

TRAVEL AND HOSPITALITY

Guest data vital to personalizing travel experiences

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Travelers are becoming more comfortable sharing personal information. Image credit: Marriott

By SARAH RAMIREZ

NEW YORK Although the luxury travel industry has been slower to innovate than other sectors, more hospitality brands are becoming increasingly comfortable using technology to enhance guests' experiences.

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During a panel discussion entitled "Innovating in Luxury Travel in 2019" at Bloomberg's The Year Ahead in Luxury conference on Nov. 29, hospitality executives discussed how consumer data is harnessed to personalize travel experiences. Information gleaned from social media, the booking process and more can help luxury hospitality brands deliver tailored stays or trips.

"Just being greeted by a human with a smile is a luxury," said Suzanne Cohen, vice president of luxury brands, Americas at [Marriott International](#), New York.

Travel data

Hospitality groups need to view consumers as booking trips as opposed to booking flights and accommodations, Gillian Morris, founder/CEO at [Hitlist](#), explained during the panel moderated by *Bloomberg Pursuits* travel editor Nikki Ekstein.

In addition to price, companies need an understanding of travelers' desirability for a location, the value of time and the social component.



Hospitality brands need to understand the reasons behind trips. Image credit: St. Regis

Ms. Morris finds the social component whether a guest is traveling with someone or to see someone and the purpose of a trip crucial to understanding customers.

Since Marriott's more established guests have the resources to visit their favorite destinations many times over, the hotel group needs to find ways to make each stay valuable and memorable.

Real-time personalization is a popular tactic at Marriott International. Information gathered from social media, such as whether a guest is traveling for a romantic occasion or for a music festival, is used to add personal details throughout a stay.

Staff members at Marriott properties are also trained to be aware of inadvertent cues from their guests, such as whether they seem to have a preference for a particular type of towel or whether they leave chocolates uneaten.

"Smart data is crucial to getting the information you need," said Tom Marchant, owner/cofounder at [Black Tomato Group](#), New York.

Mr. Merchant also finds that guests are more comfortable sharing personal information with hospitality entities.



Marriott International partnered with Amazon for Alexa for Hospitality. Image credit: Amazon

Black Tomato and Marriott already use voice technology Alexa to keep a pulse on consumers and get real-time feedback about their travel experiences.

Marriott introduced Amazon's Alexa for Hospitality artificial intelligence platform to a limited number of hotels, including St. Regis Hotels, earlier this year. In rooms outfitted with Amazon Echo virtual assistant devices, guests can ask the voice assistant for hotel information, request guest services, play music in their room and more ([see story](#)).

Expanding experiences

Travel is more than flights and hotel rooms, with affluents especially looking for more enriching experiences.

Taking into account the experiential focus of today's travelers, Marriott has expanded its Moments offerings. In addition to 8,000 experiences that can only be booked with loyalty points, the company will launch 110,000 offers that can be purchased with cash.

These include packages around events such as the Super Bowl or Coachella, or meet and greets with celebrities or sports stars. Marriott is also teaming with Universal Music Group for a "Moments Live" program of musical and

culinary events ([see story](#)).

Appreciation and loyalty towards brands also lead travelers to try new experiences.

For instance, Ritz-Carlton is launching a Yacht Collection. Ritz-Carlton's jump into sea travel has been designed to reflect its high standards of service on land and is indicative of its hotel model.

Bespoke and rare itineraries will take high-net-worth individuals to destinations such as the Mediterranean, Northern Europe, the Caribbean, Latin America, Canada and New England in deep cultural dives ([see story](#)).

"Guests that would never book a cruise have a booked a trip with Ritz-Carlton," Marriott's Ms. Cohen said.

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