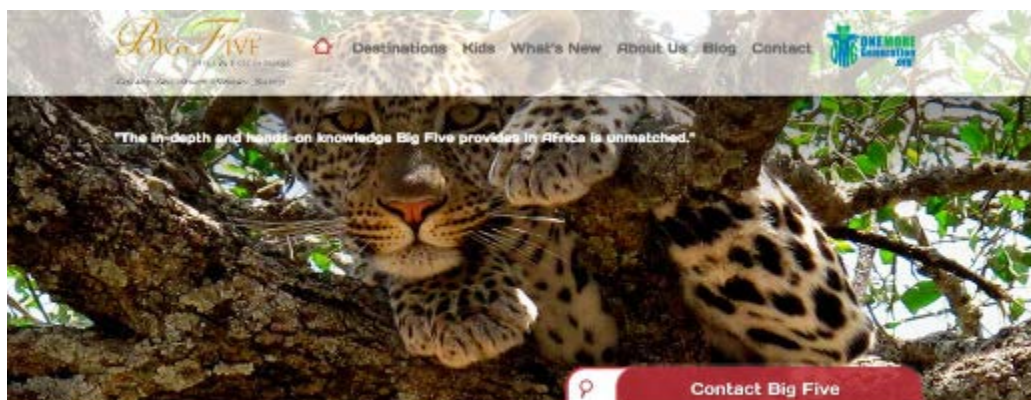




Big Five Tours & Expeditions: Life-Affirming Sustainable Journeys

How do you define sustainable tourism? If your answer is eco-friendly you're on the right track, but only partially correct. While environmental consciousness—or being green—is certainly a big component of true sustainability, there are other necessary factors to consider as well. These include the economy, or keeping money local whenever possible, and culture, or minimizing the negative impact of tourism on local society while maximizing the positive.

[Big Five Tours & Expeditions](#), founded in 1973 by CEO Mahen Sanghrajka, takes true sustainability into account at every destination. [RewardExpert](#) recently spoke with the travel company's president, Ashish Sanghrajka, about its mission, life-affirming journeys, and current sustainable travel trends.



Big Five offers travelers life-affirming sustainable trips

Built on a Dream

“Our founder had a dream to share his Africa with small groups of like-minded travelers,” Sanghrajka recalled. “Early on, he became part of a group of tour operators who established a code of ethics for safaris that included prohibiting smoking and forbidding guests and drivers to harass wildlife.”

This code became the foundation of Big Five’s sustainability focus and serves to enhance their mission even today. “We believe in the power of travel to change the world for the better,” Sanghrajka continued. “Our goal is to provide travelers with life-affirming, sustainable journeys that allow them to experience the best a destination has to offer.”

Authenticity, Conservation and Adventure

Travelers with Big Five can choose from more than 44 destinations in Africa, Asia, Latin America and the South Pacific. The company offers luxury tours for everyone from adventure enthusiasts to families vacationing together.

“We typically work with families and couples,” Sanghrajka said. “The adults average between 45 and 65 years of age. Our clients are usually seasoned travelers who seek out new adventures that will take them out of their comfort zones to explore new experiences and people.”

Big Five customizes every journey for a travelers’ specific interests. “Our itineraries are at least two-and-a-half years ahead of the curve because we constantly test the limits of the possible and seek out new and genuine experiences,” Sanghrajka added. “We specialize in creative, sustainable journeys that focus on conservation and authenticity.”

Current packages include an 18-day trip to Peru in which travelers will experience the Amazon from the perspective of a conservationist while enjoying a high-altitude trek, exploring Lake Titicaca, and journeying up the Amazon River. Or travel to South Africa on a 10-day journey to walk with local Bushmen, view Victoria Falls, and discover zebra migration paths. Costs per person average between \$8,000 and \$12,000 and depend on the journey and requested customizations.

“Every guest traveling with us receives Big Five’s premier 24-hour White Glove Service guest assistance, which provides real time assistance 365 days a year,” Sanghrajka said. “They also receive a complimentary one-year membership to One More Generation, including the adoption of an endangered species, along with specialized guides that deliver off-the-beaten-track experiences not found elsewhere. For example, if they visit Cape Town, South Africa, the guide tells the history of Apartheid through the local street foods of the city with a tour that explores the types of ethnic foods that were traditional during different eras.”



The travel company customizes journeys for travelers

The Future of Sustainable Tourism

In recent years, sustainable travel has been increasing in popularity as well as importance. In fact, the United Nations declared 2017 the Year of Sustainable Tourism Development as more travelers and travel companies began to take sustainable travel seriously.

“More companies are moving away from ‘green washing,’ which amounts to little more than talk,” Sanghrajka said. “They are beginning to walk the walk by taking real action, showing the results of grassroots work being done that goes beyond simple philanthropy. For example, in Nicaragua, we take our guests to a hammock workshop. They learn how to make hammocks there, but beyond that the workshop employs disabled workers who otherwise wouldn’t be employable. We look to partner with and support these types of win-win scenarios.”

“Understand the sustainable principles of the company that you plan to travel with to ensure that they adhere to the best practices of sustainable, socially responsible travel, which promotes cultural preservation, community well-being, and conservation of natural resources,” he said.