

TRAVEL AND HOSPITALITY

Belmond aims to reengage travelers by touting unique experiences

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Belmond First Light nature and photography excursion in France. Image credit: Belmond

By SARAH RAMIREZ

LVMH-owned hotel group Belmond is helping travelers reconnect with nature by touting some of its experience offerings.

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Belmond and high-end camera manufacturer Leica Sport Optics are offering "First Light" nature walks at different destinations, giving travelers opportunities to see breathtaking sites under unique circumstances. While the coronavirus pandemic has curtailed the travel industry, affluents will likely continue seeking out exclusive, and safe, experiences.

"While many luxury travel brands have focused on intimate localized experiences with guests for years now, we are seeing this become more important than ever as guests want to make the most of their travel experience, but social distancing is a must," said Damon Banks, editor and managing partner at [LuxeGetaways](#). "Early mornings are an ideal time to set out on these experiences to start your day on a high note while enjoying some freedom from your social bubble at home."

First Light

Travelers can participate in the daybreak adventures alongside wildlife and Leica photography experts, or opt for self-guided experiences. First Light experiences are available for guests at Belmond properties in Botswana, Brazil, Cambodia, France, South Africa and elsewhere.

By taking place around dawn, attendees are able to see animals during a busy time of day under the warm glow of "golden hour." With such a limited time frame, this makes these nature walks more exclusive events compared to other daylight excursions.



Belmond guests have exclusive early morning access to Iguassu National Park in Brazil. Image credit: Belmond

Currently, First Light nature walks are available when permitted by government regulations because of the coronavirus. Attendees are equipped with Leica Sport Optics binoculars for a better perspective of the flora and fauna.

"Belmond is always at the top of their game when it comes to personalized getaways, and this opportunity with Belmond First Light fits their brand perfectly," Mr. Banks said. "It provides guests with a reputable partner with Leica, local professionals as the guides and beautiful locations around the world."

The Belmond site has a First Light landing page with golden hour photography, Leica expert insights and nature videos for each destination.

Belmond First Light experience in Botswana

Some of films start similarly to an ASMR, or Autonomous Sensory Meridian Response, experience. Initially, nature sounds, such as chirping birds, are heard before instrumental music and voiceovers begin.

"It's a unique feeling when you walk through the African bush your pulse quickens, the excitement kicks in as you encounter the wildlife that Botswana has to offer," narrates Marc Stickler, wildlife expert and global ambassador at Leica. "For me, it's essential to be respectful towards the animals and the environment.

"Respect gains you the opportunity to get close to the wildlife," he explains.

Reengaging guests

While Belmond and Leica have offered the First Light nature walks since February 2018, the hospitality brand has recently been promoting the experiences as a safe choice for travelers amid the coronavirus pandemic.

Intimate, socially-distanced, outdoor activities are considered ideal for limiting the spread of the virus.

At the onset of the pandemic, the hotel group began its digital event series, Belmond Invitations. The digital event series is curated around Belmond's Good Living philosophy of well-being experiences that enrich mind, body and soul ([see story](#)).

Anticipating the slow return of travel and tourism, Belmond has also introduced several promotions and campaigns in recent months.

In May, the hotel group launched its Tomorrow Time Travel Pass to satiate the wanderlust of consumers. With no expiration date and available to use across Belmond's collection, Tomorrow Time Travel Passes are available as both gift cards and e-cards ([see story](#)).

More recently, Belmond has released campaign films acknowledging the slow summer of travel in light of the pandemic. This includes a film titled "My Love Letter to Italy" written and narrated by Emmy Award-nominated director Francesco Carrozzini ([see story](#)).

"Most people are not traveling like they were a year ago, but they are dreaming of that next big adventure," Mr. Banks said. "We are watching a period of time now that while many of the luxury brand hotels and resorts are only at a very low capacity, they are creating more and more ways to connect with their guests so even those not traveling this month are taking notice and planning ahead for their own experiences in the very near future."

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