

San Francisco Bay Area Travel Massive Member Spotlight

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CEO and Founder of [Altruvistas](#)



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How did you begin to work in the travel industry?

Destiny works in often unexpected delightful ways. I never expected to be a travel industry professional...it just happened. There were a few events that propelled me into my vocation as a global traveler, educator and advocate on social and ecological issues. In the 80's I was politically awakened by two trips. The first to Guatemala during the Civil War and the second through Egypt, Israel, Lebanon and Palestine. I always say that these trips awakened a deep intellectual curiosity. My ignorance about the work and US foreign policy was cracked open like a stubborn coconut. By 1990 I switched the focus and discipline of my studies. In the early 1990's I started working on my Masters of International Relations and was assigned a foreign policy analysis for one of my graduate seminars, the next thing I knew I was on an educational journey to Cuba. That tripped profoundly changed my life. I had been a young adventuring backpacker and had traveled to over 30 countries before I found myself in Havana, yet I returned re-inspired by the power of community and really by the amazing educational and transformation power of group travel. I had never had such access before as an individual. Finishing my thesis I learned of a job opening in the socially responsible travel program of Global Exchange called Reality tours. From March of 1997 till 2013 I directed that very vibrant socio political travel program.

What does your current role entail?

In December of 2012 my tenure at Global Exchange came to an abrupt end, yet I knew what I loved to do and what I thought the travel industry needed in terms of best practices. I started Altruvistas as a way to evolve the best ethical practices of a sustainable tour operator both qualitatively and quantitatively. My current role as a founder and CEO is to develop and oversee our vision and growth. The businesses is frankly booming and I find myself mostly working with our partners (all of journey's are privately branded for other businesses, individuals, educational institutions, Ngo's and foundation) to create their unique journey. I love this. It is so incredibly rewarding to take someone's vision, dreams, and/or curriculum and make it a reality. Then to do so where 50-70% benefits the local or host economy, plus knowing additional funds are support funds or donations in country or to the sponsor. Currently as our staff is expanding, I need to work more on management and improving systems. The past year we have also organized about 8 educational and fundraising salons. I have been blessed to have a great team of researchers, volunteers and partners to make these Altrusalons successfully and also to raise funds for highly impactful domestic and international ngos. Additionally as we prepare to really launch wholeheartedly the Altrufunds and Altruconnects program we will secure our 503c and then start our implementation phase.

What benefits have come from attending Travel Massive meet-ups?

Attending Travel Massive in the Bay Area is like a little respite away from the ever dynamic to-do list. I attend because it is one of the few times a month I feel like I can just be in a tribe of like minded and spirited people. I don't mean this lightly. I have a wonderful social life and great friends, yet I am the one often coming back from country X, with somewhat amazing stories and well sometimes a bug or two... Connecting with others that love travel and see its intrinsic value to our human experience is a blessing. Travel Massive benefits me by providing that space just to 'be'.

What changes do you hope to see in the travel industry?

I absolutely believe that all of us in the industry have moral and ethical obligation to move the industry forward. Donning both a social and ecological framework we have to look at where we have gone and where we still need to go. I often speak (yes, tis my soap box issue) about the lack of equity in the conventional travel industry. This is real!

We have to look at capital flight and leakage both globally and locally. We together can do so much to assist communities around the world to achieve their own development on their own terms, and contribute to UN Millennium Goals if we look at where we put our money. Just think if we all left 50% of every dollar locally and then added philanthropy on top of that. It is possible, we do it. Others do. Yet we have to reexamine the old systems and the simplistic desires of profit maximization. Additionally as we look at the underbelly we have to be honest about the commodification of cultures and people. This is something we can't look over or not talk about because it is not "sexy". It is uncomfortable and that is why we need to take it on. Thus I want to support the travel industry's movement to address the negative impacts of visiting sacred sites,

disrespecting cultural norms and also of sex tourism. I hope more operators and hoteliers do this by educating their patrons and also by signing and implementing. ECPAT's CODE.

If you could go anywhere in the world tomorrow, where would you go?

OH that is so hard! Since you did not say just one place I'd like to name three places I have not been. I am very compelled to travel to Borneo, Kashmir, and the Czech Republic. As I write however, and to take the sentence literally, I am on a plane to Havana, Cuba and well tomorrow I will be there in mi casita enjoying my third home away from home. VAYA!