

ASK THE EXPERTS

Laura French speaks to sustainability experts to find out how the industry can rebuild more responsibly and how travellers can support the communities they visit



1 "Travel can be a force for good, if we remember our responsibilities"

Justin co-founded Responsible Travel in 2001, working in partnership with specialist holiday companies to offer sustainable travel experiences. He was named one of *The Times*' 50 most influential people in travel and is now part of the UK Government's Council for Sustainable Business.



Justin Francis
co-founder and chief executive,
Responsible Travel



HE SAYS

"It's all very well to talk about 'building back better', but we need to aim higher than limiting the harmful impacts of tourism, and not only on the climate.

To survive and thrive in the long run, companies will need to work with, and not against, nature and local communities.

Tourists are increasingly conscious of both their environmental and social impacts. They're looking for ways to travel better. We've seen a steep rise in people wanting to feel closer to nature. We'll be doubling our UK nature-based trips, such as our Devon Ecolodge stays in a Unesco Biosphere Reserve, to aid rewilding efforts and because there's a clear demand.

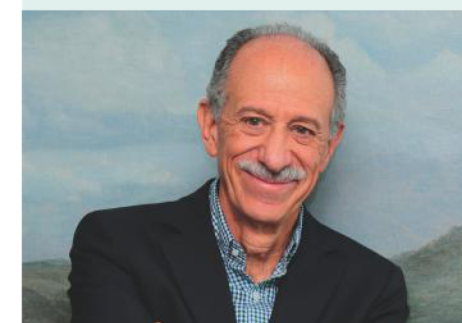
We're likely to see other changes to holiday habits. More of us will fly less, stay longer in destinations and take more short staycations.

Both as companies and individuals, we need to remember we're visiting the places others call home – they should benefit from our tourism.

Ultimately, responsible tourism is about creating better places to live in, and visit. Travel can be a force for good, if we remember our responsibility not only to customers, but to the people and places we wouldn't exist without."

2 "The pandemic has changed our values"

Based in Ecuador, Roque is the visionary behind luxury eco-retreat Mashpi Lodge as well as the chairman of Metropolitan Touring, and the president of Fundacion Futuro, which is focused on conservation in the Andean Choco region. He is also a board member of the WWF.



Roque Sevilla
chairman,
Metropolitan Touring



HE SAYS

"Sustainability means many things. It's about providing opportunities and income for the communities we interact with by helping them develop their skills. It's also about minimising our footprint; all of our companies are carbon-neutral and have been for several years.

We're now trying to take that one step further by going carbon-negative to make up for the footprint from before. And it's about protecting our wildlife; we're one of the most biodiverse countries in the world, so we need to conserve that for the next generation.

At Mashpi Lodge we support several community programmes, including working with a foundation where professionals – engineers, doctors, lawyers and so on – who have just come out of university spend two years educating others to help create more opportunities for them. We also have a project that involves training women who want to work in tourism. Then there's the research itself – we're always trying to develop new ways of doing things to minimise visitors' carbon footprint."

3 "Support local cooperatives and stay in locally-run accommodation"

As head of sustainability at Exodus, Kasia works with a global network of sustainability champions to develop the operator's 'People, Places & Planet' strategy. She also heads up the Exodus Travels Foundation, established in 2019 to support communities and conservation projects.



Kasia Morgan
head of sustainability,
Exodus Travels



SHE SAYS

"I expect people will think about travelling in a more meaningful way, visiting fewer places, perhaps on longer trips, but getting under the skin of a destination. We've had a glimpse of a 'better world' – less polluted, more generous and selfless, slower-paced, and this will undoubtedly impact the way people choose to travel in 2021.

This year has also emphasised the importance of travelling with a reputable tour operator and booking through a travel agent, so for those storm companies that are able to weather the storm, they should be looking at a more positive 2021.

What is most concerning is how the pandemic has affected the communities that rely on tourism. For that reason we launched a Community Kickstart Project (part of the Exodus Travels Foundation) to provide funding to communities that need it the most, and need it now.

My top tips for clients wanting to travel sustainably would be to stay in locally-run accommodation and eat in locally-run restaurants so money stays within the community; support local cooperatives, social enterprises and conservation initiatives; and be mindful of the carbon impact of transport on your holidays."