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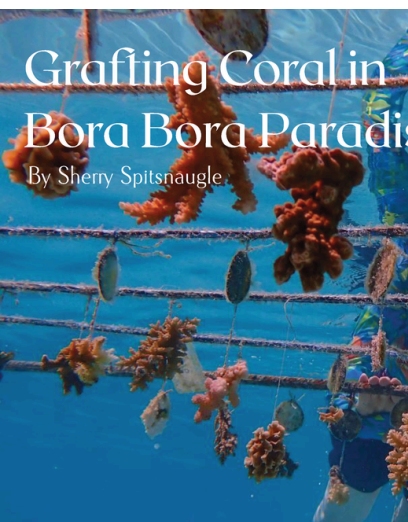


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THE RISE OF CONSERVATION-LED OCEAN WELLBEING

by Phoebe Oliver

As travellers increasingly seek wellbeing experiences rooted in nature rather than traditional retreat settings alone, Rascal Voyages has launched a new conservation-led ocean wellbeing voyage in Raja Ampat. Combining open water swimming, freediving, underwater meditation, yoga and marine conservation, the experience reflects a wider shift towards immersive, purpose-driven luxury travel. We spoke to Yeray Moray from Rascal Voyages about the emotional power of the ocean, the importance of marine conservation and why awe may become the future of wellbeing travel.

Luxury wellness has traditionally centred around spas and retreat spaces. Why do you think travellers are now searching for something far more immersive and nature-led?

I think people are looking for something more meaningful now. A spa treatment can be wonderful, but it is often quite passive. What we see in Raja Ampat is that guests want to feel part of the natural world again. When you are swimming in open water, focusing on your breath, surrounded by coral reefs, fish and manta rays, you cannot really be anywhere else mentally. It brings people completely into the present moment.

”

Raja Ampat is considered one of the most biodiverse marine ecosystems on earth. What does it actually feel like to enter these waters?

It is difficult to describe without sounding exaggerated, because it really is extraordinary. You can be in the water for only a few minutes and already be surrounded by huge schools of fish, bright coral gardens and marine life moving in every direction. Underwater there is this constant natural soundtrack as well, bubbles rising around you, parrotfish crunching on coral, reef fish communicating and calling to each other. It creates a very calming but also very alive feeling.

For many guests, it is their first real experience of being immersed in such a healthy marine ecosystem.

”

Why did Rascal Voyages want this new Open Water Swimming and Ocean Wellbeing Voyage to be rooted in conservation as much as wellbeing?

For us, the two are completely connected. The wellbeing that guests experience comes directly from the ocean, so we have a responsibility to help protect it. Raja Ampat gives people an incredible sense of awe, but we also want them to understand what they are seeing, why it matters, and how fragile these ecosystems can be. For me, wellbeing should also include giving back and helping. You can restore your body and mind, but if your heart is not in the right place, something is still missing. Conservation helps ground people and reconnect them with that giving energy, which is why it should not sit separately from luxury travel, but be part of the experience itself.

”

The itinerary combines open water swimming, freediving, underwater meditation, yoga and breathwork. Why do these practices work so powerfully together?

They all bring the focus back to breath, body and awareness. The ocean has a way of stripping away distractions very quickly. You cannot rush it or control it, you have to slow down, adapt and become present. Open water swimming builds confidence and rhythm with the sea, freediving teaches calmness and trust in your own body, while underwater meditation creates a rare sense of immersion and connection that is difficult to find anywhere else. Together, they create a different kind of wellbeing experience.

”



Manta rays often create a profound emotional response in guests. Why do you think encounters with them resonate so deeply?

Rascal Voyages has long supported marine conservation efforts in Indonesia. How important has that commitment been to the company's identity?

Manta rays have a very special presence. They are graceful, intelligent and curious, and much larger than people expect. They also have the largest brain-to-body ratio in the fish kingdom, and there is something very unique about the way they interact with people underwater. When a manta looks at you or circles close by, it almost changes your mood automatically and makes you reflect on other ways of existing and experiencing the world. The encounter is never really about adrenaline. It is more about awe, connection and respect.

Many guests become emotional because they suddenly feel connected to something much bigger than themselves.

”

It has been very important. Rascal operates in some of the most beautiful marine environments in the world, so there is a clear responsibility to protect them. Over the years, Rascal has supported marine education, coral restoration and reef monitoring work, including collaborations with local conservation organisations such as The SEA People.

We see our yachts as floating platforms that can help facilitate conservation,

creating connections between NGOs, researchers and guests in a much more personal and immersive way. We want guests to leave with a greater understanding of the ocean, not just beautiful memories of it.

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Do you think luxury travellers are becoming more aware of their role in protecting fragile environments?

Yes, definitely. Many guests are now much more aware of the impact of travel. They still want beauty, comfort and adventure, but they also want to know that their journey has some purpose behind it. They want to understand the places they visit and, where possible, contribute to their protection. That is a very positive shift for luxury travel. That is also why we include presentations about corals, marine life and local ecosystems in every voyage, and offer the possibility for guests to join dedicated conservation activities for a day without needing to commit to a full conservation-focused voyage. We also have an in-house marine biologist, helping ensure that every voyage contributes in some way to the conservation efforts in the areas we sail through.

Rascal's yachts are often described as "floating villas", combining barefoot luxury with expedition-style adventure. Why is that balance important?

The balance is everything. Raja Ampat is wild, remote and deeply untamed, and the days can be full of swimming, diving, snorkelling, kayaking and exploring isolated islands. But for people to truly enjoy that sense of adventure, they also need to feel safe and looked after.

That is a huge part of luxury for us.

How does spending time in remote marine environments affect people mentally and emotionally?

You can see people slow down. Many guests arrive from very busy lives, with constant noise, screens and pressure. After a few days at sea, their energy changes - they sleep better, breathe more deeply and become more aware of small things, the movement of the water, the light, the wildlife, the silence. The ocean has a way of resetting people.

There's a growing conversation around "wellness through awe" -the idea that encounters with wild nature can fundamentally shift perspective. Do you see that onboard?

Very much so. Awe is a huge part of what happens onboard Rascal and Rebel. Whether it is swimming with manta rays, watching dolphins race alongside the yacht, standing beneath a sky full of stars or arriving at a completely untouched beach, these moments have a way of shifting people's perspective.

They remind us how small we are within nature, but in a very grounding and beautiful way.

When people step outside of their normal routines and reconnect with something much bigger than themselves, they often become far more open to reflection, change and personal growth. That energy can be incredibly transformative and helps people reconnect with a better version of themselves.

Ultimately, what do you hope this new conservation-led wellbeing voyage represents within the future of luxury travel?

I hope it represents a more conscious way of travelling. Luxury does not have to mean being separate from nature. It can mean having rare access to extraordinary places, but with respect, education, responsibility and a strong sense of safety and care throughout the journey. For me, the future of luxury travel should be about connection: to nature, to local communities, to conservation and to ourselves.



Yeray Moreno

**Head of Experience & Conservation
at Rascal Voyages**

Yeray Moreno is a marine conservation advocate and ocean wellbeing specialist working with Rascal Voyages in Indonesia .rascalvoyages.co.

Based around the biodiverse waters of Raja Ampat, Yeray focuses on the connection between ocean conservation, immersive wellness experiences and responsible luxury travel. Alongside creating open water swimming and ocean wellbeing itineraries, he also develops conservation-led voyages where guests can actively participate in initiatives such as coral replanting and marine restoration projects. At the heart of his work is a strong belief that conservation must come before wellness, because the wellbeing guests experience is directly shaped by the health of the ocean itself.

Yeray also spends years building relationships with carefully selected NGOs, local conservation partners and village elders to help ensure Rascal Voyages' practices remain aligned with both environmental protection and the wellbeing of local communities. Through Rascal Voyages' conservation partnerships and expedition-led itineraries, he is part of a growing movement redefining luxury travel through nature, conservation and meaningful connection to place.

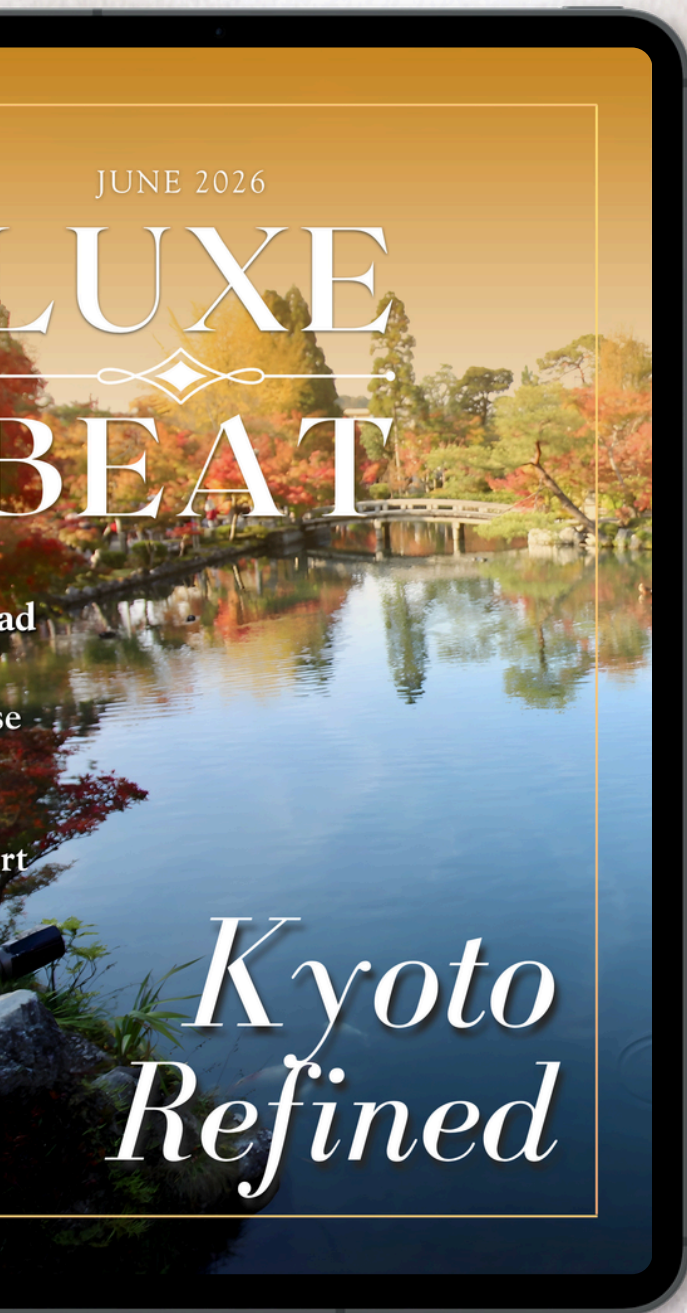
Having grown up eagerly awaiting each new issue of National Geographic, Yeray's fascination with oceans, wildlife and remote exploration began early and continues to shape his work today.







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