

TRAVEL AND HOSPITALITY

Preference for personalization extends to booking process

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Costa Rica is among the the most popular destinations for experimental travelers. Image credit: Exceptional Villas

By SARAH RAMIREZ

As affluent travelers seek out more personalized experiences, this desire extends to how travel is booked as well.

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Despite choosing to conduct research online, 90 percent of travelers prefer a customized booking process, according to a new survey from luxury villa rental service Exceptional Villas. Luxury travel companies and hospitality brands are increasingly looked at as resources to help create unique itineraries.

“Clients said that they don’t want to book online but prefer to have a bespoke highly personalized service that includes all the concierge aspects of the trip,” said Alexandra Baradi, owner and CEO of **Exceptional Villas**, Kenmare, Ireland. “They said they want to speak to an expert who has been to the destination and the various properties.

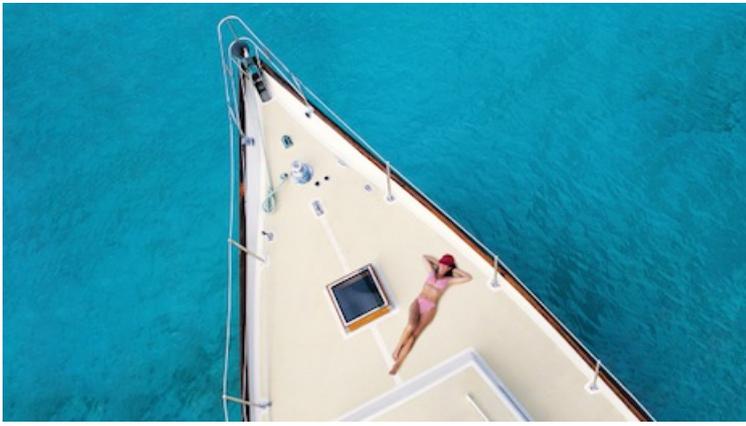
“They want a company that can provide the pro and cons of both the destination and the property,” she said. “Above all, they said that expert knowledge is essential.”

Experience bookings

Online research is the first step for consumers looking to book luxury trips.

Without neglecting personal interactions, luxury hospitality brands still need to maintain robust digital presences. Detailed information and in-depth search functions are crucial for a well-rounded travel Web site.

Ninety percent of luxury travelers would rather book vacations with a client representative that can manage various trip details, such as flights, accommodations and activities.



Travelers are shifting away from relaxing beach vacations to more adventurous trips. Image credit: Exceptional Villas

Sixty percent of clients also said they want to participate in activities outside of traditional options at their destinations. Among those who habitually opt for relaxing beach holidays, 40 percent are also looking for more experiential locales.

For 2019, the most popular experiential destinations are Costa Rica, Bali and Hawaii. Exceptional Villas' most popular overall locations are Barbados, Turks and Caicos and St. Barts.

Exceptional Villas is expanding its vacation rentals in new European locations such as Ibiza, Mallorca, Italy, Greece, the Greek Islands, France and Italy next year ([see story](#)).



Luxury villas in the Caribbean. Image credit: Exceptional Villas

Destination accessibility is an important factor among 70 percent of luxury travelers. A fifth of respondents are willing to travel farther for their dream destination, compared to 40 percent who prefer direct flights and another 40 percent who will take up to two flights.

Value is still a consideration among affluents.

Sixty percent of respondents will work with a travel company that can guarantee the best prices. To ensure the availability of a wide range of accommodations and experiences, 50 percent of travelers are also booking experiences at least six months in advance.

Travel authorities

High-end clients rely on travel companies to help them get the most out of their destination and experience new areas as locals instead of tourists.

Research from Fairmont Hotels & Resorts also supports the notion that affluents continue to see hotels as authority figures when looking for authentic travel experiences.

Fairmont's 2018 Global Luxury Traveler Insights Study found that more than half of luxury travelers are attracted to destinations based on their hotel options. Ultimately, they rely on hotel staff to help provide them with unique experiences that are not mainstream and better known to locals ([see story](#)).

Personalizing customer experiences instead of focusing simply on product and service offerings is also crucial for luxury aviation companies to differentiate themselves.

During a conversation with Elizabeth Paton at The New York Times International Luxury Conference on Nov. 12, the CEO of Qantas discussed the importance of brands reinventing themselves in a constantly-changing marketplace. Customer trust and safety loom large, especially in the aviation industry ([see story](#)).

One hundred percent of clients surveyed by Exceptional Villas ranked trust as “extremely important” when selecting a luxury travel company.

“Trust takes time to build,” Exceptional Villas' Ms. Baradi said. “Good and honest content is also important in gaining trust.”

“It is essential a potential client speaks to the person who has been to the destination and property and not just someone on a call center,” she said. “Above all, they need to be highly trained in the skill of matching the perfect property to client needs and requirements.”

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