

TRAVEL AND HOSPITALITY

Airbnb pushes further into high-end travel with luxury tier

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Airbnb has added a new luxury tier of homes and hotels to book. Image credit: Airbnb

By DANNY PARISI

Home-sharing service Airbnb has announced a number of new services to attract wealthy travelers to luxury homes and hotels.

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After years of hotels unofficially offering their rooms through Airbnb, the service is now allowing for more specialized searches for customers looking specifically for hotels rather than a room in someone's home. Additionally, a service called Airbnb Plus will connect affluent travelers with luxury accommodations, blurring the line between Airbnb and other high-end, luxury hotel services.

Luxury travel

For 10 years now, Airbnb has primarily been about finding cheap accommodations without having to dip into the expensive world of hotels. For that reason, it has become popular as a budget travel application, allowing people to find affordable lodgings while traveling around the world.

But last week, Airbnb announced a number of new features that blur the line between budget and luxury accommodations for the popular travel app.



Airbnb has partnered with luxury brands such as Audi in the past. Image credit: Airbnb

Airbnb will be adding four new property types to help consumers search for what they need, including boutiques and unique spaces. This will allow luxury hotels to list their rooms and be more searchable through Airbnb.

The travel app is also adding a new tier to its search options: luxury. With luxury searching, customers can find not only luxury hotels, but also high-end homes for only the most affluent travelers.

Airbnb will assist luxury home renters with high-quality photography and top placement on the app so that they are more likely to be seen when customers search for luxury accommodations.

Called Beyond by Airbnb, the new luxury tier will also offer custom-designed trips, including personalized experiences along with high-end rentals.

Digital changes

During Forrester's CXNY 2017 New York on June 21, a discussion with an editor from Fortune magazine revealed how the growth of Airbnb has disrupted the luxury hotel business by solving a problem from an outsider's perspective.

During the interview with the assistant managing editor at Fortune and an executive at Tumblr, the two discussed how Airbnb was able to not just build a new business, but construct a new way of life by looking at customer behavior. The home sharing network was able to disrupt the hotel industry by changing the way consumers behave, and in turn shifting the way hospitality brands need to behave ([see story](#)).

But one danger that a digital company such as Airbnb may be facing is that increasingly modern luxury consumers want to use their phones and technology as little as possible, allowing them to focus on their relaxation.



Some luxury consumers will be averse to Airbnb no matter what. Image credit: lebua

After smartphones and the Internet came into prominence, luxury hotels seemed to be chasing the next technological step that would streamline the travel experience.

But now that smartphones are so ubiquitous as to be distracting, luxury hotels have often found that taking a lower-tech approach to engaging customers is the more effective route. Instead, hotels such as lebua, owner of luxury resorts in Bangkok and parts of India, have been seeking ways to make technology work for customers in the background while all of their experiences are driven by a more human touch ([see story](#)).

Time will tell if Airbnb's push towards a more luxury-oriented service will work out.