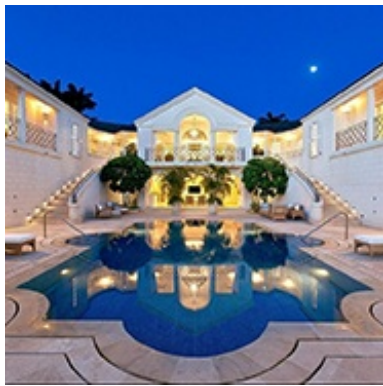


COMMERCE

HomeAway builds clout in luxury vacation sector

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Luxury Rentals from HomeAway

By JOE MCCARTHY

Vacation rental Web site Luxury Rentals from HomeAway is quickly expanding its luxury section to capitalize on the travel trends of affluent consumers.

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The travel sector has been undergoing some major structural shifts, with consumers gaining more control than ever before over where and how they will vacation. As alternate players enter the market, competition will only increase, making it critical to secure brand loyalty.

"Initial interest and demand from luxury travelers is strong," said Jon Gray, senior vice president at HomeAway, Austin, TX.

"The creation of this site is more about improving the luxury traveler experience," he said. "By offering direct access to a specially curated inventory of properties, we help discerning travelers more easily and quickly find exceptional vacation rentals that best suit their needs."

Luxury Rentals from HomeAway is a subsidiary of HomeAway.

Moving in

Less than one percent of the homes listed on HomeAway are considered luxury rentals. Currently, the number of luxury rentals is at around 4,500.

Average rates for a luxury rental are \$1,800 per night, compared to a \$268 per night average for the rest of the Web site.



Luxury Rentals from HomeAway

The luxury rentals are available in more than 40 countries and run the gamut of home styles. Some standout amenities across the portfolio include gourmet kitchens, cinemas, wine cellars, helicopter landing pads, access to private yachts and equestrian centers.

HomeAway conducted a survey with 3,800 of its consumers in July 2013 and found that accommodations are the most important consideration when traveling.

When asked to select one aspect of their vacation to be more luxurious, 75 percent of respondents selected accommodations, over first-class airfare, dining and shopping.

All of the luxury properties are assessed by the luxury travel publication Andrew Harper using the 75-point screening system that looks at amenities, local attractions, services available and other criteria to determine adequate fits.



Luxury Rentals from HomeAway

HomeAway also helps owners and properties reach consumers with a marketing channel.

HomeAway unveiled its luxury rentals wing last November, initially featuring more than 800 options in 40 countries, and generated interest with a Pinterest contest.



Luxury Rentals from HomeAway

A seven-night vacation rental at Quinta Clara in Playa Del Carmen, Mexico, was slated as the winning prize for the Pinterest contest that asked fans to put together boards consisting of dream vacation locations from the company's Web site ([see story](#)).

Changing landscape

The luxury travel sector continues to climb and many alternate rental services are emerging to meet the diversifying demands of consumers.

Home-sharing companies led by Airbnb have raised pressing concerns for hotel brands that now have to contend with an ultra-specific, growing and disruptive trend.

Airbnb has clearly struck a crude oil-like vein in the consumer imagination, as more than 500,000 listings in 34,000 cities have erupted to meet the nascent demand. As more consumers consider the merits of the sharing ecosystem, luxury hotels may begin to devise some alternative strategies ([see story](#)).

While Airbnb tends to be more decentralized, HomeAway tries to keep standards at a certain level. Also, HomeAway tends to draw second or third homes from clients that are not occupied in vacation areas, whereas Airbnb tends to draw listings of the current dwelling places of their sellers.

"Each listing [on HomeAway] is evaluated by the luxury travel experts at Andrew Harper using a 75-point screening process to ensure the resulting inventory are the ultimate accommodations," Mr. Gray said.

Final Take

Joe McCarthy, staff writer on Luxury Daily, New York

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