

A vibrant, high-angle photograph of a lush tropical garden. In the foreground, a pond is filled with large, round, green water lily pads. A child is swinging on a wooden swing set in the middle ground, surrounded by dense, colorful tropical plants and trees. The scene is bathed in bright, natural light, creating a sense of a peaceful, sustainable environment.

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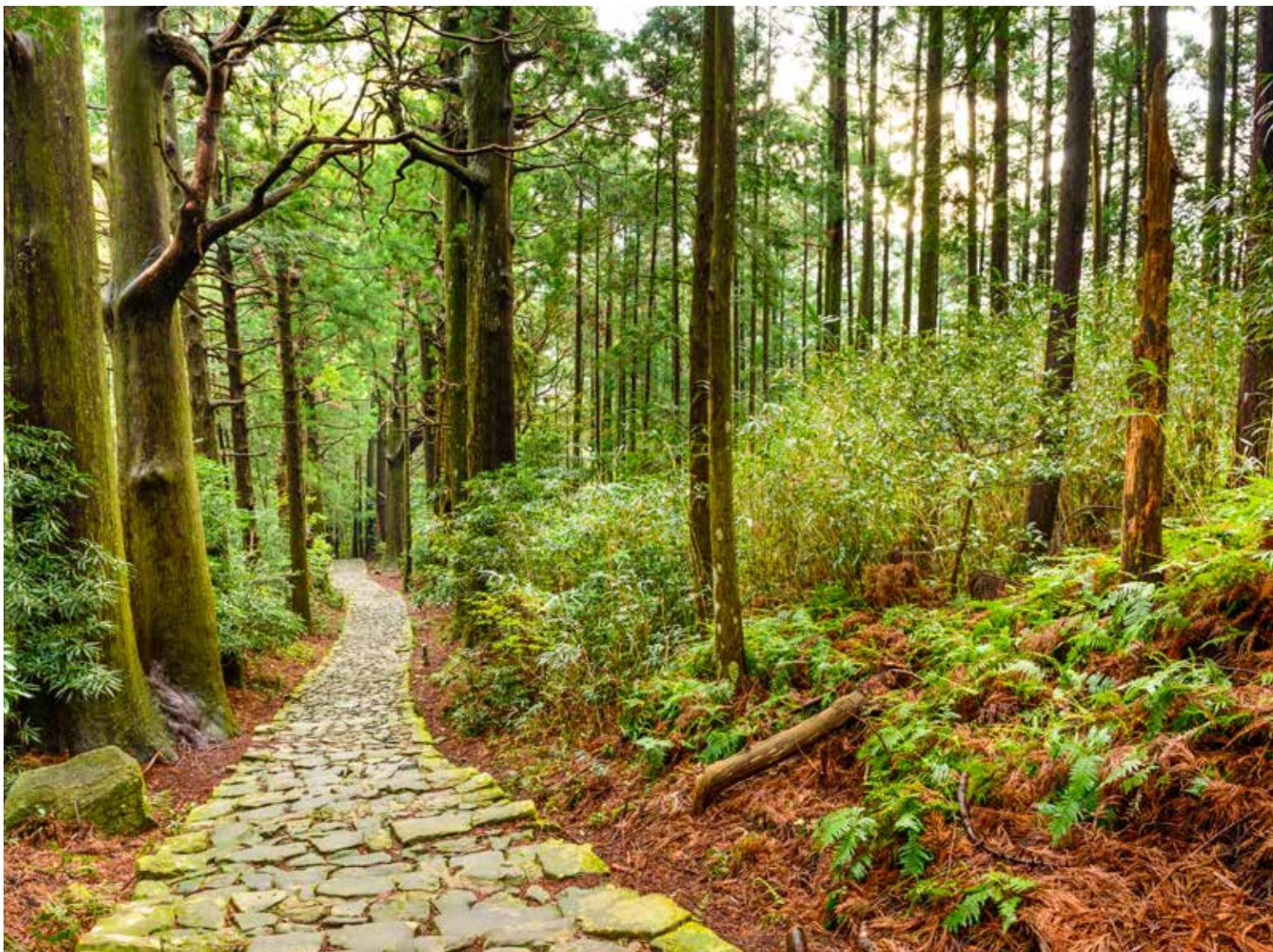
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Preserving the Planet

Continue to explore the Earth and protect it, too. BY SUSAN B. BARNES

WALK IN THE WOODS:
Kumano Kodo Sacred Japanese Trail

PHOTO:
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HIKING ALONG A PATH THROUGH THE FOREST, the only sounds I heard were the wind rustling through the leaves, the flow of a distant waterfall and, from time to time, the soft sounds of chatter from the others in my group. Missing were the sounds of traffic rushing by, car horns and the din of the everyday world in which most of us live. On this part of the Japan Hiking – Kumano Kodo & Nakasendo trip with REI Adventures, just the eight of us were on the trail, not another human in sight. An eco-adventure at its best, and it was glorious.

Earlier this year, Impact Travel Alliance, the world's largest community for impact-focused travelers, released its trends shaping sustainable travel in 2020, among them

regenerative travel, conscious consumerism, off-season tourism and slow tourism. ITA aims to educate travelers on how to spend their money mindfully so their experiences empower locals and protect the environment.

Since its inception, REI Adventures has been committed to sustainable travel, designing its trips around human-powered activity. The co-op runs its business by following thoughtful practices, including committing to working with local operators in the destinations to which REI travels worldwide and assessing and auditing its operators and trip operations to minimize environmental impact and maximize the benefits to local communities.

“It is the responsibility of all travel providers,



regardless of size, to have an active role in sustainable travel and lend their voice to care for the global treasures where our guests visit and recreate,” said Jeff Stivers, supervisor program management, REI Adventures. “For REI, we purposely design our trips first around human-powered activity in an off-the-beaten-path model. We focus on local guides and establishments that align with our principles and are mindful of our impact on natural places.”

When it launched in 2007, Aqua Expeditions, a boutique

luxury river and yacht cruise line, made a commitment to focus on sustainability and conservation within the ecologically and culturally significant destinations in which its boats sail — the Peruvian Amazon, the Mekong River in Cambodia and Vietnam, and the seas of East Indonesia. Aqua Expeditions’ eco-friendly operational procedures include fuel efficiency; low-emission launch boats; and nontoxic, biodegradable cleaning products on board all its vessels.

The company also supports wildlife preservation and con-

ECO-EXPLORATION: Aqua Expeditions’ Mekong River tour biking excursion (top), Peruvian Amazon walking tour (bottom left), and Amazon skiff side trip (bottom right)

PHOTOS: © AQUA EXPEDITIONS



PEDAL POWER: *Aqua Expeditions' Amazon biking tour*

PHOTO: © AQUA EXPEDITIONS

ervation projects, like working with local Amazon River communities to rehabilitate the population of native paiche fish through improving fish farming techniques. The population of paiche fish increased from 489 in 2010 to more than 9,000 in 2018.

Leading the industry with the world's first Zero Waste Adventure in Yellowstone in July 2019 and its decision to offset emissions from guests' international flights beginning in 2019, Natural Habitat Adventures announced it will offset a year's worth of carbon output for anyone who joins one of the company's 2020 trips from its new 35th-anniversary series, *Climate Change & the Wild World*.

"Ever since we became completely carbon-neutral in 2007, we've been ramping up our commitment to conservation every year, and this year is no exception," said Ben Bressler, founder and president, Natural Habitat Adventures. "Travel *needs* to become more sustainable, and we feel it's our responsibility to keep raising the bar on what that looks like — and we challenge other travel companies to do the same."

To offset its guests' carbon emissions, Natural Habitat Adventures invests in carbon credits to fund three community and

conservation projects: the construction of wind farms in India, distributing fuel-efficient and electricity-generating cookstoves in Rwanda and developing a rainforest biodiversity corridor in Zimbabwe.

"The tourism industry has a unique role to play in promoting conservation in that we have the opportunity to help people understand — through the power of experiences — why we must preserve this one planet we call home," said Court Whelan, director of sustainability and conservation travel, Natural Habitat. "When we act as leaders and by example, we set a precedent for not just the travel industry but for all those who travel, showing how we can do that."

Offsetting carbon emissions has taken hold with airlines, too. Earlier this year, JetBlue announced it will go carbon-neutral on all domestic flights beginning in July 2020; it is the first major U.S. airline to take this pledge. The airline also announced it will begin flying with sustainable aviation fuel in mid-2020 out of San Francisco International, partnering with Neste, the world's largest producer of renewable diesel and a pioneer in renewable jet fuel. Neste MY Renewable Jet Fuel is produced 100 percent from

waste and residue raw materials, and over its lifecycle it has up to an 80 percent smaller carbon footprint compared to fossil jet fuel.

“Air travel connects people and cultures and supports a global economy, yet we must act to limit this critical industry’s contributions to climate change,” said Robin Hayes, chief executive officer, JetBlue. “We reduce where we can and offset where we can’t. By offsetting all of our domestic flying, we’re preparing our business for the lower-carbon economy that aviation — and all sectors — must plan for.”

“It’s heartening to see so many sustainability and conservation ideas at the forefront of discussions,” said Kelley Louise, founder and executive director, Impact Travel Alliance.

This year, REI introduces two new human-powered adventures to its portfolio. The seven-day Norway Fjords Cycling trip rides past majestic fjords, cascading waterfalls, serene lakes, soaring mountains and Viking-era villages for an unforgettable cycling adventure. En route, cyclists hop aboard ferries with their bikes to continue on to even more of the country’s best routes.

REI Adventures also debuts the Japan – Shimanami, Shikoku and Kyoto Cycling trip this year. Bicyclists will spend 11 days traversing the country’s network of islands and mountains, including Shikoku, known for its 88-temple Buddhist pilgrimage route.

Go deep into the Amazon on Aqua Expeditions’ seven-night Amazon Expedition Cruise. While enjoying the luxury of a suite on board, passengers will discover the best of Pacaya-Samiria National Reserve, including its jungle trails and hidden lakes and lagoons. Spot the Amazon’s famous pink river dolphins, visit a local village and fish for piranha.

The Amazon Rainforest features in Natural Habitat Adventures’ Climate Change & the Wild World series, as do Greenland’s Arctic, wildlife conservation in Southern Africa and polar bears in Churchill. Natural Habitat Adventures partnered with the World Wildlife Fund for each of these outings; experts will educate guests about how the organization protects wildlife, habitats and humanity from the worst effects of climate change.



Regarding wildlife eco-travel, one of Impact Travel Alliance’s top wildlife trips explores Chumbe Island Coral Park, the first protected marine area in the world, off the coast of Zanzibar. Earth Changers leads the expedition, and the island’s conservation, research, education center and eco-lodge are fully funded by travelers.

Finally, consider a 4×4 tour of the Alladale Wilderness Reserve from Alladale Lodge in Scotland. The lodge works to restore the Highland ecosystem by participating in the reintroduction of original plant and wildlife species to help in the recovery of the threatened Scottish wildcat.

GO GREEN:
Natural Habitat
Adventures’ Zero
Waste Adventure

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