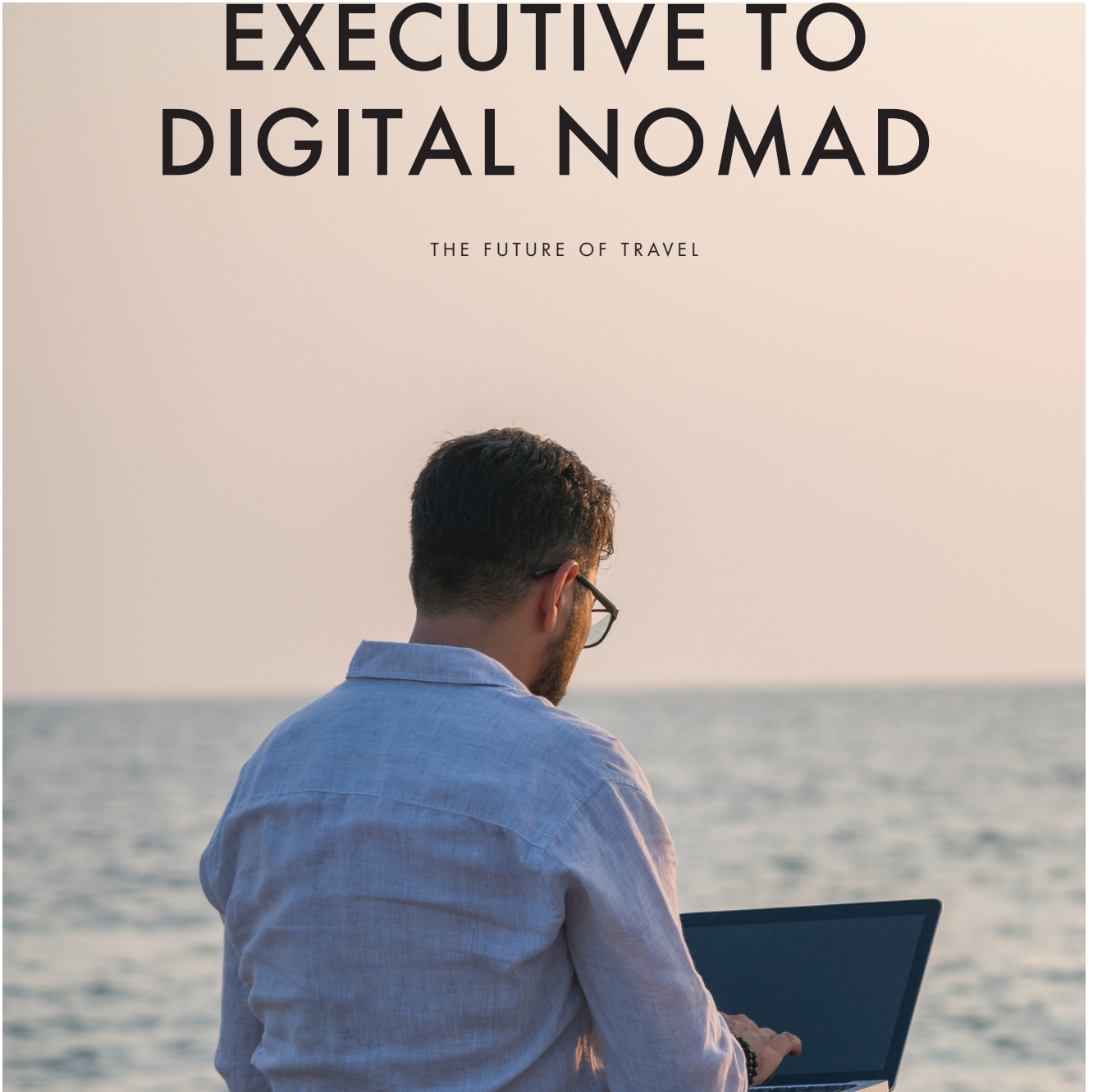


CORPORATE EXECUTIVE TO DIGITAL NOMAD

THE FUTURE OF TRAVEL



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NEXT
GENERATION
HOSPITALITY

An Immersion into Upcoming Trends

Nostalgically, I remember graduating from High School in 2004 and my friends packing their backpacks full of tank tops and bathing suits to prepare for their 'EuroTrip', which they only hoped was a fraction of the experiences they saw in the movie. Nonetheless, it was talked about as a rite of passage to adulthood. Independence by way of international travel and freedom from a traditional family vacation.

I remember wanting to go so badly, but I stayed back to work for the summer and prepare for college the next year. There was a yearning desire I felt that summer which I never satisfied. I instead continued through my four years of college while working internships and restaurants jobs during the summer, just as my family and professors said I should. Not that they were wrong, as it landed me my dream job when I graduated and joined a Fortune 200 company, which was the whole point. Right?

I never healed from missing out on this trip. One with no itinerary – just a rail pass – and a hope to meet other travelers to join me in jumping off rock cliffs, watching sunsets, and drinking Absinthe. While my friends may have brought some Absinthe back for me, I still longed for this experience myself. Maybe it was the desire for freedom. Freedom from what everyone else told me was the right path. Go to college, get a job, start a career, get a partner, save for retirement, buy a house and repeat for 44 years. Was I wrong for questioning the status quo? Was that the status quo?

At least in America, I think the answer is...correction...was, an astounding 'Yes'.

Fast forward to the year 2020 and my generation, Millennials, has split into two different groups: those following the 'traditional' path and those doing 'something else' (*Jason Dorsey, Ted Talk*). Plus, my sister's Generation Z is entering into the work force as the biggest cohort at 27% of the population (*Business Insider*) with their own set of lifestyle values. Now, throw a global pandemic into the pot and what we are likely to see in the upcoming years are more changes to the traditional lifestyle taught by the Baby Boomers, along with the continued emergence and adoption of new lifestyle designs. When I graduated college in 2008, I joined Marriott International, the world's largest hotel company, in a Management Development Program to begin the best ten years of my life. An incredible company built on a cornerstone philosophy of taking care of their associates, who take care of the guests, and the guests will continue to return (Bill Marriott). Simple, elegant and admirable. I first worked in food and beverage operations at full service resorts in Orlando and San Diego before moving back to Virginia to open a limited service brand and learn hotel operations. The next three years had me opening hotels all over the United States and traveling 100% of the time, facilitating on the ground training of employees and leaders across all operations departments (Housekeeping, Culinary, Guest Service, Event Management, Front Office, Systems). I loved it and had the best leaders anyone could ask for.



It was a unique time to be traveling, during the Great Recession, and see the tremendous impact the downturn had on Main Street and middle America. This experience will be similar to that of Generation Z, who is entering the workforce for the first time today in the midst of COVID-19.

My last five years with the company were spent leading teams who also traveled 100% of the time - many of them Millennials - who absolutely loved what they did, including the insane amount of travel the positions required. I understood the appeal, and the value these remote and travel-based jobs offered to others, regardless of age. I spent three years building a team of operations experts, beginning with 15 team members and ending with around 125 who would travel to provide intermittent support to hotels in need of operational diagnostics, backfilling of management positions, seasonal support, natural disaster responses, pre-opening training, red zone visits and a number of other services. I remember one of our Chefs telling me, 'Yeah, my wife is cool with this [100% travel], we've been married 25 years and she's happy to have me out of the house (chuckle)!' Another manager in his 50s chose to drive his RV from assignment to assignment and sold his house when he took the job, so he could literally live 100% on the road. About 50-60% of my team were in their 20s, high performers in hotel operations, and flew from assignment to assignment for 30-60 days, staying with friends or taking a 'stay-cation' on days off, or popping home to see mom and dad who were storing their few prized possessions. I developed the minimalist lifestyle myself and continued traveling 75% of the time.

I could only commit to car leases, eventually moving to Uber and public transport altogether; I found furnished apartments for short term leases which eventually led me to just book Airbnbs when I wasn't traveling; and I started to learn how feasible it was to go for weeks at a time without the traditional, fixed costs of living expenses.

It got to the point where it no longer made sense for me to have a permanent workspace at headquarters either, so I gave it up. I was using Skyscanner to go where it was cheap-est for a few days off instead of flying to my home base, or I would ping an old friend on Messenger who I knew was nearby and wanted to meetup. After all, what good are all these travel points if you don't spend them! By this time, I was Platinum, Gold or Executive with rental cars, airlines and hotels, so the digs were pretty good and traveling was a seamless, comfortable process.

So, what was I thinking when I left all of this behind?



Sunset Walking Tour with Makuto Hostel
(loc: Grenada, Spain)

A leap of faith

“I decided the best way for me to understand what changes were forthcoming, was to hit the ground and travel alongside youth travelers in emerging accommodation concepts in Europe, Asia and Australia.”



In 2016, I took a leap of faith and after months of succession planning decided to leave my entrepreneurial executive position at Marriott and I bought a one-way ticket to Portugal, prepared to fulfill a lifelong dream of a backpacking trip abroad. A main goal was just to be vulnerable and take it all in, letting spontaneity run wild. You can say I was trying to ‘find myself’ and needed some ‘me time.’ But more than that, I wanted to start the next chapter, to shake things up and grow – socially, romantically, professionally, spiritually – and understand what I wanted next. I was a few months shy of turning 30 and if a worst-case scenario happened and it didn’t ‘work out’, I knew what was available back in what my friends from Northern Virginia called the ‘real world’. I had also been exposed to enough variety in social cultures and economic demographics to understand everyone’s interpretation of the ‘real world’ was different. A feeling in my gut told me there was more out there to experience than what I had at that point and it was time for a change. It was time to ‘Surf the echelon of our complicated social culture,’ both literally and figuratively, as Matthew McConaughey said in *The Gentlemen*, and I was stoked.

I knew that a change was coming, both economically and socially, before I made my decision to leave Marriott. That foresight gave me the inspiration to challenge myself to think about how I would remain relevant once that global shift occurs. We were approaching the height of the economic rebound from the Great Recession of 2008–2009, but indicators began pointing to some disruption of that growth. It was unclear what that disruption would look like, and I honestly

thought it would be around 2017–2018 things would start to stutter, but it turned out to be COVID in early 2020 which was the catalyst to drop the stock market 38% and increase unemployment to 14.5%. But, even before COVID, I passionately believed the future of travel would be different after the downturn, due to evolving technology and the lifestyle trends I was seeing of my generation, my sister’s generation and the students I worked with as the Vice President of Careers for the Alumni Society Board of Directors at Christopher Newport University. I decided the best way for me to understand what changes were forthcoming, was to hit the ground and travel alongside youth travelers in emerging accommodation concepts in Europe, Asia and Australia. So, I went with my gut and did it – and do not regret any of it. Planning for at least six months of over-seas travel, I knew I wanted to keep costs low. Somewhere around \$30-50 per day, including accommodations. I had some friends I wanted to meet in different countries, which served as a soft itinerary, but I chose to leave my agenda open so I could plan as I go and not be restricted. Having recently found out from WYSE that the most booked accommodation segment by youth travelers, those 15–29 years old, was hostels, it made sense I chose these products to begin my journey. More about these concepts later on in the series...

Six months had passed, and I wasn't yet finished with my journey, but I needed to start making some extra cash as my travel perks and savings were drying up. Enter my first attempt at self-employment when I launched *Hospitalitarians*, a millennial travel planning service offering first-hand recommendations of off the beaten path, local experiences, as well as detailed itinerary planning services. I guess necessity can breed creativity!

Around 2017, a new term started to emerge which coined full-time globetrotters who worked remotely without any home base, 'digital nomads'. Great, a reinforcement I was on the right path and digital nomad sounded much nicer than 'nomad' or 'gypsy'! At this point, I was comfortable I had come up with a clever way to keep the cost of living low and the frequency of new experiences high. Now I was making some income, being able to work remotely while running *Hospitalitarians*, continuously learning, adapting to new cultures every month and inspiring creativity - all while seeing the world. I felt like a Global Citizen after meeting travelers from Serbia, Germany (lots of Germans!), Israel and other corners of the world. I learned about inclusion and the importance of transferring education. I'll never forget the single mother who rented the rooftop suite at Casa Caracol in Cadiz, Spain with her young daughter who was around eight years old. The goal? Home school her through the summer while learning Spanish, the local culture, and co-mingling her with other travelers who were full of life and stories to share. My 18 months of travel took me from Portugal to Spain, Italy, England, Ireland, Wales, Netherlands, Canada, Australia, New Zealand, the Cook Islands, Thailand,

South Korea and Japan before returning to the USA via Hawaii; traveling in a Juicy mini-RV up the Gold Coast to see kangaroos in their natural habitat, camping off-grid in Snowdonia, back-packing through dozens of hostels and countries in Europe by bus and living like a resident in Airbnb throughout Asia and the South Pacific.

When I returned to the US, I realized I had learned more than I had originally set out to find. I was fortunate to have experienced the 'traditional' lifestyle early in my personal and professional career, then changed courses to something less predictable as I set out on a global exploration. An adventure and a reinvestment in myself, to listen more than I spoke, and to uncover the spending and travel habits of the younger generation. That single decision, and the experiences which followed, positioned me to launch Next Generation Hospitality (NGH) and continue my journey. What I had missed through all the day to day and operational work I was doing earlier in my career, was really understanding the lifestyle needs and lifestyle designs of the younger generation, why they valued those things and how to anticipate their needs in the future.

“These experiences positioned me to launch *Next Generation Hospitality* and continue my journey”



I started Next Generation Hospitality because I wanted to share my experiences with companies looking to adapt their products and services to appeal to the next generation of travelers, bringing a new type of expertise to the industry. My corporate hotel experience was now complimented with empirical research of youth travelers, emerging accommodation products and local tours and activities. At NGH, we continue to aggregate generational and industry research, extract trends which we think will evolve the travel space in upcoming years, then spend time at those concepts to help our clients effectively execute against them.

The consulting support Next Generation Hospitality offers begins with understanding our customer's needs through a detailed exploration and assessment phase, followed by stakeholder feedback and synthesizing those results to create actionable focus areas. Once we ideate and prioritize the opportunity areas, we help manage the project roll-out by creating training materials and developing a sustainability timeline to execute the initiative while ensuring the on-site adoption of employees. Today, a massive opportunity exists within the

travel industry to appeal to Generation Z, who is the largest generation in the US, and the over 70 million Millennials. The consumer market is shifting and companies will need to ensure their business models will accommodate new traveler preferences. Strong demand will exist for leisure concepts which are value-driven, social and immersive. We also expect to see an increase in the number of long-term travelers who free themselves from traditional living expenses to work remotely throughout the year. It is no longer work from home, but a work from anywhere mentality amongst young professionals.

Over the next few weeks, you will see our publications on where we see the travel industry going, hoping to create inspiration amongst our readers. The publications we are releasing are as follows:

The Next Decade of Youth Travel
(May, 2020)

Hostels and Hotel-Hybrids
(June, 2020)

Do It Yourself Adventure Travel
(June, 2020)

Volunteer Exchange
(3rd Quarter, 2020))



make
people
feel
loved
today

Exciting times lie ahead.
Welcome to the future of hospitality.
We're happy to be here with you.



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