

SPRING 2014

UAE: MEANINGFUL DEFINITION
THE INNOVATIVE SHAPESHIFTER
TRANSFORMS TO FASCINATE FAMILIES

TURKEY: PERPETUAL MOTION
A DESTINATION OF ALLURING MAGNETISM
WITH A POWERFUL LUXURY OFFERING

WEDDINGS & HONEYMOONS
CRAFTING A BESPOKE AND
EXPERTLY TAILORED UNION

PLUS
INDIAN OCEAN
CRUISING

ttg mena
luxury

for premium travel professionals

ARTISTIC AWAKENING

WITH A REFINED AND CAPTIVATING FLOURISH, THE LUXURY TRAVEL
SECTOR IS VIBRANTLY BLOSSOMING TO SHOWCASE ITS UNRIVALLED,
CREATIVE MASTERY

PATHS OF DISCOVERY

As the rich and fertile roots of experiential travel grow into an abundant and blossoming canopy, luxury hoteliers and travel specialists are cultivating a new path for their clientele. **Natalie Hami** explores the changing landscape of experiential travel

An inescapable myriad of never before observed sights, sounds and cultural nuances rise from the varied destinations of the MENA region and gently envelop the elite visitor eager for new moments beyond the plush walls of a property. In fresh and unexplored lands filled with boundless opportunities to tantalise the senses in a most exceptional and memorable way, the luxury traveller eagerly awaits to be enthralled by select, extraordinary encounters.

Bernard Viola, general manager, Al Bustan Palace, A Ritz-Carlton Hotel noted: "Discerning luxury travellers have a certain level of understanding about their decision. They want to add unique experiences that have value to their lives."

He added: "It is no longer just about the list of exclusive locations they visit, but the constant journey of self-discovery they experience."

Sandrine Adam, regional director – France, Benelux, Switzerland and North Africa, Preferred Hotel Group also succinctly noted: "Experiential travel is to truly discover a destination through its people, culture and the uniqueness of its landscape. The common factor for experiential travel is that it has to be authentic and it has to happen away from the hotel."

She further noted: "Luxury experiential travel differs in that the activity has to be bespoke, refined and, wherever possible, a 'once-in-a-lifetime' experience that would make for a great dinner party conversation."

Just as flowers in springtime turn to the warmth of the sun to grow and bloom, thus hoteliers, tourism boards and travel agents are rising to the challenge. They are looking to this new and evolving concept to engage their guests in select ways, as this most fascinating segment of the luxury travel industry steadily begins to put down roots.

The surge in demand for experiential travel was eloquently elaborated on by Adam, who said: "We have seen a sharp rise in demand for experiential travel from the MENA region and are taking great care to support our luxury hotels across the globe as they adapt to this important travel."

Flowering creations

As this specialised segment grows and flourishes, so do the once-in-a-lifetime experiences available to the elite clientele of the luxury travel segment, allowing the guest to bask in it and truly allow the experience to embrace them. One such property that appears to grasp the significance of providing its guests the opportunity to gratify the spirit and body is Six Senses Zighy Bay in Oman which, according to its general manager, Axel Jarosch, has championed such activities.

"We are very lucky to have owners keen to see the resort try new and adventurous activities. We've pioneered unique activities since opening with the first paraglide-arrival experience in the Middle East. We've continued with our mountain top fine dining restaurant Sense on the Edge." Forever eager to discover ways to skilfully blend exceptional accommodation with an experience that remains in memories long after, Adam elaborated on Es Saadi Palace & Villas in Marrakech's distinguished way to indulge and gratify its guests' varied tastes.

"At Es Saadi Palace & Villas in Marrakech, a member of Preferred Hotels & Resorts, the team recognises that the experiences offered have to be as extraordinary as the accommodation provided."

She added: "The concierge team creates multi-layered experiences for their guests that will appeal to their sense of adventure, love of good food or need to relax and unwind. One adventurous example is seeing the sunrise over the

Atlas Mountains from a hot air balloon followed by a four-wheel drive through the desert to the town of Asni for a gourmet lunch at Richard Branson's luxury villa retreat."

Adam further explained that as this industry is expanding, hotels are investing in their concierge service in order to stay competitive. "Teams are now better equipped to understand clients' individual reasons for travel and are able to deliver tailored pre and post holiday services." It appears the need to deliver a remarkable experience to guests is increasingly being handled by an expert team able to tune into the requirements of the discerning traveller and harmoniously meet those needs.

According to Viola, this is where the hotel's ambassadors play an immensely important role. "We continue to invest in them, develop and set them up for success. They are the ones who create unique and memorable experiences for our guests - the kind of experiences that keep guests coming back, creating great word-of-mouth for new guests to try us."

At Al Maha, A Luxury Collection Desert Resort & Spa, this supreme personalised service is undertaken by a special personal guest service coordinator, according to Patrick Antaki, complex general manager, A Luxury Collection Desert Resort & Spa. "It is their pleasure to ensure that they customise every detail of your stay to your personal liking. From pillows, special menus, itineraries, the temperature of your coffee or swimming pool to orchestrating the most special milestones of your life, our guests' relations team will surpass your expectations."

Firm roots

It appears that this perhaps once niche segment has skilfully embedded its roots into the industry and is gaining strength and appeal.

Adam expressed the determination of the concept to remain and grow: "First of all, it is important to say that experiential travel is not a passing fad, it's an attitude to tourism that will continue to grow in popularity.

"It is likely that independent hoteliers, such as those represented by Preferred Hotel Group, and local tour operators will take the lead in its development as they are personally incentivised to work in partnership with local communities and to give back to the environment from which they operate. The continuing growth in experiential travel will enable them to take advantage of their superior local knowledge and to make this an integral part of their hospitality offering."

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On a similar note Hugh Fraser, managing director, Corinthian Travel reiterated the absolute significance of having excellent knowledge on a particular location as a key ingredient to enabling the segment to flourish, as well as the importance of a more personalised service. Fraser expressed this sentiment: "Luxury experiential travel is becoming ever more personalised. The future will see an increase of small boutique hotels offering a highly personalised product."

He also elaborated that as a result there will be a proliferation of small specialist DMCs and tour operators with in-depth destination and client knowledge.

"The increasing numbers of people in quest of the experience will mean the previously under developed/undeveloped niche destinations/countries will find themselves on the map for the first time as clients look for new challenges, experiences and opportunities."

He further explained that this will have a positive impact by stimulating new airline routes into previously less accessible areas, thus continuously feeding the luxury segment with new destinations to explore as well as experience.

The evolving yet fresh face of luxury experiential travel is perpetually spreading and deepening its roots in the industry, seeking creative and emotive ways to captivate its elite audience.