

TRAVEL AND HOSPITALITY

Details cannot be overlooked for immersive guest experiences

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The Regent Berlin. Image credit: Regent Hotels

By SARAH RAMIREZ

NEW YORK – Luxury brands in the hospitality industry and elsewhere must provide immersive experiences that speak to sophisticated consumers’ deeper consciousness.

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During a presentation at LuxeCX/AMCX 2019 on Sept. 25, an executive from InterContinental Hotels & Resorts’ parent IHG encouraged marketers to view clients as guests rather than consumers. Luxury consumers in particular have come to expect brands that offer fresh and relevant 360-degree experiences, especially in the hospitality industry.

“There is so much equity in heritage luxury brands that cannot be recreated in any other way,” said Ginger Taggart, vice president of global marketing for the luxury portfolio at IHG. “But it’s important to keep that modernized for today’s luxury consumer.”

LuxeCX/AMCX 2019 was produced by Luxury Daily and sister title American Marketer, with venue sponsor UBS

Experience layers

As IHG looks to find continued success, it is prioritizing brand acquisition, new hotel openings and strong partnerships within the luxury space.

To that end, IHG is extending the number of luxury properties available to members of its loyalty program through a partnership with travel club Mr & Mrs Smith.

Starting in 2020, IHG Rewards members will be able to earn and redeem points at 500 hotels in the handpicked Mr & Mrs Smith collection. Hotel firms have been working to boost their offerings to loyalty members beyond their own portfolios through partnerships and alliances ([see story](#)).



InterContinental Maldives Maamunagau Resort. Image credit: IHG

Several of the group's new resorts, such as the InterContinental Maldives Maamunagau Resort, emphasize sustainability and immersive experiences. Guests there can embark on an evening marine biology excursion or adopt their own Manta sting ray.

One of IHG's most significant moves in recent years was the acquisition of Regent Hotels & Resorts in July 2018. Since then, the brand's European and Asian properties have been revamped with a special focus on design and service elements.

"When we think of consumers today, we should really think of them as our guests," Ms. Taggart said. "There is a fundamental difference with how you approach a guest in your home and elsewhere.

"The Regent guest experiences luxury as a way of life," she said. "How do we want guests to feel, and what do we want to deliver to help them reach this?"

Each property will have its design updated to reflect the spirit of the hotel. For instance, each will feature bright colors and its own bespoke pattern, which appears throughout as wallpaper and in more subtle touches, such as envelopes.

The hotel environments will also have different design layers, according to Ms. Taggart. A bar may tout the brand's decadence, while bedrooms are more serene spaces.



IHG emphasizes "guest experience" instead of "customer experience." Image credit: IHG

Other physical hallmarks of the Regent brand include personal havens, whether this is a more secluded area in the lobby, the hotel spa or a guest suite. When possible, these spaces are personalized with selected reading materials, special scents or other touches.

Ms. Taggart also discouraged luxury brands from adding small surcharges for these personalizations whenever possible.

"It's not about money," Ms. Taggart said. "It's about adding friction to the experience."

Customer care

IHG and Regent Hotels are also exploring how to improve interactions between guests and staffers. One role that may emerge is an "experience agent," which Ms. Taggart described as part concierge, part butler.

Hospitality disruptor Airbnb is also working to meet the demand for intimate and unique accommodations among

wealthy travelers.

Through Airbnb Luxe, the platform is making available high-end homes as well as trip designers who can arrange bespoke experiences. The designers are available 24/7 and are responsible for coordinating check-ins, local experiences and arranging other services such as childcare or spa treatments ([see story](#)).

Hilton's Waldorf Astoria Hotels & Resorts is bringing its latest marketing campaign to life in its European and Middle Eastern hotels with the launch of two new concierge services.

A Jet Lag Guru will help guests recuperate after traveling across time zones, while a Book Master will be focused on guiding guests toward a travel read. Research from Hilton found that about half of leisure travelers purposefully leave parts of their trip unplanned until they get to their hotel, allowing room for guidance from on-site staff ([see story](#)).

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