

The importance of travel in 2019: How local experiences ensure sustainability

 By Jenna Berndt

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Authentic, local experiences and travelling sustainably may be the travel buzzwords for 2019, but ten years ago, they were much rarer.



Image source: [Gallo/Getty](#)

In 2009, Trafalgar pioneered one of the first immersive, local experiences and sustainability initiatives that would change the guided travel industry. Their now-famous 'Be my Guest' excursions, and Trafalgar's Treadright Foundation, are both celebrating their 10-year anniversaries.

South-Africa born and Geneva-based Gavin Tollman, Global CEO of Trafalgar, shares his love of travel and what he's most excited about for its future in 2019:

Gavin, how did you land up in the travel industry?

My family's love of travel began 100 years ago. Our story began in 1920 when my grandfather, Solomon Tollman, purchased a small hotel in Paternoster. The Paternoster Hotel still exists today and since then, it's been an extraordinary journey. I am the third generation of the Tollman family to work for the family business.

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Travel is my world. One of my greatest joys is to chat with our Trafalgar guests and I love to jump on a tour for a few hours or days to meet our guests.

In your long travel career, what have been some of the highlights?

In my 30 year career, one of the undeniable highlights was when I welcomed the first Trafalgar trip to Africa in 2018. Guests came from Canada and Singapore to discover our incredible country on our inaugural trip. We were sitting in the wonderful, glass-fronted restaurant at the 15 on Orange Hotel in Cape Town and as we sat there, this cloud slowly came

wafting over Table Mountain. Only two out of our 26 guests had ever been to Africa before. For them, as well as me, this wonderful moment we shared and emotion, we felt, will never fade.

Trafalgar's iconic local experience, the Be My Guest experience, celebrates its ten-year anniversary this year. How did it develop?

Each destination has its tourist icons. And while you certainly should see those, today's traveller wants to see much more.

Trafalgar's journey into crafting immersive, local experiences began ten years ago on the very first Be my Guest experience. On the Esposito sisters' lemon farm in Sorrento, Italy, guests were welcomed into the sisters' home to learn, laugh and share over Mamma Esposito's pasta al Pomodoro and homegrown limoncello. The experience quickly became one of the trip highlights; guests raved about it and bought bottles of the home-made limoncello to take home.

For 2019's travellers, the best part of travel is going to be this opportunity to go behind the scenes to discover the hidden gems that only the locals know about. From Beatrice in the Loire Valley who is incredibly passionate about goats cheese to meeting the fifth-generation Øvre-Eide family on their livestock farm in Norway, the opportunity to immerse yourself in the flavours and culture of the locals will be key.



Gavin Tollman

You're passionate about sustainability. What is the role of local experiences in ensuring sustainability?

One of the things I'm most excited about for travel is sustainability. As I look at the world as it exists today, tourism can, and needs to, play a far more direct role in economic and cultural sustainability. It's not just about being green either.



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So many people talk about the impact of overtourism but I see it differently. We can see travel as a force for good and change the communities we visit.

An example is Marta Cucchia, a fourth-generation hand-weaver of traditional Italian textiles. She was four days away from shutting down her business when we called her and asked if we could bring guests to see her work. Today, her Laboratorio Giuditta Brozzetti business in Perugia is one of the last remaining textile workshops in Italy. Giving travellers the chance to meet her as one of Trafalgar's Dive into Culture experiences has transformed her business, and helped sustain this important tradition.

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Ensuring cultural sustainability is vital. Whether it's supporting vulnerable children at the Shangilia Children's Home in Nairobi to having lunch at KOTO restaurant in Ho Chi Minh City, a non-profit initiative that trains disadvantaged young people in the hospitality industry, travellers need to understand the importance of what they're doing. And that's making travel matter.

We are also working together with The Treadright Foundation to ensure that all TTC's 30+ offices around the world are avoidable single-use plastic-free by 2022. We also plant one tree for every guest that opts to receive their e-Docs over printed ones. Together, we have planted more than 20,000 trees to date.

You grew up in South Africa. What role does Africa play?

Bringing the world to Africa has been 72 years in the making. We've finally come home. Our Trafalgar Africa itineraries, launched last year, have been very popular. Cape Town's water crisis did bring its challenges, but we can now look forward to 2019 and we're very excited to bring more guests to the Mother City and South Africa.

I'm also very excited about the re-emerging market in Egypt. We have seen huge interest in the destination and it's truly one of the most exceptional places in the world. However exceptionally grandiose you imagine standing in front of the pyramids to be, it will transform you. It will transform your perception of history and culture. And that's the joy of travel.

Parting thoughts?

There is much to be excited about for the future of travel in 2019. The journey is no longer the most exciting part of one's travels. It's the discovering, the touching, the seeing, the eating – that allows you to discover beautiful places around the world.

Sustainability and local experiences are deeply intertwined in this and that's what I'm most excited to see the travel industry – and travellers – focus on this year. Making our travel matter.

ABOUT JENNA BERNDT

With a curious mind and a love for travel and tourism, Jenna Berndt has over nine years' marketing experience in the travel industry. She is currently a brand owner for leisure travel brands at Big Ambitions, a specialist Cape Town-based travel content marketing consultancy.

Jenna has a journalism degree specialising in graphic design, a keen eye for visual and written communication and is focused on achieving brand goals through content creation and PR, marketing strategy, SEO copywriting and social media.

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