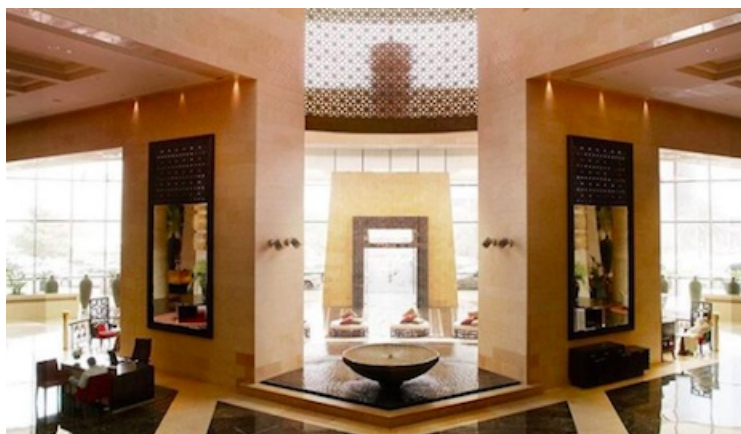


TRAVEL AND HOSPITALITY

Privacy, sustainability leading priorities for affluent travelers

May 21, 2021



Hotels, resorts and consumers alike are ready to embrace travel. Image credit: Raffles

By KATIE TAMOLA

Across the world, brands are seeing tangible signs of recovery in the luxury travel sector.

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Speaking at the **FT Business of Luxury Summit** on May 20, travel experts discussed how the future of luxury hospitality has changed due to COVID-19. The discussion, moderated by *Financial Times* travel editor Tom Robbins, also expanded on prevailing travel trends.

"I think that the big anxiety that the COVID-19-era has given us was not feeling freedom," said Matteo Atti, executive vice president of marketing and innovation at **VistaJet**, London. "Especially in the luxury world, travel is about freedom freedom to learn, freedom to try, freedom to flavor things.

"And that is what locations, destinations hotels, mode of transport are trying to remember, to deliver the core value of travel which is not a speed, it's the enjoyment," he said. "This is what we are all refocusing on, going back to the meaning of travel, which is being in an incredible room with an incredible service and tasty food."

Different places, different paces

Travel and tourism are recovering at different paces based on geographical location, vaccine rollout and other factors. Places including the United States are bright spots, with consumers excited to return to tourism after experiencing a promising vaccine rollout and receiving stimulus payments.

Iceland has also become a tourism highlight, with a wealth of holistic and wellness offerings, a volcano erupting in real-time and a coveted spot on the United Kingdom "green list." Countries on the green list pose the lowest risk, and travelers who have visited that country will not be required to quarantine upon return to England.



Iceland has many attractive tourist options. Image credit: Virtuoso

The majority of Europe is experiencing a more sluggish recovery, with disparate vaccination rollouts and restrictions still permeating regions. Progress is still apparent, however, and pent-up excitement among consumers is palpable.

Luxury hotels and resorts throughout Europe are ready to capitalize on this excitement.

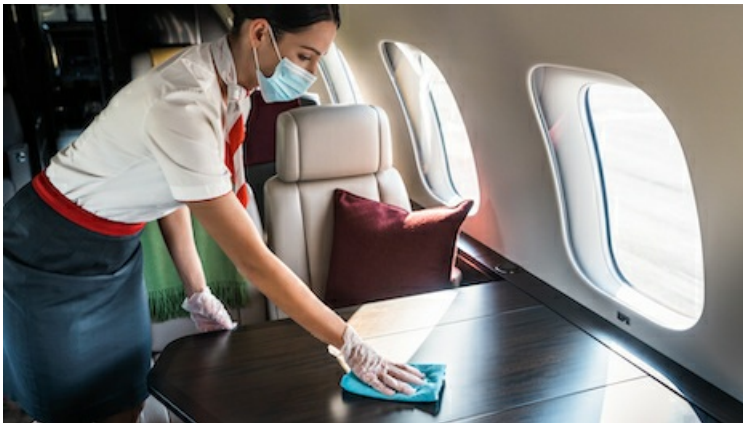
"In Europe, we have all of our hotels open," said Stephen Alden, CEO of **Raffles** and **Orient Express**, Paris. "In Paris, all the terraces are open, the cinemas are open, the parks are open.

"There are tangible signs of recovery across the world," he said. "Things are returning."

Two trends that will continue to permeate the luxury travel sector are private offerings and the desire for transparent sustainability practices from brands.

Privatization offerings, such as private jets, have soared in popularity among affluents during the pandemic.

"Businesses who wanted to continue moving had to resort to private aviation, especially because commercial [flying] should not get to the previous levels until 2024, even in terms of service, not even revenues," Mr. Atti said. "Places move, and regulations move, and with private aviation, you can ask for a flight with 24 hours notice."



The luxury travel sector is rising to the challenge of ensuring safety for consumers. Image credit: VistaJet

With private aviation allowing travelers transportation for work and leisure, and sometimes a mix of both, the attraction to the entity does not appear to be fading post-pandemic, either.

According to a recent survey from online platform Private Jet Card Comparisons, 41 percent of new private aviation clients plan to continue flying privately "regularly" after the pandemic. Furthermore, about four in 10 respondents who were flying privately before the pandemic expect to increase their usage once the pandemic ends ([see story](#)).

Travelers are also showing interest in private villas and other exclusive offerings such as private dinners, and hotels are eager to meet this demand.

Sustainable travel

Panelist also agreed that sustainability is a crucial subject to be considered when enticing travelers.

Destinations such as Iceland are drawing visitors due to a renewed and collective focus on wellness and sustainability.

According to research from Euromonitor, a shift towards value-driven tourism will be crucial for survival, as forms of tourism marketing that focus simply on driving the number of visitors will no longer work after the pandemic. Sixty-five percent of travel businesses in the Nordics are implementing a sustainability strategy, 10 percent higher than the global average with 46 percent saying that they were purpose driven ([see story](#)).

"I think we're seeing a big increase in this idea of wellness and regeneration, especially when we're talking about travel for leisure purposes, we're talking about that opportunity to regenerate ourselves and to rebuild our trust in ourselves and other people and have some sort of inner growth almost," said Eliza Reid, First Lady of Iceland. "We certainly see Iceland as a great destination for that, because of this, this wellness attitude because of our very sustainable atmosphere.

"Sustainability dimensions, especially in the luxury sector, is something that I think travelers are looking for more nowadays, they're much more discerning in terms of what they want, and they want to know that where they are spending their money on, that they're going to places where employees are treated fairly, that they're leaving little footprint," she said. "Where they're getting a unique experience that's good for their mind and their body and their soul, but not at the cost of exploiting nature and humans."

Ultimately, the luxury hospitality industry will need to follow trends and adapt to what travelers are seeking in the hopes to continue fueling overall travel recovery.

"We need to be able to shift quickly from one audience to the other, and always focus on, on the why," VistaJet's Mr. Atti said. "We need to listen to customers everyday why would they choose us, why do they not choose us, I think we all need to invest much more into research and listening to what customers need."

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