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Introduction

We are bombarded by the terms 'luxury' and 'luxurious' on a daily basis by marketers, who clearly believe that they are powerful words that can encourage us to spend money we may not have, and consume goods and services we may not actually need.

Indeed, luxury has always been associated with the purchase and consumption of products and services human beings do not actually need to survive, from holidays to high-end cars to designer brand fashion. This fact is recognised when we say, as we buy such things, 'yes I know it is a bit of a luxury but ...', by way of justifying our actions to ourselves.

Luxury has, therefore, always been associated with disposable income, the money left over when we have bought the essentials of life, such as food, and paid our electricity and water bills.

Yet, today, it seems that the idea of luxury has been extended even to everyday items that we do need or at least feel we need to be part of a civilised society. Unusually soft toilet paper is described as 'luxurious', as are sweet smelling shower gels, and microwaveable convenience foods!

In this book I will ignore the hyperbole of the marketing professionals and focus on luxury in the context of products and services which are not everyday purchases and are not essential to human survival, and are primarily in the tourism, hospitality and events sectors.

Let me also begin by highlighting what the book will not be about. I will not be talking about business tourism for, while it certainly has a luxury dimension, it is a form of tourism where enjoyment is not the aim and where the consumer usually does not make the decisions about what to consume, but is instead told what they may consume by an employer.

I will also not be looking at the large area of the market represented by the phenomenon of 'visiting friends and relatives'. Although luxury may well be present, again here consumption is shaped or even distorted by the coincidence of who your friends and family are and where they have chosen to live.

The rationale for this book

The very fact that someone is prepared to pick up a book and read it could be seen as sufficient justification for a book to be written. However, I would like to outline why I believe that a book such as this is warranted in the context of tourism, hospitality and events.

In the early days of the modern tourism and hospitality sector, virtually everything was luxury as only a small social and economic elite was travelling. This was the era in which much of our modern thinking about luxury and travel originated, from the grand hotels to the cruise ships. Destinations such as the French Riviera were developed in this era, destinations that have remained symbols of luxury ever since.

Yet since that time things have changed dramatically with leisure travel now being much more democratic, with most people in so-called developed countries, at least, being able to participate. At the same time it is my belief that our thinking on luxury has not evolved sufficiently to reflect this change.

Furthermore, the concept of luxury in the modern tourism industry was born in Europe and was based on a European values and tastes. Yet today the rapidly growing markets of Asia are setting the pace in the global market. Interestingly, though, the first generation of Asian global tourists appear to have been heavily influenced by these European concepts of luxury, from designer brands to the grand old hotels of London or Montreux or Nice. However, I believe that we are at a cusp where the Asian tourists, as they become more experienced travellers, will begin to develop their own concepts of luxury that are less dependent on the European tradition.

I am also of the opinion that for all tourists the concept of luxury is being changed by factors that are at play today and are changing the market forever. Mobile devices are allowing tourists to become their own travel agents and concierges; online travel agents are offering luxury hotels at discounted prices; and the 'experience economy' means that all travellers now seek personalised experiences rather than standardised products and services. This is reducing the power of traditional industry suppliers and increasing that of the consumer, which will have a real impact on the luxury sector, as these suppliers themselves have often been the arbiters of what constitutes luxury. For example, the term, 'Ritz' has become a by-word for luxury well beyond the hotel sector.

We are also seeing a breaking down in boundaries between sectors and a growing fusion of industries which is going to impact on the meaning of luxury. The rise of branded 'fashion hotels' is a clear example of this trend.

Terrorism and the global threat of being a victim of terrorism may also lead to a change in the meaning of luxury. Instead of being taken for granted, safety and