

Sustainable Tourism in Selected High-End Resorts in Seychelles

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Introduction

An important percentage of luxury tourism focuses on travel to less developed and poorer countries, especially SIDS, where high-end hotels and resorts are located, offering a paradise-like experience enforced by spectacular natural ecosystems (Giampiccoli et al., 2021). For more than half a century, the people of Seychelles have worked hard to position the islands as a premier destination for a luxury tourist providing an inspiration to other SIDS. Now, this vision embraces sustainability to preserve its enchanting views, sandy and clean beaches, turquoise ocean, and Creole culture and traditions (Kueffer et al., 2013). The study examines ideas behind sustainable luxury tourism and applies them to seven high-end resorts in Seychelles that promote themselves as both luxurious and sustainable to reflect on the extent to which this is possible to achieve in practice. The criteria of sustainability adopted for this research were based on nine SDGs selected specifically by the UNDESA for SIDS. They cover Food Security, Gender Equality, Access to Clean Water and Sanitation, Affordable and Clean Energy, Responsible Consumption and Production, Life below Water, Life on Land, and Partnerships for the Goals. The assessment of luxury was based on: Furnishing, Exclusivity, Premium Brand, Prestige, Room Pricing, Solitude, Targeted Marketing, Uniqueness and VIP access.

Background

Seychelles has consistently showed its commitment to the implementation of sustainable development. It uses the SIDS framework to position itself as a major actor despite its tiny population and small land area. The country has been visible ever since the United Nations started to promote the SIDS agenda in 1989 and has been active in a broad variety of global scale programmes. These include: the Barbados Programme (BPOA), the Mauritius-organized International Meeting of all the SIDS members, Biological Diversity (CBD), and the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC).

Seychelles National Development Strategy for 2019-2023 (n.d.) lists tourism as a key tool of sustainable economic development. Concrete elements of the Strategy are laid out in the Tourism Master Plan – a comprehensive exercise that involved all the key stakeholders. To operationalize the Tourism Master Plan, a roadmap was drafted to set out specific strategic steps that focus on eight priority areas guiding the tourism sector up

to 2023 and beyond. The main ones include: boosting brand development, investing in market research and outreach, as well as enhancing and diversifying products and services (Seychelles Nation, 2019). Overall, 'Destination 2023', is the strategy that *'provides for maximizing wealth producing capacity of the Seychelles tourism sector enabled by pro-tourism business development policies and appropriate investment strategies'*.

Giampiccoli et al. (2020) identify several fundamental issues regarding luxury tourism in Seychelles. The country is unquestionably recognized as a major luxury tourism destination, which attracted USD 618 Million in 2019, which (given 428,000 arrivals) translates into each tourist spending over USD 1,444 per visit (The World Bank, 2020). Although the tourism industry has become the leading provider of foreign currency, jobs, infrastructure and new enterprises, which together have helped to decrease income inequality and improve the welfare of the local population (Shahbaz et al., 2020), Seychelles continues to have a high rate of foreign ownership of hotels. This results in financial leakages from the country's economy. The country's focus on luxury tourism dominated by high-end hotels situated along the coasts of its islands is causing a debate as to whether the hotels should expand to the interior. This would still preserve some of the benefits of holidaying there and facilitate distribution of wealth generated by the tourist industry. The same applies when it comes to the noticeable deterioration of the pristine coastal natural environment. The archipelago has already been identified as a biodiversity hotspot by international conservation bodies (Fleischmann et al., 2003).

Taking into account the potential of luxury tourism to boost development efforts and the evolving character of the notions of luxury and sustainability, it is helpful and timely to explore in a more detailed and updated manner how this fits with the ambitions encapsulated by the SIDS sustainability agenda. SIDS have particular development needs, such as: their vulnerability to climate change, remote geographic setting, limited agricultural land, and long-term survival (Herbert, 2019; de Berdt Romilly, 2005). It is thanks to the UNDESA network, where Seychelles is an important actor, that nine distinct SDGs were specially selected for SIDS as a specialized tool for analysing whether sustainable development actually is successful or not (BPOA, 1994).

Case study

In this section, using a case-study approach, the researcher explored the contribution selected luxury resorts make towards sustainability. The specific aim of the analysis was to investigate the sustainability strategies adopted by each selected resort in the context of the overall luxury experience. The idea behind it was to spot tensions and management challenges to the delivery of an integrated sustainability and luxury hotel offering. The study did not set out to comprehensively assess the sustainability strategies and their implementation at each resort. Instead, it sought to identify patterns and trends in the way

management promotes and rolls out its sustainability strategies and how these approaches might resonate with the guests.

A case-study approach is one way to explore these management challenges, by enabling an examination and comparison of the diverse ways sustainable luxury tourism is handled. The joint offering of sustainability and luxury introduces tensions that are still to be understood and dealt with. While there is an ongoing debate on the soundness and practical application of the idea of sustainable luxury tourism, luxury tourist operators face increasing pressure to offer and manage sustainability.

The resorts selected for the case study were Constance Ephelia, Eden Blue, Frégate Private Island, Hilton Labriz Resort & Spa, North Island, Six Senses Zil Pasyon, Félicité, and JA Enchanted Waterfront. Each of the seven resorts actively promotes itself as sustainable. While the seven locations were chosen because of their claim to provide a sustainable luxury experience, they were also scattered in different locations, offered a distinctly diverse experience, and sought to attract a different kind of tourist. The specific set of luxury hotels partly follows an international ranking for the most sustainable hotels and resorts in Seychelles found on the website called ‘The 10 Most Sustainable Luxury Hotels in Seychelles’ (Etic Hotels Journal, 2021). As the website did not cover all the hotels used in the research, the author relied on other resources, such as booking.com, tripadvisor.com and the information found on the official websites of each of the luxury hotels themselves.

This approach is not without its perils. The research relies on an internet that is far from a reliable source of information, yet alone knowledge. The key problem is how to deal with bots and fake accounts impersonating humans that increasingly populate social media (Woolley, 2020; Theuns, 2014). In addition to relying on internet-based information, the principal researcher contacted each resort by email to verify the findings presented in this study. Resorts’ responses were made by automatic AI (artificial intelligence) systems that focus entirely on booking and reception-like activities. Short of embarking on another mission to Seychelles, there was no reliable way of contacting them and getting appropriate and up-to-date verifications of data included in this research by the resorts investigated in this study.

The resorts were chosen for their price, popularity, exclusivity and sustainability. Their price (for 6 nights, for 2 people) makes them the luxurious hotels and resorts with the highest price tag. The principal researcher visited the Constance Ephelia, Eden Blue and JA Enchanted Waterfront. He experienced their offerings, including swimming pools, bars, restaurants and, at the Eden Blue Hotel, conference venues and catering facilities. He also engaged in discussions with managers, reception and support staff. The researcher also benefitted from the library resources of the University of Seychelles. The presentation of data was inspired by Moscardo (2017). It facilitated the examination of seven cases of sustainable luxury tourism experiences exploring the extent, nature, effectiveness and challenges of the sustainability strategies adopted by the respective resort operators.

The criteria of sustainability adopted for this research were based on the nine SDGs listed in the Introduction. The assessment of luxury was based on the attributes also indicated in the Introduction. The luxury experience was split into three separate steps:

- i. pre- arrival (price, premium brand and target marketing)
- ii. arrival (exclusivity, VIP access, solitude and uniqueness)
- iii. post- arrival (furnishing, prestige and customer reviews).

The pre- arrival step refers to the stage before the guests come to the hotel or resort, arrival covers the phase when the tourists arrive for their first time at the resort and what they are likely to experience at this time, and post- arrival is what happens next. The primary aim of gathering this raw data was to gain insights (beyond promotional spin) into whether the examined resorts represent value for money for a discerning luxury tourist. The secondary aim was to determine (on the basis of available data), which of the seven resorts has the most to offer to a luxury tourist beyond the exclusiveness of high price. The research data was then summarized to measure the extent to which the resorts meet the criteria outlined in each of the nine SDGs. Each SDG came with its own set of Action Points.

Some general observations need to be made concerning the limitations of this research in the context of standard services offered by these high-end establishments. For instance, it is taken for granted that a luxury resort will offer laundry and dry-cleaning services. In doing so, it may introduce processes that contribute somewhat to sustainability objectives outlined in a SDG by, say, using local staff to deliver the service in question. This level of analysis for each resort is, however, beyond the scope of present research. In a similar vein, it is assumed that a high-end resort will provide a swimming pool for its guests. This service is, by definition, largely unsustainable in terms of all the processes involved from construction to maintenance and end-of-product-life issues. At most, Spraul and Thaler (2020) suggest that, in their efforts to make a contribution to sustainability, resorts could form private-public partnerships and offer shared pools with other resorts and the local community. This, however, would hardly be considered the high-end service expected by the contemporary consumer of luxury services, so the research limits itself to determining if the relevant pool is filled with sea or fresh water.

Although eco-friendly practices continue to expand, it seems that the task is easier for mid-range all-inclusive hotels or high-end hotels but probably only in the context of offering green conference/meeting facilities. As Shaikh and Bhautik (2022) point out, filtered water stations with free refillable bottles may be appealing alternatives to water in plastic bottles when one comes to a meeting or as an independent budget traveller. It is a harder sell for guests expecting an upmarket service. Showers, low-flow spigots, showerheads, and other installations used to save water, as well as linen and towel re-use, are now becoming an industry norm. However, it is hard to imagine that a high-end hotel would not offer a bath

in every room or focus on promoting linen and towel re-use. All the hotels reviewed as part of this research invariably have baths in every facility.

The collected data was summarised in two tables: the first (divided into three parts) examined which of the seven hotels/resorts is the most exclusive, and the second table examined which of the seven hotels/resorts is most sustainable by looking at the SDGs.

Table 1. Luxury Experience

Part I. Pre- arrival: Branding/Promotion/Marketing/Sales and Pricing

Hotels names/ Background Information	Constance Ephelia Mahé	Eden Blue Hotel	Frégate Private Island	Hilton Labriz Resort & Spa	North Island	Six Senses Zil Pasyon, Félicité	JA Enchanted Waterfront Island Resort
Advertised room rate 2 people/night in April 2022 in Euro (€). Stay for 6 nights	7,590	4,200	2,960	5,417	68,593	16,873	2,760
Premium Brand	GLOBAL (Mauritius, Maldives, Seychelles and Madagascar)	GLOBAL	LOCAL	GLOBAL	LOCAL	GLOBAL	LOCAL
Targeted Marketing	Single travellers, couples, families with children	Focused on business tourists. Not for children	Couples, elderly, single tourists	Couples, newlyweds, families with children, elderly	Couples, newlyweds, family vacations with children	All ages, luxury tourists, upper- class visitors	Single tourists and couples

Part II. Arrival

Hotels names/ Background Information	Constance Ephelia Mahé	Eden Blue Hotel	Frégate Private Island	Hilton Labriz Resort & Spa	North Island	Six Senses Zil Pasyon, Félicité	JA Enchanted Waterfront Island Resort
Exclusivity	22 luxurious villas and suites	88 luxury rooms (Luxury Apartment or Suite). 4-star hotel	17 villas on 2.19km ²	111 exclusive rooms in a private resort located on Silhouette Island	One 750m ² villa and 10 450m ² villas plus staff housing	28 single room villas, located on a separate island	10 villas located 7.2km away from the mainland of Mahé
VIP Access	Luxury suites and villas overlooking the ocean. Scuba diving, snorkelling, trekking, boat rental, car rental, surfing. Each villa has its own swimming pool and a garden	Access to one of the 88 exclusive rooms. Shared swimming pool, wine bar. All-inclusive available or breakfast and lunch variation, a wide variety of cuisine. Well-equipped conference rooms, offering top working conditions	Large 600m ² villa with a huge swimming pool, marvellous garden and a private beach.	Access to 3 swimming pools, a fitness room and a gym, wide variety of massage, private beach for hotel guests, as well as a private scuba diving centre and boat rental.	Private exclusive island with only 11 villas handcrafted by Seychellois and African craftsmen from wood, local stone and glass. The large villa comes with two large fresh water swimming pools. Snorkelling and scuba diving, trekking trails	Access to a private villa, with a swimming pool, garden, personal staff and chefs. The island has its own National Park 'Ramos', ideal for trekking trips	Each private villa is equipped with a swimming pool and a garden. Combined with a grill making set and yacht, boat, canoe rental as well as scuba diving gear and scuba diving lessons
Solitude	Medium level of privacy. All villas are fenced and secured from unwanted guests. The beach is open for all (both local, other tourists and hotel guests).	Minimum level of privacy (limited to the guest's room or conference rooms). The hotel is located on the main island of Mahé, close to the airport and city centre	High level of privacy, with only 17 other villas situated around the whole island	High level of privacy. Located on a separate island, 20km away from the mainland of Mahé, Seychelles.	Highest possible level of privacy. The island is 41.2 km away from the mainland of Mahé. Away from airfields, noisy tourist attractions and is only accessible by boat, water plane or helicopter	High level of privacy. Located on a different private island of Félicité.	High level of privacy with only 10 villas and hotel staff accommodation on the island.

<p>Individuality (Uniqueness)</p>	<p>Access to more space than in a standard hotel room. Located on the mainland of Mahé allows for quick airport transfer to and back. Unique access to trekking trails, onshore activities and beautiful beaches. Private parking and car rental. High quality restaurant and spa treatments</p>	<p>Perfect for business meetings, conferences or business trips. Located close to the airport means quick transfer to hotel and back</p>	<p>Huge private villa with access to a private beach, perfect for organising parties or honeymoons</p>	<p>An exclusive island resort opened for all guests especially with children (accessible only by boat). Wide range of top notch chefs, specializing in different cuisine. Premium spa massages and body treatment.</p>	<p>Situated in the vast area of the Indian Ocean far away from other people and disturbances of the main island. The paradise island has its own unique natural habitat with many species of plants and animals. Unique bamboo and incense oil massage</p>	<p>Villas between 175m²- 1 416m². Located on an island 58km from the mainland of Mahé. The hotel offers different ways for guests to arrive at the hotel e.g., plane, boat, helicopter</p>	<p>Location, away from the mainland of Mahé. Quick access to the mainland by boat. Romantic and paradise-like scenery</p>
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Part III. Post-arrival service

Hotels names/ Background Information	Constance Ephelia Mahé	Eden Blue Hotel	Frégate Private Island	Hilton Labriz Resort & Spa	North Island	Six Senses Zil Pasyon, Félicité	JA Enchanted Waterfront Island Resort
Furnishing	Each room in the villa has high standard of furnishing; cedar and coconut wood flooring and woodwork, specially-crafted furniture (tables, chairs, cupboards and closets), AC, a safe, 55-inch LCD TV, minibar	Each room has high quality modern furnishing. From beds, 47-inch TV, wireless Wi-Fi, a shower, a safe, chairs, tea table, AC, closets, to an open state-of-the-art shower room	Each villa is equipped with a kitchen, satellite TV, Wi-Fi, private fitness centre, pool, drinks bar, colonial featured furniture, wooden bed, marble and glass sleeping room interior, jacuzzi	Each room has similar furnishing: a king-size bed, floor and roof are made from cedar wood, 1 couch, 2-3 chairs, a tea table, a mini fridge for beverages, 65-inch LCD TV, 3-4 lamps, a desk, a wardrobe, a shower, 3-4 pools, a toilet and a coffee-making set, AC	Handcrafted chairs, tables, beds, from natural resources like cedar, glass and coconut, palm leaf flooring as well as other woodwork. Villas are integrated into the landscape, open-air fireplace, two pools, cinema and a luxury drinks bar	Luxury sofas and beds made from natural skin, multiple canopies, open air rooms, covered with wood crafted from local trees, 55-inch TV, free Wi-Fi access, cedar floor, futuristic style bathroom, artistic lighting	Modest, colonial-styled furnishing. Consists of a bed, a few closets, two chairs, a tea making set, AC, ceiling fan, standard shower room with a modern sink and a toilet. All rooms have wireless Wi-Fi and satellite TV
Prestige	Each villa has a swimming pool and offers the guests all-day access to a private masseur.	Each luxury apartment comes with a full set of bathing salts, and a 50- inch LCD TV.	Dining service 27/7, private swimming pool, free of charge scuba diving gear and lessons	Personal, individual service for each guest.	Exclusivity to a private island. Private servants and a butler	Access to a private pool and tropical spa treatments	One of 10 private villas on a private island. Private tour guide for the duration of stay

Table 2. SDG based criteria and selected high-end hotels in Seychelles

Hotels names/ Background Information and 9 SDG's	Constance Ephelia Mahé	Eden Blue Hotel	Frégate Private Island	Hilton Labriz Resort & Spa	North Island	Six Senses Zil Pasyon, Félicité	JA Enchanted Waterfront Resort
SDG 2: Zero hunger, achieving food security							
Growing own food	YES	NO (Imported)	NO (Imported)	YES	YES	YES	NO (Imported)
Pesticide free plantation	YES	NO	NO	YES	YES	NO	NO
Composting organic waste	YES	YES	YES	YES	YES	YES	NO
SDG 5: Gender equality							
Ratio of employment (M/F)	F: 20% M: 80%	F:25% M: 75%	F: 45% M: 55%	F: 33% M: 67%	F: 62% M: 38%	F: 38% M: 62%	F: 73% M: 27%
Ratio of board of directors (F/M)	F: 18% M: 82%	N/A	N/A	F: 25% M: 75%	F: 59% M: 41%	F: 13% M: 87%	F: 92% M: 8%
Pay equality (M/F) Working Conditions (M/F)	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A
SDG 6: Access to clean water and sanitation							
Connection to the main sewage line	YES	YES	NO	NO	NO	NO	NO

Desalination plant	YES	NO	YES	YES	YES	YES	YES
Garden sprinkling system. (Does it use recycled water?)	YES	NO	YES	YES	YES	YES	NO
Guests awareness programme	YES	YES	NO	YES	YES	YES	NO
Own water-treatment plant	YES	NO	YES	YES	YES	YES	YES
Senses to minimize water usage	YES	NO	NO	YES	YES	YES	NO
Staff education on water preservation	YES	NO	NO	YES	YES	NO	YES
Swimming pool (communal): fresh (fw) or salt water (sw)	(sw)	(fw)	(fw)	(fw)	(sw)	(fw)	(fw)
Swimming pool (private use): fresh or salt water	(sw)	(fw)	(fw)	(fw)	(sw)	(fw)	(fw)
Use of rainwater collection	YES	YES	YES	YES	YES	YES	NO
Water recycling	YES	NO	YES	YES	YES	YES	YES
Water-saving shower heads	YES	NO	NO	YES	NO	YES	YES
SDG 7: Access to clean, affordable and reliable energy							
Automatic light and electricity shutdown when windows are opened	NO	NO	YES	NO	NO	NO	NO

Using energy-efficient and energy-saving devices	YES	YES	YES	YES	YES	YES	YES
Solar panel installations	YES	NO	NO	YES	YES	YES	NO
Use of imported fuels (Petroleum)	NO	NO	YES	YES	YES	YES	YES
Connected to the main grid (Run on diesel)	YES	YES	NO	NO	NO	NO	NO
Energy-awareness training for staff	YES	NO	NO	YES	YES	YES	YES
Renewable energy roadmap	NO	NO	NO	NO	NO	NO	NO
Connection to the wind turbines	NO	NO	NO	NO	NO	NO	NO
Green mobility – use of hybrid vehicles	YES (melex)	YES (melex)	NO	YES (melex)	YES (melex)	YES (melex)	NO
Solar panels + electric vehicle charging station	YES	YES	NO	YES	YES	YES	NO
SDG 12: Sustainable consumption and production							
Local food supply chain	YES	YES	YES	YES	YES	YES	YES
Supporting local economy	YES	YES	YES	YES	YES	YES	YES
Using eco-labeled products	YES	NO	NO	YES	NO	YES	NO

SDG 13: Action to combat climate change and its impacts							
Eco-friendly and power-saving devices	YES	YES	YES	YES	YES	YES	YES
Non-production of greenhouse gases	NO	NO	NO	NO	NO	NO	NO
SDG 14: Life below water							
Protection of the coral	YES	YES	YES	YES	YES	YES	NO
SDG 15: Life on land							
Banning the usage of plastic straws and non-biodegradable packaging	YES	YES	YES	YES	YES	YES	YES
Beach cleaning from rubbish carried by wind and sea currents	YES	NO	NO	YES	YES	YES	NO
Buying in bulk to reduce packing waste	YES	YES	NO	YES	YES	YES	YES
Safeguarding nesting sites of archipelago wildlife	YES	NO	NO	YES	YES	YES	NO
Supporting local cultural heritage	YES	NO	NO	NO	YES	YES	NO

SDG 17: Partnership for the goals							
Co- operating with other hotel partners	YES	YES	NO	NO	YES	YES	NO
Taking into to account all stakeholders	YES	NO	NO	YES	YES	YES	NO
Working together with global/ international partnerships	YES	YES	NO	NO	YES	NO	NO
Implementation of sustainable ideas with the local government	YES	YES	NO	YES	YES	YES	NO

Discussion

Overall results indicate that luxury and sustainability are *not* compatible in the specific context of luxury tourism and high-end hotels in Seychelles. The case-study analysis suggests that high-end tourism *can at most make only a limited contribution to sustainability*. It does so by decreasing negative and increasing positive footprints on the islands. The analysis implies that the luxury tourism potential to contribute significantly to long-term sustainability is very limited. This is so despite much marketing exalting the extent of the individual resorts commitment and actions in this field. All parties involved in promoting luxury tourism participate in this process. These include local operators of luxury resorts, their stakeholders, business partners, governments and international organizations. One way to address this challenge would be to adopt generally-agreed methods of measuring the success of sustainable development interventions by the national and international providers of exclusive tourism services.

From a wider perspective, the essence of the problem lies in the fact that the key motivations of luxury tourism conflict directly with those underlining sustainable business thinking. Luxury focuses on conspicuous consumption, status seeking and prestige, extravagant and wasteful amenities and facilities, hedonism, self-reward and materialism. In practice, in situations of tension between luxury and sustainability, the former prevails as it is simply too hard, too expensive, and probably too risky for luxury tourism operators to alter consumption preferences and behaviours of guests seeking exclusive tourism experiences.

Specific obstacles to delivering luxury products and services in Seychelles sustainably include the issues around: i) the CO₂ footprint linked to the transportation of tourists to Seychelles and local transport – which is notoriously unreliable and at times dangerous given the state of the vehicles and poor road conditions); ii) transportation of goods expected by high-end tourists; iii) storage of goods; iv) resort energy consumption; v) increased waste-processing requirements; vi) unsustainable consumption patterns associated with hedonism – conspicuous consumption, snobbery, the bandwagon effect and perfectionism fuel this behavior and underpin most purchase decisions of consumers of luxury products and services; vii) legitimacy of luxury. On this last point, it is argued that if sustainability embraces the notions of social justice and fairness – and luxury is essentially ostentation, excess, and waste in an environment surrendered by extreme inequality and ubiquitous poverty – then the morality of this type of consumption is debatable (Gardetti and Torres, 2017)

Conclusions and implications

The research yielded some recommendations which do open the possibility of delivering luxury products and services in Seychelles more sustainably. These include: i) luxury

tourism preserving local culture as part of the luxury tourism initiative; ii) regular beach-cleaning initiatives; iii) boosting local employment (employing local communities); iv) promoting high-end hotels as nature-friendly as part of the luxury industry (Nicette et al., 2014); v) high-end hotels testing the offering of tangible and measurable sustainable experience; vi) continuing education on sustainability.

The case study implies that if luxury tourism is to improve its sustainability then it must seek fundamentally different models of luxury tourism development and provision. It would benefit from a more proactive role in delivering national legislation that supports an integrated approach to developing, implementing, and measuring sustainable development policies and actions, potentially driven by a dedicated model of Community Based Tourism (Giampiccoli et al., 2020). Right now, the sector is often doing the minimum required by law, or as a way to maximise profit; sustainable development should go well beyond this.

The luxury sector, and high-end tourism in particular, present the potential to change the classic narrative of exclusive travel by offering opportunities to contribute to the transmission of ancestral skills and the preservation of raw materials and local activities. An example of this new narrative is the rediscovery of flax, which seemed to press all the right buttons in relation to social benefit, deeper material meaning, and product differentiation normally reserved for traditional expensive luxury brands (Farrer and Watt, 2015).

The key challenges for senior managers of luxury tourism operations revolve around the question as to whether luxury resorts should continue to invest in marketing activities that publicize their limited sustainability efforts, or try to change their clients' and own behaviour to really deliver on the sustainability agenda. A wrong decision represents a threat to the efforts to improve the contribution luxury tourism and tourism overall make to economic development, environmental stability and preservation of local culture. The effect may well be that the number of visitors to top luxury destinations will grow to meet easily measurable financial expectations at the cost of environment and culture.

The importance of this research originates in the fact that, while humanity *as a whole* is generally healthier, more secure, and better off today than at any time in its history, more than a billion people still live in poverty hotspots distributed across 77 countries (Desai, 2020). If sustainable tourism is to become genuinely sustainable, more remains to be done to close the gap between present extremes. Given the growing recognition by scholars and practitioners that SDG-driven sustainable tourism is probably an unviable objective, a clear need is emerging for more sophisticated tourism policies (Hall, 2019). Underlying this process may well be a recognition that the best we can hope for is to focus on promoting environmentally sound tourism development that questions our expectations of perpetual economic growth. We could explore the notion of sustainable de-growth as an alternative approach to development (Sharpley, 2020), test diverse forms of 'alternative'

tourism and look at models that put a premium on empowerment, social justice and holistic community development (Giampiccoli and Saayman, 2018).

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