



# Luxury Travel and Lifestyle Trends

From the desk of Karen W. Escalera

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## SENSING SUCCESS: TAPPING THE SENSES TO SELL LUXURY TRAVEL

Our lagging recovery from recession appears endless as this roller-coaster business year slows to an uncertain finale around the globe. Where is the luxury travel sector bound? Headlines such as "[World's Rich Are Hoarding \\$10 Trillion in Cash](#)" (*Wall Street Journal*, 7/13/10) imply a cloudy view of tomorrow. This we see clearly: Motivating the affluent to spend amid so many question marks will require uncommonly sharp strategies.

Impulse buying of extravagant commodities is out. Softer selling is now in. We're seeing the use of more sophisticated, layered approaches. The best, strategic approaches combine sound reasoning with emotional lures to motivate indulging in "guilty" pleasures.

**Looking through you: The intelligent consumer.** We are now living in the age of what might be termed the "intelligent consumer." He or she shops around while trying to learn more about a product's value. "Both booking and dollar volume indicate that consumers are willing to spend money, just as long as they feel they're spending it responsibly," Jeff Anderson, a marketing manager for America's Vacation Center/Avoya Travel, told *Travel Weekly*. Consumers - luxury or otherwise - are demanding value and fairness before cracking open their thinner wallets.

Successfully selling luxury in today's tough environment requires communication. Consumers need answers to such key questions as, "What am I really buying? Why is it so expensive? What is it made of? What are the service specifics?" Educate your consumer on your product's material, attributes, its limited quantity, its inherent value. After they buy, they want to believe they've made an intelligent choice.

Apple Corp. demonstrates this formula daily in its retail and online storefronts, all designed to seem more about consumer education than hard selling. Simple, almost austere, they feature minimal signage and clear messaging. The atmosphere looks benign: *Go on, try this gizmo out. Questions? Ask a nerdy clerk. No one, it seems, is there to sell you anything.*

Shoppers, affluent or otherwise, are willing to search relentlessly for price. With corporate travel rebounding a bit, [Orbitz for Business](#) data shows business people are booking smarter these days. Some 70% say they feel personally obligated to save their company money on travel bookings. Even though their personal pocketbooks are unaffected, this penny-pinching mindset may be permanent after the past two years of cutbacks.

**See me, feel me: Emotional triggers and sensory marketing.** You've appealed to your consumer's rational side. Now, appeal to their emotions. We're hearing wide use of such sales phrases as "new lifestyle opportunity," "passion points" and "one-of-a-kind experiences."

Humans have five senses: sight, touch, taste, smell and hearing. Today's multi-sensory marketing of tourism products and services creates emotional bonds in consumers by appealing to all five of these senses. The idea is to influence perceptions of brands. Tapping customers' emotions creates memories to be taken away for the long term.

After all, what sets one product apart from another, one brand from the next? *Yes, the bed is soft, the shower water is hot and the lobby smells pleasant.* What's critical is that the customer's whole sensory experience be funneled through a hotel's identity.

As Laurie Babin told the *Journal of Advertising*, “The potential of imagery is both potent and provocative, especially when one takes into account that the forms of mental impressions include all five senses.” Travelers choose to be guests or visitors at your hotel, destination or cruise line. They may not be able to explain why, but they “have a feeling that it’s right”.

Vendors of luxury brands are in the experience and emotions business, selling stories and memories. Products and brands must inspire a special experience to provoke the universally sought “*I love it!*” response.

**Remember these “emotional marketing” components:**

**Visual.** People everywhere are visual creatures. Imagery is a smart, subliminal way to “sell”. According to the Travel Industry Association, most online reservations are still made from the picture gallery, or one click later. Yet, most guests think their decision was intellectual, not emotional. You want your product to be remembered, so choose colors wisely. One Xerox Corp. study found that color boosted attention spans and recall 82%. With correct imagery, guests will feel like they’ve touched the velvety-soft pillows, smelled the gardenias outside the window and tasted the béarnaise sauce on the juicy steaks. *Voilà!* They have bonded with your product. Images that convey cold facts aren’t nearly as compelling.

Some newer hotels incorporate “visual” literally, from Washington’s [Hotel Murano Tacoma](#), full of glass art, to the [21c Museum Hotel](#) in Louisville, Ky., literally a contemporary museum. Others feature artist-designed guest rooms or DIY exteriors. Now, we’re seeing hotels venture into other art forms, such as film and video production that become the identity, vibe, and the intellectual soul of the hotel. This summer, the future Cosmopolitan Hotel in Las Vegas is the site of an innovative public art series called [Pause](#), a digital art installation/marquee used to create a buzz around the hotel’s official launch in December.

**Scent.** Among all five senses, smell is the most powerful trigger of emotions and memories. Hotel “scentvertising” could be the stimulation of jasmine at a boutique, or the relaxation of lavender in the lobby. These scents should be barely perceptible, almost subliminal. They are meant to lull guests into a serene state – prompting them to relax, buy more and, ideally, remember the brand. “Scentvertising” has evolved from branded scents and signature candles ([Westin](#)), to perfume ([The Plaza](#)). Now, Omni is kicking sensory branding up a notch. The chain is making a lasting emotional impression on guests with customized scents “based on the destination’s particular ambiance.” They refer to this as the “local color” experience at each hotel.

**Audio.** Fine-tuning the sound of products satisfies the consumer while subtly ingraining a brand’s intrinsic quality. For years, major department stores used soothing music to slow down shoppers and induce them to look at all the merchandise displayed around them. Specialty boutiques may play anything from old French jazz to soundscapes such as laughing children, birdsongs or lapping water. These appeal to specific audiences for fragrance or sports or formal wear, for example.

The Hard Rock Café chain and Buddha-Bar embody their musical heritage in hotel concepts. Music is often instrumental to hospitality branding. W Hotels employ a “global music director” to sell the brand’s sound via compilation CDs. They recreate the aural vibe of the W experience, “be it the hustle and bustle of W Hong Kong, the seaside cool of W Barcelona or the private paradise of W Retreat & Spa, Vieques Island.”

**Touch.** If customers handle merchandise, they tend to develop an affection for it. That makes them much more likely to buy. Natural décor, featuring tactile, green elements, seems to be the way forward in interior innovation. Botanical facades are not just artistic installations anymore. They are suitable for growing, and even eating. Take a peek at [the work of Patrick Blanc](#), award-winning artist and research scientist. London’s Athenaeum was the first hotel with a “Living Wall,” a colossal garden installed vertically up the side of its exterior. Similar innovative concepts, such as hydroponic edible wall gardens – not to mention grass tiles and turf pillows – are being installed in kitchens and throughout homes by [Window Farms](#), [Green Fortune](#) and [Jungle Walls](#) in Miami.

**Taste.** Marketers are using taste to differentiate their brands. Starting in the 1980s, DoubleTree Hotels began building a welcoming reputation with their [signature cookies](#). Warm chocolate-chip cookies were handed out with room cards at check-in, while travel agents received cookies with their commissions. Now, passion for these cookies is global. [Christie Cookie Company](#), a Nashville bakery that supplies DoubleTree’s cookie dough, sells them online.

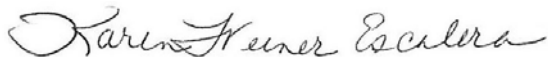
Major hotel chains built brand recognition through food for years, snagging some of the world's best and most famous chefs to design menus for high-end hotel dining.

[Claridges](#) in London, New York's [St. Regis](#), Hotel [Plaza Athénée](#) in Paris, and Tokyo's [Mandarin Oriental](#), to name a few, all feature restaurants with Michelin star chefs. These iconic stars attract discerning gourmets to sample the cuisine. You're known by the company you keep, and there is no higher rating than Michelin stars to create a top branding halo.

Lately, celebrated chefs and vintners are opening their own luxe hotels. These are giving gourmets and sightseers a glimpse into the personal tastes and gastronomic offerings of each proprietor. Chef Raymond Blanc's [Le Manoir Aux Quat' Saisons](#), in Oxfordshire, England, features rooms and gardens as carefully tweaked as meals in his gastronomic two-star restaurant. Meanwhile, chef Alain Ducasse and vintner Vittorio Moretti have co-created [L'Andana](#) estate hotel in Tuscany's Maremma region. [Marqués de Riscal](#), among the oldest wineries in Rioja, Spain, opened a flamboyant 14-room luxury hotel and restaurant designed by [Frank Gehry](#) that echoes the Bilbao Guggenheim.

Hotels and restaurants must consider creating emotional ties to help people connect through food. Communal tables, small plates, food halls, bar dining, and Yelp.com meet-ups all can play a role. Above all, sharing is a common link because emotional resonance is the desired result.

With best regards,



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For over 30 years, first in New York City and now in Miami, Karen Weiner Escalera and her firm, [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. Named one of the "Top 25 Most Extraordinary Minds" in hotel sales and marketing by the Hospitality Sales & Marketing Association International (HSMIAI), Karen is a sought-after industry [speaker](#) and author of the internationally syndicated [Luxury Travel & Lifestyle Trends newsletter](#) and [blog](#).