



SUSTAINABLE TOURISM ELEVATED FROM TREND TO TRAVEL TRANSFORMATION AT VIRTUOSO®'S INAUGURAL SUSTAINABILITY SUMMIT

Luxury Leaders Look to Make Sustainable Tourism More Accessible for Travelers

NEW YORK (September 13, 2017) – The challenge before the travel and tourism industry is real. In 2015, there were 1.2 billion international tourism arrivals, and billions more domestic tourists. This is predicted to nearly double by 2030, prompting the UN World Tourism Organization Secretary General, Taleb Rifai, to declare: “Will tourism bring us one billion opportunities to make the world a better place, or one billion disasters?”

Virtuoso® has always believed that tourism represents opportunities and it is that objective that recently inspired the renowned travel agency network, specializing in upscale and experiential travel, to hold its inaugural Sustainability Summit. For nearly a decade, Virtuoso has worked to advance travel as a force for good within its own network and globally. It was one of the earliest luxury travel organizations to offer professional development training on sustainable tourism for travel advisors and it launched the Virtuoso Sustainable Tourism Leadership Awards seven years ago to further shine a spotlight on best practices among travel companies and hotels. Virtuoso’s media platforms have long included stories and articles about travel with meaning to better educate travelers and travel advisors on how sustainable tourism can be part of their holiday planning – a win-win combining a great vacation with care for local people and the planet.

The Virtuoso Sustainability Summit attracted an impressive roster of owners, CEOs and leaders in the luxury travel space. During the summit, Virtuoso explored how it can amplify its own commitment to sustainable tourism by providing better support to the network’s hotels, tour companies, and destinations to drive sustainability in the travel industry. Virtuoso also explored how it can leverage these preferred partner relationships to help its travel advisors, the most successful salesforce in luxury travel, gain a deeper understanding of sustainable tourism and deliver purposeful travel experiences for their clients. One takeaway from the summit was the realization that sustainable tourism, once considered a trend, is now a global travel transformation that is redefining how travel companies operate and where travelers choose to go.

“Our goal is to support and shine a spotlight on sustainable tourism initiatives, which we believe are vital to the future of travel,” said Matthew D. Upchurch, Chairman and CEO of Virtuoso. Upchurch hosted the summit alongside Virtuoso Sustainability Ambassador Jessica Hall Upchurch, who helps drive the organization’s sustainability initiatives, and sustainable tourism expert and Virtuoso Global Sustainability Strategist, Costas Christ.

The summit was attended by top industry CEOs in sustainable tourism leadership, including Sven Lindblad of Lindblad Expeditions, Keith Vincent of Wilderness Safaris, Laura Turner Seydel of Ted Turner Expeditions, Luke Bailes of Singita, Brett Tollman of The Travel Corporation, Richard Bailey of The Brando, and Chris Cahill of AccorHotels, among other luminaries in hospitality and travel.

“By bringing these leaders together, we set an agenda for Virtuoso to continue advancing the principles of sustainable tourism, based upon its three pillars, including environmentally-friendly practices, support for the protection of cultural and natural heritage, and delivering social and economic benefits for local people,” says Christ.

Hall Upchurch added, “As Keith Vincent so aptly put it, ‘Purpose is the new luxury.’ More travelers today are seeking tour companies and hotels that also embrace giving back in positive ways. Travel is a force for good, and we intend to make it easier for travelers to make the choice to support sustainable tourism.”

Many Virtuoso partners that attended the Summit are also leaders in helping to protect nature and safeguard cultural heritage. The Brando, one of the world’s most stunning South Pacific resorts, pioneered deep sea water cooling for air conditioning in the tropics, with 100% renewable energy from solar power and coconut oil as a way to reduce greenhouse gas emissions that are linked to climate change. Wilderness Safaris is protecting some six million acres of endangered wildlife habitat in Africa. Cavallo Point Lodge preserved the Fort Baker army barracks next to San Francisco’s famed Golden Gate Bridge by reusing building materials and maintaining 100 percent of the exterior design, garnering praise from the National Trust for Historic Preservation. These efforts and others supporting local community benefits are helping to elevate sustainable tourism as a core value in the luxury travel industry.

“It was incredibly inspiring to join a group of visionary leaders who understand the power and importance of travel to be a positive force for helping to protect our planet for future generations,” said Laura Turner Seydel, whose father, Ted Turner, launched Ted Turner Expeditions in 2013 as part of his strategy for protecting more than two million acres of wilderness in North America.

And while all generations can support and benefit from these practices and innovations, Virtuoso says the expectation for the travel industry to step up and do the right thing is most significantly driven by its Millennial clients. Next steps resulting from the Virtuoso Sustainability Summit include more training and educational opportunities for its affiliated travel advisors on best practices, continuing to shine a spot light on travel partners that are leading the way, and creating more awareness about purposeful travel planning and experiences through the network’s professional travel agencies. For more information on Virtuoso, visit www.Virtuoso.com.

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About Virtuoso:

Virtuoso® is the leading international travel agency network specializing in luxury and experiential travel. This by-invitation-only organization comprises over 800 travel agency partners with more than 16,000 elite travel advisors in over 45 countries throughout North America, Latin America, the Caribbean, Europe, Asia-Pacific, Africa and the Middle East. Drawing upon its preferred relationships with 1,700 of the world’s best hotels and resorts, cruise lines, airlines, tour companies and premier destinations, the network provides its upscale clientele with exclusive amenities, rare experiences and privileged access. More than (U.S.) \$21.2 billion in annual travel sales makes Virtuoso a powerhouse in the luxury travel industry. For more information, visit www.virtuoso.com.

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