

IN-STORE

Luxury hotels should use local culture to attract guests

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By JOE MCCARTHY

Luxury hotels that dabble in the native cuisine, explore the surrounding area and delve into the local culture will stand out to consumers and help the properties get ahead of their competitors since these packages provide experiences that cannot be emulated elsewhere.

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Since luxury consumers are known to research their trips and hunt for exclusive experiences, putting together well-curated packages that immerse guests in new realms may boost the number of bookings. Investigating the nuances of the local culture and environment is becoming more popular and should not be overlooked when trying to attract guests.

"Many of the large hotel chains are approaching these factors on multiple levels," said [Damon M. Banks](#), director of [DMB Public Relations](#), New York.

"A great example of this is the Kimpton Hotels, which has an entire division dedicated to this very purpose," he said.

"The Earth Care Program was developed to support a sustainable world, and reflect the values of their employees, guests and investors by using non-intrusive, high quality, eco-

friendly products and services at all Kimpton hotels and restaurants."

Nitpicking nuances

The local environment is a facet of a hotel's identity that can not be studied, repurposed and repackaged elsewhere.

Engulfing the local culture with a single package should not be the aim. However, hotels should strive to find the right combination of activities, events and locations.

"From the aesthetics of a property to the available guest activities, luxury hotels are becomingly increasingly aware of the importance of authenticity," said Taylor Rains, account coordinator at [Rawle Murdy Associates](#), Charleston, SC.

"Guests are looking for a luxury experience from their hotel, there's no question about that, but oftentimes they are also looking for an authentic cultural experience as well," he said. "Those two elements were thought to be mutually exclusive until recently."

"In the past several years, luxury hotel brands have found effective ways to integrate the local look and feel while retaining what makes their respective brand unique."

Forage for fun

Cuisine can be an alluring center piece for locally sourced packages. Food inevitably varies from region to region, so gathering exquisite flavors can set a particular package apart.

Luxury hotels have incorporated local cuisine into hotel offers.

For example, Waldorf Astoria Park City, UT, is reaching out to ultimate foodies with a package that has the hotel's chef guide guests through the Wasatch Mountain Range on a foraging journey. Guests will then use the ingredients they gather for a custom-prepared meal by chef Clement Galas.

During the foraging trip, guests can picnic with their choice of wine or locally crafted beer ([see story](#)).



People at nearby farmer's markets and restaurants may carry useful ingredients and information.

"A great way that many hotels and restaurants are providing further support to the

communities is by buying local and supporting these local farmers and merchants," DMB Public Relations' Mr. Banks said.

"This is often a win-win, as the food is often fresher and cheaper," he said.

"Farm-to-table within the hospitality industry is a great movement growing in popularity."

Natural settings

Engaging guests in locally favored past-times can reflect the local culture. Luxury hotels have tapped into these experiences as well.

For instance, the Ritz-Carlton, Westchester, NY, is targeting summer travelers through a family-friendly, pirate-themed package and a historical tour offering that immerses guests in the local culture.

The "Pirates of the Hudson" package includes tickets to the Pirates of the Hudson festival at Philipsburg Manor in Sleepy Hollow, NY, and the "Hudson Valley Summer" package comprises a tour of the Hudson Valley. Since many families travel during the summer months, hotels should offer activity-filled packages for those who are traveling with children ([see story](#)).



Pirates of the Hudson festival

When crafting packages, it is important to thoroughly tour the area and consult citizens and organizations for insights.

Some hotels turn to specialized experts to get a better sense of how to structure key parts of a package.

For example, Starwood's St. Regis Bahia Beach Resort in Puerto Rico is promoting eco-tourism by letting guests monitor and learn about Leatherback Turtles that nest on the property's shores.

Promoting eco-tourism with simple activities is a good way for luxury hotels to tap into the growing eco-tourism market and inspire environmentally conscious guests to consistently visit. Furthermore, observing the natural trends of the surrounding area allows luxury hotels to maximize their use of the environment ([see story](#)).



Leatherback turtles

Historic sites

Every region is steeped in artifacts that bear insight into a culture. Exploring such artifacts can allow guests to build a historical connection to an area.

For instance, Starwood Hotels and Resorts' Luxury Collection is partnering with One Kings Lane, purveyor of vintage home decor, to tailor customized experiences and unearth the local treasures of property locations for guests.

The partnership offers exclusive sales, dinners and opportunities to road-trip across some of America's quintessential landscapes. San Diego, Los Angeles, San Francisco and Portland compose the showcased itinerary and at each of these locations guests will encounter a distinct cultural flavor ([see story](#)).

Hotel packages tend to follow common trends, which may explain the prevalence of locally-themed packages.

"For years, we've seen hotels offer to not wash linens in an attempt to conserve water, and other methods to conserve energy and water," Mr. Banks said.

"Now, in addition to the green elements, we are also seeing luxury tour operators and hotels offering opportunities to become involved with the local nonprofit organizations and communities to also give back while enjoying vacation," he said.

Final Take

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