

TRAVEL + LEISURE

INDIA
& SOUTH ASIA

travelandleisureasia.com/in
December 2024 / 1150

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EXPLORING THE POWER OF ART & INDULGENCE



Vol 11 No 12
December 2024
1150



Pushing The Boundaries: The Luxe in Hospitality

HOTELS ACROSS THE WORLD ARE WOOING CUSTOMERS WITH UNIQUE, EXCLUSIVE OFFERINGS, FROM CAVIAR ON TAP TO ORGANISING PARTIES INSIDE A PRIVATE JET, FINDS **JOANNA LOBO**



SAKA Museum in Bali offers a deep dive into Balinese culture.



IT'S A PAIR OF

bathroom slippers. Pristine white, feather light, and enveloping my feet in a soft cocoon. These aren't just regular bedroom slippers—a part of the amenities of most luxury hotels—and thrown after one use. At Carlton Jumeirah Tower in London, these slippers are monogrammed with my initials. There's a bathrobe, make-up towel, and room key bearing the same monograms; it's a part of a bespoke experience offered to guests. All of these effectively becoming memorable keepsakes from that visit.

In today's increasingly luxury-focused travel world, it is personalisation like this that can make a hotel stand out among the crowd. In recent years, the concept of luxury travel has evolved beyond opulence to embrace authenticity and unique, immersive experiences that resonate on a personal level. Experience has become the new currency among today's well-heeled travellers. They are no longer content with staying in a fancy place with top-class amenities and attentive service, but are seeking something beyond. Skift's State of Travel 2024 report finds that 57 per cent of luxury travellers say, "creating a travel experience that best fits my expectations is more important than price".

Clockwise from top left: Anantara Plaza Nice Hotel has a "World of Silence" experience that is led by French freediver and five-time world champion, Arthur Guérin-Boëri; at Six Senses Zighy Bay in Oman's Musandam Peninsula, travellers strap in for a 1,000-foot paragliding session from the mountaintop to Zighy Beach; Soneva Jani's Den is an extraordinary children's club featuring a pirate ship, LEGO room, and DJ booth for endless fun; at Carlton Jumeirah Tower in London, monogrammed slippers are a part of a bespoke experience offered to guests.

"Luxury travellers are now prioritising transformational and authentic experiences that are deeply tied to both the hotel and its destination. They seek unique opportunities to explore local culture, uncover hidden gems, and immerse themselves in their surroundings—all while knowing that their spending supports the local community," says Lindsey Ueberroth, CEO, Preferred Hotels & Resorts.

This travel experience could take the form of a unique adventure activity, invitation to a rare cultural moment, or authentic local interactions. Take, for instance, the FIVE Palm Jumeirah that can organise a party in a private jet, complete with lights in pink-purple hues, a cinema room, free-flowing champagne, and satin pyjamas. At The Interlude in Melbourne, a former-prison-turned-luxe-hotel, you can learn to fly a helicopter. At Park Lane Hotel New York, you dial 5 from your hotel room and get caviar on demand. There is a three-night sleep retreat on offer at the Reef House in Queensland's Palm Cove, designed by scientist and sleep coach, Sabine Christelli. Anantara Plaza Nice Hotel has a "World of Silence" experience that is led by French freediver and five-time world champion, Arthur Guérin-Boëri.

In today's post COVID world, the ultimate luxury embodies the phrase, "ask, and you shall receive".

EXCLUSIVE AND RARE

Exclusivity is true luxury. The demand for exceptional and exclusive experiences is driving hospitality to reach new heights. Some hotels are doing this by ensuring that every entrance to the property is an adventure. At Six Senses Zighy Bay in Oman's Musandam Peninsula, travellers strap in for a 1,000-foot paragliding session from the mountaintop to the hotel lobby. There are two ways to get to Costa Rica's Pacuare Lodge: by river rafting, or by





From left: SAKA Museum in Bali is a cultural centre that displays ogoh ogoh effigies; at Four Seasons Resort Mauritius, guests can go on educational walks, or take a snorkelling tour.

private aircraft. At Shinta Mani Wild in Cambodia, guests can enter the tent-style resort's bar by zip-lining over a lush canopy of trees, and to get to the Sorrel River Ranch Resort and Spa in Utah, they can skydive over the Colorado River Valley towards the resort's launching pad.

Recent research from business intelligence company, Morning Consult, says that cost isn't the first thing on consumers' minds when asked what defines luxury; it ranked last as a consideration. Ueberroth says there is a "growing demand for exclusive, once-in-a-lifetime experiences rooted in celebrations such as sports, arts, culture, concerts, and festivals". She theorises that independent hotels excel at curating one-of-a-kind authentic and exclusive experiences that simply can't be replicated elsewhere. It is why Preferred Hotels recently launched Live Like a Legend, a collection of six unique luxury experiences from their hotels around the world, which offer customers rare and exclusive experiences that "immerse travellers in their destinations with a level of luxury that feels as though it's by invitation only". One of these six offerings is the Art Immersion Experience at

California's Hotel Casa del Mar, which offers a curated tour of the hotel's own collection, and a private excursion with an LA art buyer that includes access to top museums, galleries, and private collections. Another is The Music City Getaway at Nashville's The Hermitage Hotel that includes VIP access to all four days of the CMA festival, and a personalised songwriting experience with a professional songwriter.

Luxury and exclusivity are not limited to just adults. Soneva Jani in Maldives has a children's club 'The Den' that is an adventure space with water slides, zip lines, a LEGO room, a pirate ship for games, a DJ booth, and even the chance to participate in marine biology programmes. "In today's world, time is a precious element. There is a growing demand for meaningful family experiences, particularly during vacations. Parents increasingly prioritise opportunities for their children to learn, grow, and explore new things when choosing family holiday destinations," says Stacy Bachan, The Den manager, Soneva Jani.

A CHANGE TO RESHAPE DESTINATIONS

Another aspect of luxury travel highlights the connection between destination and the hotel, through activities that include local communities, providing travellers a deeper

understanding of a destination. "Guests are willing to invest in high-end, bespoke experiences, and responsibly sourced products, often travelling far to discover unique treasures and specialty goods," says Ueberroth. "These experiences don't just enhance how destinations are explored; they elevate how they are marketed by emphasising authenticity, exclusivity, and cultural depth."

Every winter, the region of Courchevel in the French Alps becomes a winter wonderland. One of the unique ways for guests to experience this alpine region is courtesy L'Apogée Courchevel, which offers an inimitable gastronomic experience, Chalet of the Heights. As dusk sets, guests are whisked away by a snowmobile or snow groomer to a secret refuge, where they can indulge in a Petrossian caviar tasting accompanied by Ruinart Blanc de Blancs champagne or vodka. It's a perfect romantic evening out: the lofty snow-covered mountains, warmth of a glowing bonfire, the silent mountainside, and stars twinkling in the night sky. "The 'Chalet' is a part of the destination we are letting our guests take away as a unique memory," says Valerie Muller, regional head of communications, L'Apogée Courchevel.

"Luxury travellers today are seeking more than opulence—they want authenticity, personalisation, and a sense of purpose in their experiences," says Judith Bosnak, director of SAKA Museum. SAKA Museum in Bali is a cultural centre offering deeper insight into Balinese life with exhibits by local artists and communities that display ogoh ogoh effigies, ancient Lontar manuscripts of Bali (texts inscribed on palm leaves), Tika—Bali's traditional calendar, and stone statues capturing spiritual traditions. The museum opened this year and is a part of Ayana Bali, the cliffside resort in Jimbaran Bay. "This has encouraged travellers to see the location as more than just a picturesque getaway, but as a place with a rich narrative waiting to be explored. This approach not only differentiates the destination but also inspires more meaningful tourism, which benefits both travellers and the local community," says Bosnak.

RESPONSIBLE LUXURY

Luxury travel, with its connotations of excess, is often thought to be at odds with protecting the environment. Luxury travel network Virtuoso's survey claims that 74 per cent luxury travellers are willing to pay more to travel responsibly, especially if it is clear how the money will be used. Research from American Express indicates that 62 per cent of travellers want to be more thoughtful about where and how they travel, and 81 per cent of want the money they spend while travelling to go back to the local community. The industry, in turn, is responding accordingly, and doing their bit to offer travellers a chance to green their vacation.

Rick-Ernest Bonnier has spent eight years being Resort Ocean Environment Manager at Four Seasons Resort Mauritius at Anahita, where he takes guests on educational walks. A snorkelling tour with him goes deep into the fishing reserve area, where seahorses swim freely, and the chance to learn more about his Seahorse Conservation Project. Spending time with Bonnier is an introduction to the region's fish, coral species and even endemic trees and plants, and local wildlife. Guests who are keen to be a part of travelling sustainably have many opportunities at Six Senses Ninh Van Bay at Khanh Hoa, Vietnam. They can help offset their carbon footprint by joining the resort's three major sustainability projects: black-shanked douc langur conservation, coral restoration, and biodiversity preservation.

As travel's luxury sector is set to keep rising, it is leading to more competition among luxury hotels to attract the right kind of travellers. These hotels have proven they will make every effort to impress to offer distinctive, exclusive, and bespoke experiences and memories to travellers. 🌍

