LEADING THE WAY: THE ADVENTURE OF TRAVEL
Adventure Travel World Summit, 2013
Anna Pollock, Founder Conscious Travel

There are times in our lives when events occur that cause us to take a complete mental photograph of the context in which we experienced them. You know intuitively that nothing will be the same again. I know exactly where I was when we learned John F Kennedy was shot (1963); the World Trade Centre was attacked (2001) and when I saw this picture beamed from space 45 years ago (1968).

How many of you remember seeing this picture called Earthrise for the first time? It was a transformative experience for many of us. We were so used to looking up at the stars but had never gazed on home from “out there.”

Despite the way in which this image has become commonplace, our individual responses to it can vary enormously. For some it represents a huge piece of real estate, a whopping big pile of rock with lots of resources and a thin coating of life on top. For others, it’s Mother Earth, Pachamama or Gaia – a living, breathing organism in a state of constant flux and balance. This distinction is important – for how you see this floating sphere will shape how you behave on it.

Ironically, it was a politician, Adlai Stevenson, who first used the term “space ship earth” in public. He understood the responsibility that came with habitation in a way that so many of our current leaders have either forgotten or never appreciated.

We travel together, passengers on a little space ship, dependent on its vulnerable reserves of air and soil; all committed for our safety to its security and peace; preserved from annihilation only by the care, the work, and, I will say, the love we give our fragile craft.

Now any one who is even only half awake knows that spaceship earth is presently on “life support,” malfunctioning, and stressed out.

Or expressed another way - our Earth Mother is in distress and not everyone can hear her cries.

Governments and large global organizations know more than they’re sharing about her state of health. They seem either hesitant or impotent to act. Fortunately now, after a slow start, many large businesses are acknowledging the scale of the problem. It seems that business has more to gain by being honest than most governments do.

By 2010, even the most conservative of accounting firms believed it safe to state the obvious. This is a report KPMG published a couple years ago when it was quite daring – even for them – to state with no caveats, “if we fail to alter our patterns of consumption and production, things will go seriously wrong.”

In their report, Expect the Unexpected – Building Business Value they did what any conscientious professional management consultant would do, they analysed “the problems” and broke them down into ten “mega forces” that are threatening to make life on board spaceship earth increasingly unpleasant.
The financial and political glitterati known as the Davos World Economic Forum took longer to admit the scale and scope of the challenge – but they’ve “got it” now. In 2013, their panel of 1000 business leaders framed the challenge in terms of RISK – identifying over 50 potential crises could unravel normality: see *Global Risks 2013*

You may be interested to know that in terms of impact the top risk was “major systemic financial failure” and, in terms of likelihood, was “severe income disparity”. Given the fact that 1/5th of the planet’s wealth (20%) is now controlled by a mere 100,000 people (0.001%) that seems, to me, to be more of a present certainty than a future probability. It’s also interesting to note that while climate change adaptation was mentioned as a risk, mitigation wasn’t listed. Surely proof that perception is purely subjective. (Note: The Transnational Institute has created a number of useful infographics that help demonstrate the growing concentration of wealth in the hands of a few – see [http://www.tni.org/report/state-power-2013](http://www.tni.org/report/state-power-2013))

There are 3 primary factors that have driven space ship earth up this cosmic creek without much of a paddle – *population growth, globalization and connectivity* – of both the digital and travel kind. Paradoxically the last two – globalization and connectivity - have also made more of us aware of the problem and may also help us deal with them. But the big challenge comes from the deadly combination of numerous change forces combined with lots of connectivity – as they cause huge amounts of volatility.

Both KPMG and WEF take great pains to try and show that their 10 mega-forces and 50 risks are inter-related but in ways we don’t yet fully understand and, as you’ll sense from this ways that are hard to illustrate. We’re now appreciating the fact that small events can trigger cascading catastrophes and radical, quantum change can happen in an instant. You’ll hear honest experts answer penetrating questions with the phrase “we simply don’t know.”

I see this emerging humility as very encouraging.

In this interconnected, inter-dependent world, predictability is impossible. Planning is impossible. According to the CIA and Pentagon, we live in a VUCA world – one of their acronyms for volatile, uncertain, ambiguous and chaotic. The only thing we can say with certainty is that going forward there will be little to no certainty in our lives – if there ever was.

Tourism is utterly embedded in this VUCA world – although you’d never know it reading many of the bullish tourism plans that destinations are currently producing - which is weird considering that anywhere between 90-95% of factors influencing traffic flows between an origin and destination are completely outside the control of the destination.

Mass tourism is vulnerable because it has copied the same production – consumption model that KPMG say is unsustainable and is, therefore, subject to its same excesses and intrinsic weaknesses. It’s turned travelers and guests into consumers, tourists or, worse, market segments. It’s turned places into products and exotic experiences into safe packages that can be rated and compared by algorithm. Instead of obsessing about fulfillment, it fixates on efficiency, automation and standardization and then competes on price not value.

Just think about it – we’ve taken a highly diverse complex planet that’s 13.5 billion years old with life forms that have taken 3.8 billion years to evolve and carved it up into products we now sell at bargain basement prices. Does that make sense? Does it make you proud?

Volatile demand + highly informed consumers combined with perishable supply have, over the years led to heavy discounting that generates diminishing returns and declining yields. As a

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1 For a really good insight into the implications of a VUCA world, check out this slide deck by Denise Caron: [http://www.slideshare.net/dcaron/its-a-vuca-world-cips-cio-march-5-2009-draft](http://www.slideshare.net/dcaron/its-a-vuca-world-cips-cio-march-5-2009-draft)
consequence, volume has to grow to compensate. Volume growth leads to more congestion, less willingness by guests to pay for a deteriorating experience and less ability of suppliers to pay for external costs. We’ve created an insatiable thirst for global travel – providing it’s cheap – but the only way to make money in that model is to generate more and more demand.

And for a while demand is exactly what we’ve got. In fact, for as long as everything else hangs together, we’re facing a veritable tsunami of demand – a 40% increase in the number of feet crossing international borders is forecast for the next 16 years. But what will be the point in growing demand if yield fails? And what will happen if, in the context of declining margins, all aspects of tourism are asked to pay the full costs of its production?

I’m not anti growth but I am pro the only growth that matters – and that is the growth in NET Benefit to host, host community and guest. Right now that’s in steep decline. We’ll all pay a heavy price if we don’t reverse that trend.

It’s in this context that I confess my sadness at the lack of leadership and honesty within our industry. Over the past 30 years, regional, national and global associations have hardly deviated from the same refrain – tourism should get more recognition, we’re green and clean and should be allowed to grow faster and be taxed and regulated less. These associations are strong on conferences, declarations, codes of conduct and awards but shy away from a rigorous and honest examination of the assumptions in which their forecasts and aspirations are based.

This time last year my misgivings were temporarily alleviated by the quiet-spoken but thoughtful Secretary General of the UNWTO, Taleb Rifai, who bucked the trend. He came to the ATTA World Summit in Lucerne excited and enthusiastic and said “Adventure tourism is what tourism ought to be today and is what tourism is going to be tomorrow.” It was quite an encouraging affirmation – yes? It made us all feel good, but what on earth did it mean?

Is Adventure Travel the future because it, like “Indigenous Tourism” it is growing at a faster rate than most other sectors or is it because it models a better form of tourism? And if it is about better as opposed to more, how can that better form of tourism become the norm and not the exception? And what does better look like anyway?

And this is where I bring my bias to the table. I don’t believe we can find decent answers to those two questions until we wake up, grow up and step up. That’s what Conscious Travel is all about.

Why Wake Up? We have to wake up from the trance we’re in and become aware of our present and precarious position. This shimmering jewel floating in space is not a problem to be solved but a living being to which we belong and in which we are as embedded as the cells in our body. The earth is in distress because we have fallen out of a right relationship with her. Our indigenous brothers and sisters – from all corners of the planet – are quite insistent that we have to see our world and our role in it differently. Some like the Achuar in the Amazon rain forest insist that we change “the dream of the north,” others like the Kogi in the high mountains of Columbia ask us “the elder brother” to change our thinking before we destroy life on earth. In every case, seeing must precede being, which must precede doing.

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2 See: The Pachamama Alliance: [http://www.pachamama.org/achuar](http://www.pachamama.org/achuar)

3 See: From the Heart of the World - The Elder Brothers’ Warning, a BBC documentary made by Alan Ereira in 1990
Many scientists, most cosmologists, some economists and many deep thinkers are all saying the same thing – we have the means to restore that relationship with planet earth but until there is a major shift in consciousness (perception and will), those means won’t be deployed in time. Jeremy Rifkin, one the top advisors to the EU on its energy policy and author *The Third Industrial Revolution* (which is required reading for the Chinese Government) and *The Empathic Civilisation*, says we have one generation in which to shift human consciousness.

**Growing Up** means passing from adolescence, when it’s all about physical growth and getting bigger, to adulthood, when we stop getting taller but start developing emotionally and mentally. We also shift from thinking about “me” to “we.” Our indigenous friends have always understood the importance of marking this passage into manhood and womanhood in their various Initiation ceremonies. If tourism has not enjoyed the attention and recognition it claims it deserves, it’s likely because it has ignored John F Kennedy’s message “ask not what your country can do for you; but ask what you can do for your country.”

**Stepping Up** means not turning a blind eye to danger or shirking responsibility for facing it. Our indigenous friends know that often you have to fight to safeguard the means to life. We must each and all become activists – perhaps even warriors - now. But this isn’t about simply protesting or complaining. Our task, as so well expressed by Buckminster Fuller is not to tear down the old model but build a new one that renders the old obsolete.

Are you up for this? I hope so because there are no heroes coming to rescue us from high. Innovation is breaking out all over the planet – community by community – lead by unreasonable men and women.

Are you crazy enough been waiting

OK, I can see to say, how business? survive and

awake enough, unreasonable enough and to be the leaders in tourism we need and have for? I’m here because I think you are.

the eyes of some of you rolling upwards – as if are these high falutin’ ideas going to help my Show me the money! Tell me what to do to thrive in these crazy times.

The answer isn’t either complicated or that new. It is found in the hearts, minds, aspirations and dreams of your guests, many of whom are waking up faster than those that market to them.

The good news is that your customers are part of the biggest shift in values and perception since Galileo opened his telescope and Newton dodged a falling apple. Ride this wave and you’ll prosper. In fact it’s because you have caught this wave that many of you are already thriving.

This shift in consciousness is the biggest story of our time but it’s not being covered by the mainstream media or discussed in parliaments whose leaders simply don’t have the eyes to see what’s going on.

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5 Tourism leaders will find themselves having to make difficult choices as competition for increasingly scarce resources escalates. Sitting on the sidelines may be an option but will also be a statement with consequences. In places like British Columbia, for example, where a $13billion tourism industry has been developed over the past 40 years based on a pristine “SuperNatural Environment” its members may have to say a very loud NO to Super Tankers ferrying oil through the dangerous waters of its coastline. Egyptian tourism leaders may have to pressure a government to protect the antiquities currently being plundered by the Muslim Brotherhood or get out into the desert and defend them themselves.

6 For more on shifting values, read: [Can Tourism Change Its Operating Model?](http://example.com)
It’s happening because the change forces and risks identified earlier all suggest that the old models don’t work or make sense anymore. The richest nations aren’t the happiest, healthiest or most secure.

It’s happening because our scientists are suggesting that the basic premises on which we’ve based our worldviews, organizations and models are at best inadequate and, in many cases, false. It’s now understood that only 4% of what’s “out there” can be experienced less alone measured by our senses – which leaves room for one helluva lot of mystery.  

It’s happening because enough of us know that we have just one planet when we need at least three to sustain our present lifestyles.

And it’s happening because so many of us are wanting to grow as in stretch and develop; hone our bodies; acquire new skills, see things from another perspective; find meaning and purpose; and look to help and serve others. Maslow predicted that progression – we’re now living it, personally and collectively. A growing number of people have fulfilled Maslow’s deficiency needs (to survive, belong, enjoy self esteem) and want now to explore Personal Growth, find meaning and serve others. We’re right in the middle of a huge human migration from Stage Three to Five in this diagram – right through Transformation and the impact will be evolutionary.

A study undertaken by a media company GaiaTV and a New York futures agency has shown that as many as 100 million Americans are on a quest to find out who they are, what fulfills them and how they might serve. They occupy a spectrum from awakening to activism. Other studies such as the benchmark study on “Cultural Creatives” and consumers exhibiting Lifestyles of Health and Sustainability (LOHAS) have also quantified a conscious or consciousness seeking market in excess of 250 million consumers in North America and Europe alone. Provided that a person’s basic needs have been met, then these conscious consumers are found throughout both the world and across all age groups. In fact, no matter which study you look at, the proportion of consumers who demonstrate these conscious, responsible attributes is higher in Asia and South America than elsewhere.

This big shift - which takes the form of a vast personal and collective adventure - has two

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7 The best, most readable, often funny overview of contemporary science and its influence on a shift in worldviews is the book *Spontaneous Evolution* by Dr Bruce Lipton and Steve Bhaerman.

8 See The Explosion of Conscious Media: [http://whitepaper.gaiamtv.com](http://whitepaper.gaiamtv.com)

9 Time did not permit a detailed examination of the many reports indicating consumers’ shifts in values. You’ll find reference to some, if not all, on [www.conscious.travel](http://www.conscious.travel). More importantly, perhaps is the speed with which big business is now leading the shift – look at [http://www.consciouscapitalism.org](http://www.consciouscapitalism.org) and another, un-related annual conference: [www.sustainablebrands.com](http://www.sustainablebrands.com) for trends, and case studies.
dimensions both of which affect your future; and both of which offer opportunities and challenges.

There’s an inner adventure – a journey of becoming which starts with an awakening and an equally important outer adventure – a journey of exploration that leads to a deep shift in our personal and collective relationship with the natural world and each other.

The inner journey is about stretching oneself physically, mentally, emotionally and spiritually. While some might pursue a particular activity and identify with it, most simply want to push their boundaries out in some way.

The outer journey involves a closer, deeper, more respectful attentive, respectful relationship to the natural world – our bodies, our physical environment, the food we eat, the clothes we wear, the landscapes we walk in, - in fact all that our senses absorb and all that we affect through our actions.

Both journeys shift the way we see the world and behave in it.

Both journeys are essential for our maturation as individual human beings; both are utterly intertwined and are experienced either alone or in community; and both are essential for the future survival and flourishing of life on earth.

And who is in the best position to enable and guide such journeys as you – the enterprises that enable, deliver, promote and support “adventure travel.”

At its essence, the Big Shift is all about returning to a respectful, reciprocal relationship with Nature and that can only start from a profound sense of wonder and awe. Who is better positioned to create opportunities to experience those feelings but those of you who are making a living exposing your clients to Nature in all her splendour and power?

Experiencing Wonder and Awe in nature – especially when all senses are engaged – can move us out of that numb, dead place that fosters denial. Without feeling there can be no empathy. It’s our hearts that beat life and are the source of our courage.

“He who can no longer pause to wonder and stand rapt in awe, is as good as dead; his eyes are closed.” -Albert Einstein

Wonder and awe lead in two mutually supportive directions – to admiration and affection.

Admiration leads to imitation. Our society is desperate for radical and speedy innovation and nature is our best teacher. She has had 3.8 billion years of practice and has solved virtually every engineering, chemical, biological challenge on earth. Biomimicry – the discipline of observing then imitating nature is proving the most fertile arena for innovation and listening to Janine Beynus will open your eyes to many business opportunities. This is where the adventure travel community can step up and realize some big opportunities – by becoming allies and partners with those businesses that are committed to fostering innovation and collaboration.

Janine Beynus inspires not just through her brilliance as a scientist but as someone who has fallen in love with nature and become fully alive. Here’s one of her lectures: http://biomimicry.net/inspiring/ which will give you enormous insights into how to increase a visitor’s length of stay.
Wonder and awe also lead to affection – as Alexandra Cousteau said to us in Lucerne last year – we tend to protect the people and places we love the most. Who is better positioned than you to help your guests fall in love with the natural world and experience it through all their senses?

Our earlier keynote speaker, Pico Ayer once wrote:

We travel, initially, to lose ourselves;
We travel next, to find ourselves.
We travel to open our hearts and eyes and learn more than our newspapers will accommodate....
And we travel, in essence, to become young fools again----to slow time down and get taken in, and fall in love once more
Pico Ayer

If you succeed in transforming a guests’ perspective – cause them to feel fully alive, full of possibility and to fall in love with life itself, you’ll also experience that value expressed in higher yields, loyalty, referrals and community benefit.

“Don’t ask yourself what the world needs; ask yourself what makes you come alive. And then go and do that. Because what the world needs is people who have come alive.
Harold Whitman

Isn’t that what we all want? Isn’t that how we have felt this past week in Namibia – totally out in Nature and among people who protect it because they understand their interdependence; their embeddedness in Nature? As the Minister said last night – “Never forget, we’re all animals; some of us have been domesticated more than others.”

So in this sense, you as ATTA members have both an enormous opportunity and a huge responsibility. It comes with the privilege of earning a living while taking people into some of the most beautiful, pristine and exotic places on earth. Your own research suggests that you - as a collective – now cater to potentially one in three of all travelers. That’s more than enough to trigger a revolution in consciousness if everyone, who returned from an adventure travel experience, came home awakened in some way.

Who are you to walk away from this opportunity and responsibilty?

Surely this is the higher purpose of your business and the best protection against becoming just another commodity - simply a catalogue of activities sold on price points?

Surely the noble endeavour of shifting the consciousness of your guests is a good reason to jump out of bed in the morning and praise the sunrise?

Surely living this bold sense of purpose will help you attract the brightest and best from among an energetic, intelligent, adventurous cohort of young, educated, fit youngsters?

But this won't happen unless you as business owners and destination marketers and managers have had your own awakening. To be successful as “change agents” and “conscious leaders” – for that is what I am asking you to be, you also need to shift your perception and take off some of the blinkers that prevent us from seeing fresh possibilities.  

Charles Eisenstein’s latest book is one of best places to start if you wish to understand how an old story is dying and a new one is being born. *The More Beautiful World Our Heart’s Know is Possible*
The first step will be to break down the boundaries in your minds that separate adventure travel from eco-tourism, from culinary tourism, from indigenous tourism, eco tourism, responsible/sustainable/geo/local travel, wildlife tourism, and all the other “isms” that we use to divide and separate our offerings but that mean little or nothing for our guests. Do you see how imprisoned we are by our traditional patterns of thinking that must label and separate when all is one?

The successful adventure trip of the future – the one that generates highest value – will support your guests inner and outer journey; it will connect you guests intimately to the unique place or setting; use all their senses during their adventure (touch, taste, sight, hearing, and smell) and in addition to providing opportunities to participate in an activity will expose and, ideally, immerse your guest in a rich, holistic experience involving artistic expressions, story telling, local food, landscape, deep ecology etc. You’ll be hiring “change makers” with a much wider range of talents – from cooks to counselors; story tellers, conventional ecologists and spiritual ecologists, scientists, cosmologists, biomimics, shamans, artists and actors.

The successful business will be one that can demonstrate it cares by being actively involved in either environmental or cultural projects that protect or regenerate. You’ll also be asserting yourself on a bigger stage – demonstrating by example how a new tourism model can work, investing in deeper, wider educational programs and forming more alliances outside tourism. You’ll be learning together how to become Conscious Leaders.

So let’s re-visit this conversation between Messers Stowell and Rifai and do a little imagining…
Imagine you are a young athletic warrior member of a tribe living on an island in the Pacific. Your elders and chiefs have been huddled together for a few days now speaking among themselves. You know they are worried. The rains have failed and the crops are drying out fast. The conch shell is blown to announce a coming together in circle and the elders explain - the island can’t support everyone. It’s time for some brave volunteers to set sail into the rising sun and find a new home and make a new life. It’s a treacherous journey because no one knows whether or where such an alternative island might exist. The elder concludes - “To help you find your way, you’ll be led by one of the elders – a shaman navigator who will select the crew. They say he can see right through a man to his soul. Better still he can see the islands we seek in his mind when the rest of us just see a barren horizon. Only those warriors known for their courage, curiosity, perseverance, and capacity for observation will be picked”. Will it be you? You heart starts thumping at the prospect....

So that’s what I think Taleb Rifai’s conversation with Shannon was really about. He was asking you to set sail and find another land – another way of doing tourism in general and adventure travel in particular. And you, the elder of your tribe Shannon, know that, in order to succeed, your crew will need a skilled and powerful shaman navigator to show the way. That’s why you have

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12 Why not take just 2 minutes to find out what Conscious Leadership is all about via this brief video:
http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=RQfevwfJ5TQ&feature=youtu.be
formed this growing relationship with the indigenous people involved in tourism to be our source of guidance, teaching and inspiration.  

Many are here in our midst – as members of the World Indigenous Tourism Alliance (WINTA). They can guide us – help us remember who we are – and help us see the new land clearly in our imagination so that we are drawn to it.

They know that “when you want to build a ship, you don’t start collecting wood, cutting planks and distributing work, but waken in the heart of people, a longing for the great and endless sea.” And this is what I think our indigenous kin can and will teach us:

- how to “read the love letters sent by the wind and the rain, the snow and the moon;”
- how to look in a lake as earth’s eye and, by looking, measure the depth of our own nature;” and
- how to be filled with wonder and awe such that every breath becomes a prayer of gratitude.

Ralph Waldo Emerson once asked what we would do if the stars only came out once every thousand years. No one would sleep that night, of course. We would be ecstatic, delirious, overwhelmed and humbled by wonder. Instead, the stars come out every night and we watch television.

As I have learned first hand through an amazing week travelling with some of the finest people I know, our indigenous friends live their values. They will sharpen your senses so that you can converse with Nature’s spirits and feel, with every fibre of your being, that which makes each place unique and treasured.

They will show us the power of community – the reciprocal sharing of gifts be they talents, skills, know how, resources and capital; and they will teach us the art of listening, of knowing when to be silent and when to speak; when to reflect and when to stand close to the flame and risk scorching.

They will show you how to watch, wait, listen to the visible and audible as well as the unseen and silent; to read the tracks, smell the wind and communicate with living and ancestral spirits unknown miles away.

And through story telling, rights of initiation, singing and dancing they will make warriors of us all infused with a fierce love for this place we call home and a burning desire to protect that which is wild and regenerate that which has been harmed.

I hope I have stimulated your imagination and inspired you to invest some time, resources and effort in responding constructively and creatively to the challenge that Taleb Rifai issued last year. My indigenous friends and I have spent the past five days considering ways in which we can help you develop the capacity to pursue these rich opportunities while making such an important

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13 For more information on Indigenous Values and Tourism, see WINTA’s site and Facebook page; Ben Sherman’s web site Medicine Root; these WINTA videos from the WINTA workshop after the ATW2012 Summit in Lucerne, this paper, The Role of Indigenous Values in Developing Conscious Hosts, and this slide deck prepared for the Indigenous Tourism Conference in Darwin when WINTA was launched and the Larrakia Declaration first conceived.
contribution.

We have one generation to shift the relationship between humans and Mother Earth:

- From Ignorance to Curiosity
- From Superiority to Respect
- From Mean-spiritedness to Gratitude
- From Extraction to Regeneration
- From Indifference to Activism
- From Disdain to Love for we...

*...are put on earth a little space
That we might learn to bear the beams of love* – William Blake

We have one generation as humans to fall in love with Mother Earth and bear the beams of love that Blake describes.

In tourism YOU crazy unreasonable men and women are the ones we have been waiting for.

Now is your time to step up. Please don't hesitate as our future depends in part on you. Thank you.

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**POSTSCRIPT**
In response to comments that Conscious Travel needs to provide more practical solutions, I will focus the next few blog posts on demonstrating why and how our way of thinking can undermine the effectiveness of ill-considered, unconscious, knee jerk (reactive) actions. Not only that, but the tourism industry now boasts thousands of people around the globe suggesting actions that can be taken up but aren’t. The question is why? See Post on www.conscious.travel Titled: **On Being, Seeing, then Doing: Time to Join Up!**