

IN-STORE

## A weekend start to Valentine's Day lets luxury hotels experiment

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By JOE MCCARTHY

Is it best for luxury hotels to veer toward familiar narratives or search for something novel when crafting Valentine's Day packages?

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The holiday falls on a Friday this year, giving marketers the liberty to devise multiple-day packages that appeal to travelers from all over in ways that a Tuesday or Wednesday simply could not achieve. While the majority of properties will be adorned with common decorations and stick with ordinary events, a few properties may wade a little further into the pool of creativity.

"Standing out on Valentine's Day or any holiday for that matter is as much about the property as it is about the day itself," said Taylor Rains, account executive at [Rawle Murdy Associates](#), Charleston, SC.

"Most any brand can package traditional and predictable Valentine's Day elements into a promotion, but that hardly stands out," he said.

"When a property can take what makes it unique, its location, history and culture and frame a Valentine's Day promotion with that element, then it is something the property can claim all its own. And uniqueness is the only surefire way to stand out from the pack."

## Friday getaways

When Valentine's Day falls in the middle of the week a hotel typically depends on traffic from the local community. Couples dine out, stop by for a drink or reserve a room, but planning a far-off trip is uncommon.

However, when the holiday lands on a Friday marketers have a much deeper tool-kit with which to experiment. Rather than merely securing guests for an evening, hotels have the opportunity to pull in guests for a weekend getaway that goes beyond the hotel by creating daily excursions incorporating the local community.

Since the primary purpose of Valentine's Day is to celebrate love, many properties create an atmosphere where couples can have some alone time.

For example, Four Seasons Hotel Seattle is inviting travelers to experience an aphrodisiac-themed menu, its Chocolate Espresso Body Glow spa treatment and suite package that includes Champagne and chocolate truffles.



*Four Seasons Hotel Seattle promotional image*

Most travelers can expect that an extended Valentine's Day offer will include a spa treatment.

For instance, Mandarin Oriental San Francisco's "I Left My Heart in San Francisco" package centers on a spa treatment, a bottle of Napa Valley sparkling rosé and a \$50 donation to the American Heart Association.



### *Four Seasons Hotel Denver promotional image*

Other hotels try to tie events to a tangential theme.

Four Seasons Hotel Denver is drawing on a popular culture figure that always seems to be chasing an affair, with its James Bond-inspired packages. The Goldfinger package includes various components tailored to fit with the theme such as copious touches of gold.

Properties in China have an even greater chance to reel in guests as the Western Valentine's Day coincides with the Chinese Valentine's Day.

The Ritz-Carlton Hong Kong teamed up with Graff Diamonds to imbue its afternoon tea events with jewelry and embroidery.



### *The Ritz-Carlton Hong Kong and Graff Diamonds*

Mandarin Oriental Guangzhou brings guests to a private viewing at Cartier, a move that seems explicitly designed for a romantic purchase.

As Valentine's Day approaches, more properties will begin to promote their offers.

"Hotels can stand out on Valentine's Day by not only catering to couples but creating something fun for singles," said Tiffany Dowd, founder and president of [Luxe Social Media](#), Boston.

"XV Beacon Hotel in Boston for example, in addition to a traditional Valentine's Day package, is offering an anti-Valentine's Day package with their Love 'em or Leave 'em package geared toward single women wanting a girls' getaway," she said.

"With today's busy schedules between work and family life, time together for couples is a luxury. Hotels can use Valentine's Day as the perfect occasion to lure guests into rekindling romance and have a much needed getaway."

### Constant dilemmas

As soon as one holiday ends, hotels begin to plan for the next and ask themselves a series of hard-to-answer questions.

For example, do affluent travelers pay attention to the spate of New Year's Eve offers by luxury hotels, or do they stick with experiences that they know they can trust?

The massive amounts of money consumers spend on New Year's Eve and the chance to imprint a traveler with a memorable experience that triggers repeat visits makes the holiday one of the most highly anticipated of the year. Whether New York hotels host pre-parties, dinners, parties or holistic events, they all try to divert some of the thunderous traffic into their lobbies ([see story](#)).

Although holidays have a natural magnetism, a host of variables such as weather and the day of the week influence whether or not hotels can bring in guests.

"The fact that Valentine's Day is on a Friday this year affords properties more flexibility and, as a result, creativity for the simple reason that consumers will have more flexibility as well," Mr. Rains said.

"A Friday holiday means more people willing to take long weekends. With an increased length of stay possible, properties can be more creative in how they craft their promotions."

### Final take

*Joe McCarthy, editorial assistant on Luxury Daily, New York*

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