



In the 12 months since our last awards, the world—and the way we move around it—has changed beyond recognition. That’s why we’re especially inspired by the honorees on our 2021 list, which recognizes individuals, companies, and collectives making strides in responsible travel and sustainable living. Our winners this year prove that when passionate people meet challenges head-on, we can all change for the better.

BY JEFF CHU

Edited by SARAH BRUNING and HANNAH WALHOUT

ANNE MENKE. MODEL: EFFY BETANCOURT. DRESS BY CYNTHIA ROWLEY



Playa Viva, a Regenerative Travel member, uses a portion of the fees from each guest's stay to fund a community trust.

HOLISTIC HOSPITALITY

Regenerative Travel

For Amanda Ho and David Leventhal, sustainability doesn’t end with the mantra “do no harm.” It also means actively improving the environment and society. That’s why they founded Regenerative Travel, a collective of

luxurious, independent hotels committed to that mission. “We’re using whole-systems thinking and getting to the root of the problem,” Ho says. All member properties—among them the Datai Langkawi, in Malaysia; GoldenEye, in Jamaica; and Fogo Island Inn, in Canada—adhere to six principles, which include minimizing ecological impact and respecting the destination’s culture. Playa Viva, a resort in Zihuatanejo, Mexico (shown here and on our cover), has an organic

garden and charges guests a 2 percent fee that funds a trust benefiting the local community. Knowledge sharing is another key tenet, so experts from member resorts conduct online master classes: Steven Farrell, founder of Finca Luna Nueva Lodge, in Costa Rica, led one on incorporating regenerative agricultural practices into hotel operations, while a wellness specialist from Hamanasi, a resort in Belize, shared advice for supporting staff well-being. regenerativetravel.com.



RISE **STAR** Melati Wijsen

IN 2013, MELATI WIJSEN, then 12, and her sister, Isabel, 10, began rallying their peers for a worthy cause: to ban plastic bags on their home island of Bali. They lobbied government officials. They partnered with Bali’s airport authority to collect signatures in support. And, Melati says, they built alliances with older folks who “could speak the language of law better than we could.” In 2019, Bali’s government prohibited single-use plastic bags, plastic straws, and Styrofoam—and the sisters’ organization Bye Bye Plastic Bags currently has 55 teams in 30 countries. Building on that success, Melati, now 20, founded Youthtopia, a movement to empower young people to help their countries meet the UN’s 17 sustainable-development goals. “We can’t look at the climate crisis as if there were some copy-paste solution,” she says. “We have to do our local homework to come up with local solutions.” youthtopia.world.

▲ *Melati Wijsen has energized other young people to help eliminate single-use plastics.*

1 MILLION NUMBER OF PLASTIC WATER BOTTLES PURCHASED EACH MINUTE • **50%** PROPORTION OF PLASTIC ITEMS DESIGNED FOR SINGLE USE

STRONGER TOGETHER Keith Henry

Canada, says Keith Henry, is more than Mounties, beavers, and maple syrup. As CEO of the Indigenous Tourism Association of Canada, Henry, who is Métis, leads campaigns to raise awareness of First Nations travel experiences and lobbies the government for support. “Many Indigenous nations have survived and thrived,” he says. “We’re an expression of Canada that many people haven’t seen.” Henry also works directly with Indigenous nations, communities, and businesses to refine their offerings and broaden their

reach—as when ITAC helped set up online ticket sales for Mahikan Trails, a Cree Iroquois-owned outfit in Alberta that offers forest walks centered on traditional medicine. And another recent initiative, Rise Project, is aiming to create a formal certification system for Indigenous-owned travel businesses. indigenoustourism.ca.



► *Keith Henry helps fellow members of Indigenous nations develop travel experiences.*

CLOCKWISE FROM TOP LEFT: WORLD OF MEMORIES/COURTESY OF MELATI WIJSEN; COURTESY OF THE INDIGENOUS TOURISM ASSOCIATION OF CANADA; CEMAL ENDEN/COURTESY OF THE MUSEUM HOTEL ANTAKYA; PAOLO TORCHIO/COURTESY OF IFAW



KEEPING HISTORY ALIVE Museum Hotel Antakya

▲ *The Museum Hotel Antakya has been built around archaeological sites.*

WHEN THE ASFUROĞLU family began building a hotel in Antakya, Turkey, in 2010, they did what every developer must do in designated zones of this history-rich city, which stands partly on top of the ruins of ancient Antioch. They conducted a borehole archaeological survey. The scope and scale of what they found shocked them: a trove of artifacts spanning two millennia. The subsequent excavation, Antakya’s largest in nearly a century, transformed the hotel’s focus—and upon opening last year, it became a worldwide exemplar of honoring heritage and history. Among the hundreds of treasures on display: a spectacular second-century mosaic of the Pegasus made from stones in 162 colors, which is visible through a glass floor in the lobby, and another depicting colorful birds. The latter is especially meaningful to Sabiha Asfuroğlu Abbasoğlu, who heads up the family’s hotel group. “My family’s surname is Asfuroğlu, and *asfur* means ‘bird,’” she says. “This mosaic reaffirmed that our involvement with the project was meant to be.” themuseumhotelantakya.com; doubles from \$194.

10 AVERAGE AGE AT WHICH MASAI GIRLS LEAVE SCHOOL • **10,000 TO 15,000** NUMBER OF ELEPHANTS KILLED ANNUALLY BY POACHERS WORLDWIDE • **2,000** NUMBER OF ELEPHANTS PROTECTED BY TEAM LIONESS



▲ *Members of Team Lioness patrol for poachers near the Kenya-Tanzania border.*

HEAR THEM ROAR Team Lioness

Since its formation in 2019, IFAW Team Lioness—a pioneering all-woman ranger unit in Kenya—has transformed its members’ lives. Under the auspices of the International Fund for Animal Welfare, the project has given each of

its eight members a chance to gain economic and social independence. “My work before was to fetch firewood, take care of a baby, milk the cow, and do house chores,” says Purity Lakara, who, with her colleagues, today patrols Masai

land surrounding Amboseli National Park. (Kenya Wildlife Service rangers oversee the park itself.) “My community sees me differently,” says Lakara, whose income has paid for improvements to her family’s home. She also mentors girls in her village. The members of Team Lioness also take a more collaborative approach than the men who typically do this job. “We talk with our fellow women,

and they forget we are security guards. They give us useful information—who is going, the time the hunters usually come—and we set an ambush,” Lakara says, offering the team’s capture of giraffe poachers last year as an example of their success. “We have a soft side that allows us to communicate with all types of community members. They will not tell the men these things.” ifaw.org.

THE COMMON GOOD

Dastkar Ranthambhore

▼ *Women earn income by selling crafts to visitors at Ranthambore National Park.*

WHEN THE INDIAN GOVERNMENT established Ranthambore National Park in the state of Rajasthan 40 years ago, it preserved the habitat of the endangered Bengal tiger—but displaced the communities that lived within its new boundaries. Enter the nonprofit Dastkar Ranthambhore, which aimed to create economic stability by training the relocated villagers in traditional crafts practiced less and less by younger generations, including pottery, embroidery, quilting, and block printing. Their creations, many of them tiger-themed, are sold to tourists visiting Ranthambore—making the park a win-win for both tigers and humans—as well as in shops across India and now online. Since 2004, Dastkar Ranthambhore has helped hundreds of women, many illiterate, achieve financial independence, fund their children’s education, and better their families’ living conditions while reviving part of India’s rich artisanal culture. dastkarranthambhore.org.

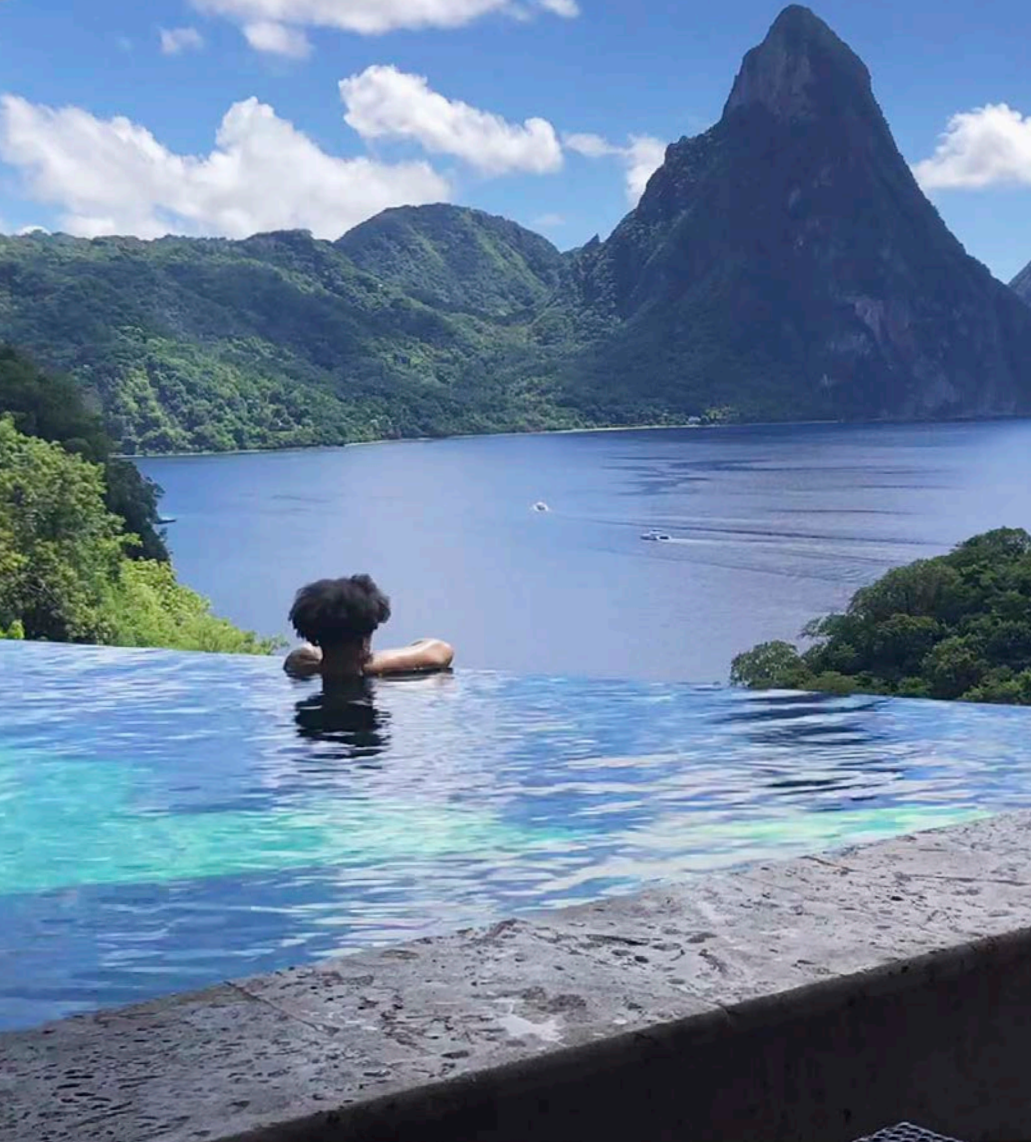


SEED SAVERS

Tehachapi Heritage Grain Project

Every variety carries a story: Sonora wheat landed in Mexico with a 17th-century Spanish priest. Red Fife wheat is named for the Canadian farmer who first planted it in Ontario in the 1840s. Oaxacan green corn has been cultivated by the Zapotec people since time immemorial. All converge 100 miles north of Los Angeles, where Alex Weiser and Sherry Mandell produce a number of heirloom grains—beloved by farmers’ market regulars and celebrated chefs, including master noodle-maker Sonoko Sakai. Rich flavor is one reward, preservation of agricultural heritage another. A third: ecological health, in a state where farming often harms, not heals, the land. “These root systems naturally keep water in the ground, and in California, water is a luxury,” Mandell says. “We’re creating healthy, loamy soil—and a beautiful product.” tehachapigrainproject.org.

▲ *Wheat at the Tehachapi farm in southern California.*



CHANGE MAKERS

The Black Travel Alliance

◀ *BTA board member Ursula Petula Barzey at Jade Mountain resort, on St. Lucia.*

BLACK LEISURE TRAVELERS from the U.S. spent nearly \$130 billion worldwide in 2019, according to research from tourism marketing agency MMGY Global—yet the Black perspective has been vastly underrepresented in travel media. To remedy this discrepancy, a group of 18 photographers, writers, and social media influencers partnered last year to launch the Black Travel Alliance, which offers training sessions on topics such as brand-building and pitching stories. The alliance has since grown significantly. Members share contacts and job opportunities, host events, engage directly with companies, and amplify one another’s voices. BTA also gathers and analyzes data about representation within the industry, not just in advertising and editorial but also on trade-show panels and in travel-sector employment. blacktravelalliance.com.

10 NUMBER OF VARIETIES GROWN BY TEHACHAPI

1,500+ NUMBER OF PEOPLE WHO HAVE JOINED THE BLACK TRAVEL ALLIANCE SINCE ITS FOUNDING

FARM TO FACE

Furtuna Skin

By tapping into the natural bounty of her family’s mountainous 800-acre estate in Sicily, Agatha Relota Luczo infuses a deep sense of place into Furtuna Skin—the beauty brand she founded with industry vet Kim Walls. Most beauty products employ natural oils, water, or some combination as delivery vehicles; Furtuna uses olive oil and water infused with leaves from the Luczos’ 15,000 olive trees. Dozens of other ingredients, often identified with the help of *nonne*

FROM TOP: COURTESY OF THE TEHACHAPI HERITAGE GRAIN PROJECT; TIM GRAHAM/GETTY IMAGES

FROM TOP: URSULA PETULA BARZEY, CARIBBEAN & CO./COURTESY OF BLACK TRAVEL ALLIANCE; PHILIP FRIEDMAN (3)

in the area and then analyzed by Furtuna’s scientists, are foraged on the land, 80 percent of which is designated as a conservation area. Wild Italian bugloss (*Anchusa azurea*), traditionally used in poultices to treat snakebite, helps their eye serum lift and brighten, while love-in-a-mist (*Nigella damascena*) brings

its potent anti-inflammatory properties to a new eye cream. “We’re taking age-old wisdom,” says CEO Walls, “and marrying it with modern science.” furtunaskin.com.

► *From left: Due Alberi oil (from \$128); Rinascita delle Olive replenishing balm (from \$78).*



The peaks of Chile's Las Torres Reserve, as seen from the Mirador Base lookout.



BACK TO THE LAND Las Torres Reserve

In 1979, Antonio Kusanovic Senkovic bought a sprawling ranch in the heart of Torres del Paine National Park, in Chilean Patagonia. For years, his family, who trace their roots to Croatia, ran a successful cattle-ranching operation. In 1990, they added a small inn, which later grew into Hotel Las Torres, to serve travelers drawn to Torres del Paine's

mountains and abundant wildlife, including pumas and condors. Then, in 2013, aware of cattle farming's environmental toll, the family made a radical change: they moved all livestock off the land, turned the ranch into a nature reserve, and went all-in on sustainable tourism and lodging—a remarkable investment in the future of a fragile ecosystem. Guides lead excursions into old-growth beech forests and deep valleys amid the towering granite mountains. lastorres.com.

FRANCESCO VANDINETTI/GETTY IMAGES

ACCESSIBILITY ACTIVISTS

Planet Abled

IN 2009, NEHA ARORA visited a temple in Kerala, India, with her parents. Her father is blind, her mother a wheelchair user, and they encountered persistent inaccessibility, as they did whenever they traveled. “My parents said, ‘Accept it,’” she says. She wouldn’t—and her loud advocacy incited what she calls “a mob fight” at the temple. The incident inspired Arora to start Planet Abled, her Delhi-based travel company. “It’s not the disability that disables a traveler. It’s the environment and thought process of society,” she says. In each destination, her team trains hotel staff, drivers, and guides; maps accessible routes; lobbies officials for better infrastructure; and even creates 3-D-printed models of monuments to offer blind travelers tactile experiences. She now sends travelers to more than 40 Asian destinations—“Singapore is most accessible”—and plans to branch out to Europe. Arora hopes that her work will benefit all visitors. “People with

▼
Planet Abled pinpoints ways to make iconic sites like the Taj Mahal more accessible.

disabilities should have the freedom to travel just like anyone else,” Arora says. “My mission is to change how travel happens, so we don’t need a separate travel company.” planetabled.com.



FROM TOP: PHILIP FRIEDMAN; COURTESY OF PLANET ABLED



FOOTWEAR PHENOMS Veja

“We wanted to create a sneaker that respects human beings and the environment,” says Sébastien Kopp, who cofounded Veja with François-Ghislain Morillion. From the get-go, the pair was adamant about making environmental and social good core to their business. Their cotton is grown by Brazilian and Peruvian cooperatives that practice soil-enriching processes, and the latex for their rubber comes from sustainably harvested trees in the Brazilian Amazon and is processed locally to ensure added value for the community. Factory operators deemed Veja crazy when

▲
Wild rubber is a key component of Veja's Chromefree tennis shoes (from \$130).

they learned the company was paying far-above-market prices for goods. Yet business has thrived; the company sells more than 550,000 pairs of shoes annually. The people supplying the raw materials have benefited from earning higher incomes and living in healthier ecosystems. Next: finding responsibly made leather. “We thought it was well done, and it wasn’t,” Kopp says, noting that ethical sourcing is an ongoing process. “This work can be hard, but many people don’t realize the happiness this kind of journey brings.” veja-store.com.

2X AMOUNT VEJA PAYS FOR RUBBER, PURCHASED DIRECTLY FROM COOPERATIVES OF FAMILY PRODUCERS, COMPARED TO MARKET RATE

Six Senses Yao Noi, which overlooks Thailand's Phang Nga Bay, maintains a protected nesting habitat for birds.

STANDARD-BEARERS

Six Senses Hotels Resorts Spas

No hotel brand has integrated sustainability quite like Six Senses—and the way CEO Neil Jacobs sees it, this eco-friendly mission is also good business. Six Senses' breathtakingly granular guidelines for new construction cover everything from wood sourcing to the toxicity of

fire retardants on fabrics. Each of the brand's 17 hotels has an organic garden, and there's an on-call permaculturist at HQ in Singapore to troubleshoot problems. An informal competition even began among the properties after a general manager in Thailand started raising chickens to provide guests with fresh eggs. Zighy Bay, in Oman, launched a goat-milk operation, and Shahrut, scheduled to open in Israel in June, will have camels for milk, too. A percentage of revenue is set aside for sustain-

ability initiatives: at Zil Pasyon, in the Seychelles, the fund has helped restore habitat for rare flycatchers, and at Vietnam's Can Dao, endangered-turtle research. Plastic usage has halved brand-wide since 2018, and Six Senses aims to be plastic-free by 2022, eliminating items like coffee capsules and yogurt containers. "Great food, great service, beautiful places...those are a given," Jacobs says. "But wellness and sustainability are the key drivers of our success." sixsenses.com.

CHRISTOPHER WISE



FEEDING IT FORWARD

The LEE Initiative

THREE YEARS AGO, chef Edward Lee and restaurant-industry veteran Lindsey Ofcacek started the Let's Empower Employment (LEE) Initiative to address issues of equity and diversity in their profession. They were just about to launch their third mentoring group last March when COVID-19 prompted widespread shutdowns. The organization pivoted—helping transform 21 restaurants across the U.S., including Detroit's Lady of the House; Olmsted, in Brooklyn; and Lee's own 610 Magnolia, in Louisville, Kentucky, into relief kitchens that provide meals for restaurant-industry workers. They also launched a program for small family farms, advancing them \$1 million to help sustain their businesses. This wasn't mission creep. As Lee says, "It's all about helping people in the restaurant industry. It's always

▲ *Chef Edward Lee switched gears to help restaurant workers impacted by the pandemic.*

tied to empowerment and jobs." As the industry seeks to rebuild, "we need change," Ofcacek says. "More equality, more sustainable food systems. Let's do it right." leeinitiative.org.

LOW-IMPACT LUGGAGE

Paravel

For Indré Rockefeller and Andy Krantz, founding a chic yet fully sustainable luggage brand meant getting granular. It took a year longer than planned to design their Aviator line of checked bags, as they sourced eco-friendly options for every element. Today almost all their materials are recycled, from the polycarbonate shell to the synthetic lining. And because manufacturing and shipping can never be carbon-

neutral, Paravel purchases offsets to mitigate those emissions—and buys even more to cover the traveler's first journey with the suitcase. By next year, Paravel hopes to become "the world's first sustainable travel-goods brand." Rockefeller acknowledges that's a tall order. "It doesn't mean we'll be perfect," she says. "It means that every single product, decision, and partnership will be viewed through the lens of sustainability. We will never be done." tourparavel.com.

▼ *Paravel suitcases (from \$255) are made with recycled materials.*



750,000+ NUMBER OF MEALS SERVED BY THE LEE INITIATIVE'S RESTAURANT WORKERS RELIEF PROGRAM



ENVIRONMENTAL NETWORK

C40 Cities

RECOGNIZING THAT GLOBAL problems need global solutions, the leaders of nearly 100 of the world's most populous cities—from San Francisco to Singapore—have signed on to this collective, which seeks systemic ways to address climate change. Together, these urban areas are home to more than 700 million citizens and about a quarter of the world's economy. And together, they have committed to reducing greenhouse-gas emissions, sharing knowledge, and pooling resources. That includes collaboratively financing bold projects that tacitly recognize global inequality; so far, 17 cities, including Bogotá, Colombia, and

the Philippines' Quezon City, have received funding for projects related to mass transit, renewable energy, and ecological resilience. c40.org.

▲ San Francisco is one of 14 U.S. cities that have signed on to C40.

THE PANEL

RONALD AKILI

Founder of Potato Head
(potatohead.co)

EWALD BIEMANS

Founder of Bucuti & Tara Beach Resort (bucuti.com)

JESSICA BLOTTER

Cofounder of Kind Traveler
(kindtraveler.com)

DENISE BOBER

Senior vice president of human resources at the Breakers Palm Beach (thebreakers.com)

CHARLES CARLOW

Founder of Wild Bush Luxury
(wildbushluxury.com)

JULIA CONEY

Journalist and founder of Black Wine Professionals (blackwineprofessionals.com)

KELLEE EDWARDS

Journalist and host of the podcast *Let's Go Together*

SUSIE ELLIS

CEO of the Global Wellness Institute (globalwellnessinstitute.org)

DANIELA FERNANDEZ

Founder of the Sustainable Ocean Alliance (soalliance.org)

JULIA JACKSON

Founder of Grounded
(grounded.org)

NEIL JACOBS

CEO of Six Senses Hotels Resorts Spas (sixsenses.com)

NATALIE KIDD

Chief people and purpose officer at Intrepid Travel
(intrepidtravel.com)

JOSÉ KOECHLIN

Founder of Inkterra
(inkterra.com)

JENINNE LEE-ST. JOHN

Editor in chief of *Travel + Leisure Southeast Asia*

MARTINIQUE LEWIS

President of the Black Travel Alliance (blacktravelalliance.com)

SVEN-OLOF LINDBLAD

CEO of Lindblad Expeditions
(expeditions.com)

ALYSSA LONDON

Founder of Culture Story
(culturestory.co)

HENRIETTA LOYD

Founder of Cazenove & Loyd
(cazloyd.com)

VIRGILIO MARTINEZ

Chef at Central (centralrestaurant.com.pe) and Mil (milcentro.pe)

ANDREA MEZA MURILLO

Environment and energy minister of Costa Rica

GREGORY MILLER

Executive director of the Center for Responsible Travel
(responsibletravel.org)

HERNÁN MLADINIC

Latin America representative for the International Land Conservation Network
(landconservationnetwork.org)

NATE MOOK

Executive director of World Central Kitchen (wck.org)

BRUCE POON TIP

Founder of G Adventures
(gadventures.com)

SHALMALI RAO PATERSON

Senior travel consultant at Wild Frontiers
(wildfrontierstravel.com)

THOMAS E. REMENGESAU JR.

Former president of Palau

ROBERTO J. SERRALLÉS

Board member for Para la Naturaleza
(paralanaturaleza.org)

LUCIA SORIA

Chef at Jacinto (jacinto.com.uy) and Pizzería Rosa (rosa.uy)

FRED SWANIKER

Cofounder of the African Leadership Group (algroup.org)

NOZIPHO SASHA THORNE

Director of programs for BoMake Rural Projects
(bomake.org)

REBECCA VAN BERGEN

Founder of Nest (buildanest.org)

ED VERNER

Chef at Pasture (pastureakl.com) and Boxer (boxerakl.com)

AUSTIN WHITMAN

CEO of Climate Neutral
(climatenetral.org)

GISELA WILLIAMS

Travel + Leisure special correspondent

Panelists were prohibited from nominating themselves or their own projects. Some panelists are affiliated with honorees on this year's list; these nominations came from others on the panel, and were vetted by the editors without regard to the makeup of the panel.

MORE HONOREES

Akua (akua.co); Allen Marine Tours, Sealaska, and the Sustainable Southeast Partnership (sustainableseouteast.net); Aruba; Bill Bensley (bensley.com); Adjany da Silva Freitas Costa; Fari Islands (fari-islands.com); the Faroe Islands; Bertony Faustin (abbeycreekvineyard.com); Gladiator Trek (gladiatortrek.org); Habitas (ourhabitas.com); Cristina Mittermeier (cristinamittermeier.com); New Zealand; Emmanuel Pratt (sweetwaterfoundation.com); and Resora (theresoraexperience.com). Read about all 30 winners at travelandleisure.com/globalvision.