

Living in the present

Suzanne Aaronson & Lauren Steventon

WHAT will luxury travel be like in the future? In the dictionary, luxury can be defined as either 'something expensive or hard to obtain' or 'something inessential but conducive to pleasure and comfort'. Two quite different things – and therein lies the key.

What characterised the classic hotels of yesteryear (think London's Connaught or Venice's Cipriani) was the white glove service: names remembered, favourite flowers bought, preferences noted down and recalled. Many properties still do this. Visit the Cipriani any time soon and no doubt you'll run into the lovely Laura di Bert who will always welcome you with the kind of smile and joy usually reserved for close family, for whom nothing is too much trouble – and who always has time for her guests, everyone of whom she greets by name.

However, in some areas of the travel industry it seems that this old-fashioned charm has been in short supply. Instead the projection of expense and indulgence became more important than providing a truly special environment. Hotels were the tallest this, or the most expensive that; and talked loudly about food flown in daily from exotic locales or suites decorated in the most rare and precious of materials. And people stayed at them. Of course: they were 'luxurious'.

But, as we all know, the world has changed. As the economy slipped into recession, we started thinking about what really mattered to us all along – what really is a 'luxury'. Experiences – our special memories – are worth more than all the gold-plated bathtubs in the world; and always have been. What consumers are seeking from travel now is the luxury of experience.

Sure, sometimes that means the latest tech gadgets, an Olympic swimming pool or chandeliers and marble bathrooms, but equally it is a bespoke camping adventure up the Amazon or simply a smaller property with an exceptional welcome and staff who really care. John Sotirakos, Development Manager of Porto Zante, says that for him, **luxury is "a blend of natural materials, like handcrafted antique marble, local wood and stone, with a modern and simple summer architecture and decoration."** Sounds perfect.

This isn't a revolutionary position; throughout the industry, we're finding smart people repeating the same thing. Alan Fuerstman, CEO of Montage Hotels and Resorts (a hotel group we rate highly on www.whatsworthit.com), told us that for him **luxury is "unobtrusive service offered by passionate staff who embrace all that is good in life. Luxury is highly personalised and it is very important that the style of service is befitting of a gracious, more humble approach, as opposed to the old notion of pretentious luxury."** We need to look back to the past and analyse the kind of service and luxury that travellers historically demanded, before we were blinded by the glare of the chandelier reflecting off those crystal headboards...

Can you imagine a world where your pillow choice is more important than your overall enjoyment; where you have champagne on tap but the concierge is an iPad? Whether we are trekking the Andes, or lazing by the pool, **luxury travel in the future must enrich our lives and provide us with special memories and human connection we will cherish. It is about making things special in the present, and being in the present.**

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Q&A

Kara Ross

Accessories designer

WHAT IS YOUR FAVOURITE... SHOP?

Bergdorf Goodman. It truly carries everything.

...HOTEL?

I am extremely happy and comfortable when I stay at a Mandarin Oriental.

...ITEM OF CLOTHING?

My leather lattice Bonnie Cashin vest, found a few years ago, now a winter staple.

...FRAGRANCE?

Jo Malone, White Jasmine & Rose.

WHAT DO YOU DISLIKE?

As I get older I try to appreciate things for what they are. Style constantly evolves, so something you dislike today could be a favourite the next season.

WHAT IS YOUR BIGGEST INFLUENCE?

I am extremely influenced by travel. Being in new surroundings is incredibly inspiring; for example, my SS11 collection was inspired by a trip to India with friends.

WHAT DO YOU DO TO RELAX?

Take a SoulCycle class with my daughters.

WHERE WOULD YOUR IDEAL HOLIDAY BE?

Anywhere with my family. This summer we are going back to Turkey for a second visit – we were captivated by it.

WHAT IS YOUR IDEAL WATCH?

My ideal watch would give me more time.

WHICH LUXURY COMPANY CURRENTLY HAS THE BEST ADS?

I love Yves Saint Laurent ads – something about their simplicity is captivating.

DO YOU COLLECT ANYTHING?

I'm passionate about vintage clothing, particularly American designers from the 1960s and 70s – Halston, Geoffrey Beene, Ossie Clark, Mary McFadden, Bonnie Cashin.

WHAT IS YOUR MOST TREASURED POSSESSION?

My engagement ring – my husband and I both picked out the stone, and I created the setting, handmade twisted platinum rope, which highlights the stone.

WHAT DO YOU PREDICT WILL BE THE BIGGEST TRENDS THIS CENTURY?

I love to see the combination of vintage with modern. While being 'on-trend' is important, I am interested in different cultures and eras that influence people's personal style.