



## It Must Be Now: informed travel

ALEXA  
POORTIER

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**Alexa Poortier, founder of the sustainable travel portal, wants to empower travellers to address the issue of responsible tourism**



I was in Paris during COP21 in 2015 when the world came together to achieve a universal agreement on climate change, with the aim of keeping global warming below 2°C. I was surrounded by people who were inspired to make positive change, and a millennial said to me: "It is your generation that did this to our planet. Now please help our generation fix it. It must be now." That was the beginning of [itmustbenow.com](http://itmustbenow.com) – a portal for travellers and tourism businesses to seek advice and become better informed about the urgent need to turn travel into a sustainable industry.

I come from a communications and hotel business background. My husband Onno comes from the hotel world – he was the president of the Peninsula group for 15 years. At Peninsula, he worked with an owner who believed in sustainability from the heart so he always had this at the forefront of his thinking. When he retired, he formed a hotel consultancy, and he tries to impart the message of how important sustainability is to any hotel properties he becomes involved with.



We were at a stage in our lives where we wanted to found a legacy project – to give something back to an industry that has been wonderful to us. Travel enriches lives, and the reality is that we are not going to stop travelling – 1.3 billion people are predicted to travel this year, and we're headed to 2 billion by 2030. Therefore the topic that we decided to get involved in is sustainability within hospitality and tourism.

Throughout my career, working with hotels, PR and the media, I've seen the sustainability concept evolve. It started in the 1980s when the Our Common Future report came out, which looked at the effect of humanity on nature and the environment – how we are affecting our air, our water and everything around us – as the population continues to grow. The United Nations has been urging the world to be more sustainable since the 80s, however it's been voluntary and 30 years later you can see the state of the planet.

In September 2017, the United Nations and the World Tourism Organisation started treaty discussions to make sustainability mandatory in the travel industry. According to the World Travel and Tourism Council 2017 report, the travel industry supports one in 10 jobs globally, so its impact, both positive and negative, is massive.



The priority of itmustbenow.com is to inform, inspire and empower travellers to really drive change. Articles focus on inspiring travel experiences, celebrating the good people and places in the industry, and interviews with leading voices in sustainability and wellbeing.

There is also a forum that provides a place to grow a community of people who rally for discussion, asks questions and reports back on places that are operating with sustainability in mind. With a wallet and a mobile phone, you can validate and share your experiences with your peers. This is today's world. It places a lot of power in the hands of the people, and it is the millennial generation that will drive this. A traveller with a wallet is the ultimate valuator of any action within the sector – if consumers demand change, the industry will listen.

At the end of the year, we will make sharing information even easier with an app to validate sustainable action. It will be very simple and easy to use – travellers will be asked to answer a yes or no question about the hotel or resort they are in, take a picture and upload it. We'll then consolidate all the information we gather into a one page rating card that will provide other travellers with an overview of how that place is doing in terms of sustainable practices and progress.



Other tools the site provides for travellers include a list of "tough questions" people should ask hotels about their sustainability practices before making a booking; a track and book service that will provide information on the sustainable initiatives of any properties listed, and enable the traveller to book directly with no commission charges levied against the properties and a carbon footprint calculator that allows you to purchase a package to offset the carbon emissions of your flights. This is very important because the biggest cause of greenhouse gas emissions within the travel industry is still flights – they account for 60–70 per cent of emissions from this sector.

itmustbenow.com tackles the issue of sustainable travel and tourism from two angles. In addition to helping travellers become informed and empowered, we also offer a marketing alliance for responsible travel agencies and hospitality businesses through our Now Force for Good Alliance, which we announced at the International Luxury Travel Market global forum in December 2017, and launched last month.



We are partnered with EarthCheck – the world's leading certification group for sustainability in travel and tourism – who devised the assessment criteria for us. The initiative will provide a platform for businesses to demonstrate their commitment to addressing the issue of sustainability by being more transparent and more accountable about what they are doing to tackle the problem. The Now Force for Good Alliance will form a global community of inspiring and responsible companies, and provide them with a platform on which to promote all the good they are doing. Within the first week, The Alpina Gstaad in Switzerland, the Grand Hotel Huis Ter Duin in the Netherlands, and Soneva Kiri in the Gulf of Thailand signed up and are currently completing the assessment process. These vanguards will set the example for the rest of the world.

They follow a rigorous sustainability programme, which saves money and resources. They've proven this – a part of the EarthCheck report shows businesses what they were using at the beginning of the year, and at the end, and how much money they saved.

The triple bottom line is that, yes, it's important to make money, but it's also important to give back to people and planet. I believe that should be the purpose of business, and for each individual as well. We have a responsibility to future generations. And the action we take – it must be now.

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