



WINTER 2018

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luxury

for premium travel professionals

GCC: ADAPTING TO CHANGE
TRADITIONAL CORPORATE SEGMENTS ARE
TURNED ON THEIR HEADS, AS THE REGION
EMBRACES A BURGEONING LEISURE MARKET

INDIAN OCEAN & CARIBBEAN
ALLURING GUESTS WITH VISIONS OF A
TROPICAL PARADISE, THESE ISLAND
DESTINATIONS ARE UPPING THE ANTE AND
TAPPING INTO CURRENT TRENDS

CITY GUIDE: LOS ANGELES
A STROLL DOWN THE RED CARPET AND INTO
THE EXCLUSIVE LUXURY LIFESTYLE ON OFFER
IN AMERICA'S MOST STAR-STUDED CITY

PLUS
EXECUTIVE AND CORPORATE TRAVEL
PROFILE

TRANSITION

STEADFAST YET BRISTLING WITH THE ENERGY OF CONTINUOUS
GROWTH, THE LUXURY TRAVEL INDUSTRY IS STRENGTHENING ITS ROOTS,
WHILE SIMULTANEOUSLY BRANCHING OUT IN FRESH NEW DIRECTIONS



BLURRED LINES

The meeting room doors of the executive travel sector are being flung open and ties are being loosened, as this traditionally stoical and phlegmatic niche lets its hair down, embracing the next generation. Emily Millett writes

The business of high-end executive travel is getting more interesting. The industry that has, until recently, been best known for board rooms, business centres, events organisation and technology solutions, is expanding to encompass more leisurely pursuits and tapping into the current trends for experiential travel and personalisation. Commenting on the current state of affairs within this lucrative niche, Kevork Deldelian, chief operating officer, Millennium Hotels and Resorts said: "The industry is set to regain momentum and business travellers are increasingly seeking luxury-level travel experiences for all types of visits, may it be employee group getaways, company-sanctioned travels, entertaining activities or individual free time itineraries."

Authenticity and personalisation in business

Despite essentially focusing on work rather than play, at the highest end of the spectrum, business, corporate and executive travel is much like any other type of luxury travel, and the discerning high-flyers who frequent this exclusive pool expect nothing less than exceptional, customised and exclusive, in all areas.

"Luxury business travellers, just like any other, are looking for more than just the standard business travel arrangements," explained Deldelian. "They expect great service and exceptional quality; what they seek now is to experience exclusive, authentic itineraries with private services and cultural immersions."

In response to these shifting demands, and with so many options now available in what has become a very mature luxury marketplace, Millennium Hotels and Resorts is growing toward providing tailor-made experiences of extraordinarily high quality for its guests.

And they are not alone; across the business travel spectrum, the demand for personalised services, tailor-made itineraries and customisable experiences is catalysing an innovation

shift towards incorporating personal touches within the business experience.

"High-end business travellers require a personalised take on luxury travel through services and experiences that go beyond the physical hotel product," said Nicolas Villemin, regional director, Middle East and North Africa, Preferred Hotels & Resorts. "We are constantly focusing on innovative ways to achieve this and many of the luxury hotels within the brand offer a host of added values and a plethora of amenities to business guests."

According to Villemin, these personalised additions include dedicated concierge services and drivers, in-room check-ins and late check-outs, complimentary high-speed Internet throughout and welcome drinks. Other VIP perks offered to Preferred Hotels & Resorts guests include the ability to reserve prime tables at Michelin-Star restaurants, make last-minute spa appointments with renowned therapists and schedule efficient airport transports via helicopter.

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"We've found that those booking MICE travel are increasingly looking for tailor-made itineraries," said Jon Brown, managing director, Virgin Limited Edition. "Our teams work closely with clients in order to create unique and bespoke experiences. Authentic experiences are also very important, and so visits to the local community are integral to a stay."

At Ulusaba, Virgin Limited Edition's private game reserve in South Africa, community tours are a particularly popular activity, according to Brown, facilitating team-building but also making a difference to people's lives.

"We think it's the little touches that make a big difference, and that's true for our business travellers as much as leisure," commented Brown. "We like to surprise our guests whenever we can." General managers at Virgin Limited Edition hotels have also been known to personally take executive traveller guests out on their favourite running or cycling routes in the local area. And Brown believes it is these personal connections that really make the properties feel like a 'home away from home'.

And although the executive travel sector is perhaps the most switched on to the latest in cutting-edge travel technology, a personal and human touch remains integral to ensuring five-star hotels stay ahead of the curve.

Commenting on this, Vipin Khattar, general manager, Hyatt Regency Dubai Creek Heights & Residences said, "Even though technology, increased connectivity, remote meetings and digital

collaboration tools have changed the dynamics of business and corporate travel, good deals are still done face-to-face – keeping our MICE segment strong. People still want a physical forum where they can connect, exchange ideas and interact. "We as a hotel stay ahead of the curve because of the services and facilities we offer, and by having integrated technology in all our business functions. These services range from online booking, to being able to customise all experiences and requests, to the state-of-the-art meeting facilities. We create unique experiences – and that's just something technology can't offer. Customisation is the name of the game, as many luxury travellers are looking for experiences that align with their unique needs and values," he added.

Every stay for executive guests is carefully curated at Hyatt Regency Dubai Creek Heights & Residences, offering services like private check-in, butler facilities, an exclusive lounge, complimentary meeting facilities for Regency Club guests and WOH points redeemable across the world. According to Khattar, a 'people-first' policy is also in operation within the hotel team, meaning that every member of staff is empowered to take decisions that they believe will add value and create memorable experiences for guests. Whether this means booking the ideal dinner spot, helping in the celebration of a special occasion, serving off-menu items or creating special in-room amenities, team members are given the green-light to be creative, innovate and tailor experiences for

the property's luxury business travellers.

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Heading towards a more sustainable future

With personalisation a hot topic for high-end business travel right now, where is the future of the sector going, and what trends or demands are set to influence the industry in coming years?

"Sustainability is a very hot topic for the future of business travel, and rightly so," said Brown. "With both businesses and consumers becoming more educated on environmental issues, it's important that we in the travel industry play our part."

Virgin Limited Edition has always believed that luxury doesn't have to come at the expense of sustainability, and the group works hard to make sure one doesn't compromise the other. The Virgin Limited Edition approach includes a commitment to responsible supply chain management, fair trade policies, and ethical dealings with employees, the local community and the environment. The group also works with the Sustainable Restaurant Association; a not-for-profit organisation which helps hospitality businesses come together to create a more sustainable industry.

Another key habit is the luxury executive traveller's preference for healthy living, according to Khattar, who shared: "This is at the core of what we believe is important and therefore, all our restaurants at Hyatt Regency Dubai Creek Heights & Residences offer fresh organic produce, vegan and vegetarian options, in addition to having revamped our breakfast with all healthy and delicious options." Furthermore, the hotel has recently expanded its gym facilities and now offers fitness classes,

including karate and yoga, for business guests

who want to stay active. As part of a global movement to safeguard the environment, the property has also taken important steps such as going plastic-straw free, using grey water for several hotel functions including irrigation, in addition to having substituted traditional lighting in the hotel for LED lights; all sustainable-friendly actions which, according to Khattar, Millennials increasingly demand. Commenting on the growing propensity for business travellers to stay health and wellness conscious while travelling, Sharon Cohen, vice president, Fairmont Brand Management, AccorHotels Luxury Brands said: "What continues to evolve at Fairmont in a more tangible way are the many partnerships, programmes and services that the brand offers its clients, such as Fairmont Fit where business and leisure guests are provided with the latest and greatest Reebok workout

apparel delivered to their room, or our partnership with BMW that offers guests the use of bikes to explore their destinations from a different perspective."

Changing demographics, new demands

Exploring a destination may not have seemed a likely prospect for time-poor business travellers in the past, but today, as the generations shift power positions, new demands are seeing the rise of new Millennial-minded trends.

Speaking of Millennials, the next generation of luxury business traveller is currently having a serious impact on the shape the sector is currently taking, as their unique demands are increasingly being taken into consideration. "With Millennials fast becoming the largest segment of business travellers, I would say that their behaviour and preferences are the key trends to watch out for, as they are quickly becoming the biggest influence in our industry," said Khattar.

With the rise of the much-courted Millennial demographic, 'Bleisure Travel' is continuing to trend and remains a key part of the business strategy for Preferred Hotels & Resorts, as Villemin explained: "Bleisure travellers are looking to maximise the time available to them and cultivate a balance between work and personal fulfilment, as well as seeking unique and memorable guest experiences. We believe we can go one step further in offering them Preferred Residences, our collection of more than 80 luxury residential-style properties." Guests at the Preferred Residences receive the best features of a luxury hotel stay with the comfort, privacy and convenience of a residence setting, according to Villemin. This includes fully custom furnishings, bespoke amenities, the quality assurance associated with an exceptional hotel and unique VIP perks, such as private transportation options via chauffeured car or even helicopter.

"The concept of being 'traveller centric' will continue to flourish with Millennial travellers constantly seeking flexibility, freedom and value-for-money," said Villemin. "It is a very competitive market and Preferred Hotels & Resorts is dedicated to being innovative, unique and flexible in what we provide as incentives to travel buyers." The growing popularity of the 'Bleisure Travel' trend amongst the Millennial and Millennial-minded generations, is also forcing the business travel sector to look into incorporating more experiential travel options into their executive packages.

"The industry naturally evolves with shifts in guest demographics and global economic patterns," said Cohen. "Today, we're seeing Millennials who naturally mix business with pleasure when they travel globally for work, wanting to stay on and explore, with a growing desire for immersive experiences that connect them to their destination in an authentic way, not as tourists, but as locals.

"Also, in the digital age of loneliness, where we are all connected 24/7 to gadgets, and less and less to each other, genuine human interactions are becoming more important and impactful than ever before. At Fairmont, we believe that by enabling unique and perspective-changing experiences that help our guests see a culture or a place a little bit differently, experiences that help shape their view of the world create the most lasting and impactful memories of a place," she added.

According to Cohen, the combination of an inspiring, well-preserved physical space, authentically local experiences and warm, engaging service, creates a profound and memorable guest experience that is timeless.

The rising Millennial demographic has also had a catalytic effect on the explosion of technology in the business travel industry, as the travel patterns of this tech-savvy new generation call for the sector to increasingly go digital.

"A key trend is Millennials' tech-centric travel habits through the increasing use of online booking tools as well as smartphones, tablets and apps," commented Khattar, adding that Hyatt Regency Dubai Creek Heights & Residences has embraced this trend by enabling mobile booking technology and smart technology in the rooms. "Millennials are also looking to connect, which makes our hotel a perfect fit, due to the array of shared and communal style spaces that give them the opportunity to interact with different types of people during their stay," Khattar added.

Preferred Hotels & Resorts has plans to continue focusing on the rise in travel tech by researching ways to better utilise technology, social media and digital marketing.

"This trend will also continue to mould and deeply affect the future of luxury business travel," said Villemin.

"Technology is now engrained in the entire booking process from mobile bookings and checking-in, to online reviews and posting on social media platforms."

Once solely focused on the areas of business and MICE, the corporate and executive travel niche is currently

broadening its horizons, in tune with the demands of a changing demographic, whose demands are blurring the lines between business and pleasure.

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