



UNLEARN

THE YEAR THE EARTH STOOD STILL

AN INSTABOOK ABOUT TRAVEL AFTER THE PANDEMIC

BRUCE POON TIP

Founder, G ADVENTURES

CONTENTS

Introduction.....	2
Nobody told me there'd be days like these	3
Something's happening here.....	4
Travel-less-ness	6
Getting back to free	8
The other side	10
Underneath.....	11
We've got to do better than sustainable.....	12
Don't travel less; travel better	14
Go beyond.....	16
Spread the love	17
Do luxury different	19
Cruise control	20
Homestays	22
The Year the Earth Stood Still.....	23

INTRODUCTION

We've all received messages from every company we've ever made an online purchase from telling us how they're handling this coronavirus situation. It's starting to read like a walk of shame, companies parading through our online history from the purveyor of every skincare or cosmetic product, shoes, or quirky t-shirt we bought on Instagram.

People were asking me to put out a public statement about the situation, too. Three times I started to write something, and each time, the points were irrelevant before I got finished because these days every day seems like a month. And I was starting to sound like every footwear company and provider of fine salamis that had sent me their important message: "We'll be stronger," "We thank our community..."

I knew I needed to take the time to write something meaningful, because my thoughts were changing by the minute. I needed to take some time to harness them, to consider this moment, consider how we travel and why, consider that the World Bank just announced that for the first time since 1998, global poverty rates will rise this year, pushing half a billion people into destitution in places many of us have visited, and more of us should be visiting.

Even in the best of times, it's rare I get the chance to collect my thoughts in relative tranquility. And this is not the best of times.

There is no question travel has changed, that it won't be the same on the other side of these days of global isolation. The question is: What will it look like on the other side? I think there is a fine line between hope and hard reality. I think there is also a difference between what I would like to see and what might actually be possible. We have a chance to reset everything. This is what this instabook is about. It's about you, me, and every traveller in the global community having the chance to rethink, restart, and rejuvenate the idea of what travel should be and could be. This is about the potential for travel to be anything we want it to be on the other side.

NOBODY TOLD ME THERE'D BE DAYS LIKE THESE

I'm writing to you from the middle of a very awkward, tenuous time.

Everything's changed. No more meetings, no more restaurants, and with all this scrubbing, our hands look 10 years older than they did last month. Hopefully, once this is all over, most of these things will go back to the way they were.

But I wonder about travel. Travel's what got this thing going, right? Someone flew from Wuhan Tianhe Airport and landed at Suvarnabhumi in Bangkok, someone else got out at SeaTac, and a local virus became a pandemic. Will there have to be a reckoning? Will travel have to pay for what it did?

I was worried when I started to hear people online saying we were all going to have to start reining in our travel habits after this. Blaming a freedom for one of its side effects seems wrong-headed and knee-jerk, like blaming the internet for the bad things that sometimes happen as a result of it. We regulate the internet and try to stop bad things from happening on it, but we have been pretty conscientious about not letting that stop the free flow of information. I think we should take the same approach to the free flow of people once this is over.

I don't want to talk about the infrastructural hows. I'll leave that to the ministers and the regulators. But I do want to discuss the whys (and we'll get to some of the hows we travellers have control over later, too). I've been collecting whys and thinking about them over 30 years of planes, trains, and tuk tuks.

I love travel. It's my business too, but beyond my own financial concerns, I think travel is important. Travel is a privilege, but it's also a kind of freedom. Sure, it used to be reserved for the privileged few, but according to the UN, more than 1.2 billion leisure trips to international destinations are taken every year and before the pandemic hit, it had been expected to hit 2 billion by 2030. Travel has become so efficient and inexpensive that people who'd never have flown thousands of kilometres for a vacation a generation ago now barely think twice about it. And before the coronavirus, it was getting cheaper still with new classes of hotels, the online accommodation marketplace, and discount airlines driving everyone's prices down. It was a new freedom for many, but it had taken quick hold, as freedom always does.

So while I'm huddled up in my house, working at trying to keep my business together in the most challenging of circumstances, I'd like to try to put all those thoughts together into an argument for travel in a post-pandemic world. What will it look like? What should it look like? What are the opportunities we've got to change how we travel for the better? I think travel could be the thing that helps us – and the world – recover from all this. I've been accused of being a dreamer but I believe our fastest path to peace is through travel. I know that sounds big. I truly believe it though. If more people understood how other people live and how other cultures endured centuries of evolution just like us, it would give us all a much greater appreciation and understanding of where we come from, where we are going, and who we are.

SOMETHING'S HAPPENING HERE

I was in Cape Town when I got my first hint of what was coming. As I scrambled through the airport on arrival, I was pulled over for having a temperature by one of those guys with a thermometer gun that he had pointed at my forehead. I was feeling fine when I got on the plane, but I started feeling not so great somewhere over the Atlantic. By the time we landed, I was feeling really crappy and, apparently, had a fever. He asked me if I'd been to Asia in the past month and partly because I had a fever, partly because my travel schedule is nuts, I couldn't give him an immediate answer. I started filing back through my last few months which seemed like a week to me but in that time I'm sure I covered over 100,000 miles. I guess I seemed like I was stalling, or trying to come up with a lie. He pulled me over and asked me for my passport, a dog's breakfast of overlapping stamps and stickers, and we worked it out together. I had not been to Asia in the last three weeks. I hadn't actually been to Asia in the last 10 months. What was I thinking? I didn't know, I'd never been pulled over like this before. But I wasn't really concerned. I just wanted to get to my hotel and shower and sleep, which I did, and didn't think too much more about it.

By the time I got back home a few days later – yes I went to Cape Town for two days – people were starting to cancel things; but just the really big things, like international conferences. I thought it was overkill – this was the beginning of March – but the ones I was booked to speak at in Sydney and Auckland were still on. So on March 4, less than a week after getting back from South Africa, I got on a flight to Sydney.

I was there to speak at the International Women's Day conferences in both cities at the acclaimed "A Force for Good" conference.

While I was there, I had a packed media schedule with 12 print interviews, three radio shows, one TV show, and a few meetings off the side of the stage at the conferences with various digital media players. The first journalist I met only wanted to ask me questions about this virus. How was it going to affect the travel business? What were my plans to deal with it? Aussies can be, let's say idiosyncratic, especially when they're journalists. I answered the questions as best I could, mostly saying that I wasn't too concerned about it, that we were monitoring the situation. You know, the things you say when you haven't really thought about something. Because despite that thermometer gun, I really hadn't. Sure enough, as my schedule proceeded, each time we'd sit down, the first question would be about the virus. It was weird. Australia had five cases when I arrived; New Zealand had one. It didn't feel so much like I was missing something as like I was looking at one of those Dali paintings with the desertscapes and weird things scattered around. On the one hand, everything's sort of realistic and should be making sense. But why is that lady wrapped in telephones? And what are those giraffes doing there?

It was unsettling.

But you know what it really reminds me of now, that first hint in Cape Town, those questions increasing in force and volume? It reminds me of Thailand.

I was there in early January, 2004. Six months earlier, we had started a foundation we called Planeterra to raise money to do good things around the world. We hadn't figured out exactly what kind of things yet. And although we weren't thinking about disaster relief, when the tsunami happened on the day after Christmas I figured, how can we not?

When I got to Phuket and then on to Phi Phi islands just after it hit, two beautiful places that were dear to my heart, what had been some of the most beautiful resorts, towns, and beaches was now all splintered wood and

houses that looked like they'd been tossed across the shoreline in a game of jacks. And there were people, some wandering, some helping, some just sitting staring at the horizon, or their feet. I must have talked to dozens of people who were still trying to wrap their heads around what had happened. Everyone who had been there that day, whatever the rest of their story was, talked about the beach. Some had been there, some had just heard about it from those who had, or who'd seen it from a hilltop. That great, slow drawing back of the tide. At first, it had seemed normal. Then you saw shells you hadn't seen before, big ones, and coral, not the little bits and pieces you usually find on the beach, but shelves of the stuff, the kind that's still alive, and usually under a lot of water. Some people talked about the giggling they heard, the kids that had started running out to explore. Some talked about how eerie it was, the beach turned into a momentary desert, and how it took a second, or maybe three, for the first people to start walking quickly in the other direction. Then more. Then the sound started. Not the water coming back in; that was silent. But the calls, parents to their kids, wives to their husbands, friends, at first merely insistent, then panicked, then just screaming. People had mapped it out by now, a detailed taxonomy of a few seconds when no one had a clear idea of what was coming.

That's what this moment feels like to me. As I write this, things are getting bad in a lot of places. But in Toronto, though I'm still in quarantine after getting back from a family trip a little less than two weeks ago, it seems unreal, how quiet the street is out front of my house. How quiet everything is. It's already bad, but we have no idea yet how much worse things will get, how many will die, whether we caught it in time, or if it's already too late. We do know, though, that from now on, we – like the people in Phi Phi and Banda Aceh and Galle after the tsunami – will be thinking of things as having happened before the virus, and after the virus.

TRAVEL-LESS-NESS

These past couple of weeks, I've often felt like a crash test dummy. My whole adult life has been one big acceleration, always moving, faster and faster, airport to airport to home to airport to office to airport. And then, it all came to a crashing stop.

Over the past 30 years, I've averaged almost 200,000 miles a year. That's a lot of airports. I used to tell everyone who'd listen how much I hated business travel. It seemed like I lived in airports. The lines, the flat lighting, the overpriced and mostly terrible food, the rushing: Even if you were on time and in a lounge, it always felt like rushing. I used to play games with myself to see how late I could get to the airport and not miss my flight. I really thought I disliked it and that it was a necessary evil until it just stopped. I always thought I was in a constant search for stillness until it was forced upon me, mandated, necessary in the name of public health.

It was in those quiet moments, which I always yearned for (or so I thought), that I caught myself getting nostalgic about those airports, those places of perpetual motion.

I was at home at my desk after a Zoom call. As I left my office and headed down the hallway, I suddenly realized I missed the feeling of having one of those rollie bags behind me and heading to my next gate, my next flight, my next place. The freedom we all took for granted, given to us with our passports.

As I write this, I've been on the ground for a little less than two weeks after coming back from a long-planned family vacation to Barbados cut short right at the point when it was becoming clear travel was no longer going to be possible, and getting home was no longer a given. In itself, two weeks is not especially unusual for me, or at least not anomalous. I've been in the same place for that long before. But by the time you read this book, it'll be four weeks, maybe five. That is unusual. And I won't be in the air on week six either, or seven, or eight... I don't remember the last time I was on the ground that long. It would be over 30 years. I am not sure what to think of this. I feel like a grounded falcon built for speed with an injured wing!

That's the defining quality of being in the world right now. Whether you're in the Fraser Valley wondering whether Takeout Wednesday is a good idea (and why it wasn't Takeout Tuesday?) or the Sacred Valley on the road to Machu Picchu wondering when the tourists will come back and whether you should bother finishing weaving that scarf or just set it aside, not knowing when this will be over, when you'll have your old life back, is the global Zeitgeist.

I've said it before, and I'll say it again: We're born explorers. From the time we learn to crawl and can see what's behind the sofa under our own steam, everything in our lives is about exploring. Riding our bikes to the next neighbourhood over, going to summer camp, that first time we get behind the wheel of a car and can just drive anywhere. At every stage, our world expands and we can't imagine it any other way. That's why getting grounded is such an effective parental punishment. It shrinks our newly expanded adolescent world back to a size we thought we'd grown out of; a size that's suddenly intolerable.

Now I'm cooped up in my house, and it reminds me of the first time I tried to go to the South Pole.

It was 2010 and I flew down to Punta Arenas, the southernmost town in Chile. I was scheduled to take a Hercules plane out on a scientific trip to begin my trek to the South Pole. When I got down there, the entire southern part of the country broke out into riots and strikes over the price of fuel. It was their summer, our winter. There were clashes and tear gas in the streets of this very small town and we were trapped in our hotel for 11 days. We couldn't

leave. They barricaded all the hotels. They had put large trucks and machinery on the roads out to the airport so no one could leave.

Like now, I was stuck in fairly pleasant surroundings. An ex-prime minister of France was staying at our hotel at the same time, as was a son of one of the founders of Korean conglomerate LG. It was a nice hotel. The food was good, until it started running out. And even the time I managed to get through the barricades after making an arrangement with a local shop owner to open his store one night so I could buy some running shoes and a pair of shorts for the gym, drew a big line under our situation. It's not so much a visual memory I have of that time as it is the feeling of being trapped inside, that loss of freedom. We were trapped. It wasn't like jail, and I can't claim to have any insight into what prisoners go through, but it did convince me that those arguments you hear (mostly on certain U.S. news shows) about so-called luxury prisons where white-collar criminals go are nothing of the sort. Remember those members of the Saudi royal family who were imprisoned in the Riyadh Four Seasons between 2017 and 2019? Luxury isn't luxury when you can't leave. (One reason I don't like cruises or all-inclusive resorts.) And it's the part of this crisis that we share with the whole world right now.

We've still got it good here, relatively speaking. But I've employed people in over 100 countries, and in the first couple of weeks of this as we were trying to figure out how to weather the storm business-wise, I heard from people in Peru and Japan, Italy and Spain, and whether they were alone or with family, in a house, apartment, or cabaña, we were all stuck.

The gap between global North and global South may yet widen as supply chains get disrupted and favour the North, as they always do, and my colleagues may yet suffer in ways we may not here. I pray this is over before that happens. But those moments of connection across dozens of countries in the early days of the pandemic highlighted something I'd long thought, and sharpened it. If you've seen me speak in an interview or at a TED Talk, you'll have heard me say at some point that both my life and my business have been about the pursuit of freedom. It's a big part of my brand promise. I owe a lot of my success to creating freedom. Freedom and happiness are the two big cultural inflection points that G Adventures builds its corporate culture around, and it's always been an important part of my understanding of life. You'd also have heard me follow this up with some example of how good we've got it in this part of the world compared to some others, how we take our freedom for granted every day in the free world. Being stopped by a police officer and given a ticket is so frustrating and aggravating precisely because we feel impeded in ways we almost never are.

But those calls around the world a couple of weeks ago made me realize that, while all that was true in some ways, I wasn't seeing things as clearly as I might have, and that my observation was about as dated as the term "free world."

It's true that in, say, Rwanda people don't have the freedom of speech we do, or that in Kazakhstan, the press is only free as long as it doesn't oppose the government. But in one fundamental way, the whole world – except for women in Saudi Arabia, everyone in North Korea, and a few other dire but isolated exceptions – has been the free world for the last 30 years. It's no coincidence that it's been during those same 30 years that travel has blossomed, with the Russians and Chinese being at the front of the line.

Freedom of movement had become practically universal, and whether that meant moving from town to town or hemisphere to hemisphere, all of us had the freedom. And it's only now that we've lost it that I'm fully grasping how globally profound this loss is and how important it is that we all get it back. To quote Kris Kristofferson, via Janice Joplin, "Nothin' don't mean nothin' hon' if it ain't free."

GETTING BACK TO FREE

Though there would never have been a good time to lose our freedom to travel, the novel coronavirus appeared at an especially unfortunate juncture. The world as it stood at the beginning of March was starting to show cracks. We caught our first glimpse of it in 2015, when we saw that video of Petra László, a Hungarian camerawoman, tripping and kicking refugees as they fled police in Röszke. To most of us, it seemed just plain evil, an epically dick move. But it was not a coincidence that this happened in Hungary, where an increasingly nationalist government, and a population that supports it, have been making creeping, creepy moves not only against refugees, but Jews and gays, too. Then there was Trump's wall, the Polish anti-gay zones, and Brexit. It wasn't enough to be a global shift, but it was a trend away from the borderlessness that NAFTA, the European Union and the Asian equivalent, ASEAN, seemed to have heralded. We were stumbling away from free, rather than marching, which was encouraging. The number one search the day after the Brexit vote on Google, for instance, was "What's Brexit?" Brazil, Italy, the U.S. were all voting in these populist personalities that want to create division instead of unity, separate people based on views, religion, class, skin colour, or culture, well, let's just say it was darkly reminiscent of another age that I thought we'd left completely behind. But even as these things were happening, as I heard those speech soundbites and started to be uncertain as to whether some tweet or Instagram post I was seeing was reality or a meme, I was still hopeful, because one thing 2020 had that 1920 did not was mass travel.

Any look at old headlines from North American newspapers writing about what was happening in Spain or Germany when the roots of fascism were being planted in the 1920s will tell you just how important it is for masses of the population to be familiar with foreign places, for them to be able to see those places as no longer foreign. Germany would not have taken the rest of the world by surprise if instead of a few foreign correspondents with their own kinds of blinders on, a million middle class tourists had been walking along Friedrichstraße every month, and then come home to talk about what they saw. Imagine if six million tourists were streaming through Cambodia in the early 1970s, as they did in 2019. They might not have stopped the killing fields, but with the world's eye on them, the Khmer Rouge also might not have been so bold, and the money those tourists brought in might have blunted the population's support.

The world can't sneak up on you if you're there seeing it, feeling it, tasting it, talking about it. Sure, travellers may miss the occasional subtlety that living in a place can give you, but we get the big stuff. Picking up on subtleties makes you sophisticated, and you can start to get a hold of them after a week or two with the right local guides and introductions, but it's the big stuff that keeps the world in check, keeps it from splintering off into jagged little schisms. Travel is a great unifier. We've lost it at a bad time, but we're going to get it back, and when we do, we should realize just how important it can be, both for the visitors and the people and places they visit.

One thing has been clear from the moment I got back to the office from Australia and New Zealand and started hearing about all the trip cancellations: When we do get it back, whether that's in six weeks, six months, or longer, whether things get worse in Toronto, where I am, or whether we've successfully flattened the curve, with those 10,000 planes parked, 10 million hotel rooms empty, a billion and a half people who would have taken trips this year sitting at home and thinking it all over instead, travel may never be the same.

Now let me tell you why I think that's a good thing.

It has something to do with Joseph Schumpeter, the Austrian economist who came up with the term “creative destruction” in the 1940s to describe his theory that the way money moves evolves in much the same way that plants and animals do. He said mutation, caused by changes in the economic environment, “incessantly revolutionizes the economic structure from within, incessantly destroying the old one, incessantly creating a new one.” He called this “the essential fact about capitalism.”

Just as a meteorite or an ice age can hurry along evolutionary processes that may already have been underway, this virus, by destroying so much that underpinned the way we travel, is almost certainly going to get all Darwinian on travel.

THE OTHER SIDE

There were a lot of complicated opinions about travel developing in the years before the pandemic.

Greta Thunberg and a sympathetic chunk of Swedish society came up with the term *flygskam*, or flight shame, adding momentum to a global movement that was against both business and leisure air travel on account of its carbon emissions.

The home sharing economy was being condemned in Barcelona and New York for encouraging landlords to take otherwise affordable rental properties off the market to turn them into more profitable tourist accommodation.

Airlines were coming under increasing scrutiny for packing in ever more bums in seats, and seeming – especially in the U.S. – to care less and less about the comfort, safety, and dignity of its passengers. Remember when Dr. David Dao Duy Anh got dragged off that United flight because an airline employee wanted his seat? It seems like a hundred years ago now, but in 2017 when it happened, it was a symbol of all that was wrong with the industry.

The term overtourism had also just entered the mainstream, describing the situation in places like Venice and Amsterdam, southern Thailand, and Hawaii, where there are too many people in the same place at the same time. This is sometimes referred to as “loving places to death.” Those pictures of enormous cruise ships looming over 500-year-old Venetian palazzi were, for many, eloquent arguments against an industry, a cultural norm that had gotten out of control.

Though as head of the world’s largest small-group adventure travel company, I’m clearly supposed to be one of the villains in these scenarios, I agree that four out of five of them are absolutely right.

(And the fifth? Before the pandemic drove everything else out of our heads, Thunberg’s message was a powerful one, and it was building steam. Flights are a source of carbon emissions, and they do environmental damage. I disagree with the conclusions she draws from this fact, though, for reasons that would take another instabook to cover.)

I said that I thought we were born explorers, and I do, but the travel industry has made us into tourists, consumers of culture rather than contributors to it. We have become people who leave their ethics and even their manners at home, lumbering drunk and naked on Bali’s Kuta Beach Road, throwing bottles over the sides of catamarans in the Caribbean, spray painting ancient walls, and toppling even more ancient geological wonders. In so many ways, the travel industry does to travellers what the Tiger King did to tigers. It takes these noble creatures and packs them into tight spaces, feeds them off-label food, and makes them behave in whatever ways earn the most profit.

UNDERNEATH

The world is a big place and even those of us who travel a lot can get caught up in the differences, because those are the things that are most interesting when we visit places. We like eating food that's different, drinking drinks that are cool and weird for us, and marvelling at the different ways people do things, whether it's weaving or hospitality or pants. Some of my best memories are all about this sort of thing. Like the yak-butter tea you're served as a welcome drink in so many homes in Tibet, which is neither tea-like nor buttery, but more salty and chewy, with a taste that makes it a challenge to smile through. Or that the first thing I notice whenever I land at an airport in Italy is that six centuries of some of the best art the world has ever seen has given men the idea that wearing bright yellow and purple pants is socially acceptable. I've never seen anything like it anywhere else in the world, and I hope I never do. (Just say "no" to pastel pants!)

But whether we travel or not, we are often blinded to the similarities, the connections. We see pictures of kids in Sub-Saharan Africa and our immediate response is pity or sympathy because often the only time we see images of them are as part of the ad campaigns of big charitable organizations which, like travel, have the effect of emphasizing differences. If we saw those same kids sitting out front of their houses drinking a Fanta rather than in the streets seemingly alone, we'd be less likely to donate. This is not necessarily a bad thing, but the effect can be distancing. Likewise when we see pictures of villages in Nepal, we notice the charm and the majestic surroundings, not the people going to the store and fixing something quick for the kids for supper.

One of the greatest lessons I've learned from His Holiness the Dalai Lama is that we have to teach our own children – and ourselves – to be compassionate, not charitable. It's the difference between being active rather than passive, engaging with the world rather than trying to help from afar, committing to acts that change not only the person you're trying to help, but yourself as well. Travel, when you're doing it conscientiously and with the Dalai Lama's vital distinction in mind, can be an act of compassion.

We have these borders, these legal lines to separate countries, but when it comes to humanity, this pandemic has shown us in the most visceral way possible we're all connected. And not only by transmission. We are all in the same boat right now. As I said, divisions are opening up along the usual socio-economic lines, but as I write this, we're all worried, all wondering what's going to happen next, all washing our hands as much as we're able, all thinking about this submicroscopic infectious agent that doesn't care where we live, what we believe, or whether we live in Tom Hanks' luxury hotel suite or a house made out of leftover building materials in northeastern Santo Domingo. We are all connected by circumstance for the first time since humanity started spreading out from East Africa 70,000 years ago.

Unless we try very hard not to, we will all see the world differently on the other side of this, and my hope is that people will understand, or at least have more of an openness, to seeing other countries with new eyes, and cultivating a better understanding of the world in general. Maybe this will make the world seem smaller to people. That's my hope anyway. This travel pause we're taking now is our chance to hit reset. Here are a few ways I think we can do that.

WE'VE GOT TO DO BETTER THAN SUSTAINABLE

We have heard quite a bit about sustainable tourism, but the concept has become murky and confused.

In principle, sustainable tourism is tourism that does not use up the places it takes us. We have seen spectacular failures in recent years, like the beaches in Thailand and the Philippines being forcibly closed to give them a rest from the constant beating they take from millions of footfalls and water bottles and megalitres of sunblock. Barcelona's municipal government has taken its cues from the increasingly popular anti-tourist graffiti on the city's walls and passed anti-tourism by-laws to try to keep the crowds at bay.

But when the concept of sustainability expands to take in air, train, bus, and sea travel, it can seem that the words "sustainable" and "travel" are simply incompatible.

I profoundly disagree with this.

Which is why we've begun to use the term "community tourism." I've never related to the limited definitions of ecotourism, responsible, sustainable, green or ethical tourism, labels that can be confusing, overlapping, and constricting. As I sit here at home refreshing my screens with updates on policies and laws and case counts and poorly lit celebrity messages thinking about what I'm going to be doing on the other side of this, I'm convinced that term is the best way to express my ideas and hopes about what travel could and should look like in the post-corona era.

If you'll permit me, I'd like to quote something we've had up on the G Adventures website for a while now.

"We've always believed travel can help local communities. Indigenous peoples, women, youth – anyone who had traditionally been marginalized or undervalued. Because there's incredible power in being part of something bigger than yourself. Today, our definition of community tourism means that the communities we impact ripple far beyond our destinations. To us, it includes our employees, supplier and agent partners, small business owners, customers, social followers, and travellers just like you."

That was a pretty big community we were talking about. Unlike responsible or sustainable tourism, which tends to focus primarily or exclusively on the health of the destination, our notion of community travel has, for a long time, included ethical treatment of and trade relationships with employees, contractors, suppliers and partners all along the various business threads we operate. From the beginning, we've pioneered training local talent rather than bringing along guides from home and invested in homestay projects, which are not only an as-authentic-as-you-can-get travel experience, but one that ensures the money goes directly into the pockets of the families travellers meet.

It was a very big community indeed, but I believe it's bigger now.

As I write this, the high court in Malawi has just struck down that country's 21-day lockdown, not because they don't think they need it to stop the spread, but because too many people are too poor to be prevented from going out to make enough money to eat and pay for electricity, water, and basic housing.

Think about that a second.

Things are fragile enough in Malawi, a gorgeous country with one of the world's most beautiful lakes (it's where one of the world's most popular aquarium fish, cichlids, come from), lush forests, a fantastic history in the successful struggle for freedom that overthrew colonial lords and Apartheid *soldate* all along the coast from Nairobi to Pretoria. But it is so poor that, though they were prescient and organized enough to initiate social distancing, school closures, and ultimately lockdown before they had a single confirmed case, they have now been forced to overturn all those well laid plans because the threat of depriving people of their livelihoods for even three weeks exceeds the threat of this deadly virus.

Though there have been no similar court proceedings yet, the same thing is going on right now in Uganda, Rwanda, Eswatini, and a dozen or more other countries. Western Union kiosks in Zimbabwe have run out of cash, so even those lucky enough to have friends and relatives elsewhere able to send help can't get hold of any money. Sri Lanka's situation is just as desperate if you don't live in one of the old colonials *manses* and sparkly new condos in Cinnamon Gardens.

These places have three very specific things in common. One, the economies are brittle enough for many that large chunks of the population live not month to month, but day to day. Two, they're absolutely beautiful. And three, they get very little benefit from the multi-trillion-dollar travel industry, though for quite different reasons.

According to the World Bank, there will be a lot more people in a lot more places in that same situation after the virus has wiped out its trillions of dollars of global GDP. They say that Sub-Saharan Africa will experience its first recession in 25 years, that things in South Asia will be worse than they have been since the 1970s. And it will be precisely those people who have most recently been lifted out of poverty, beneficiaries of better education and more opportunities for women, who will be first and hardest hit. According to the United Nations, 210 million people made it out of poverty in India between 2006 and 2016, and since 2000 fully 10% of the population of Bangladesh crossed the line into economic viability, a lot of them women. In the Philippines and Mexico, two economies heavily reliant on remittances from friends and family members working abroad, often in the hospitality industries, things are expected to get real tough, real quick.

Let's look at all this, consider it as we consider our travel, and figure out what we can do about it when we get back on the move. Read on, but spoiler alert: It's more than you may think.

DON'T TRAVEL LESS; TRAVEL BETTER

There's a term the tourism industry uses that is every bit as ugly as it sounds: Leakage. It describes the process through which money we spend as travellers leaks out of the country into the hands of multinational corporations. It is usually expressed in percentages. For instance, a 2017 study found that four- and five-star hotels in Bali experienced 55.31% leakage. This means that when you spend \$202 for a night at the Fairmont Sanur Beach hotel, \$111.73 wings off to the various international suppliers and franchisors. The \$90.27 that remains put is divided by the franchise-holder, staff, local suppliers, taxes for the state to provide the infrastructure necessary for people to enjoy their stays, etc.

As terrible as 55.31% sounds, it's not that bad a number, globally speaking. I heard the Jamaican minister of tourism recently say that parts of India experience leakage of more than 100%, meaning communities have less after a tourist leaves than before they arrived. We've recently become familiar with the economics of negative oil prices, the idea that because of extraordinary circumstances, someone has to pay to sell something of value. That is playing havoc with the markets right now, but it will right itself before long. Leakage will take a lot more effort.

But it's worth it.

Chances are, if you're Canadian or American, that you've been to the Dominican Republic. Millions have. And as a result, billions of dollars go through Punta Cana or Puerto Plata. But according to World Bank figures, the median per capita income for a Dominican is \$8. Of course, the prices are all geared to the tourists, which means that \$8 is even less than it might be in Uganda or Sierra Leone. The result is poverty of the sort for which there's simply no excuse. They've got ample natural resources – their beaches, their weather – and yet entire neighbourhoods of Santo Domingo, a city the size of Seattle, are made of corrugated sheet metal and drywall. That's what leakage looks like.

The term "leakage" makes it sound natural; it is not. This is a planned economic effect, a specific business plan devised by resorts, cruise lines, and multinational chains of all sorts.

And leakage is just an economic term. It does not account for other kinds of loss, which we'll get to later.

If you take one thing away from my first instabook, I'd like it to be this: The tourism industry is not tourism.. We are tourism. The industry is just doing what our buying habits are telling them we want. Sure, they try to nudge us in directions that work better for them, but the whole \$8,000,000,000,000 (that's eight trillion) industry of airlines and cruise ships, hotels and resorts, trains, tour companies, and car rentals are all there to do our bidding. Which means if we want less leakage, there will be less leakage.

But I can hear the business-minded among you say that leakage is the way capitalism works. Big companies are big because they're good at what they do and, as they keep doing it, capital naturally collects in pools around the results of good ideas from Samuel Cunard, Howard Hughes, and Conrad Hilton.

These are my thoughts on travel in this dark and remarkable moment, not a piece of marketing for my company, but I'm in a unique position to refute this bit of economic fatalism. So if you'll permit me to break the tranquility of my recollections and pull out my trumpet for a moment, let me say that I built G Adventures from nothing into the biggest small-group adventure tour company in the world, profiting beyond any reasonable expectations, precisely

by plugging leaks wherever we went, training and hiring local guides, encouraging local businesses in between major attractions, bringing guests to restaurants staffed by people we helped transition from the street. This all cost us money, but it also made us money. Our business model is as close to the opposite of the cruise industry as you can get. We believed from early on that spreading the wealth, not concentrating it, was not only a good way to make money but also to create freedom – not just for us but for everyone who is part of our community. Together we do extraordinary things everyday. And now I can look back over 30 years and tell you definitively that there's another way. By employing local people rather than parachuted-in “experts,” by either staying at local hotels (modest or luxurious) or with families and paying them for the privilege, by buying your drink from the guy with the cart on the street instead of from the big chains, you can make sure that more of your travel dollars stay in the pockets of the people who make your trips so memorable. I built a nine-figure company on this very premise; believe me, you can put together a successful trip on the same principles and not only enjoy it more, but come back knowing you've made the world a better place, not a worse one.

In January, just four months ago as I write this, G published a thought-leadership piece in *Skift*, on something we've been calling the Ripple Effect. You should be reading *Skift* – there's lots of good stuff there for those interested in a bit of critical thinking which seems to be lacking in the travel industry these days – but in case you don't, let me quote the essence of the piece here:

“The Ripple Score evaluates the entire supply chain within a tourist's journey to determine if their money is being spent with majority local-owned or foreign-owned businesses within a destination. You get a one if local, or a zero score if it's non-local. Each of the expenditures within the tour – from accommodations to transportation and meals – are taken into account and are calculated to give a final score out of a hundred. The intention for the measuring system is to drive the tourism industry forward by quantifying the positive impact tourism can have on local communities in an open, transparent way that allows travelers to make more educated and informed decisions.”

I hope that one of the things we get from this generation-defining event is that we think more about people as individuals wherever we go and conduct ourselves accordingly. That means being as conscientious when we travel as we are at home, not only by reducing single-use plastic to help the turtles, but by travelling in ways that don't rip people off.

GO BEYOND

I don't think anyone's ever calculated the total amount lost to tourism leakage globally, but it's in the billions at least, the tens of billions probably, and very possibly in the hundreds of billions of dollars that are in shareholder portfolios instead of the pockets of servers and guides and small entrepreneurs. It's big but in a way, it's also relatively easy to fix. In the words of Deep Throat, just follow the money, and then choose wisely.

More difficult is what I call going beyond. You can experience the Caribbean in more communitarian ways, but you already wanted to go to the Caribbean, felt comfortable going to the Caribbean, and know other people who have been to the Caribbean. What about the places that are off your travel radar, the places you know from geography class, but haven't thought much about since? Places like Malawi, Comoros, Mozambique, Haiti. These are some of the most beautiful, culturally vibrant places in the world, and some of the least visited. They're also already some of the hardest hit by the coronavirus, suffering not so much from the virus itself – at least not yet – but by the privations its prevention has brought. There's not a lot of tourist infrastructure there; not many global hotel brands, few resorts.

But like I said, we are the ones that make tourism what it is. When I started running tours to Peru, there was very little going on outside the major hubs. But as we encouraged our more adventuresome travellers to visit, we started bringing in enough money to encourage businesses to open up along our routes, and sometimes we chose routes to follow that would take travellers to spots where they could both experience local culture and contribute to it by buying traditional crafts.

There's no reason this couldn't happen in places like Malawi. It was a hard sell in the pre-Covid world, but if we're paying attention, and I think most of us are right now, we realize that though we may not be able to send money or rice or pretty much anything over there now like we usually do when we feel sorry for a place, we can make a promise to them and to ourselves to book a trip once this is all over, to check in on our fellow corona survivors, sit down for a meal with them, talk about how it went for them, and share stories of how it went for us.

If you'd like a starter list for travel ideas you may not have considered, but that would be especially good to visit as soon as you're able, I'd suggest, in continental order:

Sub-Saharan Africa:

Eswatini, The Gambia, Malawi, Mozambique, Uganda

Asia:

Laos

Central Asia:

Uzbekistan, Turkmenistan

Europe:

Albania, Armenia, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Georgia, Serbia

Central America, South America and the Caribbean:

Bolivia, El Salvador, Haiti, Honduras

SPREAD THE LOVE

Some see the megalitres of oxybenzone and octinoxate coral poison in the sunblocks that sluice off our bodies on the popular beaches of the world as a slam dunk argument against tourism. Tourists are literally killing the oceans. And they are, but it's not because they're tourists. It's because they're all in the same place.

There are business reasons for this, things like efficiencies of scale. There's also notions about safety, that people want to go to places that have been tested, that they don't have to worry about. I call this the McDonald's theory. People don't go to McDonald's for the food, they go there because it's familiar and reliable, whether it's in Moscow, Buenos Aires, or Singapore. It never fails that when I am with a group in a remote place sometimes lacking the basic essentials, when we get back to the capital city there will be people who want to head straight to McDonald's. It's not so much that they love McDonald's, but that they have been so far out of their comfort zone they want to feel a return to normal.

There are some very big things behind why we travel where we do. Comfort is one of them. We like to see things we've always wanted to see. We like to see things our friends have seen. There's also prestige associated with going to certain places, though it tends to change from generation to generation and, in this faster social media age, from year to year ("Tulum is so 2018. Now it's all about Holbox"). The Caribbean is prestigious; St Barth's is more so. Europe is fancy; Monte Carlo is fancier. With the increasing success and sophistication of luxury hotel and resort chains, some people have begun choosing their destinations based on whether there is, say, an Aman resort there.

All these complex issues have been around as long as we've been mobile, Instagram just gave us an acronym for it. In much the same way that perfect is the enemy of good, FOMO is the enemy of travel. It's like a funnel, and we all end up sliding into the same places. Then there are all these systems of positive reinforcement in place to ensure we all want to go back. On one level, it's all about what the travel industry likes to call amenities. The more people go to a place, the more amenities that place has to cater to them, and the more amenities they have, the more people like going to that place. Then you find yourself on a vacation where the destination is irrelevant. Sure, your friends are going to love your posts about the shows, food, indoor ziplining, dolphin encounters, or indoor surfing, and on the surface, that can just seem nice. Amenities are nice. They're what make things comfortable, after all. Spas, room service, poolside lunches, different bars to choose from, different cuisines, shops that sell quaint local goods and high-end luxury products, people to drive you places who speak English. It's hard to argue against all that. Having the world tailored to your needs sounds nice, but it can be a bit of a monkey's paw.

I went on a safari in Kenya and Tanzania with a very wealthy group of friends and their families. We stayed at a very nice place with the kids, a Four Seasons. It was super luxurious, but I woke up in my 300-thread-count Dobby Sateen cotton sheets and looked out at the little infinity pool on my little terrace and a watering hole pitched perfectly west to catch every sundown where coincidentally a large herd of elephants come for water and a very spirited bath at the end of each day. It was beautiful. It was hard to not be stunned by moments like this, but after I finished my perfect cocktail, served by my perfect waiter, lounging on the perfectly situated veranda with the most intentionally rustic Italian lounge sofas and chairs, there was a point I realized this was like the stage version of *Joseph and the Amazing Technicolor Dreamcoat*. This was created for our viewing pleasure and those beautiful "wild" elephants are habituated. I suddenly felt that I was no longer in the place I'd travelled so long to get to. I mean, it was all lovely, don't get me wrong. But this hotel could have been in Singapore or Toronto or LA. To me, it diminishes the experience, it diminishes what motivated me to go to another country, the reason I wanted to travel in the first place, which was to be someplace else, see something different, experience something unique to

that specific place. I wanted to explore the wild frontier of the Serengeti but somehow I ended up in an episode of *Lifestyles of the Rich and Famous*, complete with a slightly more natural version of Barnum & Bailey circus.

What would happen if, in the wake of this virus, we started to see the world as a fragile place? I mean, we've known it is for a while now. Climate change is real, just like those dying coral reefs and all the plastic floating around the oceans. But maybe it'll take something like this, something even more personal, our own personal worlds falling apart, for it to really hit home. And what if, as a result, we decided to spread ourselves out a little, both to see parts of the world our friends, families, and Instagrammers have never seen, and to land where we land a little more lightly? That means not only going beyond the usual destinations (see above), but spreading ourselves out in the more popular ones as well. Do you want to see Paris? Of course you do, who doesn't? But do you have to be in the same room with the Mona Lisa, a painting you've known inside and out ever since she was the keeper of the Caramilk Secret? Take a walk on the Left Bank, sure, but then head into the outer arrondissements, where so much of 21st-century French culture is being made. You can still go to Italy, but maybe head up to Piemonte instead of Tuscany, skip Como and try Lecce. You get the idea.

DO LUXURY DIFFERENT

I don't want to leave you with the impression that just because I wasn't a big fan of that infinity pool and dog-and-pony show I saw in Tanzania that I don't like luxury. I just like it to have something to do with where I am.

The Amanera hotel in the Dominican Republic, for instance, is gorgeous. But look around, and even out across its vistas, and you could be in any one of a hundred places. One big reason for this is that it was designed by a British architect using Asian wood to build a hotel for a company founded by an Indonesian businessman who wanted to build a place for himself in Thailand. They describe it as "subtly infused with the spice and flavour of Dominican life," but it is so subtle, it's ridiculous. The spa treatments described as being Dominican refer to the chakra-balancing properties of a stone native to the island. The Dominican Republic is relatively diverse these days, but it would be a stretch to make the case that Hinduism was a fundamental part of it. I realize spa treatment descriptions are easy targets, but they are what displaced luxury is all about.

Every country I know of has its own history of luxury that has developed for most of the same reasons Britain, France, and Italy developed theirs. But because the hospitality industrial complex is about the highest possible price for the lowest possible denominator, luxury tends to be a mish mash of things, but mostly British, French, and Italian, the things most travellers up to the current generation were most familiar with. But equating luxury with three forks and four spoons and a different crystal glass for each European wine is learned behaviour. Since travel is all about learning and re-learning, shouldn't we be learning about other luxuries?

My favourite example is this hotel I stayed at once in Hyderabad, in India. It's a good example for me because it makes it clear that trying to stay true to a place, which is one of the things we're talking about here, does not mean you have to get fixated on unattainable notions of cultural purity. Places are complicated, no place more than India, and the Taj Falaknuma is a symbol of that. Built for the prime minister of Hyderabad in the 19th century, it was designed by a British architect, but according to the prime minister's ideas, which included making it look like both a grand European palace, and a scorpion. British colonialism was a fact of Indian life for centuries, and its influence on Indian culture remains huge. But the luxury at the Falaknuma is all about how the nawabs absorbed Western ideas into their own, and the flower petals that fall gently onto your shoulders, scattered by staff posted on the roof above the entrance, is pure Indian luxury.

On that same trip I visited the Umaid Bhawan Palace in Jodhpur, where three months earlier, Nick Jonas and Priyanka Chopra held their star-studded wedding with every luxury including arriving on elephants dressed for a party. (Nothing says "I love you forever" like animal abuse!) One night, we were treated to a dinner fit for the formerly royal family that built and still owns the palace hotel. As we were shown to our tables by the attentive staff, I noticed everyone in this regal room, dressed to the nines, was eating with their fingers. It took me a couple minutes to get the hang of it once my own food was served. Up to this moment, eating food with your hands had been the opposite of dignified for me, something I associated with early childhood. But it only took those couple of minutes for all that to fall away, my idea that eating with a knife and fork, or chopsticks, was sophisticated or civilized, and eating with your hands was primitive. This was the least primitive place I'd ever been, the Rajasthani cuisine one of the most complex in the world. It may seem like a small thing, but it's these small things that make up our view of the world and each other. Like the Grinch's heart, my mind grew a couple of sizes that day.

You can get similar – by which I mean totally different – experiences in Thailand and China, Ethiopia and Argentina, Oman and Turkey. You've just got to be open to new definitions, like I was, at another old palace in India, at some very fancy supper, where everyone was eating with their fingers. It took me a couple of minutes, but I got into it, and as I did, my world once again got a little bigger.

CRUISE CONTROL

A few years ago, I went on my first ocean cruise. I was speaking to a big travel agent conference that was taking place on one.

My mind was blown a few times that week.

The first time was in the check-in area at the beginning of the trip. I was amazed how efficiently they were able to process so many people, but it was when I got to my agent to get my picture taken and shipboard ID issued that really wowed me. As she handed me my documents, she told me I'd be in room 1452. I said, still not completely aware of the scale of things, "Does that mean I'm on the 14th floor? This ship has 14 floors?" I knew they were big, but I immediately imagined what a 14-storey office building looked like, and a floating one didn't compute. "Oh, no sir," she said, "you're not on the top floor."

The thing had 18 floors.

Later, I remember standing by the side of one of the pools (*one* of the pools); it was crowded. So crowded, people were standing shoulder to shoulder, literally: their shoulders were touching. They were holding drinks from what would have been the swim-up bar if anyone had room to swim. I'm sure I was scowling, but I'm even more sure that they were smiling. They were having a great time.

It was an awakening moment for me. My views were the odd ones out.

I thought it was ridiculous, the whole thing, not just the crowded pool in the middle of an ocean but everything. The notes they slip under your door telling you about sarong-tying lessons or the schedule for jazzercise class, the tone they use when they talk to you, like you're a child always in danger of falling into a tantrum. It all made me agitated, shocked. I mostly locked myself in my room and wrote six chapters of my first book, *Looptail*, in three days.

Maybe I wasn't being fair. I was not a fan of cruises before I ever went on one. I thought I probably wouldn't enjoy that kind of travel. But more than that, I didn't like how they did business, landing at beaches they own so that even when you buy stuff from "the locals," they get their cut. I didn't like that they fed you all your meals on-board, not only because I didn't know how they could possibly make it taste good when they're making 6,000 meals every morning, noon, and night, but because it means that you won't be eating on shore, at local restaurants, tasting the places, leaving your money behind.

It's the same with all-inclusive resorts. A bunch of foreigners all concentrated in one place, having fun, but not really travelling, not experiencing anything other than leisure, which no matter how cheap the resort is, you could probably get from a hometown spa. At least at your hometown spa, the staff would get decent wages.

One all-inclusive I stayed at in Jamaica a few years back for another travel agent conference had a wild west theme for some reason, a shopping street in the middle of the property, storefronts made out to look like saloons and things, where you could buy your basic Jamaican souvenirs, including baseball caps with dreadlocks sewn into the back. In addition to being just weird, I was astonished at how much effort they put in to making sure you didn't get just your food and drink on the property, but that any shopping you might have wanted to do to bring back something for the kids needed to be done on the premises as well. Not one dollar could escape.

I totally understand the motivation behind fly-and-flop vacations where you just want to relax, get drinks brought to you wherever you are, and not think about anything that's going on back home, or anywhere else, for a few days. But as it's put together now, all-inclusives and cruises are business models built for investors rather than travellers. I saw it summed up pretty well on an industry site once, where one of the biggest all-inclusive companies, addressing potential investors, told them that owners "can purchase in bulk, decrease operating costs by partnering with vendors across multiple properties, and negotiate advantageous prices for local artisans and entertainers who sell goods and services to guests."

Advantageous prices for local artisans and entertainers.

When I got onboard my cruise, though, I realized that of course there was a reason 30 million people cruised in 2019. People loved it. Talk to anyone on a cruise and chances are, you'll hear a story about how it's their fifth time on that ship, 10th time with that cruise line, and 22nd time cruising the Caribbean or Mediterranean or wherever you happen to be.

But I wonder, now, whether before booking a post-Covid cruise people will remember the Diamond Princess, the Carnival cruise ship that I'm sure they're already in the process of renaming. It had more people with the novel coronavirus – 712 – than entire nations. I wonder if they'll remember everything they learned about viruses and surfaces and the value of physical distancing, if maybe we'll all have a bit of social claustrophobia after this and want to be close to people we want to be close to, but not packed in with people we'd rather not be. I wonder whether marketing based on how huge the ship is – biggest in the world – will start to fall flat. I mean, they didn't care that Carnival got fined \$20 million dollars for dumping tonnes of trash off the sides of their ships and other environmental crimes last year, and it wasn't the first time. So maybe I'm wrong, maybe price has been the single biggest motivator. I would like to think though that maybe now we're at a place where we've hit a tipping point and people might just pause to think about exactly what is happening. Maybe more of us will experience sticker shock at the price these kinds of travel are really asking us to pay.

I don't think people will be as carefree about booking their 80-year-old parents on a cruise when we see what's happened through this pandemic. When we get more and more information about the control of germs and viruses, it's taught people so quickly, so gut-wrenchingly, that everyone's become an expert on the spread of germs and viruses. We now know a virus can stay on a surface for 48 hours or 3 days. It's the end of the innocence. Cruise ships have a lot of surfaces. Norovirus wasn't bad luck. It was those surfaces!

Cruising won't just stop, and they'll put on a hell of a marketing push to make sure you'll feel like it's safe again. But I don't know if it'll ever return to what it was.

As with so many things, the coronavirus has put the brakes on these industries' momentum, which before this seemed as unstoppable as one of those 200,000-tonne ships once they get going. Tourists may use the pause to reconsider, but so may governments, because they don't actually get much out of this end of the travel industry. The bigger companies often buy the ports, paying minimal fees and sometimes no taxes. And as we've seen, the tourists don't drop much money onshore either. I've always said that cruise ships are great for re-election campaigns in countries like Jamaica, because ministers can report how many millions of tourists visited this past year, how much it's up from last year, and how much more it'll be next year. Millions of tourists, not dollars. But it still sounds good. Governments think in terms of four and five years; it's tough to get them to think beyond the next election. But now, after everyone's had time to think, and after what will undoubtedly be at least a major dip in cruise and all-inclusive business, maybe, just maybe, these island and coastal governments, whose economies depend so much on tourism, will think about investing in ones that will return the love.

People will still cruise after Covid-19, they will still go to all-inclusives. I don't think it will be with the same carefree zest as previously, but remember, tourism is as tourists do. If you decide you don't want to be a part of that anymore, that you want to be more connected to the people, to the places, to the world than walls and gang planks let you, then who knows? Maybe Covid will make this sort of insular travel obsolete. It's possible. I mean, we don't travel on Zeppelins anymore either.

I wonder if, on the other side of all this, I won't be the odd one out anymore.

HOMESTAYS

In the early days of the online home-share accommodation offerings, they were emulating something that already existed, and that continues to exist, even after the apps have pivoted off in different directions.

Staying with a family while you're travelling is still one of the simplest, purest ways of getting money into people's hands. It's also about the best way to get to know a place. When we started doing it at G decades ago, I had a hard time believing more tour companies weren't into it yet. It seemed so obvious.

But unless you're in the middle of a fairytale or a dirty joke, you can't just walk up to a farmhouse and ask to spend the night, so you'll want to find families who have decided this is something they want to do, what they can offer you, and for how much. Some will be more or less a bed and breakfast type arrangement, but as people on all sides of the equation realize there's more to be had than that, families are taking travellers out to work the fields, teaching them crafts and other skills, offering tours, taking people fishing, pretty much anything you or they can think of.

To give you an idea of how it works, what G does is vet and sometimes train people interested in hosting homestays to make sure they're aware of everything involved and are able to handle it. Then, we ask them what they would like to charge. We then work this into our overall tour price.

But ultimately what makes homestays such a good way of doing tourism is the effect I've seen it have, over and over again, in Peru, in Nicaragua, in Nepal, on the communities and their young people. Homestays are usually set up in small towns and rural communities, the sorts of places the UN has shown us are increasingly losing their younger people to bigger towns and cities where they think they can make a better life for themselves. But something kind of magical happens when a bunch of relatively wealthy foreigners come into a community from far away, asking about every little thing, complimenting them on their houses, oohing and aahing over everyday pottery and hats and llamas: it starts to make the younger people proud of where they come from.

That's a huge transformational point, and you feel it when you're there. I've seen it so many times, a little community that's off the usual tourist map, where kids once wanted to move to bigger towns and cities. Now they cherish and want to preserve their culture.

It's along the same lines of what Jane Goodall talks about with regard to other national resources. Many communities have been in the habit of killing animals because they're pests on their farms, but once they realize that there are people around the world who value these animals, a whole generation of learning arises. People become proud of their jaguars and capybaras, proud that they're part of their country, and the whole next generation. I've seen it myself in Belize, where they've transformed the community to value the wildlife.

We've heard, mostly in Sub-Saharan Africa, about poachers becoming conservation officers in light of these sorts of tourist-driven conservation efforts, where new streams of income provide new perspectives. But an even more extreme transformation takes place generationally. Colonizers once barged into these lands and made it profitable to help them hunt their animals to the point of extinction, assisted by missionaries who did all they could to convince them that their traditional ways of life were inferior to those in Paris, London, and Madrid. I know tourists are sometimes seen as modern-day colonizers, but when I see what some of them have been doing, how things like homestays and conscientious wildlife tourism are helping to bring back local pride, re-value traditional trades, and reconfigure the value of animals from trophies to be taken to experiences to be had (from afar), I can't help but think that, if we all take this pause to consider our potential for good, that we'll all – the entire planet – come out better on the other side.

THE YEAR THE EARTH STOOD STILL

When I decided I wanted to write something, I was feeling pressured because everything escalated so quickly and it was hard to communicate in soundbites. This was profound. Unprecedented. There were no words and people just couldn't understand that. As my inbox grew with letters from people whose lives had been changed by travel, or people who just shared the tent within our global community, I thought I wanted to write something that was instant and in the moment, to capture the charge of the world shutting down. So I coined the term instabook to represent something in the moment that is really only relevant now, in this moment. As I started to find my stride, it went in a different direction. I started wanting this to be a love letter to our travellers and every traveller who would listen that we need to get back to good, we need to travel again, that travel is our vehicle to change the world and transform lives. Our industry has the opportunity to be transformational but maybe we've just gone off the rails a bit. We're all at ground zero, the world has just stopped. This pandemic has created the largest startup economy ever seen as we all go into hibernation and wait until we can travel again – and we must travel again. But we can do it better. We can rethink everything we thought was normal. Why fight so damn hard to return to normal when the opportunity to transform travel is on the other side of this mess. This is about you... it's about me... it's about everyone. As a traveller, you have enormous power and privilege. Your decisions are what drive the circular economy that creates those unique experiences you want to post on Instagram. This is an incredible moment and I hope you understand your power of purchase and that all we have to do is embrace our freedom to travel and connect with the parts of the world that we want to explore.

As I said at the beginning: If there is one thing we should learn from this pandemic, it is that we all share the same planet, and the better we understand each other the better we'll appreciate who we are and where we came from. That's why your decision to travel is important. We cannot let fear spread faster than coronavirus. With great challenge always comes great opportunity for those who choose to rise and meet it.

There's a kind of traveller -- I'm sure you've seen one or two of them on Instagram -- who uses travel to reboot their lives. A corporate lawyer quits her job, travels for a year, and decides to work for Doctors Without Borders, that sort of thing. Travel's always been a great way to step back and get perspective. And now that all travel's stopped, there's an opportunity for travel itself to step back, for all us non-travelling travellers to re-assess, to consider things we've been doing as if by reflex. Sometimes, what seems in the moment like just flat-out fun can make you think, when you've got a moment to think, "Wow, what was I thinking?" Travel's always done good, whether we travellers have thought about it or not. But it can do a lot more good when we know what we're doing, and why. We've been doing good, but after the pandemic, let's see if we can do better.