

The future of travel

In recent years, the travel industry has come under sustained attack for everything from its carbon footprint to its social costs. Industry insiders agree that something has to be done, but what exactly? In this special issue of *Geographical*, produced in conjunction with responsibletavel.com, we look ahead to see where travel is going. Here, **Justin Francis**, the company's chief executive and co-founder, offers his vision of a truly sustainable industry

EVERY DAY AT responsibletavel.com, we talk to tourists and people within the tourism industry who are

passionate about travel. They recognise the benefits that responsible tourism can bring to destinations, in terms of employment and the preservation of cultural and natural heritage. At the same time, however, we're all acutely aware of the growing contribution that aviation makes to global warming.

Consequently, we face a dilemma. How can we align a desire to see the world alongside a conscience that calls for the reduction in our everyday carbon emissions? It's this dilemma that inspired us to start a debate around the future of tourism. If we're serious about pursuing a sustainable future for travel, it's essential that we have a vision to which we can aspire.

My own experiences within the industry have given me a unique insight into the forces that drive it. This, in turn, has allowed me to formulate a series of ideas about the changes we can expect to see taking place over the next 20 or so years.

TRAVEL WITH A PURPOSE

The rise of the package holiday and 'bucket and spade' culture during the past half century led us to believe that travel was about jetting off for two weeks of sun, sand and souvenirs. More recently, the advent of low-cost airlines has seen tourism become, for many people, a race to tick off trophy experiences and destinations.

If I walked into a high street travel agent today, the first question I would be asked is: 'Where do you want to go?' I've always thought that this was the wrong question: it isn't the 'where' that's important, it's the 'why' and the 'how'. I want to go on holiday to recharge my batteries, to meet new people or to discover and learn about another place and another culture. When deciding what my next holiday will be, I try to place the focus more on what I need from the holiday and what I can give back to destinations and local people.

As the cost of flying increases and 'carbon guilt' sets in, meaning we no longer feel entirely comfortable boasting about our overseas holidays, the 'why' and 'how' of travel will surely become more important. When we travel in the future, it will be with more of a purpose, with not only our own needs in mind, but also those of the destination.

This new way of travelling could be described as 'deep' travel. It will be about getting under the skin of a place. We already seek out authenticity – real experiences rather than fake culture packaged up for tourists – but travel in 2020 will go further. It will be about appreciating local distinctiveness – as much about the smell of fresh spices in Kerala in India and the colourful tailors of Hoi An in Vietnam as about rediscovering the exotic and locally distinctive closer to home.

KEEPING IT LOCAL

As the cost of flying increases, we'll see the end of the truly low-cost airline. Consequently, the 'local' approach will become central to travel – not only as a new mindset in the quest for regional distinctiveness but also as a factor affecting our choice of destinations.

To coin a new term, travel in 2020 will be 'geo-local'. In other words, holiday-makers will travel much closer to home. A British family might head to Cornwall to stay in a locally run Cornish cottage, shop for Cornish crafts and enjoy a cream tea.

Holidaymakers will increasingly discover that the exoticness of the unknown doesn't have to take the form of a desert island in the middle of the Pacific.

Tourism will no longer be dominated by Westerners either. We'll see residents of India and China becoming more mobile than ever before from a leisure perspective. Already, hotels in these two countries that once hosted Western visitors almost exclusively are beginning to see the proportion of domestic guests rise, in some cases overtaking the number of foreigners.

By 2020, we'll also see the majority of hotels getting their produce, employees, materials and services from sources within their immediate vicinity. I refer to this as 'hyper-local' sourcing. We'll see a new type of hotel – the 'ten-kilometre hotel' – for which all food and materials will have been sourced from within a ten-kilometre radius. These hotels will provide energy and water for guests on a metered system, and separate charges for each will appear on their bill, with discounts for visitors who keep their usage below average.

ALTERNATIVE TRANSPORT

Driven by the increased cost of flying, travel will begin to develop parallels with the slow-food movement. We'll gradually see an appreciation of 'slow travel', with journeys made by train, boat and bike gaining in popularity. People will gain a greater appreciation for the journey itself, as opposed to restlessly striving for the next destination.

This change in mindset will be coupled with improvements in other forms of transport, making the whole experience more enjoyable. I hope that we'll see carbon caps for airlines, with an investment in rail travel – and a consequent reduction in cost – one of the direct beneficiaries of carbon trading. Planning rail travel will also be easier as timetables are designed to link up fast trains between countries and one global website is created through which to book them all.

In the same way that travellers now choose tour companies and hotels based on their responsible-tourism credentials, new websites will allow you to choose flights from the lowest-carbon airline for your particular journey.

And we're sure to see the implementation of new ideas, such as adding giant sails to cruise ships to reduce their carbon footprint, and the return to old ideas such as using airships for shorter journeys.

CHANGING CLIMATES

Climate change is already having a profound impact on tourism and will soon start to change which destinations we feel

comfortable about visiting and when. The traditional holiday migration of northern Europeans to southern Europe during July and August will be threatened by temperatures that are too hot for many tourists.

Destinations will also be forced to change their focus. Many lower Alpine ski resorts are already having to either close or shift their emphasis to summer walking holidays. Coral bleaching, coastal erosion and a rise in sea level will threaten many traditional diving and beach destinations. Extreme weather events are also likely to become more frequent, reducing the tourist season in many destinations, such as those in the Caribbean.

The consequences of global warming, such as crop failures and changes in water availability, will lead to mass migration and increased social and political instability – threatening tourism in some of the countries most dependent upon it.

Given the reality of climate change, destinations need to plan ahead to ensure they attract the right kind of visitors to the right areas of their country in a way that maximises sustainability. For far too long, tourism ministers have single-mindedly pursued increased tourist numbers without fully understanding either the local economic benefits of different types of tourists or the true cost of tourism to local cultures and the environment.

Smart destinations will no longer just pursue more tourists per se. Instead, they will focus more on the types of tourists they need and match them to the most

TRAVEL TRENDS

'Climate change is likely to severely truncate the skiing season, with many lower resorts forced to recast themselves as summer destinations – a return to their original attraction for UK visitors during the 19th and early 20th centuries'

Justin Fleming, PRESIDENT, ASSOCIATION OF BRITISH TRAVEL AGENTS

suitable areas and communities within their country. As a result, economic benefits will be maximised, while social and environmental costs are minimised.

We'll also see a change in the way that destinations are presented and marketed to travellers. There will be further growth in consumer-led, online peer-to-peer travel advice, sparking a 'democratisation' of travel, whereby travellers and locals alike will become empowered to speak on behalf of a diversity of new and interesting places. The repercussions on destinations will be vast. Negative impacts such as overcrowding will be reduced and the benefits of tourism spread more broadly.

HOLIDAY LABELLING

Over the past few decades, we've seen the food industry introduce an array of labels: fair trade, organic, locally produced and, increasingly, 'carbon ratings'. I think we'll eventually see a similar scheme being applied to holidays. Although it would be fiendishly difficult to implement, a truly holistic approach to responsible tourism would include a rating for the holiday's impact on local communities, as well as on the environment.

IN SEARCH OF UTOPIA

I'm optimistic that in the future, travel and tourism will be both sustainable and responsible, with a focus on preserving identities and cultures, celebrating the unique and conserving what is locally distinctive about a place. We'll fly less and, in turn, we'll fall back in love with travel closer to home.

I think we'll begin to have a more personal relationship with the places we visit and a better understanding of our individual motivations for travelling.

This vision, explored above and within this special edition of *Geographical*, is just that – a utopian vision, a collection of ideas upon which a sustainable future could potentially be built. I hope that it will spark other ideas: creative, innovative and inspiring ambitions. Above all, I hope that it creates debate. After all, if we can't begin to work towards a more responsible future for travel, there may not be a travel industry at all.

JOIN THE DEBATE

To have your say and find out more, visit responsibletravel.com's dedicated website at www.futureoftourism.com

TRAVEL TRENDS

'Consumers will expect more from their free time, and will want good value rather than cheap holidays. They will demand more of an experience from their holiday. Rather than simply the chance to lie on a beach for a fortnight, they will want to emulate TV and media travellers as they come to realise that they can do the same things on their annual or biannual break'

Paul Bondsfeld, PR AND SPONSORSHIP MANAGER, EXPLORE



BACK ON TRACK

As people become increasingly concerned about their carbon footprints, rail travel is likely to be one of the major beneficiaries. Already, passenger numbers in the UK have risen to their highest level since 1946

FLYING INTO TROUBLE

The price of fuel is sending ticket prices up and airline profits down, pushing numerous operators to the wall. Many commentators are now suggesting that the era of cheap flights has come to an end

LOCAL HEROES

The environmental and financial costs of long-haul travel will persuade many travellers to take their holidays closer to home, sparking a renaissance in British tourism, with an increasing emphasis on regional distinctiveness

SEA CHANGE

Again, rising fuel costs and the need for an image makeover will see cruise companies look to improve fuel efficiency, perhaps adopting innovations such as the addition of huge sails to ships to cut consumption