

Green is the new luxury - Q&A with travel writer Dawn Jorgensen

 By Ruth Cooper

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Travel writer, beauty seeker and earth advocate, Dawn Jorgensen from blog The Incidental Tourist, shares her #LockdownLessons and predictions on how travel will shift to a more authentic, climate-friendly and sustainable focus post Covid-19.



Dawn Jorgensen at Lions Rocks, a Four Paws Sanctuary, visiting the rescue cats brought from a Gaza Zoo

■ ***What was your initial response to the crisis/lockdown and has your experience of it been different from what you expected?***

The first time I heard of the new coronavirus causing a rapid rise in infections across the globe was late January when I was on a job in Rio de Janeiro. It seemed such a distant problem though, and as much as I took note and it raised concern, I could never have imagined what would unfold in the coming months. By the time I flew home in early February, most passengers were wearing masks and additional precautions were being implemented in airports. But still, I believed we'd contain it and soon resume our normal.

From there the situation became increasingly terrifying and tragic. I was already minimising movement and very aware of social distancing, sanitising, handwashing and in semi-quarantine after my trip, yet now my concern extended to my elderly parents, children and loved ones as we all tried to adapt to the new reality. When President Ramaphosa announced the official lockdown, I decided to spend the time in Pringle Bay with my parents, helping take care of them, while benefiting from the advantage of a sparsely populated village and the remoteness of our location.

I am so grateful that we have leaders who have assessed the situation, made firm decisions and put in place precautions that are contributing to our safety despite the endlessly far-reaching economic impact.

The lockdown weeks have gone by quickly for me, as I've been lucky enough to be working throughout. Plus, the added benefit of quality time with my parents has kept the mood light. Although, like everybody, there have been very difficult days when I feel intrinsically sad, as though in mourning of a life now gone.



In Rishikesh, India with a fellow tourist

■ ***Comment on the impact of the Covid-19 pandemic on the tourism and travel industry as a whole.***

The tourism industry has been devastated by Covid-19 implemented travel bans, border closures and necessary restrictions of movements. Almost overnight, travel itineraries were cancelled with a safari season decimated and many travel and hospitality employees floundering for their jobs. Most difficult thing I have found is the uncertainty that hangs over the industry, not knowing how long to keep positive, to keep fighting, to try and stay afloat. With over 1,5 million South Africans employed in the sector, and likely 70% of them now unable to work, the situation is crushing.

■ ***Comment on the challenges and opportunities.***

The challenge at this time is to find ways to see the light, to stay optimistic and reflect on ways to keep going, now and in the future. That said, not having any idea of whether survival is necessary for three months or a year, makes planning very difficult. Opportunities do exist to restructure, change the narrative, focus on the things that matter and influence the face of travel - local, regional and international.

Nobody really knows or has all the answers, but what we can do is recognise that change is needed. That we must tread more gently on the world, both personally and professionally, making travel more impactful and sustainable in the future as we explore how we can give back to the environment, community and conservation projects on our trips.



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■ ***How has the lockdown affected you and your business opportunities?***

The collapse of the travel industry has greatly affected my earning ability, with most of my work falling away overnight. As a freelance writer contributing to numerous travel and in-flight magazines, it doesn't look set to return soon. Planes are grounded, magazines aren't going to print and many travel companies (online and traditional) are putting their marketing and content budgets on hold as they redirect the funds to customer service - and efforts to stay afloat.

Also working with a Cape Town-based tour operator, I've been directly involved in client cancellations, retrenchments and, in a few cases, the rescheduling of trips to 2021, working with service providers who are hardest hit, yet pushing through and keep the #TourismInMyBlood spirit alive. It's hard though, for all of us, and the snowball effect on countless lives is heartbreaking.

Not being able to travel, see those that I love who live abroad and be exposed to new and wonderful places and people, is something that I really miss. But it will all be there when the world is ready.



At Samara Private Game Reserve

■ ***How have you had to change the way you work?***

I have worked predominantly from home for two decades, first running my own tour operating business and later with the move to full-time travel writing and blogging. However, in the last year, I've been commuting into the city two to four times a week. I've loved that, the engagement with others and learning from fellow team members, not to mention the social aspect that a shared office space provides. I'm now back to full time at home and even though I miss the people, I have over my years of extensive travel perfected the ability to work anywhere – as long as I have Wi-Fi.

■ ***Has this global crisis changed your view of the future of travel?***

In my opinion, travel will never be the same again. We will travel, we will just do so less and with more appreciation for the privilege that it brings. We are likely to see the first movement being families loading their cars with provisions and venturing a few hours away to self-catering cottages where they can remain safe and together, yet with a change of scenery. After that, it is likely to be business travellers who will again start moving – although many companies have now realised how much can be achieved remotely and through video calls. From there high-end travel for those able to pay more for space and precaution will follow in the new year.



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Dawn Jorgensen 8 Jan 2019



■ ***Any trends you've seen emerge as a result of the crisis?***

The coronavirus will likely make travel more expensive, with those endless heydays of travel to escape and explore, and the era of digital nomads permanently on the move a thing of the past. In the process of recovery, I predict that flights will cost more and accommodation establishments will increase their rates – yet lower their occupancies.

Growing in the appeal will be the exclusive destinations and remote country retreats that allow us to be removed from the crowds. Safari and wildlife destinations, desert landscapes, private and vetted guides, glamping and walking trails will replace areas previously impacted by mass tourism. On the upside, the future of travel is certain to adopt a substantially more climate-friendly and sustainable focus with eco- and pandemic-compatible practices key. Smaller, family-run businesses are likely to be well supported.

Travelling will have more value again, and so will be at less cost to the world. Green is the new luxury.

■ ***Your top tip for staying sane during lockdown?***

I say this to myself as I do to any other. Don't be too hard on yourself. Set a routine, work if you can, learn new things, call a friend, cook nutritious meals. Staying fit is important and for me, long daily yoga sessions and an hour a day on an exercise bike are keeping me sane, although I miss beach walks with my dogs, the wilderness and time with loved ones. For now, however, we need to take collective action, stay home, wear our masks, support feeding schemes and vulnerable communities wherever possible, while hoping for a return of the freedom and way of life that most of us pine for.

Comply by the restrictions or they will last longer.



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■ ***How do you hope those in the travel industry and humanity, in general, can come out of this pandemic better and stronger?***

So much of what is happening is beyond our control and we need to truly accept that while nurturing our health, minds and hearts. We need to look out for each other, be humbled by the enormity of the situation and let nature take her course.

I feel it is important to reflect on where this virus originated and drive the change that will do away with trade in wildlife, something that occurs across the globe. We need to examine how to reduce our impact on the planet, personally and in business, and find conservation efforts to support.

We can all be better, do better. The images of the world breathing and animals roaming free as we are paused and given them space will always stay with me. We now know that we can connect and work even when not together. That we can live more modestly, support each other from afar and should all be working towards a greener and more sustainable way of travel – and living.

Deep gratitude for family, loved ones, health, wellbeing and the luxury of an income is the new normal.

ABOUT RUTH COOPER

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