

TRAVEL AND HOSPITALITY

Cond Nast Traveler aims to help travelers navigate new normal with specialized hub

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The New Standard aims to help travelers and brands to navigate the new normal. Image credit: Cond Nast Traveler

By SARAH RAMIREZ

Cond Nast Traveler has launched a new digital hub geared towards affluents who are interested in resuming leisure travel amid the coronavirus pandemic.

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"The New Standard" is guided by five principles that luxury travelers expect hospitality brands and destinations to uphold. The editorial initiative was inspired to draw attention to the travel providers working to meet those evolving expectations.

"First, and most important, we wanted to give our audience, and travelers in general, the confidence to start planning and booking again," said Jesse Ashock, U.S. editor at *Cond Nast Traveler*, New York. "There has been so much uncertainty, and so much noise, about what's going on with travel in the wake of the pandemic, so we wanted to offer some clarity.

"Our consumer research was showing us what travelers care most about right now, and meanwhile we were hearing about all the things our partners in the industry were doing, so to some extent this was an effort to bring the two together," he said.

"That leads into the second inspiration: we wanted to salute the travel industry for all the difficult work they've done in responding to this crisis, for which they don't get enough credit.

New standards

According to The New Standard, travelers are demanding health and safety, communication and transparency, flexibility, innovation and civics.

Beyond meeting current best practices for COVID-19 precautions, travelers want brands to be upfront about their crisis responses. Generosity towards rebooking policies is also expected.

Finally, travelers are more appreciative of innovations from hospitality brands, particularly those that enhance the guest experience or address issues such as sustainability. Similarly, hospitality brands can appeal to travelers by supporting their local communities.



Singapore's Cloudstreet restaurant has adapted its protocols because of COVID-19. Image credit: Singapore Tourism Board

The Singapore Tourism Board is the launch partner for The New Standard, and other sponsors include tourism departments from Colombia and the U.S. Virgin Islands.

Content on the platform includes advice on how to be a mindful guest during the pandemic and a column on how travelers have adapted their vacation plans. Other features explore how notable hotels or restaurants have adjusted to the climate.

The New Standard launch comes as luxury travelers have begun planning their next trips.

"Our specialist community has reported exceptional demand for trips in 2021, and 2022, and 2023," Mr. Ashock said. "The cruise industry, contrary to what you might think, has been doing healthy bookings for next year and beyond.

"There might be some shifts in how affluent travelers travel, in terms of destinations and style, but it's not a question of if, it's a question of when," he said. "And I think a lot of them are going to want to make up for lost time."



Cond Nast Traveler's The New Standard. Image credit: Cond Nast Traveler

In June, *Cond Nast Traveler's* "What Matters Now" study found that 74 percent of travelers are hoping to book hotels for domestic travel within three months after travel restrictions have been lifted. One in two are also looking to book international trips within six months of restrictions lifting.

When choosing between lodging options, 73 percent of travelers are seeking stricter cleanliness or hygiene protocols. Seventy percent would choose the brand they are familiar with if they felt comfortable with the safety standards.

Connecting with Travelers

Even prior to the pandemic, it was important for travel brands to emphasize their values to reach consumers.

During a panel at *Cond Nast Traveler's* Points of View Summit on Oct. 7, industry experts discussed how travelers are increasingly concerned about the impact they have on different environments.

Luxury hotel brands have been introducing more sustainability initiatives that prove hospitality does not need to sacrifice upscale experiences to achieve ecological and social responsibility. In addition to implementing more sustainable policies, brands lean on creative storytelling to share their stance on the issue ([see story](#)).

Now, hospitality groups hoping to welcome back guests should create emotional, rather than cognitive, connections with travelers.

Guests are more likely to humanize hotels that center emotion in their crisis communications, according to a recent

study from the United Kingdom. However as the COVID-19 pandemic has rattled the luxury travel industry, many brands are emphasizing the more clinical aspects of their response ([see story](#)).

"Obviously it's vital that brands and destinations are adopting enhanced cleaning protocols, social distancing measures and all the emerging best practices for protecting travelers," *Cond Nast Traveler's* Mr. Ashock said. "But they should also be seeking to push the envelope with innovations around technology, around amenities, around shared spaces you name it.

"And perhaps most critical they need to be transparent about what they're doing," he said. "A thoughtful, empathetic communications strategy has never been more important."

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