

WHAT'S NEXT: LUXURY TRAVEL & LIFESTYLE TRENDS

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Everyone seems to have his or her own definition of luxury these days. One of the better I've heard is from Yaffa Assouline, the prominent French magazine publisher and editor of *Luxuryculture.com*. She believes that true luxury presupposes a level of sophistication and education, and products and services need to adapt their marketing message to highlighting not only quality and authenticity, but also process.

Speaking of "process", now that **organic** foods have become mainstream. Natural luxury products are the new chic, dubbed **Organic Chic**. It's the new luxury, an indulgence that doesn't seem harmful, and appeals to consumers who feel the need to express their individual values and moral responsibilities. Celebrities and consumers alike are taking the plunge, but in a way that makes the right political, environmental, or philosophical statement, by adorning themselves in non-conflict diamonds, organic fiber gowns, and leather-free shoes. They would rather hire a nonpolluting vehicle (the Toyota Prius) or book a natural gas-powered Suburban from the EVO limo service – LA's environmental luxury car service. With celebrities like Leo and Cameron leading the way in their politically correct vehicles, there is a movement towards authenticity, simplicity, and environmentally correct consumption. From the food in the fridge to the sheets we sleep on, organic is also moved to the hotel bedrooms in a big way - organic mattresses and organic bedding are becoming an important new trend for travelers on a quest for a healthier lifestyle on the road.

Another intriguing definition, courtesy of Charles Leadbetter of London's *Observer* newspaper, is that in all ages luxury reflects what we are trying to escape, as in everyday experiences. In a world grown too complex, **simplicity becomes the new luxury** as in products that are intuitive. Brands that are ubiquitous, found in every major capital and even in airports become mundane, to be replaced by unique, one-of-a-kind offerings. And, as Leadbetter said, in an "always on", tremendously fast paced world people will seek sanctuary where we can go a lot slower. Interestingly enough, the trend-spotter and trend-setter Andre Balazs in recently explaining his new hotel, The Standard, in South Beach claims to offer a hideout which is all about "withdrawing."

Goodbye to passive consumerism. 2006 will be the year where we see travel products beginning to cater more to people's desire to express their individual, creative side and interactive pursuits will open up new markets and build loyalty. This calling for creativity has produced a new category in deluxe hotels – for design and artistic voyeurs – making these hotels a destination of their own. At Madrid's Puerta America, every floor has been designed by a different name-brand architect. Or see Copenhagen's Hotel Fox, where each of their 61 rooms is an individual piece of modern art, from whacky comical styles, graphic design, and fantastic street art to Japanese Manga. A leading resort in Los Cabos is also making noise with its "Aspiring Artist Package" complete with full art supplies and private painting lessons with a well known local artist, helping guests discover their inner artist.

Moreover, hotels will begin to not only focus on the hotel experience, but will need to **address the entire travel experience**, door to door, going well beyond computerized guest preferences and airline meals to go. The Palms in the Turks and Caicos is making waves with its "Spa Journey" which begins when guests step off the plane, met by a spa attendant, and for VIPs, a private car complete with a Car Spa Kit. On departure guests are given a "Breath of Life" infused tissue to aid easy breathing and calm travels home. "Rooms by the hour" no longer has that old notorious connotation – Marquis Reforma in Mexico City, with its "Spatacular Layover Package" aims to improve layover hassles by shuttling travelers from the airport to the hotel for rest and relaxation at the largest and most luxurious spa in the city. To streamline travel, cruise ships are also allowing guests to check into connecting flights while still on board ship.

Trends in the coming year? Expect to hear more about resorts, products and services for **five-star families**. Luxury brands are targeting not only the parents, but a young demographic, trying to develop brand loyalty at an ever earlier age, not to speak of the additional revenues families bring in. Recently reported are New York nightclubs for teens, spa treatments for parent and child, designer dresses for teens (how about a \$27,000 Dolce & Gabbana for a Miami teen's party) and even computer domains for babies. The billion dollar, 13 island Durrat Al Bahrain project will have one island devoted to a five-star family hotel and aqua park and the Riviera Maya's Esencia was designed as a sophisticated family-friendly alternative to its adult only hideaway up the beach. The new *Cookie* magazine, already with a circulation of 500,000, is targeted and written for stylish and sophisticated parents, which features everything for designer families, including home decor, travel, entertainment, fashion, gear, toys and furniture. The ads alone feature kids wearing nothing less than the most luxury branded designer apparel.