

COLUMNS

# Pack your bags: 2024 will be the year of high-end hospitality, but what does this mean for luxury?

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By **Nimi Raja**

2024 is set to be the year of luxury travel and hospitality.

From London (finally) experiencing a luxury hotel gold rush to the global market bursting with new far-flung destinations, high-end hospitality is back on the itinerary. For luxury travelers, a package deal to Mykonos isn't going to cut the mustard.

Macro-cultural shifts in values mean UHNW/HNW travelers now have a different set of expectations pursuing everything from wellness and togetherness to pilgrimages and passions so what can luxury learn?

## **Return to seas and skies**

If 2020-2021 marked the stay at home' years, 2022-2023 was lovingly dubbed the season of revenge travel' then 2024, is the year luxury travel returns to the skies and sea.

In fact, it's already set sail with high-end travel advisor Virtuoso having seen a 69 percent uptick in sales versus 2019, and exclusive operators such as Black Tomato and Original Travel report regularly hosting trips costing six figures.

So, it finally feels safe to say that luxury travel is back on the agenda.

And when it comes to luxury city-break go-to's, London has, finally and firmly, cemented itself as a clear frontrunner. Having seen a slew of new luxury hotel openings of late and more than 13 scheduled to open by 2025 a hotel gold rush is hitting the UK capital.

In the past, when you thought of the luxury hotel offering in London, you're most likely to recall the elite grand dames of The Savoy, The Ritz, The Langham or The Lanesborough.

A classic luxury London hotel experience traditionally featured exceptional service, potentially with afternoon tea, taking place in an elite setting where you had to dress to impress with hyper-attentive staff, who would immediately start fluffing the cushion as soon as you stood up. But, in the last decade, the once strict category of luxury hotels has been reinvented; becoming a chameleon for creative experimentation, and hotbed of local culture.

## **Hotel are leveling up**

Luxury hotels are moving to a new beat.

Unlike other luxury categories, where the knee jerk strategy to offset the potential of losing market share is typically to refocus on an authentic or heritage-centric narrative stream, luxury hospitality simply expanded the market to create space for the new competition.

The new luxury establishments didn't want a bigger slice of the pie, it was about baking a bigger pie altogether. Luxury hospitality is now ultra-localized; becoming the new frontline of city culture. They have transformed into new creative spaces that provide the backdrop for cultural conversation.

Want an urban retreat from the hustle of city life? Head to the 1Hotel.

Craving a fun and sexy night out with your girlfriends? It's got to be Nobu.

Fancy a glass of Champagne with a glimpse of Joan Collins? At Claridge's, your wish is their command.

The point is, that in the luxury hospitality scene, competitors seem to act more as comrades; independently unique with their own personality, while collectively homogenous; to expand the horizons and possibilities of high-end hospitality.

## **London calling**

London's hotel scene in particular has really pushed the envelope when it comes to hotel experiences.

The city is now a hotbed of local culture; a luxury space to be immersed in art and creativity of the capital.

For example, The Rosewood recently upped its cultural offering; with a sustainable restaurant pop-up that replicates the Scottish Meadow in collaboration with Stella and Mary McCartney. Or how guests at The Milestone Hotel & Residences can now have their self-portrait drawn and painted by the establishment's new resident artist, Shelley Levy.

Casting an eye to a more global scale, and there's also a clear shift in gear.

Major luxury hotels groups have significantly upped their offering, departing from the "paradise" promise in favor of creating and immersive experiences for guests that reflect the establishments unique identity.

A luxury retreat in Mykonos or the Maldives doesn't even touch the side as the ultra high-net worth traveler's appetite has grown voraciously more adventurous. People now want more than just a private suite with a sunset view, they want a taste of authentic culture, immerse themselves in experiences and create memories at bucket list locations.

Post-pandemic, luxury travellers have a heightened sense of self-awareness and a curated sense of personal lifestyle has triggered changes in the ways hospitality stakeholders personify their brand promise.

These newly developed expectations have taken hold of the luxury hospitality industry, calling in an era where it's no longer just about how you travel, but why you want to go there.

## **The emotional appeal**

People are seeking emotional fulfillment from their purchases.

So what does this mean for luxury beyond the hospitality category?

In a reality that is ever-changing, in which people are more connected than ever before, there's less fragmentation between luxury categories. When analyzing the current luxury market, and with the growing prominence of luxury fashion and lifestyle brands showing up in the hospitality space; we appear to have arrived at the next phase of reality; the experience' economy.

Hospitality and especially hotels can help luxury fashion brands immerse people further in their worlds.

In 2023, these ranged from Prada's pop-up caf in Harrods department store to resort-based rollouts like Fendi's, which extended the luxury fashion brand's aesthetics to design a beach club for the Puente Romano Beach Resort in Marbella, Spain, featuring personalized sailing boats for guests of the luxury Costa del Sol destination.

Just like the London hotel competitor landscape, luxury categories are becoming more cognate.

Fashion is joining forces with hospitality to reimagine experiences for travelers, taking you on vacation to demonstrate how they

are the brand for all of your whims and fancies; realizing your aspirations, enabling recreation and ultimately inspiring your way of life.

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