

TRAVEL AND HOSPITALITY

InterContinental crowdsources local insights to take travel beyond tourism hotspots

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InterContinental is looking to give travelers a more authentic experience. Image courtesy of InterContinental

By SARAH JONES

Hospitality brand InterContinental Hotels and Resorts is looking to help its guests go outside of the typical tourist destinations by asking locals to weigh in on quintessential must-have experiences in their hometowns.

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InterContinental's ICons campaign is based on consumer research, which found that three-quarters of consumers want a local experience while traveling. Despite the desire to immerse themselves in a destination, tourists often gravitate towards the same expected sights, leaving room for more diversity and off-the-beaten-path experiences.

"InterContinental is the world's largest luxury hotel brand with 208 hotels in 66 countries worldwide," said Ginger Taggart, vice president of global marketing for the luxury portfolio at IHG. "As a result, we understand the global luxury traveler's mindset and we know our guests are looking for a deeper connection with the destinations that they travel to.

"Our goal for ICons is to reignite a sense of fascination for much-visited cities around the world and encourage a passionate discussion around what makes them truly iconic," she said. "It's our hope that by facilitating this dialogue, listening to the opinion of luxury travelers around the world and creating offerings that align with these values, we'll be able to provide a more distinct, immersive travel experience."

Getting off the tourist trail

InterContinental tapped Toluna, which conducted a study with 6,000 consumers in major cities including New York, London, Paris and Shanghai. One of the trends that came across is the fact that 59 percent of locals feel that tourists do not get to truly experience the spirit of their respective cities, and four in 10 feel as though visitors' social media posts do not accurately represent their hometowns.

Seventy-seven percent of travelers say they feel an obligation to visit major sights in the cities they visit.

This is illustrated on social media. InterContinental did an analysis of posts from travelers and found that the Eiffel

Tower makes up a full 10 percent of tourist photos globally.

Other popular spots tagged include New York's Central Park, which accounts for one-fifth of posts from the city, and Buckingham Palace, which is the most commonly tagged location in London.



InterContinental ICons Social Media Analysis

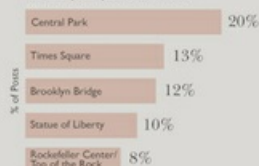


Key Findings

- **The Eiffel Tower** is the **Most Overexposed Icon in the World**, representing 53% of all relevant Paris posts on Instagram and nearly 10% of all postings worldwide.
- **New York City** is the only destination that **did not have a building/structure as the most overexposed icon**.

New York City

163 total posts qualified, with #NYC



London

155 total posts qualified, with #London



Dubai

155 total posts qualified, with #Dubai



Mexico City

152 total posts qualified, with #MexicoCity



Paris

155 total posts qualified, with #Paris



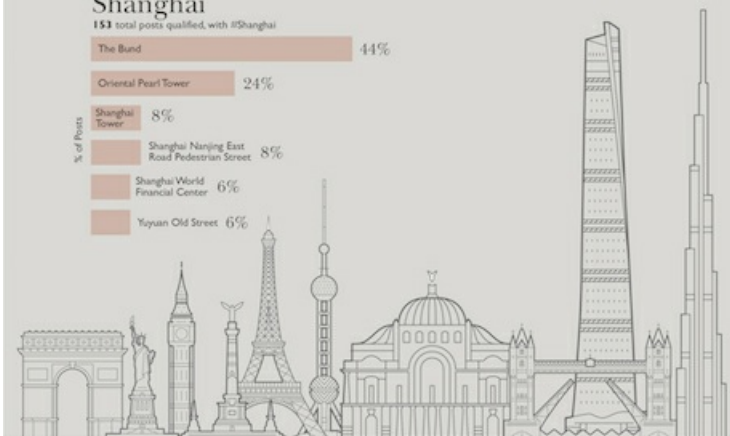
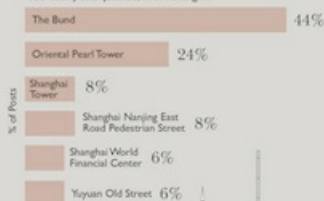
Sydney

157 total posts qualified, with #Sydney



Shanghai

153 total posts qualified, with #Shanghai



Methodology

More than two thousand pieces of Instagram content were screened to find 937 images around the world of popular tourist sites in seven cities globally that used the most popular destination hashtag in each city. Through an analysis of real-time Instagram data, the most overexposed icons were identified.

To qualify for the analysis and have been deemed overexposed, each Instagram post had to:

- Prominently feature what could be classified as a monument or tourist attraction
- Be accompanied by the popular destination hashtag (i.e. #NYC)
- Appear in more than 5% of the total content for that city

**Anything listed under 5% is considered too low to be "Overexposed"

#InterContinentalIcons

InterContinental found the most photographed spots in seven cities

In an effort to get to the heart of seven global destinations, InterContinental is giving consumers the opportunity to

weigh in on their own hometowns. The multiple choice poll asks individuals to select five ICons that best represent the city.

For instance, New Yorkers can choose whether the city is best reflected in freshly baked bagels in a West Village shop, hailing a taxi cab or the feeling of a subway car rushing past.

Londoners are being polled on whether their city is more about the smell of roses at Regent's Park or the illuminated skyline at night during a Thames crossing.

The choices focus on sensorial experiences, such as smells, tastes and sounds.

Beyond consumer input, InterContinental has tapped influencers from key destinations to share their points of view. These include *British Vogue* deputy editor Sarah Harris and photographer Isaac Jero, who calls Mexico City home.

"InterContinental Hotels and Resorts traces its roots to Pan American Airways, and as the originator of the jetsetter' mindset that is common today, we were the first hotel brand to help fuel global travel by being the gateway to new, fascinating places," Ms. Taggart said. "Now, after more than 70 years of opening up the world for travelers, we understand that our guests are craving a deeper connection and want to experience each place they visit like a well-informed local.

"We engaged locals to help us identify what should truly be celebrated in seven InterContinental destinations so that we could explore not just under-the-radar spots we've identified as experts but how we can truly revisit iconic places like Central Park in new, under-celebrated ways," she said. "Now, we're seeking the authority of travelers and locals alike to help us identify the top five ICons in each market through voting at life.intercontinental.com/icons."

Local haven

As affluents become more drawn to experiential travel, the role of the hotel has evolved to become more about the destination than simply about hospitality.

During a panel at *Cond Nast Traveler's* Points of View Summit on Oct. 7, industry experts discussed how high-end and boutique hotels are becoming more reflective of their location. Design, sustainability practices and programming are different ways hotels can incorporate local elements ([see story](#)).

Social media has become a key source of inspiration for consumers as they make travel plans, but a report finds that friends' posts are more influential than what a brand or publication shares.

According to a survey from Allianz Global Assistance, about half of millennials say social media influences their travel decisions. Peer-to-peer word of mouth holds the most sway, as 86 percent of consumers trust their own social networks to post accurate content about travel experiences, while 55 percent deem brands to be truthful on social media ([see story](#)).

InterContinental's study found that 55 percent of consumers equate capturing social media content with having a meaningful experience.

"According to survey data that helped shape our campaign, social media remains one of the leading sources of travel inspiration globally," Ms. Taggart said. "Thirty-nine percent of survey respondents also admitted they will focus more on social media while traveling in 2020.

"Though the desire to travel like a local was stronger than ever in our survey, we found through social media analysis that images displaying the true depth and culture of the places visited are not making their way onto social media," she said. "Now, in light of these insights, we are inviting the public to take part in a global conversation on what makes cities around the world truly iconic."