no-one else dares

OVERTOURISM CONTINUES TO BE ONE OF  
THE BIGGEST BLIGHTS ON OUR INDUSTRY  
AND OUR PLANET.

But experiential travel is about seeing unconventional new places, exploring the path less trodden, and seeking to redress the balance where rampant consumerism has damaged nature, community and culture. Given that by 2033, travel is set to become a \$15.5 trillion industry – accounting for more than 11.6% of the global economy – bringing travellers to these previously untouched regions can, when done sensitively and in tandem with the local community, play a huge role in preserving their environment and traditions.

New luxury ocean expedition company Kontiki Expeditions was founded on these principles of conscious tourism. Founder Carlos Nuñez took his family's old tuna fleet and, rather than taking the easy option of touring the already saturated Galapagos Islands, decided to be the first yacht to travel seldom-visited locations along the Ecuadorian coast.



He invented a new tourist destination with the power to touch the community there, and now has plans to do the same in an unexplored part of Costa Rica.

*“We are pioneers. Those who travel with us get involved in cultural immersion, and can truly appreciate the untouched natural treasures a destination holds and the warmth of the indigenous people who are opening the intimacy of their homes. These groups, although small, leave a huge positive impact in the lives of locals, who find through tourism a way to rescue and preserve old traditions and skills, which are increasingly being lost to technology and modern city life.”*

— Carlos Nuñez

The brilliant minds behind Metropolitan Touring and Mashpi Lodge in Ecuador’s cloud rainforest have plans for a new operation set to launch in Colombia in 2024 that shares this ambition to revitalise forgotten parts of the country. The Magdalena River was once a valuable shipping route and the towns that border its banks are packed with history and culture, but is now only used by fishermen and for the transportation of coal and oil. They plan to create an expedition cruise through the Colombian Caribbean connecting Barranquilla with Cartagena through the Magdalena, running through coastal towns like the lesser-known Mompox.

*“We’re working with The Nature Conservancy to bring the community together to take care of not only the small piece of land that we are impacting, but the entire region. That’s the biggest change we underwent: from not understanding our impact to trying to change the way the entire territory is protected by working with all the communities.”*

— Nicolás Vial

The regeneration of faraway destinations doesn't only mean impacting the places we take travellers, but going even further beyond them. Kontiki Expeditions organises social programmes in small rural towns that endeavour to keep their beaches and oceans clean, and has founded a soccer school for children.

Kontiki’s passengers contribute to the development and preservation of these communities in more ways than they can see. And while the operator Avila Reizen is based in The Netherlands and sends tourists all over the world, it established the Avila Foundation to have a positive impact in destinations it doesn't send tourists, such as Venezuela, where its Casablanca project provides a safe place for children and young people by giving them not only food and education, but hope. The Foundation also supports projects in Indonesia and African national parks where there is no tourism.



This was a town frozen for 100 years – like Gabriel Garcia Marquez’s 100 Years of Solitude, but in a real town. And now it’s coming back. We’re taking it out of the freezer: its people, its history, its traditions, its music.”

— Klaus Fielsch —



Image courtesy of Mashpi Lodge.



Image courtesy of Luxury Action Oy

---

*“I think there are many places in the world that tourists don’t get to, but with which they can have a certain connection. I believe there might be an opportunity to create growth and have an impact not only in the place you visit, but also in other places that you don’t.”*

– Tim Van der Wel

Finally, countering overtourism means not only shifting the focus of where we travel, but also when. In Lapland, Luxury Action implements advance reservation systems for popular attractions and areas to distribute visitor flow more evenly, as well as providing 80% of its activities on its own lands. This not only supports the local community, it also provides guests with the best experiences far away from the crowds. And in areas like the Maasai Mara, one of the most significant challenges is posed by unbalanced periods of peaks and troughs of demand.

---

*“Spreading tourism demand and weaning ourselves away from ‘the best time to travel’ allows for environmental respite, rest and recovery time, and better financial planning on the part of governmental conservation organisations such as our National Parks in East Africa, who raise large sums from July until September and far lesser sums outside those months. All tourism businesses need to manage their finances and HR resources more efficiently.”*

– James Haigh



Image courtesy of Entrée Canada & Alaska.

HOW CAN EXPERIENTIAL TRAVEL  
BE A FORCE FOR GOOD?

## 4. Tell stories that inspire, not shame

IT FOLLOWS THAT IF WE WANT TO CO-CREATE NEW ECOSYSTEMS WITH OUR COMMUNITIES AND TAKE TRAVELLERS INTO UNEXPLORED REGIONS, WE ALSO NEED TO CELEBRATE, SHARE AND PROVIDE A PLATFORM FOR THOSE NATIVE STORIES THAT HAVE TRADITIONALLY BEEN IGNORED OR UNTOLD.

This is of particular importance in places where the local populations have suffered from colonisation and cultural erosion, and where communities may still be suffering from intergenerational trauma.

This act of cultural preservation is paramount to the work of the operator Entrée Canada & Alaska, who are working with indigenous communities in Canada where colonisation has led to a loss of language, culture and connection to their history.

By putting indigenous tourism in front of guests in a way that is authentic and sensitive, using indigenous guides and allowing them to tell their own stories, it's not only helping to redress the historical imbalance, but also creating a heartfelt connection between travellers and locals. The more the community is involved, the more likely it is that they will accept the presence of travellers as a benefit from which new indigenous-led ideas and innovations can spring, rather than an invading force looking to change their way of life.

---

*“Putting indigenous tourism in front of our guests is part of learning about the land. There are countries all over the world whose indigenous people have suffered, and it's a beautiful part of culture that's worth sharing. When we do, we're giving them an opportunity and the agency to make their own decisions and run their own businesses. As the saying goes: 'nothing about us without us'. I can facilitate these stories, but they're not mine to tell. They must tell their own.”*

— Marc Telio

Even in parts of the world that are already rich in story, with a little imagination and collaboration with local talent, we can find new tales and surface alternative histories.

The Luminaire is a travel operator that puts storytelling at its core, using community led-content and working with local storytellers. Its “Office of the Night” campaign, for example, uncovered the queer history of Renaissance Florence, using access to state archives and multi-platform experiential storytelling to bring a lesser-heard vision of the city to life.

Leading with connection, rather than shame, means that travellers who experience these kinds of storytelling are more likely to become an advocate of that cause. It's not about a guilt trip, but instead a trip through learning, outrage at prior injustices, and finally, understanding. When the travel experience is co-created with those who own these stories, this empathy and connection will come through naturally. At Phāea Resorts in Crete, the leadership tries to create as many opportunities as possible to immerse travellers in the island – not through its ancient history or golden beaches, but through a connection with its people.



This connection might be cemented through real-life experience, but it can also start to be formed through marketing before the experience begins. Avila Reizen's magazines and newsletters don't focus on the promotion of the bricks-and-mortar product alone, but instead on the stories of community and sustainability that make their offering something special.

---

*“We want to show that by travelling you're not only contributing carbon, but to the community. During the pandemic we kept up our marketing. Our message to the customer wasn't about waiting to travel again, but about imagining what was happening in the destination right now. We created videos from the point of view of tour guides in places from Cusco to Kenya, raising awareness about the impact on those communities. And when they were able to reopen, people looked to travel with us – not necessarily because we were the best agents, but because they knew we cared about helping those people.”*

— Hilda Van der Wel



We started in small ways, such as having a farmer sitting with guests at a shared table drinking raki and discussing what they do, instilling a sense of pride in their work. Creating conversation and friendships, you can make people feel differently about tourism, so that everyone is very welcome. It's planting those small opportunities for whatever purpose you may have.”

— Agapi Sbokou —



HOW CAN EXPERIENTIAL TRAVEL  
BE A FORCE FOR GOOD?

## 5. Transform travellers into agents of change

WE CAN POUR OUR EFFORT, RESOURCES AND ATTENTION INTO ACHIEVING REMARKABLE THINGS IN THE DESTINATIONS WE OPERATE IN. HOWEVER, TO REALISE THE POTENTIAL OF OUR PROJECTS WE NEED TO NOT ONLY BE CHANGE-MAKERS OURSELVES, BUT TURN TRAVELLERS INTO CHANGE-MAKERS, TOO.

Experiential travel attracts those who are open to new experiences and ideas. This grants us a unique opportunity to offer them something new that educates and empowers them to create change once they return home, influencing others to follow suit.

Behaviour change is really difficult to achieve. However, transformation begins with emotion triggered through education and most importantly, experience. We may only remember 10% of what we read and 50% of what we hear and see, but we remember 90% of what we experience.



*“Developing impactful projects and being good at what we do is not enough. If we want to generate real impact and reach every corner of the world, we need travellers to become agents of change. You can be a change agent wherever you are. Good and impactful projects will have enough echo that their message will be heard all over the world.”*

– Nicolás Vial

People may come to a destination for a high-end travel experience, but when they are exposed to the community and the purpose behind it, they leave wanting to protect the place they've discovered, invest in it for the long term, and make changes in their own lives.

The relatively new shift to consuming locally is an example of this change in action. There was a time not too long ago when “luxury” meant sheltering the customer from the destination and giving them whatever they desired, even if that meant plonking an American burger bar in a Balinese resort. Now, while there are still many luxury resorts pandering to this kind of excess,

more responsible tourism resists these demands and looks to grow, buy and consume locally, giving back to the local economy and educating travellers to make better choices. Examples might include refusing to serve unsustainable fish like bluefin tuna, charging an additional fee for air conditioning, and being consistent in the marketing, messaging and experiences you do – and don't – offer.

---

*“Certain things are a given for travellers, like WiFi: they don't demand them and you don't advertise them. The next generation are increasingly including sustainability and giving back as part of these basics. But while we're still bridging the gap, we need to open up and convert as many travellers as possible into this community of like-minded guests by educating them on what the new standards are.”*

– Agapi Sbokou

In the Ecuadorian rainforest, Mashpi Lodge has come up with a creative innovation to engage travellers to think locally: the Mashpi Lab. Working with a local gastronomy school and botanists specialising in fungi and insects, they explore the rainforest to find items people don't normally eat and which only thrive in a healthy forest, see if they are edible, and transform them into dishes on the staff menu. If successful, they implement the same dishes for hotel guests

as a bold, clever provocation to sourcing locally and with respect to biodiversity, even in the wildest of locations.

This “Trojan Horse” approach isn't didactic or lecturing, but sinks in naturally through these kinds of authentic, surprising experiences. These experiences are also exactly the things we are most likely to recall and share when we return to ordinary life – the memory of spending time giving back, whether through harvesting crops with local farmers or visiting a discovery centre that immerses them in the story of a place, is far more powerful than the pure consumption associated with traditional luxury.

---

*“When guests arrive, they're coming to a high-end private island experience. But they're most moved by meeting the team and community and hearing the stories of what we're achieving together. We don't charge guests to get immersed in these projects, because we want to raise awareness of how the destination is being regenerated through storytelling and connection. And that's the stuff that moves people. That's the stuff they take away. By staying with us they become part of the future success of this community. So when they go home, they see the world through a different lens.”*

– Melita Koulmandas



More and more, sophisticated travellers are actively seeking meaning, purpose, and to consume more consciously. As we set out in our last Innovation Lab white paper, the rise of the purpose economy combined with an increased appetite for connection and changemaking in the wake of the pandemic means that people want a life that is optimised and amplified, with purpose at its centre. Increasingly, what we're selling is no longer travel, but transformation. As Charles Revson, the founder of Revlon, once said: "In the factory we make cosmetics. In the store we sell hope." If you market yourselves as a transformation rather than a travel brand, your perceived value to the customer will increase.

People might not always know exactly what to ask for to reach this transformation, but the role of the experiential travel brand is to offer them potential routes in. Tourism alone doesn't promise this outcome: it's merely a journey from A to B and back again, promoting the product, such as hotels, rather than the emotional journey. We all want to be the hero of our own lives – so why not focus our efforts on providing people an adventure into the potential of their own souls instead?

---

*"Geoffrey Kent says 'where there is mystery, there's margin'. 'Adventure' comes from the Latin, meaning 'what must happen with purpose'. People will pay money to get into the unknown and return transformed. They want to become a better version of themselves. And there is no better version of that than going somewhere and being told a good story that makes you a nicer, more caring person – because frankly, our life in the cities is pretty cynical. People are longing for it. But a lot of our industry is still promoting their product, the hotels, rather than the outcome, transformation. If more people were promoting the latter, there'd be a greater margin for everyone and we'd get to where we want to go faster."*

– Serge Dive

The industry could also do more to extend and integrate this transformation at home, and encourage this kind of travelling in the future. Explora's guests in Chile automatically become part of a community and loyalty programme called Eco Society, where they can keep in contact, share their experiences, remember lessons and continue to push boundaries. As a wider industry, we could even connect purpose-driven travel brands by creating joined-up loyalty programmes that let people earn points for their impactful projects and experiences instead of just their purchases. Or perhaps we invite travellers – particularly relevant, high-net-worth individuals – to not only become aware of what we do well, but to help realise what we could do better.



We're approaching the post-experience era, where the emphasis will be on educational experiences and moments of personal growth. This sort of purposeful travel promotes meaningful learning about the worlds you're travelling through, giving back to the cultures you explore, and posits that knowledge is the new luxury."

– Nicholas Priest –



HOW CAN EXPERIENTIAL TRAVEL  
BE A FORCE FOR GOOD?

## 6. Influence governments & public policy

EVEN THOUGH THE TRAVEL INDUSTRY CLEARLY HAS A HUGE ROLE IN SOLVING SOME OF SOCIETY'S MOST PRESSING GLOBAL CHALLENGES, MANY CHANGE-MAKERS IN THE SECTOR OFTEN FEEL THAT GOVERNMENTS AREN'T TAKING EXPERIENTIAL TRAVEL AS SERIOUSLY AS THEY SHOULD.

However, when we can successfully forge these alliances, tourism can be an influential force in shaping public policy and perceptions for the better – and ultimately, we cannot achieve our grander ambitions without government support and a joint commitment to living and travelling more responsibly.

As with any partnership, the most important first step is creating a dialogue that leads to collaboration, not combat. Travel brands need to push governments to understand their ambitions and want to work with, rather than against them – but they also need to understand the pressures and targets that governments are up against.



Image courtesy of Explora.



Image courtesy of Wilderness Safaris.

While investors might be motivated by clear numbers around how much needs to be invested, the intended impact and how long it will take, democratic governments are often motivated by fulfilling their election promises and getting reelected. Brands must therefore present their needs in a way that aligns with these policies, rather than pulls away from them, so they can be part of the conversation.

---

*“In Africa, typically the measurement is numbers of arrivals because the more people you employ, the more likely they are to vote for the incumbent government. Low density runs counter to the desire for reelection.”*

— James Haigh

If this doesn't happen and government policies that affect tourism are brought into being without the industry's input, it can quickly have a negative impact. When the government imposes high tourism taxes on travellers coming into the country without clear communication, as happened in Bhutan, it can destroy tourism and communities, particularly lower-end operators that tend to be owned by locals.

But when the strategy is aligned with a healthy tourism model – for example

in Rwanda, where gorilla tourism has incentivised communities to protect the animals rather than use the land for extractive purposes, in balance with a controlled number of high-value tourists – it can create both a more pristine environment and higher demand. Post-pandemic, there was an opportunity to rebuild tourism in a more responsible way in partnership with governments, with mixed success in different destinations based on how these kinds of conversations unfolded.

This dialogue runs both ways. Travel brands need to communicate their expectations of their governments clearly, whether that means creating demand and a positive view of the country, operating a coherent and fair taxation system, or protecting threatened ecosystems.

---

*“In a country like Chile, I would expect the government to protect the territory. And if it's not able to because it's not a rich country and has to choose between putting money in tourism or education or healthcare, then to be open to receiving help from privates. That can be really hard in countries where combining private and public sectors always looks like corruption.”*

— Nicolás Vial

When this dialogue is successful and ambitions and resources are aligned, the results can be astonishing, particularly when it comes to marketing under-the-radar destinations to the world. Entrée Canada & Alaska's Marc Telio convinced the government to partner with his company to create 20 new itineraries across Canada, including indigenous experiences. The government's ability to lend media and marketing support across TV, press, social and measuring led to 68.5 million impressions for the campaign in the first year, and created new business for Canadian tourism – particularly in promoting places that were previously unheard of.

---

*“They're the best possible partner – they've got the deepest pockets. When you get a government that believes in what you do, and you're doing what they need, it's crazy what you can accomplish.”*

– Marc Telio

In Cambodia, Melita Koulmandas is working with the government and other people in the country in a partnership called Cambodia's Eco Tourism Association, rebranding it as a leader in regenerative luxury not only at high-end properties, but to a grassroots level in the communities and looking at the preservation of natural habitats.

In creating Cambodia's first protected National Marine Park in 2006, she also needed government support to sign it off, achieved through collecting data and assessments in the community to build their case.

These kinds of collaborative working groups can go a long way to converting reluctant governments into adopting the same thinking. A decade ago, Greece was being marketed as a mass-tourist destination rather than a high-end, experiential offering. Using seed money from the private sector, a confederation of members of the tourism industry created a brand to market Greece in a different way. They slowly changed the narrative and eventually, so did the tourist board, investing more in unknown destinations and changing their storytelling, too.

---

*“How can the private sector help the government do a better job? The most important thing for me is not what reaches the end consumer, but all the education we've achieved internally. Hoteliers and travel providers think of tourism in a completely different way, because it's changed the conversation. It's something to celebrate: you start small, you know what you're doing. You don't try to involve the government if they're not listening. You go ahead anyway, and eventually they will follow.”*

– Agapi Sbokou



If we can do this successfully and everyone has a voice, there's a chance that from a tourism point of view, properties will follow. Then we can change the reputation of Cambodia. It's a unique moment in time – not every country has this, but we do.”

– Melita Koulmandas –





HOW CAN EXPERIENTIAL TRAVEL  
BE A FORCE FOR GOOD?

## 7. Think collaboratively, not competitively

TRADITIONALLY, TRAVEL BRANDS HAVE THOUGHT OF OTHER SIMILAR OPERATORS IN THEIR DESTINATION OR SECTOR AS COMPETITION, RATHER THAN PARTNERS.

However, the age of jealously guarding our secrets is over, if we're to achieve our ambition of being a force for good and tackling those challenges that affect us all.

The need to work collaboratively is even more acute in parts of the world where the public sector is unlikely to step in. This requires a mindset shift that may take time and concentrated effort, but which can yield impressive results.

Haigh is tackling this challenge head-on, and is in the embryonic stages of talking to an organisation to create a tourism industry across eastern Uganda. "We won't conduct the wildlife conservation work itself, but the tourism facilities that will help to support or create some kind of marketing awareness of what we are doing," he says.

And as well as being on the board of a non-profit called Destination Mekong, which is bringing six countries together to collectively promote the Mekong Delta, Song Saa's Melita Koulmandas is also embarking on a food mapping project that encapsulates this broader view.

*"We're going to make it incredibly transparent, so anyone can look it up and set their own targets. I think it's so important to be able to go through that process, show it to the world, and work with other people to improve the same thing in their community. Transparency is key, and to not be afraid. We're not all perfect. We're all limited. But we're all trying our best. And if we can care for each other, look after each other, and support each other, we're halfway there."*

– Melita Koulmandas

The challenge is to realise that it's not about being the first, best, or most luxurious, but about running in the same direction and giving practical examples that others can learn from, so our work becomes much bigger than anything we could achieve alone. When we go together, we go further. Ultimately, this spirit of collaboration is why the Innovation Lab, and PURE Life Experiences, exists: to connect a community of dedicated mavericks that together, might just change the world for the better.



“Sadly the private sector in East Africa is more used to competitive marketing than collaborative marketing, so entities are not keen to co-fund any initiative as they fear not ‘getting their fair share’. Africa’s Eden in Victoria Falls is a good example of the private sector coming together to jointly promote a region, while accepting competition between individual entities is part and parcel of any investment

– James Haigh –







# PURE

L I F E   E X P E R I E N C E S

MONDAY 9 - THURSDAY 12 SEPTEMBER 2024

