



Luxury Travel and Lifestyle Trends

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RIDING OUT THE ROUGH SEAS: SOME NEW IDEAS FOR SUCCESS:

It's an undisputed fact that we are currently experiencing one of the grandest sea changes of this century – not only in the mindset of consumers, but also in the economic, social and cultural realities. Marketers and strategists take note: consumers are in the process of an identity shift, and this is a time to create new models and take advantage of new opportunities, which are there for the taking.

The advent of neo-tribalism. What is this? Nationalism re-emerged back in the 20th Century, where each country trumpeted itself, and citizens saw themselves in patriotic terms. With the new millennium came globalization, the disappearance of borders, one world. Now, aided by the Internet, wireless technology, satellites and more recently, the breakdown of trust in governments and institutions (remember when “you can bank on it” meant a sure thing?), we are seeing the fragmentation of societies into smaller communities - neo-tribes.

In turbulent times, we turn to the timeless comforts of family, friends and “villages”, but with a new twist. Our “tribal villages” are social communities, driven by personal and professional interests and passions. Such fragmentation may explain the phenomenon of Facebook, where 175 million users find people of precisely similar passions, persuasions, pursuits, and even past lives. No longer can we look to demographics as the holy grail of marketing, but rather, psychographics and behavior. It's significant that a few weeks ago Google announced it will be selling ads based on consumer behavior, long a winning formula for Amazon.com. For example, I am “me,” not because I'm from Delaware, or of a certain socio-economic class, or of a certain age. But rather, I see myself as a CEO and marketing executive, a “foodie” who has an affinity for French culture and enjoys myriad forms of the arts.

Find your niche. Back in the colorful 1960s, former Harvard University Professor Timothy Leary gained a certain infamy for urging young people to, “Tune in, turn on and drop out.” It became a way of life for a whole generation to, “Do your own thing,” as Leary and others preached. Nearly half a century - and innumerable trends - later, a surprisingly similar lifestyle fragmentation is upon us as society re-groups itself into niches, each one ripe for a very specific and targeted appeal.

We must focus on niches and micro niches for our markets, products, delivery of these products and distribution channels. It's no longer sufficient to pitch products to a broad category, such as the family market. Tomorrow's success stories will cater to new subsets of a mature family niche, such as gay/lesbian parents, teens, single parents, active families, multi-generational travelers, multi-cultural families, and family reunions. And then there are the new travel niches, from grief tourism (visiting Holocaust sites and Ground Zero), to danger tourism, slum tourism and glamping (glamorous camping). For example, in late 2008, Slovenia was quick to capture an offshoot of eco-tourism, beekeeping tourism. Months later the Fairmont Royal York's urban beekeeping initiative in Toronto not only began supplying honey to its restaurants, but also nurtures the local, endangered bee population. Even famous London retailer, Fortnum and Mason, has recently begun to produce its own honey from its rooftop beehives, collecting pollen from chestnut, lime trees, and flowering plants from the best addresses in London.

Start your “experience” engines. Last year, my 25 year old son and his friends took a guys-only adventure getaway to Los Cabos, Mexico. They had such a good time that they decided to repeat the adventure in a new destination this year, based on their interest in surfing. Yet, the destination website they searched was complicated to navigate and provided too little information to help them plan the type of trip they envisioned.

The upshot? They're returning to Cabo while a different destination lost their business. The lesson? As Jitendra Jain, editor of hotelemarketer.com, articulates, “experience engines” will be the next big innovation in trip-planning – online engines that will host all the building blocks of the entire travel experience. Travelers will be able to search and bundle destination information, flights, accommodation, attractions, geotagging (interactive maps with site-specific data such as photos, video, websites, RSS feeds, coordinates etc.), social networking, media and consumer reviews and pairing of travel companions. Not only will a customized itinerary pop up containing all of those elements, but we'll be connected to

dozens, or hundreds, of like-minded fellow prospective travelers with the same interests who will be going to the same destination and looking to meet online first. This technology is either fast on the way or already here, in bits and pieces.

From Wall Street to Main Street. Consumers today are shell-shocked from last fall's stock market plunge, which shrank nest eggs and rearranged long-range plans for months, if not years, to come. They are looking for value in everything they purchase. This means we must reposition ourselves to address this new value proposition and mindset of frugality.

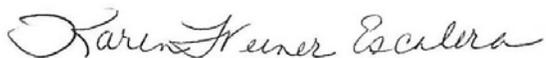
Included in the change that must come are the vocabularies we use to present ourselves, market and advertise. Yesterday's imagery excess is out, while today's is more modest. Totally discredited are many of the clichés once applied liberally throughout much luxe travel and consumer promotion, such as best-kept secret, paradise, gourmet, unique (and heaven forbid "very unique") and masterpiece. Now, the emphasis should be on qualities such as authenticity, value, substance, and comfort. A new vocabulary is replacing yesterday's terminology:

<i>Old Vocabulary</i>	<i>New Vocabulary</i>
Over the top.....	Value
Quantity.....	Quality
Fashionista.....	Frugalista
High design.....	Smart design
Flash.....	Substance
Super-sized.....	Real-sized
Branded luxury.....	Individualistic luxury
Status symbols.....	Status skills
Spectator.....	Interactive
Extravagance.....	Simplicity
Imported.....	Local

Profiting from stress. When Barack Obama captured the White House last fall, his entire platform was built around a mantra of change. What he didn't entirely communicate was just how drastic these changes were going to be. Institutions, businesses and individuals are rapidly trying to reinvent themselves to become relevant (an important word) as we finish out the decade. As a result, such change and uncertainty of what may or may not lay ahead causes stress.

The good news for our industry is that a wellness lifestyle is still sought after because it's not seen as excessive, but a means to achieve personal well-being. It's not a matter of "want", but a matter of "need" to destress and be a better, healthier you in difficult times. Figures provided by SpaFinder to *Travel Weekly* are staggering - the most searched terms on their site since January are: "massage" up roughly by 1900%; "getaways" up more than 400%; "spa retreats" up 235%; "local spa" up roughly 600%; and "tranquility" up 75%. With that being said, searches for "luxury spa" and "luxury spa resorts" were down, which indicates that spa-ing is becoming more synonymous with essential stress reduction and relaxation, than a luxury pursuit. Look to anything that claims to relieve stress to boom, and spas will flourish as never before. Armed with this information, spas will need to start getting creative with new variations of packages that appeal to today's consumer needs, especially lifestyle management and life coaching.

With best regards,



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Named one of the "Top 25 Most Extraordinary Minds in Sales & Marketing" for 2008 by the Hotel Sales and Marketing Association International (HSMIAI)



For nearly 30 years, first in New York City and now in Miami, Karen Weiner Escalera and her firm's [KWE group](#) have been among the nation's leading strategic marketing and public relations experts in luxury travel, hospitality and real estate. Creator of the [KWEst PROcess](#) for strategic market positioning and product development, Karen has worked for brand leaders in all segments of the industry. She is a frequent speaker on travel trends and is editor of an internationally syndicated luxury travel and lifestyle trends [newsletter](#) and [blog](#).