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ECO-LUXURY

Intelligent travel takes off

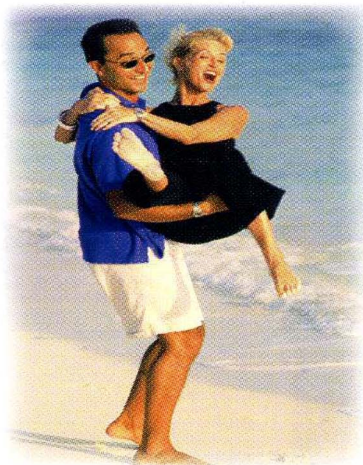
By James Rutter

Reconciling the worlds of high-end luxury and sustainability is no easy task. Luxury virtually requires the consumption of scarce resources and few brands have yet figured out how to make sustainability either sexy or lucrative.

One area in which strides are being made is travel. Leading the way is Sanu Shivdasani, founder and chief executive of the Six Senses Resorts & Spas, arguably the top sustainable travel company in the world.

Shivdasani believes there is a small but growing group among the wealthy who are happy to pay a premium for rare travel experiences based on the goal of sustainability. He calls it “intelligent luxury” and while he concedes that not every visitor to a Six Senses resort embraces the eco-friendly ethos he reckons three quarters are in tune. “They get it: they might have a private jet but they

will offset the carbon emissions,” he said. In fact, all visitors get a 2% surcharge on their bill to fund Six Senses’ carbon offset fund and compensate for their journeys to and from the resort. “Nobody has ever batted an eyelid,” said Shivdasani.



Soneva Fushi, Six Senses’ original Maldives resort which opened in 1995, will this summer become carbon neutral. In two years it aims to be a carbon-free resort – effectively turning off its connection to the grid and producing all its energy from sustainable resources.

It is an ambitious goal which depends on cutting-edge technology to generate solar, wind and a tidal power. “Luxury and sustainability can work together,” said Shivdasani. “To be zero carbon and retain luxury will prove it can be done.”

The company’s first sustainable property development is due to complete this year. Shivdasani is working on a new, zero-carbon hotel brand called Eva after his Swedish wife (pictured left), who is closely involved in the business.

Shivdasani describes Six Senses’ archetypal client as “a sophisticated escapist, journeying for a greater truth”. This means questioning the future of the capitalist approach which is likely to have delivered their wealth. “The concept of free competition and open markets is a good one, but it is based on a fundamental flaw,” said Shivdasani. “Subsidised oil.”