

## WHAT'S NEXT: LUXURY TRAVEL & LIFESTYLE TRENDS

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**Creativity is the new currency**, from offbeat approaches to staff training and travelers seeking to develop their creative side on holiday, to personalizing one's environment. Script writing in Spain, stand up comedy in Devon, a dozen different textile courses in Europe from one operator alone, and writing "chick lit" are among the fast growing list of industry offerings which address one's creative side in new locales. The Four Seasons Resort in Langkawi, Malaysia goes so far as to offer a large dedicated writing room as part of their Beach Front Suites.

Look for growth in **bespoke** travel and lifestyle products for the affluent. Everyone wants something different, says Tom Ford, new entrepreneur and ex-creative director of Gucci. It's about personal style, choosing a concept that fits into one's sense of self and making a statement. Consumers will be looking to brands as partners to get them to a personalized, custom service or product. Last year Armani launched a bespoke tailoring division and Louis Vuitton will make anything from a lipstick case, to one for a tiddlywinks set. Trend tracker *Daily Candy* has dubbed custom offerings as "cutting edge". In hospitality, bespoke is being used to define unique, niche products such as design hotels, art hotels, underwater hotels, museum hotels and of late, extreme hotels. But what about bespoke as in a guest room, airline, or cruise ship cabin environment? Its still virgin territory.

Savvy marketers will increasingly tap into experienced, creative consumers to co-author product development and renovation, tying into the trend of people eager to show off their creative skills. This bottom-up phenomenon is what [Eric von Hippel](#), head of MIT's Innovation and Entrepreneurship Program, calls "**lead-user innovation.**" "Travelers can be your best employees for designing packages, innovations, improvements and marketing programs," said Charles Kennedy of DYG at a recent *Travel Weekly* forum in Mexico City. "Motivate them to be part of the 'smart mob' of the hotel," he continued. Besides product development, this also serves to build a bond and guest loyalty with customers.

As companies are challenged to come up with new ideas and ways to make creativity happen, they also look inward to their own employees. Offbeat team-building exercises such as recently reported "Iron Chef" style cooking competitions, incorporating ballet methods and comedy routines into hotel training seminars (*Hotel Interactive's* "[You Had me at Hello](#)"), or days off for employees to explore their creative side are on the rise (KWE group's team tried handbag making, tango dancing, and floral arranging). These new approaches are meant to stimulate the right side of the brain in the Human Resources arsenal. In conjunction with this, new products will arise as environments to heighten creativity of workers: witness [Cloud](#), an inflatable conference room made of pliable nylon walls imitating its namesake, the ideal escape for creative brainstorming.

One of the most unusual approaches is what *Luxury Briefing* called "swap shop". Retailers [Browns Focus](#) in London and [Acne Jeans](#) from Stockholm literally swapped shops. For 10 days Browns took over Acne's retail space in Stockholm selling its own brands and using its own sales staff and vice versa. Sales assistants even swapped apartments. Similarly, an Austin hotel recently sent about a dozen staffers to a local Whole Foods supermarket to see how it impresses customers, borrowing ideas for the hotel.

**Look to big and bigger money following culture** as the boom is just beginning. You can be sure that the phenomenal success of Miami's Art Basel both in Miami's image building and generating tourism revenue will spawn numerous imitations. Or look at the growing media appeal of the Sundance Film Festival. In culture and the arts, **architecture** is the new medium of choice. Destinations, museums, hotels and restaurants alike are turning to what the *New York Times* called "star-architects" to put them on the map - names like [Gehry](#), [Libeskind](#), [Herzog & de Meuron](#) among others. In a recent plug for [Yoo](#), a design oriented property development company Jade Jagger is involved with, she said "it's not *where* you live but *who* designed it".

With the advent of the New Year, we couldn't speak about luxury without mentioning "bling" and "over the top". Admittedly, most everyone enjoys reading about the \$1000 omelette, \$8 million getaway and \$10,000 martini, but conspicuous consumption will soon see its peak in the U.S. (not so for sure in emerging markets). Part of this phenomenon will surely be the advent of "less is more" as luxury consumers are sated with product and wastefulness. We'll be hearing more about "enlightened luxury", a return to notions of sophistication and refinement and inconspicuous consumption. Multi-purpose products will also strike a chord. My favorite new product: a dress by Ron Arad that doubles as a covering for his [Ripple](#) chair.