

TRAVEL AND HOSPITALITY

Travel brands embrace royal wedding fever with lavish experiences

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Promotional image for Fairmont Royal York's Duke and Duchess for a Day package. Image credit: Fairmont Royal York

By SARAH JONES

As the wedding between Britain's Prince Harry and Meghan Markle nears, travel and hospitality brands are giving guests the opportunity to experience their own royal moments.

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The upcoming celebration on May 19 is inspiring consumers to seek out travel to the United Kingdom, as they look to explore more about the nation and its monarchy. For those who are staying closer to home, hotels are rolling out regal experiences and offers aimed at letting consumers live like kings or queens.

"I've seen hotels from Chicago and Atlanta to the Cayman Islands all marketing themed packages around watching the wedding from their hotels," said Doug Gollan, editor in chief of [DG Amazing Experiences](#) and [PrivateJetCardComparisons.com](#).

"The benefit for hotels is purely ringing the cash register," he said. "Saturday mornings in May are not normally a peak period for food and beverage at city hotels or resorts, so to be able to have a royal wedding breakfast package where you can charge hundreds of dollars for a themed buffet, house Champagne and big screen TV is good for business. It's also the weekend after Mother's Day, which means it would probably have been slower than normal.

"The danger for hotels both in London and other places that want to capitalize on the wedding is to truly deliver something special so guests don't feel ripped off. Renaming sandwiches and cocktails and increasing the price is good for the short-term only.

"Let's face it, virtually everyone who has a true connection to the royal family or Ms. Markle aren't going to burn that relationship for short-term commercial gain. Expect more gimmicks than substance, but gimmicks can still be fun."

Royal celebrations

As consumers seek out opportunities to toast to the happy royal couple, hotels are meeting the demand.

Across the world, Fairmont Hotels & Resorts will be celebrating the nuptials at its properties, leveraging its relationship with the royal family and the groom and bride to be. Hotels including The Savoy, Fairmont Hotel Vancouver and Fairmont Chateau Laurier in Ottawa have hosted members of the royal family over the years.

Actress Ms. Markle's character on the television show "Suits" wished to get married at Fairmont-managed New York hotel The Plaza, and Toronto's Fairmont Royal York served as a stand-in backdrop for her on-screen wedding.

Commemorating the actress' real marriage, Fairmont will be showing the wedding on big screens in some of its properties. The Plaza will host a royal breakfast with experts in everything from the monarchy to wedding planning offering their commentary.

In addition to the screenings, a number of Fairmont properties will be offering special royal-themed afternoon teas with treats such as mini wedding cakes and Ms. Markle's favorite tea flavor, a blend of licorice and green tea.



The Savoy is serving up afternoon tea, royal style. Image credit: The Savoy

Fairmont Royal York will be celebrating royal weddings past and present with an exhibit in partnership with WedLuxe Media. The "Roses and Crowns" display will showcase fashion, flowers and cakes.

"For more than a century, Fairmont Hotels & Resorts has welcomed members of the British royal family as cherished guests," said Sharon Cohen, vice president of Fairmont brand management, in a statement. "For all of our guests, whether royalty, celebrities or simply intrepid and worldly explorers, Fairmont hotels create rich emotional connections and are often chosen to celebrate memorable and momentous occasions."

Cruise line Cunard similarly boasts a link to the crown, with Queen Elizabeth II having launched and named four of its ships. Cunard's Queen Mary 2, Queen Victoria and Queen Elizabeth will each hold celebrations on-board, allowing travelers to mark the occasion at sea.

Similarly to Fairmont, Cunard will screen the wedding, allowing passengers to experience the event. The cruise line will also serve specially created cocktails that reference the couple, such as American Beauty and the Princess Bride, as well as a cake modeled after the royal couple's.



Cunard is marking the royal wedding. Image courtesy of Cunard

"We are excited to celebrate the royal wedding with our guests on board all three Cunard ships," said Josh Leibowitz, senior vice president of Cunard North America, in a statement. "We are thrilled to honor this special moment in time,

and to commemorate Cunard's longstanding special relationship with the royal family."

The Ritz-Carlton, Washington D.C. is bringing back its luxe \$75 per seat viewing party for the royal wedding, complete with an authentic English breakfast and prizes for the best hat. When the hotel hosted the event for the marriage of Prince William to Kate Middleton in 2011, it sold out.

"Following our wildly successful viewing party in 2011, the first and only event of its kind in D.C., this year's event will be completely customized to fit the unique personality of both Prince Harry and Miss Meghan Markle, from the decor down to the food, so guests feel as though they're at the wedding in-person," said Amal Zaari, The Ritz-Carlton, Washington, D.C.'s director of catering and wedding specialist, in a statement.



The Ritz-Carlton in Washington is offering brides the chance to wed like a princess. Image courtesy of The Ritz-Carlton, D.C.

Taking the concept of living like royalty to the bridal space, the property is also gathering purveyors to enable brides and grooms to plan lavish celebrations. A \$1 million wedding package includes specially-made plates, a private jet trip to New York to create a custom gown and a two-week honeymoon in the Mediterranean on The Ritz-Carlton Yacht Collection.

"In many ways, it feels like hotels in the United States are even more excited than those in the United Kingdom," said Damon Banks, editor in chief of [LuxeGetaways Magazine](#). "There is no shortage of overnight travel experiences, royal afternoon tea and more to allow everyone to enjoy a small piece of British culture to remember this exciting wedding that we will all be watching."

British boost

Key events in the monarchy, including marriages, act as publicity for British tourism.

Given the British luxury industry's considerable ties to the royal family, brands frequently align themselves with major events in their lives. The monarchy already provides a boost to the United Kingdom economy through brand positioning and tourism, but this year's nuptial celebrations may provide further benefit to luxury purveyors.

The previous royal wedding provided a boost to British travel. The Office of National Statistics said that 800,000 more visitors traveled to the U.K. in 2011 than in 2010 ([see story](#)).

History appears poised to repeat itself, as Travel Leaders Group found that the royal wedding is boosting Americans' interest in traveling to the U.K.

"The biggest opportunities for the British hospitality industry will be leveraging the coverage immediately before and during the wedding," DG Amazing Experiences' Mr. Gollan said. "The May timing means there will be opportunities to come up with programming and promotions encouraging those who watch the wedding to hop across the pond and experience it."

"You will see everything from small add-ons such as including commemorative books to itineraries focused around royal homesites and hangouts."

The United States is the largest consumer of British luxury outside of the United Kingdom itself, which gives Made in the U.K. brands reason to play off its appeal among audiences across the pond.

British luxury trade group [Walpole](#) produced an insightful report titled "Britishness and Brand Identity" that identifies some of the key pillars of British luxury and offers some data on British luxury performance in the U.S.

Per the report, U.S. luxury consumers also represent a huge portion of the U.K.'s tourism industry, with more visitors to Great Britain from the U.S. than any other nation, with 3.5 million in 2016 alone. In total, U.S. visitors to the U.K. spent \$3.4 billion in 2016 ([see story](#)).

"With so much media attention being dedicated to the wedding, it is sure to bring added exposure to the British travel opportunities," LuxeGetaways Magazine's Mr. Banks said. "Seeing the destination at its absolute best for the wedding will inspire many to visit the U.K. to experience a bit of this dynamic culture for themselves."

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