



KETCHUM'S 2ND ANNUAL ASK AN INFLUENCER REPORT

The Future of Travel Amidst COVID-19

June 2020

AS WE ENTER THE REBOUND STAGE FOR THE TOURISM INDUSTRY, INFLUENCERS ARE FACED WITH A PIVOTAL MOMENT

As the world turned upside down at the hands of the COVID-19 pandemic and travel came to an abrupt halt, so too did the lives of travel influencers. For many, their very livelihoods hinge on the ability to chase wanderlust to far corners of the world, feeding their audiences content as they go. But, in the wake of the pandemic, these jet-setting influencers suddenly found themselves homebound.

Despite the pandemic's profound impact on tourism, this isn't the end of the travel influencer. Rather, it's a pivotal moment and an opportunity for many to take a step back, reset and reassess their brands.

As we began preparing for the inevitable "new normal," we wanted to better understand the pandemic's specific impact on travel influencers. How has their perspective on travel shifted? How will their business strategies change? Where are

they planning to go once the world opens back up? To do this, the Ketchum Travel team leveraged its strong relationships and collected insights from some of the most well-known and knowledgeable travel influencers gracing today's Instagram and other popular social feeds. **THOSE INSIGHTS HELPED US CREATE OUR 2ND ANNUAL ASK AN INFLUENCER: THE FUTURE OF TRAVEL AMIDST COVID-19.**

At Ketchum, we understand the power of the influencer, which is why we weave influencer engagement and marketing into the core of everything we do especially in Travel. In 2020, that power remains. Consumers are itching for an escape now more than ever, and travel influencers will continue to inspire them and get them there. Read on to discover what's next.



Sara Garibaldi

Partner/Managing Director,
Ketchum Travel



Bettina Garibaldi

SVP, Ketchum Travel

Meet the Influencers

MEET THE INFLUENCERS



[@missangievilla](#)
Angie Villa



[@anna.everywhere](#)
Anna Karsten



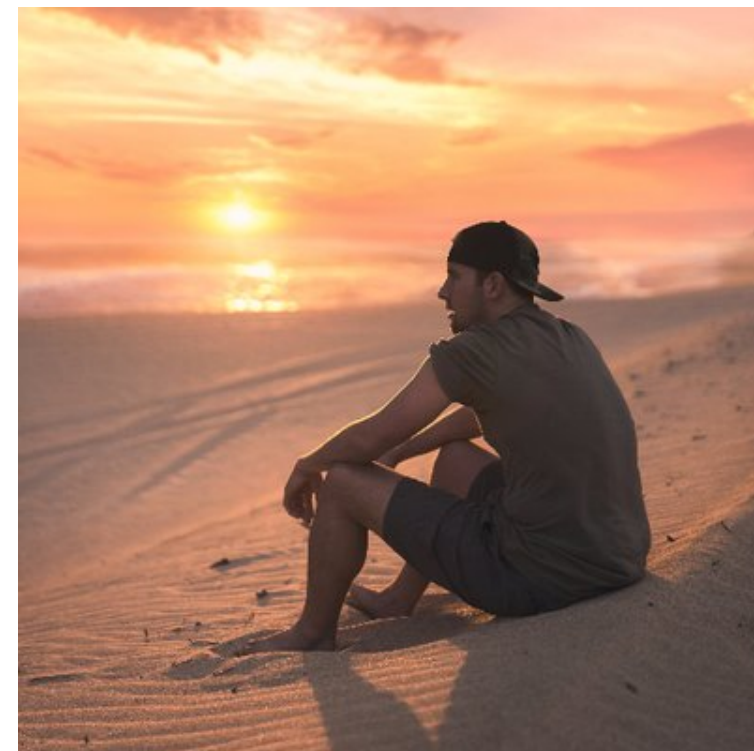
[@briankelly](#)
Brian Kelly



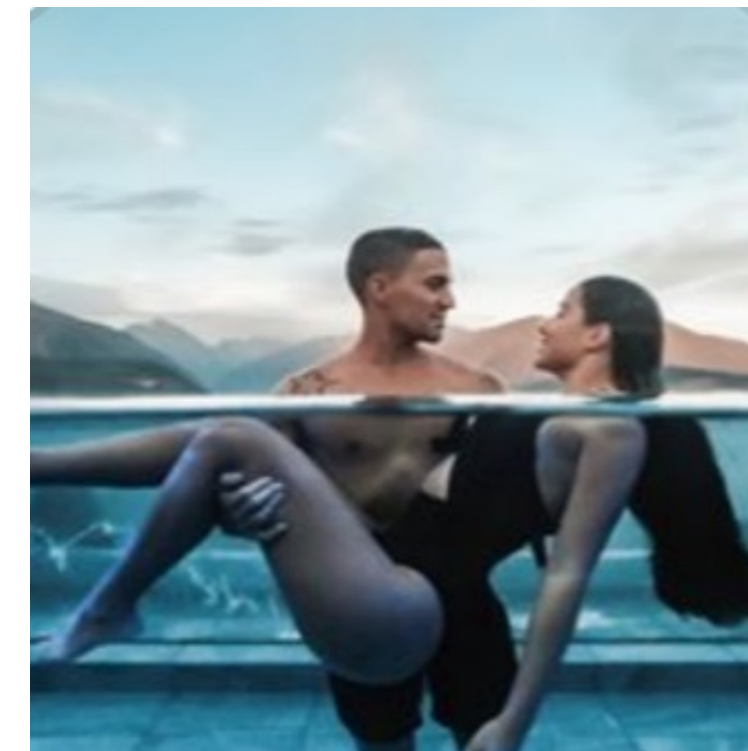
[@thecameronlee](#)
Cameron Lee



[@tourdelust](#)
Christine Tran Ferguson



[@erubes1](#)
Eric Rubens



[@jeremyaustiin](#)
Jeremy Austin



[@johnnyjet](#)
Johnny Jet

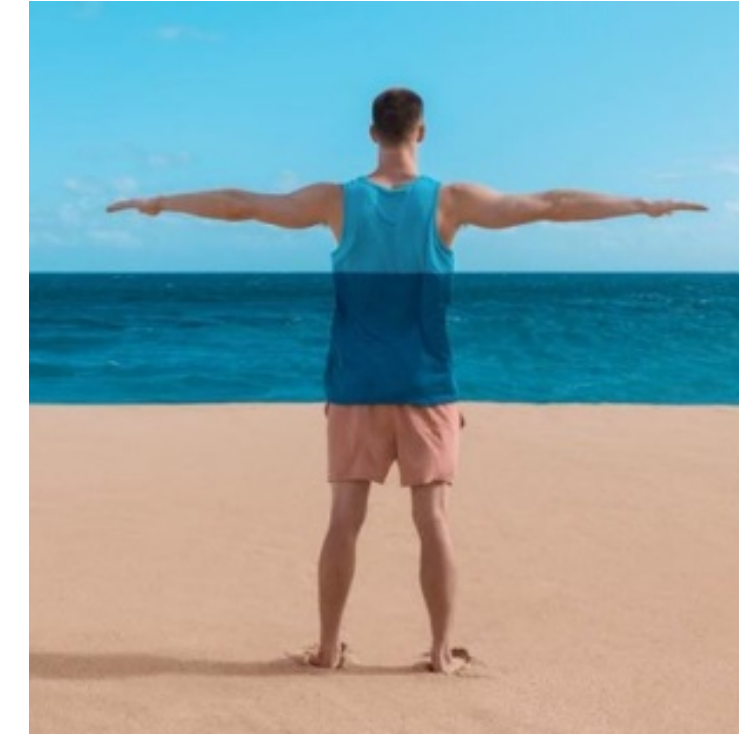
MEET THE INFLUENCERS



[@kirstenalana](#)
Kirsten Alana



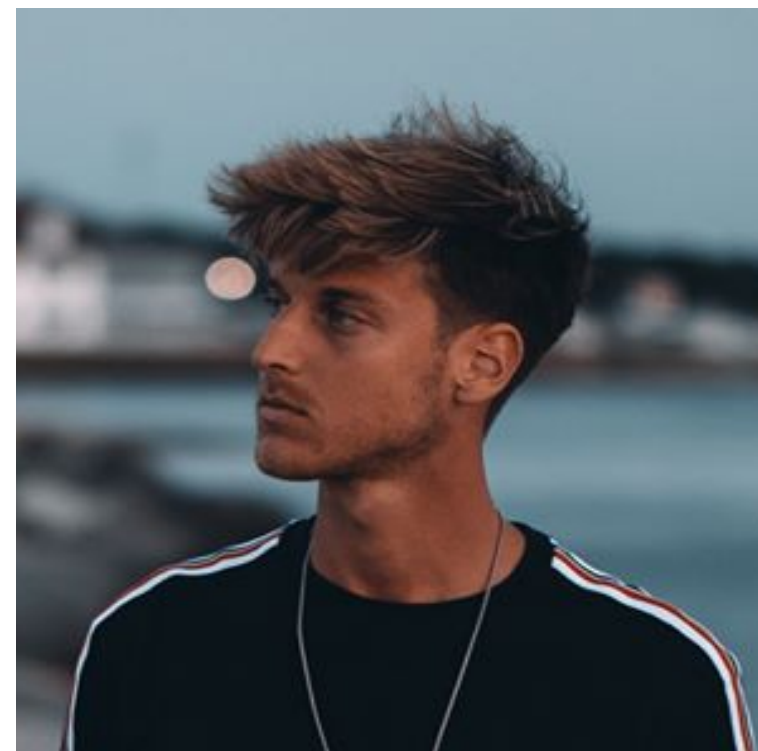
[@theblondeabroad](#)
Kirsten Rich



[@asenseofhuber](#)
Kyle Huber



[@lindsaysilb](#)
Lindsay Silberman



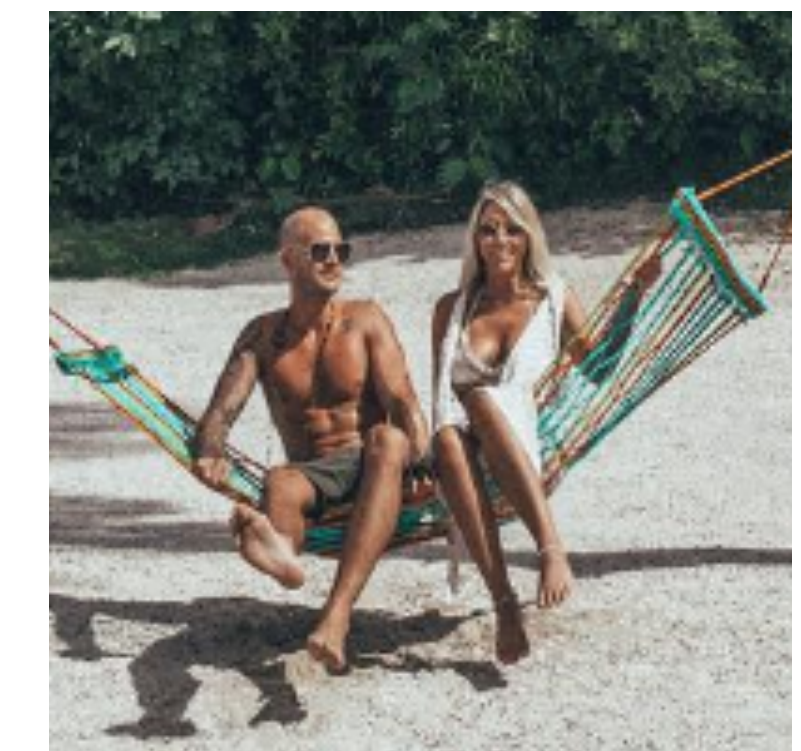
[@meirr](#)
Meir Schonbrun



[@oneikatraveller](#)
Oneika Raymond



[@tobishinobi](#)
Tobi Shinobi



[@xkflyaway](#)
Xavier & Katie Ritzi

Fresh Perspectives on Traveling

Finding a Deeper Appreciation for Travel

When you travel for a living, you sometimes find yourself going through the motions—book the flight, pack your bags, take the trip, unpack, repack, etc. without focusing on just how special traveling is. Now that it's no longer as accessible as it once was, I'm even more grateful for the experiences I've had, and the ones I've yet to have. [@lindsaysilb](#)

I've always viewed travel as a gateway to expose myself to different cultures and experiences. Without it, I feel stagnant and not inspired. It's even more difficult for travel influencers, because not only am I losing out on partnerships, I'm also losing inspiration. [@thecameronlee](#)

This extended time at home has shifted my perspective on travel greatly. It really opened my eyes to how valuable the experience of visiting other countries, cultures and people is. Looking back, it's amazing how most of my favorite memories with friends and family all come from trips we've taken together. [@erubes1](#)





Taking a Moment to Reset

Looking ahead, there are so many places that we haven't visited because we get stuck in a pattern of keeping up with the trends and visiting destinations that are in season – Santorini in the summer, Maldives in March. When it's safe to travel again, we're eager to visit new places that we had been holding off on due to certain jobs and campaigns. We're going to make it a priority to see places we have yet to see. [@jeremyaustiin](#) and [@missangievilla](#)

I have really enjoyed my time while being grounded and not traveling. I have been staying at my house in Pennsylvania with my new pup Marshall and have learned to slow down, how to be a better cook, and how to really become one with nature. That said, when it is time to take to the skies again, I will definitely be more intentional and purposeful with my travels. I no longer want to take the privilege of travel for granted. I want to make each trip count and visit the places that will push my boundaries while nurturing my soul. I know I've personally enjoyed the solitude of quarantine and reconnecting with the beauty of Mother Nature during this time. [@briankelly](#)

This pandemic has given me time to finally sit still and reflect on my business. It's made me realize how important all of that continuous traveling has been to my success. My work depends heavily on the outdoors and public spaces, so it's been a big shift for me to create at home. [@asenseofhuber](#)

Staying Close to Home

A number of people may be eager to jump on a flight to a remote destination, I believe more people will want to travel but stay closer to home. I think we might see a spike in domestic travel, vacation rentals versus hotels, road-tripping, and RV travel rather than flying. [@theblondeabroad](#)

The world has suddenly gotten a lot bigger. Pre-COVID-19, I wouldn't think twice about going to NYC or Hawaii for a meeting or party. It will take a vaccine for those days to return, and I won't be traveling internationally until there's a vaccine or treatment. [@johnnyjet](#)

I believe in the short-term, people will start with local trips close to home and slowly expand their traveling. I've heard from quite a few hospitality executives that their emphasis will be on attracting customers that are within a 250-mile bubble. Who knows how long that will last but I'm personally excited to get international as quick as possible. [@erubes1](#)





Prioritizing Cleanliness

Before I even consider visiting a property, I'll need to have 100% confidence that they're taking the proper measures to assure my safety as well as those around me. [@lindsaysilb](#)

I focus on luxury travel, so fortunately cleanliness has never been an issue and I expect the type of brands/hotels/DMOs I work with will look into this issue even more diligently moving forward. I've always sanitized the hotel and plane with wipes whenever I travel, and I will continue doing that. [@thecameronlee](#)

We were already very big on hygiene – looking ahead, we'll strive to strike a balance of being practical and being safe. That means hand sanitizer and masks in our carry-ons. We don't want to be living in fear, but we do have to be smart and protect the people around us. [@jeremyaustiin](#) and [@missangievilla](#)

I think every brand is going to have to prioritize hygiene and cleanliness to levels that have never been done before. The stakes are extremely high and all it takes is one mistake to really damage a reputation. I think brands will be looking to highlight all they're doing to keep their environments clean. [@erubes1](#)

This has always been a concern of mine especially traveling to new countries. I know some hotel chains are now incorporating different strategies to ensure sanitation, such as mobile check-ins and sanitizing rooms. Some airlines are already implementing mandatory masks on each flight. [@meirr](#)

Contextualizing the Meaning of “Travel”

While travel might seem like a privilege, I don't think it should be treated that way. Most people have traveled in their lifetime - while it might not be Bora Bora or another exotic place, traveling to a lake nearby is still traveling. Tourism is one of the biggest global industries and employs a ton of people - in some countries, it's a quarter of the economy. We shouldn't just start saying it's a privilege and ignore it now because many people's lives depend on it. [@anna.everywhere](#)

There is a creativity which comes from having certain parameters and restrictions put in place. Necessity demands innovation and it has forced people to adapt. As a result, I've seen some inspiring work where people have been forced to be creative with what they have and some of my creativity has even been inspired by the current COVID-19 situation. [@tobishinobi](#)



New Approach to Influencing



Being a Role Model

As an ‘influencer,’ I think we have the responsibility to not encourage anyone to do something that would put them at risk during this time — in that sense, I think there will be a shift in what influencers are sharing.

[@theblondeabroad](#)

One thing that has bummed me out has been seeing a lot of travel influencers and all kinds of travel media reacting to the need to stay home as something that is actually ruining their lives. There seems to be such a huge lack of perspective, this sense of ‘travel is my right.’ **[@kirstenalana](#)**

COVID-19 has had such a deleterious effect on many destinations and I think that as travel influencers we should be leading the charge when it comes to modelling responsible tourism practices that mitigate the spread of the virus.

[@oneikatraveller](#)

I do appreciate the platform that I have, and that people take my opinion more seriously than they might do someone else. As a result, I am very concerned about influencing people to do something which could cause harm.

[@tobishinobi](#)

Pivoting Content Strategies

As someone who creates a majority of content around travel, the reality is that most people won't be traveling in the immediate future and therefore aren't looking for that information right now. Fortunately, because The Blonde Abroad has created a broad umbrella of content for women, we've been able to pivot and create more content that people are looking for right now. We're seeing more interest in home goods, self-improvement, small business, and self-care topics than ever before. [@theblondeabroad](#)

As we navigate COVID-19, we've been figuring out ways to stay innovative from home. We've been connecting with our audience more through stories, sharing insight about who we are outside of what you see on Instagram, and doing Q&As with other big creators in the travel industry. [@jeremyaustiin](#) and [@missangievilla](#)

I'm now currently focusing my strategies on ways I can help others to keep busy while at home such as cooking, home projects, beauty tutorials, anything that everyone can do or needs on a daily basis. [@tourdelust](#)

I have been focusing on building my TikTok audience so that I can continue taking on advertising projects, beyond the days of Instagram. [@asenseofhuber](#)

Our main focus right now is the consumer and giving them the most up to date, helpful information about travel throughout this pandemic. Our editorial team has been working around the clock to share breaking news from guides on elite status extensions and cancellation fees to op-eds about the future of travel and where we think the industry is headed. [@briankelly](#)

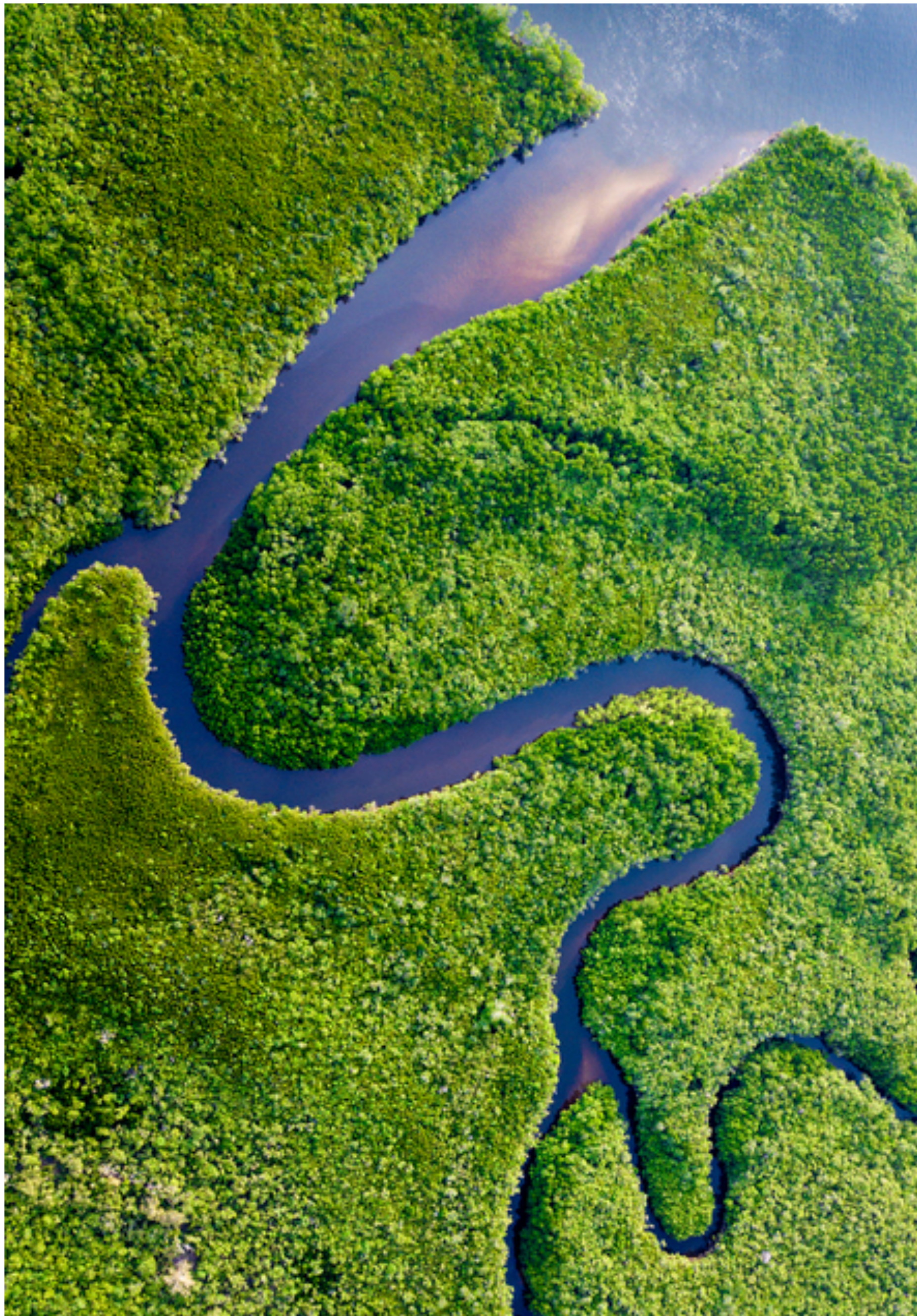


Diversifying Revenue Streams

I've always made a conscious effort to diversify my revenue streams and content, but I'm doing so now more than ever. I recently started accepting one-on-one consulting clients for SEO and blogging, which is something I had previously considered but didn't have time for. [@lindsaysilb](#)

Right before the pandemic started, I made a decision to transition to blogging part-time. Not because I wasn't making enough money - quite the opposite, but I had a feeling that this industry might not last forever. I decided to go back to school and start a career in nursing while blogging on the side. However, with my blogging income being down, I'm also opening an online store. [@anna.everywhere](#)

Being a travel content creator, my main source of income and entire business is surrounded by the travel industry. Over the last 2 months I've definitely had to restructure some things for my personal brand, creating different types of content for brands and finding other ways to generate different sources of income! [@meirr](#)



Adapting Business Strategies

I'm focusing on how I can help during this time, donating to charities, spreading the messages, helping small businesses in any way I can. [@tourdelust](#)

I think influencers provide a lot more value than traditional advertising because we are offering firsthand experiences and that's what people will be needing to see when we are able to travel again. As an influencer, you have to be adaptable, and I expect most hospitality brands will be looking to do more trade collaborations than paid the first few quarters. [@thecameronlee](#)

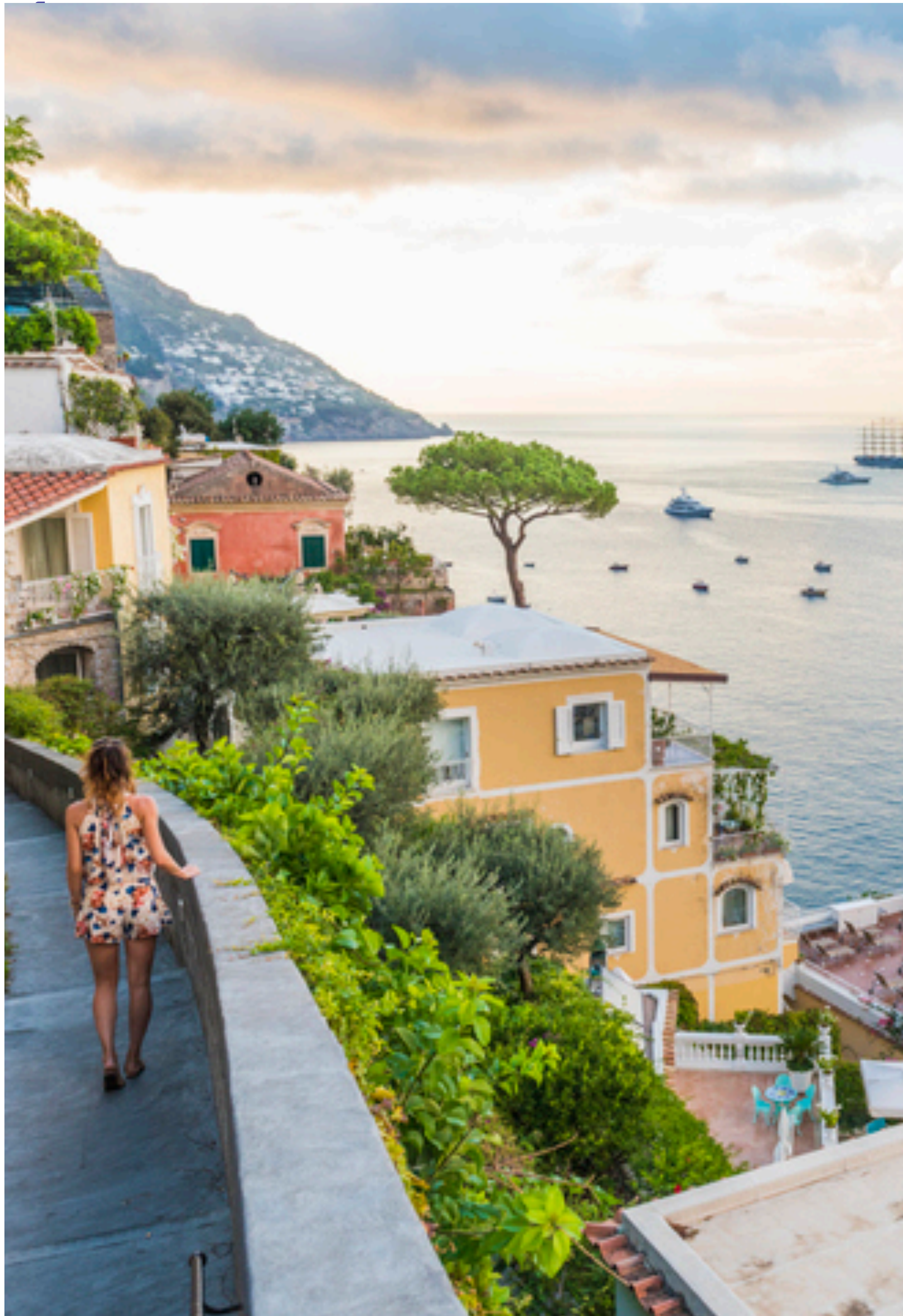
We also know there will be a big demand when travel explodes in the post-COVID-19 rebound, and because of that, we'll need to be selective with our time and focus on campaigns we feel are valuable to the brand and to travel in general. Especially campaigns tied to more sustainable properties. [@jeremyaustiin](#) and [@missangievilla](#)

The biggest thing for TPG this year will be the much-awaited launch of our app which will revolutionize the way you earn and redeem frequent flyer miles and points. [@briankelly](#)

I've focused a lot more on local companies and how I can help small businesses push through these times. With the larger hotel, airline, and cruise clients I have, I've been helping on re-build and re-launch strategy versus promoting travel. The emphasis is heavier on checking in with customers, making sure everyone is doing well and staying active, and trying to find ways to provide value during this time. [@erubes1](#)



First Trip in the Rebound



Supporting Hardest-hit Countries

While I'm typically the type of traveler who prioritizes new destinations over places I've been to before, right now I'm thinking about going back to Italy (and other countries that have been hit the hardest due to lack of tourism.) St. Barths is top of mind, too. Their tourism industry had just started to bounce back after Hurricane Irma, and now they're forced to start all over again. [@lindsaysilb](#)

Italy where I got married last year. It would be amazing to celebrate our 1-year anniversary where we got married and also show my support to one of our favorite countries. [@tourdelust](#)

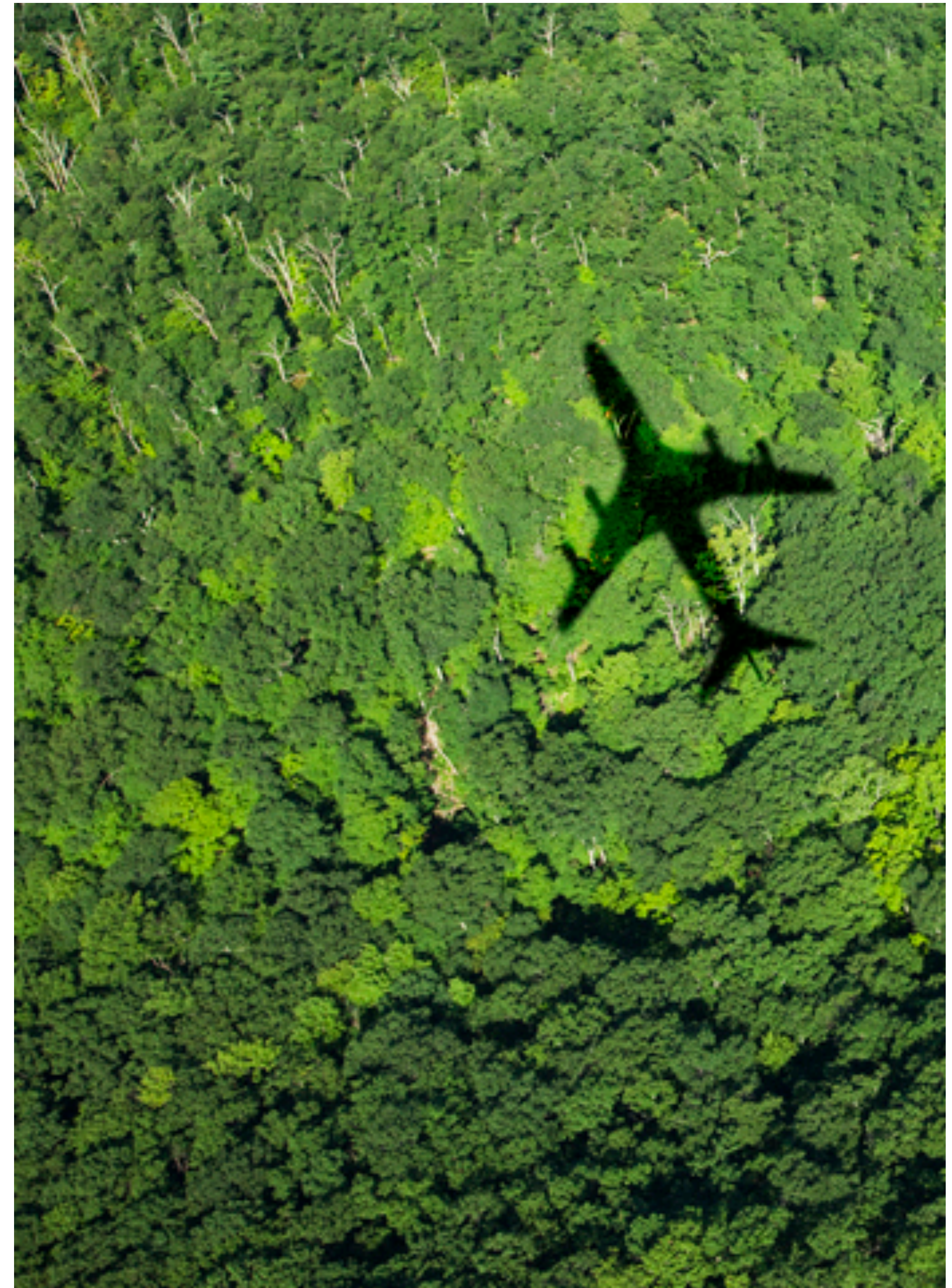
Visiting Loved Ones

My first trip to go give my 91-year old dad a big hug. [@johnnyjet](#)

I'll go see my family who I have been quarantined half a continent away from during this time. [@kirstenalana](#)

I know my family is planning to do Gulf Shores together in August (fingers crossed). [@asenseofhuber](#)

One of the first places I'll go is to Toronto, my hometown! With the U.S. Canadian border being closed, I haven't had the chance to see family and friends since before my daughter was born five months ago. I look forward to taking her to meet her relatives for the first time. [@oneikatraveller](#)





Hitting the Road

I think that domestic travel will come back online before international travel does so yes, I think I will go on more domestic trips initially later this summer and fall. For my first trip, I'm thinking of renting a tricked-out Airstream and exploring hidden gems and National Parks across the US with my new pup, Marshall. [@briankelly](#)

We will be traveling internationally as soon as we can. In the meantime, we may plan road trips once parks open up. [@xkflyaway](#)

Craving Island Vibes

I'm eager to take a solo diving trip to the Caribbean. My passion is scuba diving and it tends to be an activity that makes it easy to social distance yourself. I'm looking forward to getting back to somewhere tropical when I can! [@theblondeabroad](#)

I'd love to escape to another tropical paradise once this is all over! [@meirr](#)

People have been dying to get to the beach. [@xkflyaway](#)



REACH OUT TO US TO BREAK THROUGH THE CLUTTER AS THE WORLD OPENS UP AGAIN.

Ketchum Travel is a boutique agency within Ketchum. We deliver the best of both worlds — the grit of a boutique with all the resources of a global communications consultancy at your fingertips, including a deep Influencer Marketing specialty.

We've supported tourism organizations and travel brands through some of their biggest challenges, and we're continuing to do so through COVID-19. We understand the traveler's path to purchase, and we get them there through integrated campaigns that prioritize earned media and influencer outreach. Our systematic approach creates highly relevant content with the most impactful voices across earned and paid tactics. We focus on creating meaningful connections between brands and consumers with artful, co-created content that is relevant to influencers' loyal fans.

As your travel brand or organization navigates the unprecedented challenges brought on by COVID-19 and shifts from crisis management to recovery planning, how will you inspire wanderlust and instill confidence among travelers? How will you break through the clutter and differentiate yourself among competitors when the world opens again?

WE BELIEVE INFLUENCER OUTREACH CAN BE A CRUCIAL COMPONENT OF THAT – AND OUR KETCHUM TRAVEL TEAM CAN HELP. REACH OUT LEARN MORE.

Sara Garibaldi

Partner/Managing Director,
Ketchum Travel
+1 646-935-4097
sara.garibaldi@ketchum.com

Bettina Garibaldi

SVP, Ketchum Travel
+1 646-935-3957
bettina.garibaldi@ketchum.com

Ketchum.com | [@KetchumPR](https://www.instagram.com/KetchumPR)