

# Design your next holiday

More environmentally travel conscious than ever, columnist **CYRIL ZAMMIT** walks us through the emerging trends



**W**hen the Holy Month of Ramadan comes to a close later this month, many will rush abroad for the Eid holidays. A well-deserved break, and a chance to get away before the annual Summer price hike.

While everyone enjoys (and deserves) a holiday, we have become acutely aware of what our travels can mean for the planet.

During the pandemic more mind was given to how we travel; where we travel to; and how we give purpose to those journeys. Greenhouse gas emissions fell by 15 percent in the USA alone due to the absence of air traffic. And even though we're now back at pre-pandemic levels, the industry has noticed a redefinition of travel tied to a new set of consumer values. This is especially true of young travellers, with Gen Z and millennials (who aren't that young anymore) expressing a strong desire to include sustainable criteria in their trips.

New trends in travel have arisen around the nascent metaverse, 'bleisure' and regenerative tourism. Last month, I spent some time with the Royal Commission for AlUla where I was introduced to more than 30 key criteria that will soon be implemented for each new hotel in the ancient Saudi valley. Beyond merely limiting negative impact, regenerative tourism goes even further giving visitors an opportunity to leave the destination a better place than when they arrived. It also allows for local populations to be involved in guiding authorities on decision-making around how their communities are visited.

Another Saudi example is the Red Sea Project. Beyond the pristine water and ultra-luxurious offering over 50 islands, the project aims to increase

local biodiversity by 30 percent by rejuvenating coral reefs and mangroves with cutting-edge 3D printing technology. Should you prefer colder climes, kayaking experiences in Oregon will allow you to help the local authorities remove invasive plants from the river before you rest up for the evening. Similar initiatives are being pioneered in Canada and New Zealand where Indigenous communities are helping restore their lands with active participation from tourists.

Meanwhile, Metaverse hospitality continues to grow. Although it is still early, it is one of the most popular platforms for 'Generation Alpha' (those born after 2010, if you're wondering). Thanks to AR and gamification, there are serious players such as hotel chains and airline companies investing in virtual hospitality. In the UAE, Sharjah became the first Metaverse city with Sharjahverse offering anyone the possibility to visit the city and create their own avatar.

For slightly-older set, the word 'bleisure' is being bandied about, with an increasing number of people tacking on a few days off onto the end of business trips. Why not? Who really cares where you're answering email or Zooming in from—it might as well be from the beach or a snow-capped mountain. A tip from a seasoned traveller: let your hotel know that you are extending your stay after the business trip, a smart hotel manager will see the benefit of offering you a better rate for the additional days. Whichever way you choose to travel, one thing is for sure: there are more ways to do it than ever before. ☺

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