



# VIRTUOSO®

## VIRTUOSO® HONORS PARTNERS AND MEMBERS WITH SUSTAINABLE LEADERSHIP AWARDS AND REVEALS SUSTAINABILITY TRENDS WITHIN THE NETWORK

**LAS VEGAS (August 13, 2024)** – [Virtuoso®](#), the leading global network specializing in luxury and experiential travel, hosted its Under One Sky lunch Monday, August 12 during the 36th annual Virtuoso Travel Week, taking place this week in Las Vegas. Under One Sky brought together the network's top advisors and preferred partners who share a passion and commitment to creating a more sustainable future for travel and tourism. Building on the organization's more than 13 years of supporting responsible tourism and those who make it foundational to their practices, Virtuoso honored top leaders in the space, while also sharing findings from its Virtuoso Impact Report: Sustainable Travel 2024, an ongoing study that tracks sustainable contributions amongst Virtuoso's partners and member agencies and the results of their efforts.

During the lunch, Virtuoso Chairman & CEO Matthew D. Upchurch and Vice Chair & Sustainability Strategist Jessica Hall Upchurch awarded both a travel agency member and an individual advisor with Sustainable Leadership Awards, while three additional award categories based on Virtuoso's three pillars of sustainability - Protecting the Planet, Celebrating & Honoring Cultures and Supporting Local Economies - were voted on live during the Under One Sky lunch and presented to the winning partners.

"Virtuoso's mission statement has been to make sustainability a greater factor in traveler's choice, so that those who do good are successful," said Hall Upchurch. "Today, that statement is more powerful than ever. Not only is doing good important, but prioritizing sustainability is both a serious market opportunity and a transformative way of doing business. At Under One Sky, our desire is for all those in attendance to see themselves and their companies as part of something greater, and to uplift our members and partners whose efforts make the world of travel better every day."

Additional award information follows.

**Protecting the Planet:** Recognizes a distinguished Virtuoso partner that has taken a lead in protecting and preserving the globe and/or promoting sustainable practices in their local community or around the world.

**Winner:** Wilderness

Wilderness's "Conservancy Rhino Ranger Program" in Namibia's Palmwag Concession partners with Save the Rhino Trust (SRT) and local communities to protect endangered black rhinos. Since 2003, the program has provided financial support, employment and community upliftment, sharing 11 percent of the camp's revenue. Hosting SRT's tracking teams, the initiative has expanded rhino protection by 20 percent and bolstered local stewardship, proving that rhino tourism can enhance both wildlife conservation and community development.

**Supporting Local Economies:** Applauds a Virtuoso partner that has made a positive financial impact on a local or global community. Their generosity has improved conditions, circumstances and livelihoods.

**Winner:** Big Five Tours & Expeditions, Inc.

Big Five Tours and Expeditions' "Kipi Robotic Education Program" emerged during the pandemic as a comprehensive initiative addressing poverty alleviation, cultural heritage and education. Kipi, a multilingual robot, teaches school curriculum in over 20 indigenous dialects in Peru, keeping children away from cartels and illegal mining. With built-in solar panels and no cost to communities, Kipi's presence is vital, especially in remote areas lacking internet access, empowering economically challenged communities and young girls.

**Celebrating Culture:** Honors a Virtuoso partner that is a driving force in transforming and impacting others in their community, the travel industry and/or the world around them through the expansion of knowledge, beliefs, arts, customs or capabilities.

**Winner:** Abercrombie & Kent Vietnam

In rural Cambodia, where 20 percent of the population lacks safe water and 13 percent of deaths are related to unsafe water or inadequate sanitation, Abercrombie & Kent Vietnam's "Digging Deeper in Cambodia" project is making a significant impact. Each well is equipped with a bio-sand filter to provide safe drinking water, improving sanitation and health. The clean water also supports irrigation and livestock, boosting economic progress and autonomy. Over 1,300 wells have been installed, benefiting more than 24,000 people and helping lift families out of poverty.

**Member Sustainable Leadership Award:** Acknowledges a Virtuoso member agency that advocates for sustainability and vocally supports sustainable tourism in their words, actions and marketing.

**Winner:** NUBA

**Advisor Sustainable Leadership Award:** Celebrates the outstanding sustainability work of an individual Virtuoso travel advisor, showcasing their inspirational story that promotes and demonstrates the positive impact of sustainable travel.

**Winner:** Kristin Winkaffe / Winkaffe Global Travel, an independent affiliate of Avenue Two Travel

In 2023, Virtuoso initiated the "Virtuoso Impact Report: Sustainable Travel" as a systematic approach to catalog the sustainability efforts of its partners. Over the past year, the Impact Report also began tracking efforts on behalf of Virtuoso member agencies. A survey of 50 questions saw responses from 482 Virtuoso partners – more than double compared to last year – from 70 countries, along with over 100 advisors from 14 countries, resulting in an inspiring look at what these sustainability leaders are doing to lift up the travel space. As a living, breathing report, the Virtuoso Impact Report: Sustainable Travel 2024 factors in the current findings, but allows ongoing participation that will update in real-time, effectively creating a database of sustainable practices that can be used to identify trends and insights from the luxury perspective.

Virtuoso Vice President, Sustainability Javier Arredondo presented report findings at Under One Sky. Key insights from his presentation follow, and the full Virtuoso Impact Report: Sustainable Travel 2024 can be found [here](#).

- The Virtuoso partners that participated collectively represent over 7,000 sustainability initiatives – a 43 percent increase compared to last year -- that support Virtuoso's three pillars of sustainability: Protecting the Planet (47 percent), Celebrating & Honoring Cultures (34 percent) and Supporting Local Economies (19 percent).
- The surveyed Virtuoso partners collectively created over 385,000 jobs in their local communities.
- The surveyed partners donate an average of \$460 per visitor to local artisans, NGOs and other businesses and individuals. A total of 22 percent of the partners' revenue goes back into their local economy.
- Eighty-eight percent of surveyed Virtuoso advisors (spanning owners and managers, independent contactors and agency staff) see selling sustainable travel as a business opportunity.

- Seventy percent of advisors say they are knowledgeable in sustainable travel, 61 percent are confident or very confident in talking about sustainability with partners and clients, and 55 percent say their business is focused on sustainability.
- If clients understand a partner's sustainability initiatives, 66 percent of advisors say their clients are willing to increase their spend.
- Of Virtuoso's three pillars of sustainability, advisors say 46 percent of their clients are more inclined to support local economies, 30 percent to protect the planet and 24 percent to celebrate culture.

Virtuoso wishes to thank all its partners and members that contributed to the report, while also congratulating all award recipients this year. Photos available upon request. For more details on Virtuoso's network of world's best travel agencies, advisors and preferred partners, please visit [www.Virtuoso.com](http://www.Virtuoso.com).

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### **About Virtuoso**

**Virtuoso®** is the leading global travel agency network specializing in luxury and experiential travel. This by-invitation-only organization comprises over 1,200 travel agency locations with more than 20,000 travel advisors in 58 countries throughout North America, Latin America, the Caribbean, Europe, Asia-Pacific, Africa and the Middle East. Drawing upon its preferred relationships with 2,300 of the world's best hotels and resorts, cruise lines, airlines, tour companies and premier destinations, the network provides its upscale clientele with exclusive amenities, rare experiences and privileged access. Normalized annual sales of (U.S.) \$35 billion make Virtuoso a powerhouse in the luxury travel industry. For more information, visit [www.virtuoso.com](http://www.virtuoso.com).

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