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How Regenerative Tourism Is Transforming The Way We Explore The World.

Jennifer Lee Contributor ⓘ

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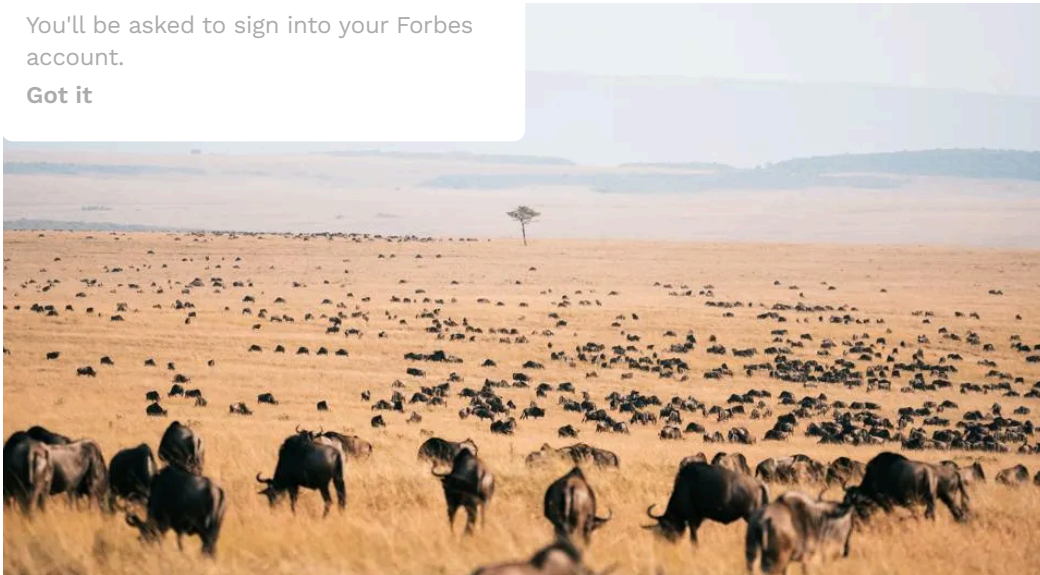


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The yearly Great Migration of the wildebeests. SASHA JULIARD

Jennifer Loh's passion for environmental activism began at a young age, fueled by her family's extensive travels and a pivotal moment in third grade. An article in Time Magazine for Kids on global warming sparked her concern for the environment and inspired her to take action. This early awakening marked the beginning of a lifelong commitment to sustainability and conservation.

Fast forward to a post-graduate life, Loh began working at the Hyatt Regency, Maui, where she was a co-chair of The Green Team during the property's LEED certification process. Working

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closely with the Director of Engineering, she witnessed the diversion of 500,000 pounds of food waste from the landfill and the successful transition to renewable energy sources, particularly solar power. As the hotel implemented various energy-efficient measures, Loh began to wonder why more companies were not embracing such sustainable practices.

Reflecting on this experience, she notes, "That was 15 years ago. Hyatt Regency Maui was the first hotel in Hawaii to achieve LEED certification, and since then, 25 more hotels have followed suit." This transformative journey at Hyatt Regency Maui was a pivotal moment for Loh, shaping her commitment to sustainability and leading her to co-found [Travaras](#), a regenerative travel startup dedicated to advancing sustainable practices in the hospitality industry.

As this new concept emerges, new language follows. A term like "sustainable" has become ubiquitous and runs the path of everything "organic." "Regenerative" has occasionally been used to describe sustainable practices interchangeably. Regenerative travel, a concept with roots predating its formal definition, asks to consider its unique characteristics compared to sustainable travel. But do they overlap? What distinguishes regenerative travel from sustainable travel?

Co-founder of the travel platform aptly named [Regenerative Travel](#), Amanda Ho, defines it in its most simplistic form. "It's a type of travel that is an act of restoring, replenishing and renewing the environment and community. It's a reciprocity of how the destination and hotel provider really looks to actually contribute to a positive impact. It's the restoration of the bond that we have with communities and nature."

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Amanda Ho, co-founder of the travel platform, Regenerative Travel, visiting one of her recommended ... [+] REGENERATIVE TRAVEL

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O'Shannon Burns, Program Manager of [Cornell University's Sustainable Tourism Asset Management Program](#), explains that regeneration in its nature is an aspirational concept. "If you are truly trying to embody regeneration, you're constantly striving to add further value."

Another seasoned voice in the conversation is Sarah Dusek, one half of the award winning team of travel innovators with her partner, Jacob Dusek. Having founded and sold the largest and leading glamping company in the US, Under Canvas, for over \$100M, she and Jacob have launched a new venture, [Few & Far](#), an elevated, ultra luxury safari camp and outdoor hospitality experience with sustainability and regeneration as its core values. She offers another lens to the verbiage question.

"A lot of people still don't really understand what regenerative travel actually means – it's a buzz word that doesn't resonate. Let's use a different language that helps people connect with the concept, for example, 'Travel that gives back', 'Travel that invests in the environment and local communities', 'Travel that makes a difference.' "

While the general principles of sustainable and regenerative travel both aim to minimize the negative impact of tourism and promote positive outcomes for the environment, local communities, and emphasize the importance of conservation, resource management, and community engagement, the key difference lies in their approach and scope. Sustainable travel focuses on maintaining the status quo and ensuring that tourism activities do not deplete resources or harm ecosystems.

Regenerative travel goes a step further by actively seeking to restore and regenerate the environment, cultures, and communities impacted by tourism. Regenerative travel aims to leave a destination better than it was found, promoting biodiversity, supporting local economies, and fostering cultural exchange and understanding.



Ha Long Bay, a Vietnamese archipelago designated as a UNESCO World Heritage site.

JOHN BARBOUR

Regenerative travel is a relatively new concept within the travel industry and occupies a small but growing portion of the market.

While sustainable travel has been more widely adopted and integrated into various aspects of the hospitality and travel industry, regenerative travel is gaining momentum as travelers and businesses become more aware of the need to go beyond sustainability. Regenerative travel also satisfies requests from travelers seeking more immersive and authentic experiences in remote and lightly visited locations.

Legislation has been introduced to assist in moving the agenda forward and is shaping the future of regenerative travel. Notable initiatives such as the Glasgow Declaration on Climate Action in Tourism is one global action leading the way. Conceived and signed during COP 26, the 2021 United Nations Climate Change Conference in Glasgow, this declaration commits signees and stakeholders to ambitious goals. One such goal is the commitment to halving emissions by 2030 and achieving net-zero emissions by 2050. To achieve these targets, the declaration outlines five key guidelines among the signatories: measuring, decarbonizing, regenerating, collaborating, and financing. It signals a significant shift in the industry's approach, emphasizing not just sustainability but active regeneration of the environment and communities affected by tourism.

In Hawaii, where legislation now mandates LEED certification for new buildings and offers grants to support regenerative tourism initiatives, the commitment to sustainable practices is clear. This proactive approach not only benefits the environment but also creates opportunities for innovation and entrepreneurship in the tourism industry.

An analogy from Lisa Hennessey, Co-Founder and Chief Brand Officer of Travaras, of the travel impact scale resonates strongly, highlighting the importance of moving beyond sustainability towards regenerative practices.



“Regular travel,” Hennessy explains, “is measured as a ‘Minus,’ as it often involves taking from the place and its people, leaving it worse off than before. Sustainability, on the other hand, is represented as a ‘Zero,’ where travelers aim to leave the place as they found it, without further harm. Regenerative travel, however, is the ultimate goal, measured as a ‘Plus,’ where the traveler leaves the destination better than they found it, actively contributing to its regeneration and well-being.”

Where once traveling sustainably offered visions of eco-lodges and bare minimum accommodations, companies are now redesigning thoughtful and curated experiences for travelers wanting to leave no footprints. As travel season approaches, the global leaders interviewed here recommend a few compelling destinations to consider for a transformative regenerative travel experience.



Songsaa Private Island and Resort in the Cambodian Archipelago. SONGSAA

[Songsaa](#) - After a glorious two week holiday at the Cambodian archipelago, Founder and CEO, Melita Koulmandas, discovered a small island completely covered in trash and a dying ecosystem. She decided to stay and committed to revitalizing the area. With the collaboration of the local community, the area became Cambodia’s first ever marine protected area within 18 months. The marine zone eventually grew into a National Marine Park.

Koulmandas opened Songsaa in 2012 as a living initiative furthering the continuation of revitalizing the archipelago.



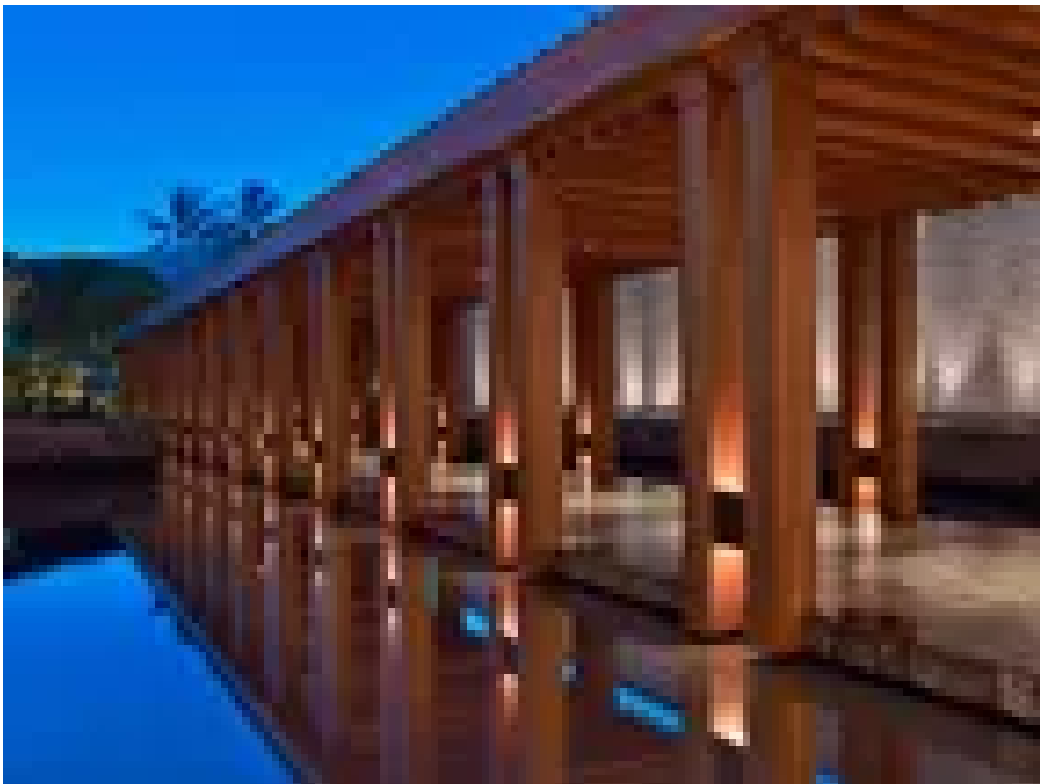
White Deer San Lorenzo Lodge in the Dolomites, Italy, a self sustaining lodge where guests stay for ... [+] © GIOVANNI DE SANDRE

[Winter in the Dolomites](#) - A winter ski trip in the Italian Alps with luxury accommodations at a self sustaining European [wooden chalet](#) based at the foothills of the Dolomites. Bookended with two days in Venice, the experience offers meals from local growers, natural spring water, and breathtaking views from the slopes.



Carbon Neutral Safari in the heart of the Maasai Mara. BRIAN SIAMBI

[Emboo](#) - A luxury, [carbon neutral safari](#) at the center of Maasai Mara, with leaving no trace at the heart of its ethos. Some initiatives detail usages of completely solar powered tents, a fleet of electric jeeps for transportation, 100% recycled water, food from local gardens, and zero chemicals in cleaning products. And the thrill of watching safari animals up close.



The Arrival Bridge at Andaz Maui ANDAZ MAUI - WAILEA

[Andaz Maui at Wailea](#) - A recycled, Leed Certified Silver, 5 Star hotel offering energy saving efficiencies with the use of solar for the hot water system and a rooftop solar panel, waste reduction, glassware made from recycled wine bottles, free bicycles for guests and EV charging stations on the property.



Coral Reef Safari at Pemba Island off the coast of Tanzania. JESPER ANHEDE

[Manta Pemba Island](#) - A remote island off the coast of Tanzania, the 5 star luxury resort hosts stunning ocean and garden rooms along with a free floating structure with an underwater room. The crown jewel is the exclusive 2-person Coral Reef Safari complete with personal guide and a 3 hour tour of the coral reefs below the island. All proceeds support their partner foundation, [Kwanini Foundation](#), to continue conservation and preservation efforts.



A personalized glamping experience against the backdrop of the Grand Tetons in Wyoming. WILD PRODUCTIONS

[Grand Teton Luxury Tented Camp](#)- A luxury customized experience immersed in the setting of the iconic picturesque peaks of the Grand Teton National Park. With a leave no trace ethos, travelers sleep in a custom built safari style tent situated on a local ranch, which is packed up when finished, eat local foods, and use solar powered energy.

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For more information on regenerative travel, O'Shannon Burns recommends two additional travel platforms: [The Long Run](#) and [El Camino](#). She and Amando Ho are offering a certification on this subject through the [Regenerative Travel](#) platform.



Jennifer Lee

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Trevor M

26 April, 2024

Thoughtful, and informative information throughout. However, in the Emboo piece, that is clearly an electric-converted Toyota Land Cruiser. Please don't use "jeeps" to refer to off-road vehicles. Land Cruisers have an elevated status as reliable and prolific off-roaders in many countries (look a...

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