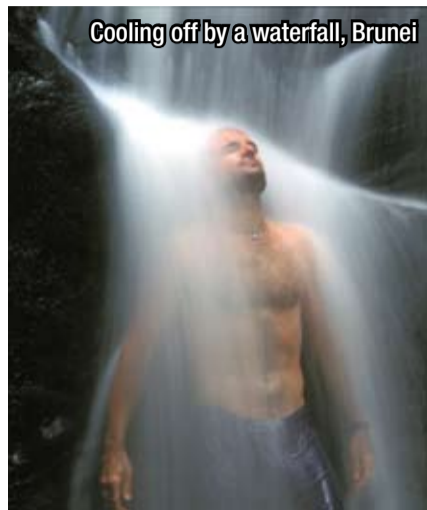


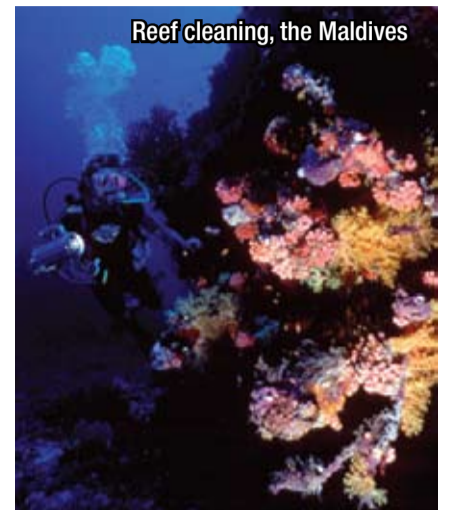
# Purpose-driven travel



Proboscis monkey, Brunei



Cooling off by a waterfall, Brunei

Tourists boarding *temuai*, Brunei

Reef cleaning, the Maldives

## Viewpoint

Adventure and eco-travel are thriving from new travellers' lust for more meaning in their trips, say operators



"It is definitely the well-heeled elites as opposed to young travellers who make up the bulk of adventure, cultural and wildlife trips due to the

factors of time and disposable income.

Frequently, these clients are able to 'rough it out' in exchange for authentic cultural experiences. They could be spending nights in the top hotels at the beginning and end of their stay, but camp in the wilderness in between.

(As a result), there are increasingly luxurious options for the adventure traveller, from the various ultra-luxury lodges and private camps in remote parts of Africa, to the luxury mobile tents offered by my company in the Serengeti, the Empty Quarters in Oman and the remote temples of Cambodia.

There is a desire to go to even more exotic destinations and pursue more esoteric activities among the adventure travel set."

**Hajar Ali**  
Founder  
Urbane Nomads  
Singapore

"Adventure and green tourism is not just a tour, but a life experience now. Travellers are seeking programmes that include four elements:

- Protecting the culture: Travellers are involved in the daily life of the people. They even wear *sarongs* like the locals.
- Protecting nature: They participate in coral recultivation and receive a certificate. Their names are written there, and they return with their families to visit the corals later on.
- Local people empowerment: In Tangkahan, North Sumatra, for example, we train locals who used to be porters to become cooks, and then local guides.
- Supporting nature, environment, cultural conservation: We work together with NGOs and share our profits with foundations such as the Orang Utan Foundation.

Travellers also appreciate and are proud to be able to help the community. For example, they paint schools, stay in orphanage homes and participate in their daily lives and share their knowledge with the local community."

**Ridwan Tulus**  
Director  
Sumatra and Beyond  
Indonesia



"The 18- to 35-year-olds today identify themselves further with travel companies that promote responsible travel.

The rise in demand for adventure and ecotourism is due to new awareness and interest in nature, culture and the environment. Another factor is growing affluence and travel experience, which makes the younger set demand trips that would enrich them at the end of the day.

More young adults are choosing itineraries in Europe and New Zealand that get their knuckles white – white-water rafting in Austria, or lazy bike rides across countrysides. Beyond the adventure, we promote responsible travel in our product range, for example, patronising shops and restaurants that give back to local societies and cultures.

Our travellers are happy with how we incorporate the green element into all our trips. They know where the Contiki brand stands in terms of social responsibility and this credibility goes a long way."

**Nicholas Lim**  
Director of sales and marketing (Asia)  
Contiki Holidays  
Singapore

"In honesty, ecotourism is not the focus of our journeys. Of course, we try to be environmentally-responsible – leave no garbage behind, stop using old, polluting SUVs, etc – but that's just common sense and a sense of responsibility.

China offers little innovative or off-the-beaten-path tourism. But we believe more visitors will want to see more than just the main tourist spots in China. Given China's relatively underdeveloped tourism infrastructure, going off the beaten path means having a degree of adventure, which means accepting that not everything will always go according to plan and that hotels, restaurants, roads and services don't always correspond to international standards. In return, however, customers will experience the thrill and excitement of seeing a different – mostly beautiful, occasionally disturbing – side of China.

Many destinations around the world attract customers with "adventure". China, especially its gorgeous south-west (Yunnan, Tibet, Sichuan, Qinghai, Guizhou, etc.) will do so too. Our self-drive holidays are a wonderful way to experience soft adventure in China."

**Peter Schindler**  
Managing director  
On the Road in China

## Case study

How Buffalo Tours' founder builds the business by taking to heart community reinvestment

**WHO** Buffalo Tours, an adventure travel operator and DMC specialising in Thailand and Indochina that champions local empowerment and sustainable development

**WHAT** Community reinvestment

**ACTION** Founder Tran Trong Kien built the business by paying particular attention to ecological, socio-historical and micro-economic issues.

Most staff are local to ensure wages are reinvested in the local economies, while local guides ensure a more authentic travel experience for clients. The company was also instrumental in opening the Mai Chau region, south-west of Ha-



Grand Palace, Thailand

noi, to sustainable tourism. It worked to build the confidence of local villages and authorities to ensure basic infrastructure development was conducted in close collaboration with the affected communities, a project that has since inspired another in a region near the Chinese border.

The agency also pioneered volunteer tourism in Vietnam for short- and long-term placements for individuals and groups to undertake construction work, medical or nursery tasks, environmental activities and teaching for local communities. Projects selected must be transparent, have the support of the community but should not be supported by NGOs or other travel agents to ensure there is no duplication. Its social projects include a water buffalo fund to replace lost buffalos as the animals are crucial to communities, medical treks to Vietnam's ethnic minorities in remote regions and a fledgling foundation that receives 10 per cent of the company's annual profits and manages volunteers' payments and donations for health, edu-

cation, environment and poverty eradication programmes.

**RESULTS** By immersing itself in the local community, Buffalo Tours succeeded in opening Mai Chau to sustainable tourism and ensured its growth – since its 1994 founding, the company has grown to 95 fulltime staff and about 120 part-time guides, all mostly local, and attracted 25,000 customers resulting in a 35 per cent increase in revenue. With selection and monitoring crucial to ensure volunteer projects deliver on expectations, the company plans to finetune the evaluation system to ensure mutually beneficial experiences for both the local communities and the volunteers. – Source: PATA