Ecotourism Now and in the Future

- Post Reprint: “Camping is back, with fewer people and activities and more cleaning and waiting”
- KidsPost Reprint: “Jaguar release is a step to saving the species in Argentina”
- Post Reprint: “Halt in ecotourism threatens conservation efforts worldwide”
- Post Reprint: Partnering to help travelers go greener
- Student Activity: Green Future or Economic Paradise?
What Shape Will Your Travel Take?

In the 19th Century the Grand Tour taken by wealthy and fashionable young men not only included cultural Europe but also the natural habitats of Malaysia, unexplored islands and the Amazon. The idea of immersion in the natural environment to learn from it was refined into today's concepts of ecotourism. As defined by The International Ecotourism Society, it is “responsible travel to natural areas that conserves the environment, sustains the well-being of the local people, and involves interpretation and education.”

Articles in this resource guide explain green travel and provide a 2021 update. Read and discuss to see how outdoor activities and the travel industry have changed. Will you bike, camp, hike or walk? A realistic account of life in a campground and RV is found in “Camping is back, with fewer people and activities and more cleaning and waiting.”

Another angle on ecotourism is found in articles that focus on its benefits and challenges. To what extent are wildlife, local inhabitants and the land saved by ecotourism? Marred by it?

The Green Future or Economic Paradise? activity and readings demonstrate the clashes in goals of developers, business owners and environmentalists in Brazil. Alter Do Chao and Fernando de Noronha both are case studies that highlight the roles of government and volunteers, of policies and practices, of individuals and international organizations, of preservationists and developers.

When pandemic restrictions are eased and doors open, what shape will your travel take?
If you travel, you will leave a charcoal smudge in your wake. You can’t help it. Planes spew carbon emissions, hotels guzzle gallons of water to launder sheets and towels, and thirsty travelers chug-a-lug plastic bottles of water. But don’t let the guilt dampen your vacation. Eco-friendly travel practices can lift the remorse and lighten the blemish on Mother Earth.

Green travel is not a passing trend but a portable lifestyle choice. According to a TripAdvisor survey, nearly two-thirds of travelers plan to make more environmentally sound choices over the next year. A majority of respondents said that they turn off the lights when leaving their rooms, participate in the hotel’s program to reuse linens and towels, and recycle on-site. Travelers can do much more by building an eco-trip block by block.

“Sustainable travel is all about creating a positive effect on the communities you visit,” said Jon Bruno, executive director of the International Ecotourism Society. “Leave the place better than you found it.”

Easy, right? Not always.

Environmentalists often tout arcane terms such as low-VOC paint, warm-mix asphalt and aeroponic gardening. Eco-extremists can make you feel guilty for wanting a hot shower and lightbulbs that don’t cause eyestrain. And less-than-honest properties and tour operators embellish their Earth-friendly achievements, an act of falsehood called greenwashing.

But don’t let these challenges deter you. “When our choices align with our eco-interests and values,” said Dawn Head, owner and editor of the online resource Go Green Travel Green, “it doesn’t feel like we are making sacrifices to be green.”

For guidance on planning the ultimate eco-trip, we turned to a panel of green-travel experts. Follow their tips and watch your footprints turn greener with each step of your journey.

Choosing a green destination

No destination is a Green Giant; they all make environmental missteps. However, some countries and cities demonstrate a deep commitment to Earth-friendly policies and practices. Ask for a recycling bin and they’ll point to three.

Bruno, whose organization promotes ecotourism, commends the efforts of Namibia, where its constitution includes habitat conservation and the protection of natural resources, and Ecuador, which placed 97 percent of the Galapagos’s landmass under the watchful gaze of its national park service.

“The environment has its own rights in Ecuador,” he said.

Among emerging locales, Bruno is keeping an eye on Uzbekistan, a former Soviet republic with a burgeoning outdoor culture (skiing, mountaineering, white-water rafting, birding); alternative lodging, such as yurts and cooperative-run guesthouses in the Nuratau-Kyzylkum Biosphere Reserve; and more than 1,000 native varieties of apples. In Brazil, he praises the ambitions of the town of Bonito, the Portuguese word for beautiful.

“This little town has put everything behind ecotourism,” he said. “The Rio da
Prata is so clear, it feels as if you’re hanging in the air watching the fish float by.”

Closer to home, Bruno high-fives Hilton Head, S.C., a surprising choice considering its reputation as a golf-and-tennis haven. But the city has shown its green colors as its reputation as a golf-and-tennis haven.

Head, S.C., a surprising choice considering its Global Green Economy Index last year. Dual Citizen, a consulting firm, released the fifth edition of its Sustainable Communities Program. It is also one of two towns on the East Coast to have received gold-level status from the League of American Bicyclists. The 12-by-4-mile island may be compact, but its bike paths stretch like Silly String across 60 miles of terrain.

Everyone and their science teacher seems to publish an annual list of the world’s greenest destinations. Dual Citizen, a consulting firm, released the fifth edition of its Global Green Economy Index last year. Of 80 countries and 50 cities surveyed, the company anointed Sweden the top green banana, followed by Norway and Finland.

Among developing countries, the report singled out Zambia, Ethiopia, Brazil and Costa Rica, but noted that the two African countries need to burnish their “perception ranking.” And while Asia didn’t fare well, Cambodia did improve its standing, rising 20 spots to 20th. (For context, the United States placed 30th.) In the city category, Copenhagen experienced deja vu when it returned to the No. 1 spot after holding it in 2014.

But don’t judge a destination by its ranking, or lack thereof. When researching a vacation spot, look for places that naturally embrace the green lifestyle. Telltale signs include a robust public transportation system, acres of parkland, walkable neighborhoods, designated bike lanes, farmers markets and volunteer opportunities. Your discoveries will bounce you all over the map, from Tokyo to Chattanooga, Tenn., to Cape Town, South Africa, to Adelaide, Australia.

Head has an important message for “last chancers”: Ignore the clarion call to “go before it’s gone.” She warns that travelers can do more harm than good by visiting endangered areas, such as a Pacific island under threat from rising seas, a melting glacier in Antarctica and an aboriginal rock worn down by countless pairs of feet.

“Choosing a place because it might not be there any longer?” she said. “Well, you’re destroying it.”

Choosing a green mode of transportation

What makes Mother Earth proud? Seeing you use your own power to get around.

Many adventure-tour operators, such as Backroads and VBT, arrange cycling, hiking and walking holidays. Bonus points if you can reach the starting point by bike or foot.

Next in line are trains and buses. However, their impact on the environment depends on such factors as route, fuel type and passenger load.

“Among land transport, trains are generally very environmentally friendly,” said Randy Durbard, chief executive of the Global Sustainable Tourism Council. “In terms of non-rail transport, the larger number of passengers per vehicle is best.” For Durbard, the magic number is 40-plus.

The greenest rides typically run on electric power or alternative fuels and boast a high occupancy rate. Switzerland is leading the caravan with its hybrid buses and trains powered by hydroelectricity; Japan is running close behind.

If you plan to drive, consider renting a fuel-efficient vehicle. Hertz introduced the Green Traveler Collection in 2011. The program, which is available at select locations, stocks a variety of models, such as the Toyota Prius and Nissan LEAF. Some peer-to-peer rental sites also list low-impact cars. On Turo, visitors in San Francisco can tool around in a Smart Fortwo, BMW 13 or Tesla, the sultan of electric vehicles.

Cruising can be very, very good or very, very bad. Sailboats and catamarans are as gentle on the planet as a sea breeze; larger vessels can have a stormier effect on the environment. Friends of the Earth has some unflinching words for cruisers. “Millions of Americans take cruise vacations every year,” the nonprofit organization wrote in the introduction to its annual Cruise Ship Report Card. “Yet, most travelers don’t realize that taking a cruise is more harmful to the environment and human health than many other forms of travel.”

It assessed 17 major cruise lines and assigned grades that would make any parent cry. Only one company, Disney, earned an A-minus; the other cruise lines received Cs, Ds and Fs.

In their defense, the cruise lines have been making strides. They are installing LED lights and tinted windows, treating black and gray water to near sipping standards, using low-sulphur fuels and recycling all types of refuge. Last year, Royal Caribbean combined forces with the
World Wildlife Fund to set sustainability goals for 2020, such as reducing carbon emissions and serving sustainable seafood.

“The cruise industry is investing more than $10 billion in new technologies, fuels and waste management systems, many of which are already deployed, as further protective measures for the environment,” said a spokeswoman for the Cruise Lines International Association.

This year, Hurtigruten announced plans to explore even greener waters. The Norwegian cruise line is building two expedition ships that will run on hybrid technology, the world’s first of its kind. Imagine an aquatic Prius slipping silently through the fjords.

“For too long, ‘innovation’ in the cruise industry has been a race to build bigger ships with more waterslides, bumper cars and surfing waves,” said Daniel Skjeldam, the company’s chief executive. “For us, innovation is all about honoring our Norwegian explorer heritage and moving the industry forward by developing technology and solutions that will benefit our guests and the environment.”

And now for the black sheep of the chartreuse bunch: airplanes.

“There really aren’t any green ways of flying,” Head said. “Just minimize as much as you can.”

To shrink your carbon footprint, the experts offer a litany of suggestions. Travel less but stay longer. Select a full flight on a large plane in a fuel-efficient fleet. (A sampling: Norwegian Air, Finn Air, Alaska Air, Virgin Atlantic and Cathay Pacific.) Book the itinerary with the fewest number of connections, because takeoffs and landings guzzle fuel. Patronize green airports, such as Chicago’s O’Hare, which boasts an apiary and a vertical garden, and Boston’s Logan, which erected miniature wind turbines. Pack light and bring a refillable water bottle and snacks from home. And pass on first-class: The extra leg and elbow room is a waste of space and fuel. Feel free to spread your angel wings as you pass through the Profligate Class to Conservationist Coach.

Since the 1990s, some airlines have offered customers a means to offset carbon emissions. This is how it works: Calculate the CO2 from your trip and donate the corresponding amount to an organization of the carrier’s choosing. Cathay Pacific, for one, supports a cooking and heating project in China’s Shanxi Province; Qantas directs funds to a group that conserves the Tasmanian wilderness and restores indigenous practices in Western Australia.

Bruno backs the concept, with reservations.

“‘There is no industry standard or transparent system that allows carbon-offset buyers to see what their purchase has done,’” Bruno said. “‘However, some standards are receiving greater acceptance. They just aren’t anywhere near an industry standard.’”

Martha Honey, executive director of the Center for Responsible Travel, encourages travelers to offset their entire vacation. This way, you can neutralize even more emissions and select the programs you wish to support, including ones that benefit your vacation destination. Companies such as Carbon Fund and Carbon Neutral can assist with the calculations and vetting process. Honey shared some suggestions, as well.

“Tree-planting is iffy. Sometimes they die,” she said. “Support renewable energy in your destination.”

Choosing a green hotel

No pressure, but . . .

“No pressure, but . . .

“Once you are at your destination, if you can get the hotel right,” Head said, “you can make the greatest impact.”

Unfortunately, hotels ribbit their greenness louder than a pond of frogs. The cacophony can be deafening, and dishonest.

To silence the noise, Head suggests focusing on the issues that matter the most to you. Then find a hotel that matches your priorities. “Decide your cause and what you won’t compromise on,” she said.

Most major chains and many independent hotels operate in-house green programs. (Durband tips a hat to Accor and IHG.) Look for a fact sheet online, or call the front desk and unleash the questions. Ask them how they dispose of their graywater and if they compost. Inquire about the bathroom fixtures and toiletries, in-room recycling bins and the provenance of the restaurant food.

You can also search for hotels approved or accredited by respected certification programs, such as Green Key, the Global Sustainable Tourism Council and the U.S. Green Building Council, which oversees LEED certification. The most holistically green hotels support the three pillars of sustainable tourism: environmental, social and economic.
“If you have an opportunity to stay with a local provider in an eco-lodge,” Bruno said, “that can be more sustainable” than a LEED hotel.

The Unique Lodges of the World, a collection of 55 properties affiliated with National Geographic, bang on all three drums. For example, Sabi Sabi Private Game Reserve in South Africa eradicates invasive species, employs a sustainable wastewater management system and assists community programs that specialize in education, health care, sports, culture and conservation.

As a guest, you can also advance the cause without much effort.

“Making environmentally friendly choices on your own during your stay can have a long-term impact on the environment and only takes small changes,” said Rhiannon Jacobsen, vice president of strategic relationships at the U.S. Green Building Council.

Some ways you can help: Participate in the hotel’s linen-and-towel-reuse program and always flick off the lights when you leave the room. Skip the bottles of water in your room and refill your own beverage container. (Try HydraPak’s Stash or Klean Kanteen.) Decline housekeeping and, depending on the hotel, score a food-and-beverage credit. Use water glasses and coffee mugs instead of plastic or paper ones. At breakfast, ask the staff for real tableware instead of disposable plates and utensils. Avoid buffets, which result in mounds of wasted food. Recycle. (Advises Durband: If the hotel is not “visibly recycling, ask them to begin doing so. They need to hear this from more customers.”) Borrow the property’s bikes and utilize its shuttle service. Wear outfits more than once, or if you must do laundry, find a local facility that supports the community. Don’t fall for those wee bathroom amenities; bring or buy your own and take them home or donate them. (Advanced activism: Encourage your hotel to enroll in Clean the World, a nonprofit organization that sends donated hotel toiletries to developing countries.)

If you notice a lapse in the hotel’s eco-practices, speak up. “Suggesting ways a hotel can become greener is a great way to push for change,” Jacobsen said.

One success story: In the 1980s, a guest at the Bucuti & Tara Beach Resort in Aruba shared his disappointment with the bar’s use of plastic cups. Owner Ewald Biemans agreed and eliminated the wasteful materials. Since that one exchange, the resort has racked up numerous awards and accolades for its environmental practices. Last year, Green Globe, a certification board, named the property the “Most Sustainable Hotel & Resort in the World.” The resort scored a 98 out of 100.

Choosing green activities

The Earth-friendly options are legion: You can sail, snorkel, scuba dive, hike, paddleboat, paddleboard, kayak, bike, swim, bird-watch and play I-spy-a-monkey in a tree. Visit a crafts or food market, and don’t forget to bring a reusable bag for purchases. Take a tour that employs local guides. Give yourself an extra pat on the back if the company donates some of its proceeds to a local conservation group or charity.

You can also lend a hand during your holiday. “The green movement has changed from how to preserve and protect to how to use less and do good when you’re there,” Head said.

Many hotels and tour operators arrange short-term volunteer opportunities. For example, 1 Hotel Central Park, which partnered with Bette Midler’s New York Restoration Project, invites guests to help beautify the city by watering trees, composting and pulling weeds. Participants earn Lyft ride credits to the garden plus two cocktails for their efforts. At Emirates One & Only Wolgan Valley in Australia, visitors can help conservationists by monitoring feral animals, conducting wombat surveys and testing water quality.

If you are more of the donate-and-run kind of traveler, Laura Hoffman, operations manager of Global Basecamps, a socially responsible tour operator, recommends Pack for a Purpose. After you plan your trip, check the organization’s list of destinations and programs that seek supplies. In Jamaica, for example, Beaches Negril Resort & Spa works with Mount Airy All Age School, which serves 650 children. Visitors can pick from a long list of items to donate, such as pens, Frisbees, tennis balls and board games — basically all the clutter in your garage that you have been meaning to clear out.

Andrea Sachs has written for Travel since 2000. She has reported from nearby places such as Ellicott City, Md., and the Jersey Shore, and from far-flung locations, including Burma, Namibia and Russia.
**TRAVEL**

Camping is back, with fewer people and activities and more cleaning and waiting

BY DANIELLE BRAFF

Originally Published June 5, 2020

Kristi Haight was getting very tired of staring at her four walls. So the Greensboro, N.C., blogger packed up her family, face masks, hand sanitizer and food — and went camping for the weekend at a beach in South Carolina, coronavirus-style.

The family brought their own food and drink for the trip, avoiding restaurants and gas station stores, Haight said. When they reached the beach, “we spent all of our time at the campground and at our campsite.”

In the covid-19 world, camping might be the hottest getaway around. As of June 1, about 80 percent of campgrounds, RV parks and camping locations on Campendium — a Web app listing about 30,000 campsites throughout the United States, Canada and Mexico — were open, according to Leigh Wetzel, co-founder of Campendium.

Each state has its own guidelines and rules when it comes to camping mid-pandemic. For example, Ohio’s parks and recreational facilities just opened at the end of May, while California’s state and local parks are still closed, although it has allowed RV parks to continue to operate, said David Strait, an advertising services vendor in the outdoor hospitality industry.

Campers are flocking to any place available. Bookings for RV rentals have doubled week over week since April 20, shortly after states began to announce reopening plans, said Maddi Bourgerie, spokeswoman for RVshare, an RV rental marketplace similar to Airbnb. Arizona and Oklahoma bookings have more than doubled compared with this time last year, while Arkansas, Utah and Wyoming sites have grown more than 50 percent, Bourgerie said.

Because camping provides more opportunities for social distancing than, say, a vacation to a resort or a major city, it’s become enticing even for those who wouldn’t typically take a camping vacation.

Amie White and her family were supposed to drive from Illinois to St. Paul, Minn., to visit friends for Memorial Day. “We won’t share food like we usually do, and we’ll try to maintain social distance around the fire pit for the kids to roast s’mores together,” White said before the trip. “We just felt this was the best possible option to see dear friends while minimizing exposure.”

Christine Wang, founder of the blog TheSkiGirl, said that since the ski industry essentially shut down for the season, her team has been exploring other travel avenues to write about and to explore. “Camping has become a big focus,” Wang said.

Still, camping today isn’t going to feel like it did before the pandemic. There will be fewer people to allow for social distancing, some activities will be closed (many pools are shuttered for now), and cleaning and waiting will be more common. Each campground is creating its own coronavirus distancing rules. For
example, the Alvarado Campground in Colorado is setting limits of two tents and two vehicles per campsite, with gatherings that don’t exceed eight people.

Yogi Bear’s Jellystone Park Camp-Resorts — locally operated independent franchises throughout the country — are following federal, state and local directives. To that end, guests can expect enhanced cleaning procedures, increased use of disinfectants when the cabins are serviced, and cleaning of golf carts and bicycles between rentals. Some Jellystone pools and splash grounds may not be open, depending on the local social distancing guidelines.

Georgianne Austin, spokeswoman for Escapees RV Club, whose eight RV parks across Southern and Midwestern states have remained open through the pandemic, said the company has implemented many changes. All gathering spaces are closed, including pools, clubhouses and activity centers, Austin said. The park offices are conducting business electronically and are closed to walk-ins. Shared facilities, such as bathrooms, shower rooms and laundry facilities, are open but are cleaned multiple times daily.

Such precautions are a start, but they don’t remove all the hazards of covid-19, according to Leann Poston, a pediatrician, assistant dean at Wright State University Boonshoft School of Medicine and a contributor to Invigor Medical. Camping safely, she said, depends on how you camp.

“If you are a camper with your own restroom and there is enough space in the campground for you to socially distance, then I think it is probably safe,” she said. “If you are tent camping and need to use the campground restrooms, then you are at a higher risk.”

Because it’s unclear whether the novel coronavirus can be spread via feces or aerosolized particles generated when toilets are flushed, it’s important to avoid public restrooms and minimize contact with potentially infected surfaces, Poston said. If you must use a public restroom while camping, Poston suggested avoiding touching any surfaces and door handles and asking in advance how the campground is monitoring the cleanliness of the bathroom.

Campgrounds that cater to a single family or group at a time may be safer right now, said Tyler Weathers, an instructor at Trail Blazer Survival School in South Carolina and co-owner of a few campgrounds. He suggested looking for campgrounds where you can book electronically and rent the entire campground. If that’s not an option, ask whether you can stay in a campsite that’s farther away from the main camping area of the park, he said.

Sticking to remote areas of dispersed sites (public lands outside designated campgrounds) is just one of the strategies employed by Marissa Lovell of Boise, Idaho, who went camping with her partner in the height of the pandemic and has other camping trips planned nearly every weekend in the near future. She and her partner bring their own water and gas so they can bypass all small towns during the drive. They sleep in their truck or their tent and bring their food and cooking supplies.

“I have noticed that some areas are busier than they normally are, but it seems to be mostly day use with hiking and biking,” Lovell said. “People have been good about keeping distance on the trail, from my experience, and everyone seems very happy to have open spaces to escape to.” She said that she intends to avoid campgrounds even when Idaho reopens them.

No matter how many adjustments campers make, however, the safest option is to stay home, said Diane Vukovic, founder of the website Mom Goes Camping.

“Campgrounds are typically located in remote areas which do not always have access to hospitals,” Vukovic said. “These gateway communities could end up with covid-19 outbreaks because of travelers who used their facilities along the way, such as when buying gas or stopping in a store to buy some snacks.”

Because not all campgrounds are arranged in a way that allows campers to be distant from one another, Vukovic suggests looking for smaller campgrounds, which are more likely to have a good distance between pitches. While these may not have as many amenities as the larger spots, they will be better for a socially distanced vacation, she said.

“Even better, consider going wild or dispersed camping,” she said, noting that it offers another major attraction: It’s free.

Or, try your own backyard.

Bruff is a writer based in Chicago. Find her on Twitter: @daniellebruff.
Jaguar release is a step to saving the species in Argentina

BY LEILA NARGI

• Originally Published March 3, 2021

Many of us were stuck at home in January because of the coronavirus pandemic. But a special mom and her two babies took a trip. They were driven a few miles from a breeding center in northeastern Argentina to a 1.7-million-acre nature preserve called Gran Iberá Park. There the three jaguars were released into the wild.

Their release was the first reintroduction of jaguars in northeastern Argentina since the species almost went extinct in that part of the country 70 years ago. Scientists hope they can turn things around for this important apex predator, meaning one that is on top of the food chain. Only 200 to 300 jaguars remain in the country. They have been declared “natural monuments.”

“That is the highest category of protection that can be given in Argentina,” says Sebastián Di Martino. He’s the conservation director for Rewilding Argentina, which is one of the organizations helping to reestablish jaguar populations.

The jaguars’ journey started in 2018, though. That’s when the park was established in the Iberá Wetlands. Several-thousand jaguars once roamed there, along with other important species such as giant river otters, peccaries (piglike hoofed mammals) and macaws. But the jaguars’ pelts were valuable, so people hunted them.

Then the land they needed to roam and to hunt on was cleared for cattle ranching. This threw the balance of the ecosystem out of whack.

“In the absence of this species, ecosystems stop working well and may even collapse,” Di Martino says. “The main prey of jaguar is the capybara and the caiman. They are very abundant due to the absence of the jaguar, which causes imbalances in the ecosystem.”

The park was the first step in getting jaguars reestablished. Then they needed to be bred. A female named Mariua was mated with a male jaguar from Brazil.

It sounds simple, but the reality is more complicated. Di Martino said that bred jaguars have to learn how to hunt and must stay unaccustomed to humans. Otherwise they will not have success in the wild.

At the breeding center, “we provide live prey to them in captivity without their realizing that it is people” who are doing it. In addition, “all the monitoring of the animals is through video surveillance cameras that are managed from several miles away.”

Mariua wears a radio collar so researchers
can track her and her babies, Karai and Porã. So far, so good. She’s been hunting capybaras and wild pigs and is “raising her cubs very well,” Di Martino says.

The father will be released at a later time. So will six more jaguars. In all, Di Martino says his organization hopes to release 10 to 15 jaguars.

“That’s enough for the population to be established and their numbers to be increased,” he says.

The last part of the rewilding equation is trickier. People in the surrounding communities have to be persuaded that having jaguars around is a good thing. So Di Martino and others are working to create jobs around ecotourism. They hope travelers will come to Argentina just to see the wildlife in Gran Iberá Park. Soon that will mean not just jaguars but giant anteaters, pampas deer and mui̇tu birds, too.

Now there’s something to look forward to, after the pandemic, when we can travel freely again.

Questions for Discussion

1. Define these terms found in the article:
   a) apex predator, b) ecosystem, c) ecotourism, d) extinct, e) natural monument, f) nature preserve.

2. Why is it important to have a balance of the ecosystem?

3. Name two ways jaguars are prepared to live in the wild.

4. Marina wears a radio collar. What has it revealed to researchers?

5. What are the benefits of developing ecotourism in Gran Iberá Park?
TRAVEL

Halt in ecotourism threatens conservation efforts worldwide

BY HUGH BIGGAR

Originally Published June 11, 2020

In northern Cambodia, giant ibis, white-winged ducks and other rare species have helped ecotourism take flight in recent years. Just two decades after their near extinction, the population of giant ibis has grown to about 300 birds, bringing in thousands of visitors to remote areas of the country. This tourism has provided an important economic catalyst, generating critical revenue for rural communities and conservation initiatives.

But now, in Cambodia and other wild places around the world, ecotourism is in the crosshairs of a new threat — covid-19, the disease caused by the novel coronavirus. The consequences for both wildlife and people are still unfolding and expected to be far-reaching.

“A major source of income for rural communities has suddenly been cut off,” said Jeremy Radachowsky, director of the Mesoamerica and Western Caribbean Program for the Wildlife Conservation Society. “It’s going to have an especially large impact on budgets for protected areas and wildlife, which also happen to be some of the most important investments we can make to avoid future pandemics.”

Why? Because, he said, “degradation of natural ecosystems and wildlife trafficking facilitate the spillover and spread of zoonotic diseases.”

Or as the World Economic Forum website puts it: “It is no coincidence that the destruction of ecosystems has coincided with a sharp increase” in infectious diseases.

Added Midori Paxton, head of ecosystems and biodiversity at the United Nations Development Program, “Intact nature gives us air, water and food and serves as a ‘natural vaccine’ to reduce the frequency and intensity of future outbreaks.”

Since the outbreak of the coronavirus, investments in nature are in jeopardy as resources are diverted and tourism dollars supporting conservation dwindle. Most world travel destinations have experienced shutdowns as borders have been shut, visas restricted and quarantines enforced to limit the spread of the virus. National parks, game preserves and wildlife sanctuaries in Africa, Asia and beyond have closed. The closures have led to reduced protection for wildlife and lost incomes as rangers, guides, drivers, cooks, animal caregivers and others have been let go. The U.N. World Tourism Organization estimates a decline of international tourism of 60 to 80 percent by the end of the year compared with 2019, with trillions of dollars and millions of jobs lost.

“The biggest concern in the short term is continued investment in ecotourism and rural areas to make up for lost revenue streams and jobs,” said Johan Robinson of the U.N. Environment Program (UNEP), noting that the global cutbacks due to covid-19 could last a year or more.

The collapsed tourism economy adds new stressors on top of ongoing challenges from vanishing habitats to climate change to human encroachment. Already, the International Union for the Conservation of
Nature (IUCN) and the U.N. Development Program have reported an increase in natural-resources exploitation and illegal killings of wild animals and threatened species.

In Costa Rica, a new ecotourism initiative to help conserve the once-common white-lipped peccary — similar to a wild boar — has seen few visitors. Meanwhile, the white-lipped peccaries are increasingly endangered due to hunting of the large animals and deforestation. In Namibia, a cheetah conservation center can no longer rely on tourist visits to help fund operations. In Gabon, in March, the government closed its great-ape parks to tourists due to COVID-19, and there are no tourists and no safaris. It’s a huge loss of income, and a lot of lodges don’t know if they are going to make it.

In the wading pools, swamps, marshes and rainforests of northern Cambodia, tourists used to visit in hopes of catching sight of the critically endangered giant ibis, characterized by their height and silver-tipped wings notched with black crossbars, and other wildlife. Their visits have generated thousands of dollars for community funds and conservation programs, according to the Wildlife Conservation Society. But now the local economy is in limbo, and this spring the group reported that several giant ibis were killed for their meat, as were white-winged ducks, painted storks and other wild animals.

International agencies and organizations are scrambling to respond to the crisis and reduce incentives to hunt, poach and illegally clear land for farming, timber or other resources. Wide-scale socioeconomic stress related to COVID-19 has added to the pressure, with the World Food Program estimating millions of people worldwide are now living close to starvation and resorting to whatever options are available to survive.

“If the supply of money from tourism dries up, rangers might be laid off, leave the bush and look for other ways to feed their families,” said Chris Thouless, director of research for Save the Elephants. “If someone sees an elephant, for instance, they might shoot it as an investment even if they cannot immediately get money for the tusks, and hunting for bush meat may increase.”

Across Africa, with many countries dependent on a wildlife tourism industry that brings in billions of dollars, the outlook is equally grim. “The situation is pretty bad,” UNEP’s Robinson said. “Most of the parks have been closed, and there are no tourists and no safaris. It’s a huge loss of income, and a lot of lodges don’t know if they are going to make it.”

Similarly across Central and South America, conservationists are seeing increases in deforestation, poaching and sudden disruptions to long-established businesses and ways of life. In Ecuador, the wildlife-rich Galápagos Islands have had few visitors this spring, and the tourist-based economy has seen thousands of jobs lost.

In response, organizations are ramping up support. The Lion’s Share nonprofit, for example, is awarding small grants to ecotourism-dependent communities in developing countries. Other groups are tapping reserves and emergency funds to keep employees on the payroll and ensure staff and partners in the field have food, water and other supplies.

Continued international cooperation and global support for conservation is also seen as vital, including such programs as the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service’s Rhinoceros and Tiger Conservation Fund, as government priorities are diverted by the crisis.

“Funding from governments and existing private sector is not going to
be enough,” Robinson said. “Estimates already indicated that more than double the pre-covid government and philanthropic investments were needed for effective global conservation.”

Experts also say this is a good opportunity to revisit some of the deleterious effects of tourism and consider new approaches. For ecotourism, drawbacks can include overcrowding of fragile ecosystems, overdevelopment of tourist amenities and pollution. Long flights to far-flung destinations also emit tons of carbon linked to global warming. To offset some of these impacts, some organizations are considering investing more in economic alternatives to ecotourism.

“Governments that have defaulted on properly financing protected areas too easily rely solely on tourism revenue to make up the difference,” said Trevor Sandwith, director of IUCN’s Global Protected Areas Program. “This reliance has exposed these areas to a funding crunch that coincides with the pandemic and is caused by it. It has the very serious knock-on effect of affecting the livelihoods of local communities and increasing pressure on protected areas.”

In response, alternatives to ecotourism are gaining popularity while sharing the goal of protecting nature and supporting local economies. Among these are conservation trust funds, debt-for-nature swaps, biodiversity offsets, tax incentives and green and blue bonds — debt instruments to raise capital for ecological purposes. In one example, two years ago the Seychelles, a scenic vacation spot in the Indian Ocean, diversified its tourism-dependent economy by raising $15 million through a blue bond to protect the marine life that helps bring in tourists.

And as travel slowly resumes as quarantines and lockdowns are lifted, ecotourism will also find its place again in the post-pandemic world.

“Travel is important for all sorts of reasons, and ecotourism is essential to this,” said Joe Walston, executive vice president for global conservation at the Wildlife Conservation Society. “Hopefully, people will also recognize all of these environmental issues are related to each other and will take fewer trips but spend more time in the places they visit. In the short-term, we must do what we can to see rural communities and wildlife through.”

Biggar is a writer based in Washington. Find him on Instagram: @hughbiggar.
Partnering to help travelers go greener

BY BAILEY BERG

Originally Published March 7, 2021

The past year has changed people’s priorities in many aspects of their lives, but one of the biggest pendulum swings could involve travel. Previously, many found their itineraries at the intersection of affordability and bragging rights. But after the events of 2020, a growing number of wanderers are instead seeking opportunities that help them be better stewards of the Earth.

“I think the pandemic has given people time to consider travel and sustainability and how they want to do things differently going forward,” said Louree Maya, founder of Kynder, a website that aggregates eco-friendly and ethical hotels and eateries in Europe and the United States.

Maya’s impression isn’t just anecdotal. Booking.com recently released the findings of a global research report in which analysts asked travelers if and how they planned to travel differently when borders reopen. The report found that 53 percent of global travelers wanted “to travel more sustainably in the future as Coronavirus has opened their eyes to humans’ impact on the environment.” Another 69 percent of respondents said they expect the travel industry to offer more sustainable travel options.

Recognizing that a focus on sustainability is expected by a growing number of customers, many companies have used their relative downtime to take stock of their environmental footprint and make road maps for a greener future.

“The important thing, even with covid at the front of our minds, is remembering that climate change is a bigger risk for the planet and for tourism,” said Susanne Etti, environmental impact specialist for Intrepid, an adventure travel company.

“Tourism has a front-row seat for the effects of climate change,” Etti said, adding that some seasonal and outdoor tourism opportunities, like skiing or exploring reefs, have been diminished by the planet warming.

While many within the industry had previously implemented environmentally friendly programs, with varying levels of ambition, tourism still contributes to 8 percent of the global greenhouse gas emissions and is expected to grow at an annual rate of 4 percent. One silver lining of the pandemic may be that it has helped unite some travel companies to do more against what they said may be their next foe.

Etti published an open-source guide to decarbonizing travel businesses in April, which has since been downloaded by more than 180 businesses. She has also conducted more than 50 free consultations aimed at helping her peers take the first steps.

“It’s important to understand your impact on the environment,” Etti said. “When you know your impact, you can start reducing.”
is one example of travel entities collaborating to “build back better.” The coalition has called for tourism stakeholders to commit to its list of 13 guiding principles, ranging from “Choose quality over quantity” to “Use sustainability standards.” Twenty-two groups have signed on, including: multiple tourism boards for countries including Jordan, Colombia and Palau; hotel chains such as Hilton; and tour groups such as Intrepid and Lindblad Expeditions.

Another joint effort that launched in 2020 is Tourism Declares, an initiative aimed at helping those in the travel sphere to develop plans to reduce carbon emissions as they recover from the pandemic. More than 200 companies, ranging from travel agents to tour operators, have committed to publishing a climate action plan within 12 months of joining.

Going forward, Jamie Sweeting, vice president of social enterprise and responsible travel at tour provider G Adventures, predicts that there will be more interest in trips that focus on time in the outdoors and going to less-visited places, moves that make sustainable practices easier and help lessen the burden of overtourism.

“We’ve seen a big trend toward more meaningful travel experiences,” Sweeting said. “I think more travelers want to discover a place, rather than just check it off. People want more out of their trip, like knowing it’s having a beneficial impact on them and on the place they’re visiting.”

Some of those places could very well be within travelers’ own backyards. G Adventures launched trips within the United States and Australia last year aimed specifically at citizens of those countries. While the excursions were in response to border closures, the company plans to continue offering the tours post-pandemic, as organizers said it helps locals build deeper connections to their own country and causes less environmental harm than jet-setting across the world would.

Pre-pandemic, “overtourism” was a buzzword associated with destinations such as Venice and Bali, that saw so many yearly visitors that it became harmful to the environment and made life more challenging for locals. One way tour companies, like G Adventures and Intrepid, are looking to decrease the stress put on those places is simply opting to travel in the offseason.

While what is “good” travel is fairly subjective, both Etti and Sweeting said it’s important for tourism groups to work with companies that have the same mission. By prioritizing giving their business to local hotels and restaurants that practice recycling, use solar panels and reduce waste, it makes it more attractive for others to get on board. The same goes for travelers.

“In the travel industry right now, your dollar means way more than it did before covid,” Sweeting said. “You have a lot of power as a consumer. If you reward the companies that are addressing climate change and work with local communities, the marketplace will change.”

While Sweeting acknowledged that not all travelers or companies are going to consider the environmental impact of their travels, he was optimistic that this may be the impetus for an evolution within his industry.
Green Future or Economic Paradise?

A country’s leadership and environmentalists do not always agree on what is best for the country’s natural resources and its economic well-being. Enter ecotourism into the picture for an even more multifaceted definition and nature of development.

Brazil, rich with the rainforests of the Amazon and beaches, with fish and yet-to-be-discovered medicinal plants, with indigenous people and pink dolphins and pristine lands, provides several examples of this battle for revenue, conservation and a form of development that will provide for the people who live there and preserve the flora and fauna.

Alter Do Chao, Brazil, provides one example of a village that opened its rainforest and beaches to ecotourism. Alter Do Chao became known as the “Amazon Caribbean” and became a popular destination. The new Brazilian President Jair Bolsonaro pledged to support development of the Amazon. Without government support to limit visitors and no control of land grabbers who occupied land, burned forest areas and built houses and fields, dozens of projects were built within protected areas.

Read more about how a local reporter, residents and volunteer firemen, President Bolsonaro, the World Wildlife Fund, and Leonardo DiCaprio got entangled into a web of allegations, misinformation and fire. Read The Post’s “They say they’re firefighters. Police say they’re arsonists. The battle for truth reaches the Amazon.”

In his article Terrence McCoy prepares readers for the different perspectives:

The information wars, the battle of competing narratives that is increasingly shaping global affairs and corroding a common consensus on truth, have reached the Amazon rainforest. As deforestation rises under President Jair Bolsonaro, the forces of development and the protectors of the rainforest are fighting by claim and counterclaim, anecdote and hashtag, over the future of the Amazon.

“Everything is being interpreted in the worst way, as deliberate and malicious,” said Daniel Nepstad, an environmental scientist who studies the Amazon. “The tendency is to demonize.”

Does the right-wing Bolsonaro want to develop the Amazon — or destroy it? Will he enrich indigenous communities — or hasten their demise? Are international environmentalists safeguarding Brazil — or holding it back?
This Brazilian island wants to show the way to a green future. Businesses, backed by Bolsonaro, see the next Cozumel.
His take on Noronha mirrors his administration’s approach to the environment more broadly: Ease regulations, promote business, shout down critics.

When the head of the government’s space research agency reported a jump in deforestation in the Amazon this year, the president denounced the data as “lies” and fired him. He has dismissed international criticism over deforestation as an assault on Brazil’s sovereignty; as fires spiked across the Amazon last month, he initially rejected an aid package offered by the Group of Seven and told foreign leaders to mind their own business.

Bolsonaro’s rhetoric has isolated him on the world stage. But here in Noronha, it’s struck a chord.

Fabiana da Silva, 31, remembers when living on the island meant wading through muddy streets and waiting weeks for food to be shipped from the mainland. Growing tourism has changed life here, creating jobs, funding improvements, strengthening the economy.

Environmental regulations, she says, mean she has to ask the government for everything.

“We are humiliated,” says da Silva, who works at a shop that sells clothing and jewelry. “We have to ask to build a toilet. If you want to build a house, you have to beg.”

WRITER’S CONTENT AND TECHNIQUE

5. What and where is Brasilia?

6. In his Facebook post and quoted tweet, what attitude toward business and tourism does President Bolsonaro express?

7. Explain an example of Bolsonaro’s rhetoric and how it might need to international isolation.

8. Who does Fabiana da Silva represent?

9. As a reader what perspective do you expect to learn in the next section — especially if the writer continues to use the comparison and contrast structure?

Endangered species, and the world’s most beautiful beach

What happens in Noronha can reverberate throughout Brazil. After officials here introduced the ban on plastic, they say, they received calls from local officials around the country hoping to do the same. Paulo Câmara, the socialist governor of the state that administers the island, says he uses it as a laboratory to test ideas before implementing them more broadly.

Noronha, just a 70-minute flight from Recife on the Brazilian mainland, has much to attract visitors. UNESCO has declared the island a World Heritage Site, citing its “indescribable beauty,” its biodiversity and its endangered species, including green sea and loggerhead turtles. TripAdvisor has named Baia do Sancho the world’s most beautiful beach. Spinner dolphins greet tourists in the morning; lemon sharks dive around them during the day, stingrays gather at their feet at dusk.

The island received 103,000 visitors last year. They generated nearly $9 million in taxes.

Marco Aurelio da Silva, a ranger at Fernando de Noronha Marine National Park, delivers lectures to visitors each week. Between instructions on how to behave during their stay — “Please don’t poke the sharks with your selfie sticks” — he tries to instill a sense of environmental responsibility he hopes they’ll take with them when they leave. “We have to remember Planet Earth is our home,” he told one group. “Who takes care of it? We do!”

WRITER’S CONTENT AND TECHNIQUE

10. It what ways is it possible for an island to impact one of the largest countries in the world?

11. Citing reliable and respected sources is a technique writers use to convey opinion while remaining objective in reporting. Give an example of this technique used in this section.

12. One way readers know that Lopes was an eyewitness is the dateline. What else indicates that she was an eyewitness to ecotourism in action?
Everyone has an opinion

Tourists have brought opportunities, but also challenges: Growing crowds are straining the primitive sewage system, taxing the limited water supply and wearing out unpaved roads.

The solution? Business leaders say it’s more development — building the new port, expanding the desalination plant, reinforcing the infrastructure.

Falcão, the hotelier, considers himself the founder of tourism in Noronha. He began chartering flights for 100 travelers a week in 1981, when only fishermen, soldiers and biologists had reason to venture here.

His 40-room hotel, between the airport and the beach, is one of the island’s most popular. But expanding the business has proved all but impossible. His hope of building a second hotel has stalled over environmental permits.

He blames the environmentalists. “They say no, just to say no,” he said. “But it’s the people’s heritage. Noronha should compete with the world.”

Bolsonaro, he hopes, will rein in local officials and clear the way for more business-friendly decisions.

The president is already making changes. After his Twitter tirade, he sent Environment Minister Ricardo Salles here to assess whether some of the tourist fees should be waived. Salles met with business leaders, lifted a ban on sardine fishing, and replaced the head of the island environmental agency with a native who the business community hopes will ease restrictions.

In Noronha, where environmentalists have enjoyed an outsized influence, activists fear that Bolsonaro could threaten projects decades in the planning. Local officials worry that speaking out could make them the president’s next target.

They didn’t have to wait long to see their fears realized, with the reassignment of a local environmental official. José Martins is an oceanographer who worked on Noronha for three decades. A public critic of the spike in tourism, he was ordered to leave Noronha after Salles’s visit.

The Ministry of the Environment denied repeated interview requests and would not allow Martins to speak to reporters. At a town hall meeting in August, however, all eyes were on him. He silently teared up as lifelong friends called on the government to reconsider.

“He has not committed a crime,” said Domício Alves, one of Noronha’s most senior political leaders, drawing a standing ovation. “If you disagree with him, let’s discuss it, but don’t do this. “He is an affront to the interests of big business. That’s why this is happening.”

The meeting descended into chaos. Business leaders shouted over activists. The future of the island was at stake, and everyone had an opinion.

13. Contrasting points of view continue in the final section of the article. Who do you think has the strongest argument? Support your response.

14. People may be used to exemplify government policies. Summarize what happened to José Martins. What does he illustrate?

15. This article was written in 2019. In 2020 the pandemic closed tourist destinations across the globe. First, write a short statement about what you think happened in 2020 on the island of Fernando de Noronha. Next do some research to locate an update on any development plans or ecotourism activities on the island.