

# Eco-Evolution

How one of the largest industries on earth is shaping the future of responsible travel.

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**W**HAT STARTED IN the early 1990s as ecotourism – responsible travel to areas that protect nature and sustain the well-being of local people – has given rise to one of the most significant transformations in the history of modern travel: the emergence of sustainable tourism. Call it the new green standard. While ecotourism focuses on jungle lodges and adventure outposts in the far-flung corners of the globe, sustainable tourism is taking the same principles and practices of being environmentally friendly and supporting the protection of cultural and natural heritage and moving them into the tourism mainstream – from urban hotels to cruise ships and even into the air (last year, Virgin Atlantic was the first airline to use biofuel). Even golf resorts are redefining themselves by going green – witness the K Club’s collaboration in Ireland with the Europe-based Golf Environment Organization to promote environmental responsibility and sustainability in golf.

We are living in a new age of travel, with more destinations opening up to visitors in even the most remote corners of the planet, and more ways to get there, than ever before. With that freedom comes a new



The new green standard: sustainable global tourism.

responsibility, as travel emerges as one of the largest industries on earth: In 2008, it accounted for 1 in every 12 jobs worldwide, according to the World Travel & Tourism Council. And sustainable tourism is now at the forefront of a movement helping that industry play a key role

in safeguarding culture, protecting the environment, and supporting local communities – the very things that often inspire us to go on holiday. After all, no one ever said a place was spoiled because there were not enough billboards dominating the landscape, the beaches were

too clean, and the towns and villages lacked fast-food chains.

More than ever before, our individual choices will make a difference in helping to usher in this new world of travel, where enjoying a place is matched by our ability to give something positive back. When we travel with companies that are helping to address climate change, protect nature, and promote cultural authenticity, we are also investing in our own rewarding travel experiences now and for future generations.

## Old Europe Got It Right

After three decades of traveling on the continent of my ancestors, it is clear to me that Old Europe had it right from the start – cobblestoned streets with a butcher on every block; open-air markets in every village; a garden in each yard; and cafés, pubs, and restaurants that are no two alike. In that sense, sustainable tourism is really about going back to the future. The European Union was among the first governmental bodies to make sustainable tourism a priority. And in Barcelona last October, the world’s first Global Sustainable Tourism Criteria were announced, a set of standards to help guide travelers in their desire to go green in the same way that Michelin stars do for those seeking culinary

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## GO GREEN

excellence. Within the next few years, expect the rollout of an internationally recognized rating system based upon sustainable principles and practices – a new vision for tourism in which being eco-friendly is also a sign of quality and great service. Meanwhile, to help you plan your next trip across the Atlantic, here is a sampling of tour companies, hotels, and destinations that are already transforming travel for a greener generation.

### Mission: Carbon Neutrality

With 342 different trips to nearly every country on the European continent, **Trafalgar Tours**' high-end motor coach tours have one of the lowest carbon emission rates per passenger compared to air, car, and rail travel. So you'll be doing the planet a favor when you travel with the company by limiting your impact on global warming. (And if you've ever questioned whether a motor coach holiday can deliver first-class service, know that Trafalgar has perfected it, beginning with its fleet of Mercedes luxury coaches.) Among the company's top green initiatives? It collaborates with Sustainable Travel International to offer clients the option to offset the remaining CO<sub>2</sub>, thus making their trip completely carbon neutral: a goal scientists have been calling on the travel industry to achieve as a way to address global warming. Last year, Trafalgar helped launch The Leading Travel Companies Conservation Foundation, which contributes \$1 million per year to support cultural and natural heritage preservation worldwide, including archeological restoration work in Venice and protection of Brazil's Atlantic Forest, a biodiversity hot spot. And everything at Trafalgar's headquarters is recycled, from paper to mobile phones, including biodegradable utensils made from potato starch. "Potato starch gives us the same thing from nature, only it is here today and gone tomorrow from the environment," says managing director Brett Tollman. "That is what we are aiming for."

### Sustainability Sets Sail

A European holiday circumnavigating the Black Sea on a luxury expedition cruise? Check. "Leave no trace" practices? Check. Helping save some of the rarest birds on earth and support preservation of traditional arts? Check again. Leading the cruise



Saving the cork forests in Portugal.

industry's green efforts, **Zegrahm Expeditions** brings sustainable tourism principles into one of the biggest cruise destinations in the world: Europe. Recycling, along with using Forest Stewardship Council paper in brochures and onboard, is second nature to Zegrahm, which helped pioneer ecotravel

We are living in a new age of travel, and with that freedom comes a new responsibility.

on the high seas back in 1990. In Europe, the company does it while visiting traditional villages, medieval cities, and quiet corners of pristine nature, accompanied by scientists, anthropologists, and archeologists who share their knowledge along the way.

### Green Leader

Fairmont was the first major hotel group in the world to launch a companywide environmental initiative: Consider the now-familiar option to wash your towels and linens every other day to help save water and



On the horizon: innovative green efforts in the cruise industry.

limit pollution. At **Fairmont St Andrews** in Scotland – the birthplace of golf – Fairmont's trademark environmental and community benefit programs further the company's green tradition. When guest room linens, furniture, and clothing need to be replaced (according to Fairmont's standards), they're not thrown away; instead, they're donated to community groups and charities. "During 2008 alone, more than 19 tons of materials were recycled," says Fairmont's Lori Holland. Ninety-five percent of the 209-room hotel is retrofitted with energy-saving lights, rainwater is captured in underground tanks, and did we mention that the hotel shuttle bus is fueled with kitchen grease from its fine-dining restaurant?

### Old-World Renewal

At a time when veteran European travelers bemoan the erosion of the Old World's

charm by generic hotel brands, Portugal has tacked in a different direction. The country has created a system of heritage properties to restore crumbling historical sites, including **Convento do Espinheiro, Heritage Hotel & Spa**, an abandoned fifteenth-century convent brought back to life as a 92-room luxury retreat outside the hilltop town of Evora, classified by UNESCO as a World Heritage City. In one of the boldest decisions of any Mediterranean country yet, Portugal is ripping down high-rise beach condos and resorts lining the coast on the Tróia Peninsula 30 miles south of Lisbon and replacing them with smaller, low-rise green hotels. And in Alentejo, a region of old vineyards and rolling countryside – think Tuscany and Provence before the crowds – rather than build hotels where old cork plantations now stand, officials have made the decision to sustain the cork forests, one of the last areas where the rare Iberian lynx roams. So when you uncork a bottle of wine on your next trip to Portugal, you are helping to protect wildlife and preserve the heritage of small rural farmers. VI

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