

YOUR JOURNEY BEGINS WITH US

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VIRTUOSO LIFE



THE INSIDERS ISSUE

Sustainable Travel Spotlight

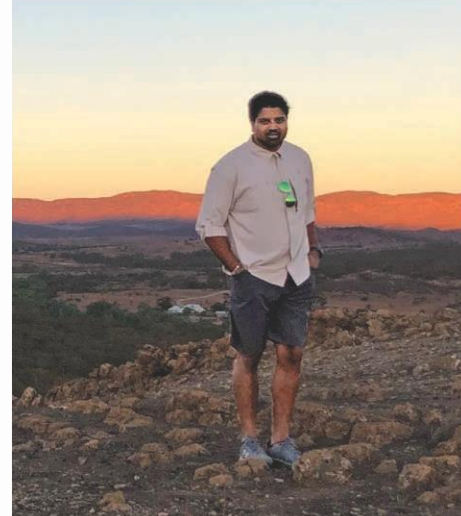
Big Five Tours & Expeditions president Ashish Sanghrajka on overtourism, giving back, and destinations on the rise.

Tour operator Big Five keeps sustainability at the heart of all its trips. The company also operates the Spirit of Big Five Foundation, established to formalize the responsible-tourism concepts Ashish Sanghrajka's family has supported since his father founded the company in 1973.

Tell us about the Spirit of Big Five Foundation. It's 90 percent funded by family endowment. We have two really active regional projects we support. The first is the Awamaki nonprofit organization in Peru, where we're helping empower women in Andean communities, teaching them how to earn money through weaving and then land contract work with hotels and stores in

major cities. In northern Sri Lanka — a country that's only been living in peace for less than 15 years — there's a bit of a lost generation that went through the civil war. We work with a development program that teaches young people applicable skills and helps them find local travel and tourism jobs.

What's the biggest threat to travel and tourism right now? Overtourism is today's major issue. Look at things like the defacing of Angkor Wat or the closing of an entire island [Boracay] off the coast of the Philippines. Respecting fair pricing and focusing on quality over quantity can lead to controlled tourism numbers, but, most importantly, local citizens must have a seat at the table.



There has to be a sense of ownership from all sides, both domestic and foreign.

Which destinations are Big Five travelers seeking out? Colombia is our fastest-growing destination; we have our own offices in Bogotá and Cartagena. Tourism is now the country's second-largest export after oil (and just ahead of coffee). We've recently launched tours in Ethiopia, and we're watching it very closely — everyone has returned completely blown away. Our most popular destinations are South Africa and Peru.

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