

SUSTAINABLE LUXURY: THE NEW FRONTIER

Luxury Frontiers

Lockdown, in a way, gave us a wake-up call about our priorities, values, the reality of our mortality, and the impact of our existence. This time also highlighted our innate yearning to reconnect with nature, and increase our awareness of the environment, and our responsibility to protect it.

One of my favourite pastimes during lockdown was to watch TED talks, and one such discussion, that had a profound impact on me during this time was: “The architectural wonder of impermanent cities” by Rahul Mehrotra.

This fascinating talk discusses a particular Hindu religious festival that occurs every 12 years, called the *Kumbh Mela*, and takes place at the confluence of the Yamuna and Ganges rivers in India. Hindus believe

that, during this festival, if you bathe at the confluence of these two magnificent rivers, you are freed from rebirth. It truly is an enthralling idea, that you are liberated from life as we know it, which likely is the reason why millions are attracted to this festival. *Kumbh Mela* takes place over 55 days, during which, an ephemeral megacity is created where seven million people live during the festival, and another 100 million come to visit.

The phenomenon behind this temporary megacity is that it contains all forms of physical as well as social infrastructure, while

touching the environment very lightly, it has no foundation, and is mainly constructed out of fabric. At the end of the festival, this entire city is disassembled, and the terrain is offered back to the river, as the monsoon waters swell again.

The thought-provoking statement of Rahul Mehrotra, “we are, as humans, obsessed with permanence. We resist change. It’s an impulse that we all have. And we resist change even though change is perhaps the only constant in our lives”, challenges how we perceive our design, and the materiality



of that design, and how it relates to and interacts with the environment, to ultimately create a positive sense of place.

IMPERMANENT LUXURY

A company that has accomplished this idea, where sustainability and permanence collide, is Luxury Frontiers. They are a San Francisco/Johannesburg-based international design and development firm, specialising in upmarket, light-on-earth hospitality concepts. Founded in 2011, Luxury Frontiers consists of a multicultural team that has a passion for creating an extraordinary travel experience. They turn beautiful remote locations in the wilderness, into a once-in-a-lifetime luxury experience destination, enriching people's lives while remaining sensitive to the natural environment.

Luxury Frontiers accomplishes this by placing the emphasis wholly on the exquisite geographical setting, highlighting nature rather than structure. Due to the flexible nature of the alternative building material they use, such as high-performance canvas, wood, steel and glass, they can think out of the box, to creatively deliver an Haute design. This enables Luxury Frontiers to design technically dismantlable structures in places where environmental concerns and strict regulations are in place. This includes UNESCO World Heritage Sites, RAMSAR





sites, and national parks, allowing for building licences to be approved in locations where traditional buildings would not be permitted.

SPANNING THE GLOBE

Luxury Frontiers has designed and developed some of the world's most renowned and visionary travelling properties in over 25 countries and across six continents. Producing anything from stand-alone resorts and resort add-ons, greenfield and refurbishment projects, and from pop-up experiences to permanent structures. Due to that, leaders and visionaries in the hospitality and real estate industries are working with Luxury Frontiers, including Four Seasons, Aman, Belmond, Ritz-Carlton Reserve, Abercrombie & Kent, and Wilderness Safaris.

By staying true to their values, and through innovative creative solutions, Luxury Frontiers has turned the seemingly impossible into high-end luxury tented camps, treetop suites, and light-on-earth building concepts, pushing the boundaries while being sensitive to the environment and the sense of place, without sacrificing comfort or style.

This approach has seen them being awarded in the 2020 *Awards for Hospitality Experience and Design / AHEAD Americas* award in the "New Concept" category, for their design of Nayara Tented Camp. This winning concept is situated in the Arenal Volcano National Park in Costa Rica.

The camp has bespoke levels of luxury not to be found anywhere in the Arenal

Volcano area or throughout Central America, with an immaculate amalgamation between indoor and outdoor spaces.

The Naya Resort is a floating structure that touches its environment lightly, seamlessly blending into circumjacent biome, where over 20,000 unique floras were introduced for re-population to actively reforest the surrounding area, and further nurture Nayara's sloth sanctuary. Through this initiative, guests at Nayara are given the opportunity to interact with 15 sloths in the sanctuary surrounding the tented camp.

Camp Sakrika by Amangiri is another breathtakingly beautiful project geologically contrasting, and absolutely captivating place on earth, in the heart of the Utah Desert. This tented pavilion



"Cities, people, architecture will come and go, but the planet is here to stay. Touch it lightly, leave a minimal mark. And I think that's an important lesson for us as citizens and architects. And I think it was this experience that made me believe that impermanence is bigger than permanence and bigger than us all." - Rahul Mehrotra



is the epitome of sustainable genius. The design mimics the surrounding canyons and mesas, introducing the solitude of the desert that contrasts and evokes the spirit of adventure. With every glimpse and view enticing you go out to explore. This camp is equipped to accommodate families of every size, with every pavilion featuring a private fire pit to spend quality time around at dusk, creating moments to reflect and connect and unpolluted by artificial light providing night skies that are ideal for stargazing.

Looking at Luxury Frontiers portfolio across the globe, I stand in awe. Their designs are honest, real, innocent, almost naïve. Complementing the surrounding ecosystem, wherein it is nestled, creating luxury without vanity or ego, yet touching your spirit through sensitivity and grace. 🌿

by *rudi lubbe* /
photography by *luxury frontiers*