

# HOLIDAY WITH A PURPOSE

Nature and wellness - and social distancing – may well drive post Covid-19 holiday trends

TAY SUAN CHIANG

EVEN AS AIRLINES chalk up losses, cut back or cancel flights totally, there is still cautious optimism that wanderlust will return before the end of 2020.

Indeed, in a recent survey of over 6,000 people in the Asia-Pacific region by travel search site Skyscanner, over half believe it will be safe to travel internationally later in the year.

“This optimism is reassuring, and we believe that travel will thrive in a post-coronavirus world. The desire to connect with family and friends overseas or the desire to explore the world will only increase,” says Paul Whiteway, Skyscanner’s senior director for APAC.

Of course, there is a big caveat. “It is difficult to predict exactly how travel demand, expectations and behaviour will change, but it certainly won’t be ‘business as usual’. Instead, we anticipate a period of ‘business as unusual’ as both travellers and travel providers adapt to a new normal.” That new normal includes social distancing, as travellers in countries that have slowly opened up take their own precautions.

In China, for example, hotels have been quick to adapt. Guests at the newly reopened Capella Shanghai are eschewing regular rooms in favour of private villas which are equipped with independent air-conditioning units, with no shared lobbies or lift areas. “They feel safer in the villa as they are able to practise social distancing,” says general manager Ronan Henaff. The hotel has also introduced new protocols such as guests showing their green health code which proves they are not under quarantine and can move around the city freely; daily temperature checks for all in-house guests; and airing rooms for 30 minutes daily.

Arnaud Champenois, senior vice president and global head of brand, marketing and communications at Belmond says, “We will continue to ensure that our guests’ needs are fulfilled - especially with regard to personal space. For example, we may adapt our ‘in room’ dining experience or provide more space for outdoor dining in secluded locations throughout our gardens.”

Over at Aman, its COO, Roland Fasel says that outdoor dining at Amanyangyun in Shanghai with its palatial gardens has been popular with its guests. “When Amangiri in



Utah reopens soon, we will be reducing our already low room count by skipping a key,” he adds. For A2A Safaris, which creates bespoke African safaris and tailor-made itineraries for Latin America and Antarctica, it will be business as usual when guests return.

“We have always been proponents of social distancing for our safaris and journeys and are well positioned to provide trips where our clients have zero exposure to crowds,” says Monica Alsagoff, its head of marketing for Asia.

With time spent at home, taking things a little slow, and seeing how the world is “cleaner” from the lack of air pollution and carbon emissions, luxury travel players believe that going forward, travellers will want holidays with a purpose, with more focusing on sustainability and wellness.

“Luxury travel will be defined by more appreciation as opposed to a transactional vision, more driven by the quest for human

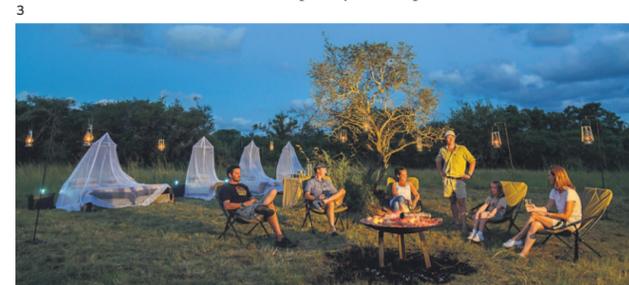
experience rather than just for consumption of luxury goods,” says Benoit Badufle, regional director for Monaco Tourist & Convention Bureau. He says that although the affluent clientele which characterises Monaco may be more immune to the economic consequences of the coronavirus pandemic, “these guests will be even more demanding in their choices.”

Nicole Robinson, CMO of luxury travel company andBeyond notes that “luxury travel experience will morph into one that is more purposeful, where making a positive impact and giving back in meaningful ways will form basic tenets of what guests seek in a luxury travel adventure.” Besides travellers going on more holidays that have sustainability and wildlife conservation in mind, Lindy Rousseau, CMO of Singita, which operates luxury lodges and camps in Africa, predicts travellers will want getaways that include a greater focus on a healthy lifestyle.

“In fact, we’ve already noticed a change in the consumption of content digitally where fans are actively seeking inspirational content, and we believe that the value of luxury in the future will focus on a far simpler way of life,” she says.

Banyan Tree Holdings is another operator who is gearing up its wellness programme to cater to guests. For example, it has especially created a White Room at Banyan Tree Wellbeing Sanctuary Phuket. This is a sensory detox space designed to enable guests to be free of distractions so they may recharge through guided breathwork and meditation. Rosalynn Tay, the group’s head of growth and demand says, “now, more than ever, luxury brands must reconsider what their aspirational purpose is in serving guest needs in this new chapter of the hospitality landscape.”

(1) Belmond Cap Juluca offers seclusion and privacy in its villas. (2) At one with nature on a game drive in Sabi Sand. (3) Travellers will want more unique experiences such as a sleeping under the stars at andBeyond’s Phinda Private Game Reserve.



Weekend



# CONSERVATIVE BUYING

Despite pent up demand, shoppers will remain cautious

TAY SUAN CHIANG

DINING OUT AND travelling aside, what do people miss most during a lockdown? Heading out to the stores to buy non-essential items, it seems.

A day after Hermes reopened its flagship store in Guangzhou last month, it recorded S\$3.8 million in sales, said to be the highest for a single boutique in China.

Some have termed it “revenge shopping”, or overindulging in retail therapy.

While it sounds like hopeful news for struggling retailers, revenge shopping doesn’t happen across the board.

“It only appeals to those with extra cash,” says Dr Lynda Wee, adjunct associate professor, division of marketing at Nanyang Business School.

Dr Kapil Tuli, professor of marketing and director of Retail Centre of Excellence at Singapore Management University says, “Revenge shopping is a one-off expression of pent up demand that only the ultra-rich indulges in.”

Dr Wee says, “for the majority, they will adopt a wait-and-see attitude as their careers and lifestyles are reimagined and changed.”

In the meantime, Dr Tuli says it is important to be prepared and ready to make up for

lost sales. This includes assuring shoppers that they have taken the necessary safety precautions, including crowd control, effective social distancing, cleaning and sanitising of merchandise, temperature checks, contact tracing and hygiene protection for employees.

He foresees that store layouts will be updated to be consistent with safety and assurance protocols. “This is pertinent both from the business and public policy perspectives,” he says.

More people may have turned to online shopping during this period, but Dr Tuli says that businesses should see online platforms more than just an avenue to sell.

They should think about social commerce, using social media to engage with consumers, show merchandise and address queries. “If online is only viewed as an avenue to sell, then retailers are likely to lose out on opportunities to serve and therefore retain and potentially cross and/or up-sell to their customers,” says Dr Tuli.

Dr Wee says that post Covid-19, shopping needs to show empathy, empowerment and evolution.

“Shopping needs to be supported by human empathy. Emotional appeal engages and

sells more than rational appeal. So build a relationship with your consumers.”

She adds, “retailers should empower their staff to do more than take orders - to make connections, identify customers’ pain points and offer customer-centric solutions.”

They should constantly evolve their method of sales. “If retailers are relevant, they will always have customers,” she says.

As with most other sectors, luxury furniture retailers in Singapore have also been impacted by Covid-19. But there have been some silver linings too.

Lim Choon Hong, managing director for Xtra says, “the fears and anxieties arising from the pandemic are obviously not very conducive to the consumption of luxury products. This may not affect the high networth individuals but many others will either postpone their purchases or lower their budget.”

Money spent on big-ticket items such as kitchens and wardrobes have dropped, but Xtra has seen growth in home office furniture sales. “Interest in Herman Miller ergonomic chairs increased when more people started working from home,” says Mr Lim.

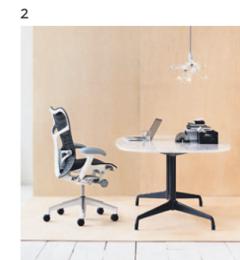
While P5 has also seen an increase in sales for home office items, its marketing manager Terence Choo says they are not out of the woods. “It will be about survival of the fittest,” he says. Despite the circuit breaker, business still goes on. P5 is regularly showing its furniture range on social media platforms and focusing on its online shop.

Stores not only had to deal with slower sales locally, they also felt an impact when the outbreak hit Italy.

Jennifer Soh, general manager for sales and marketing at Space Furniture says, “Covid-19 hit northern Italy hard. The epi-centre for the virus is also the heart of furniture manufacturing. Many of our partners had to close their factories temporarily.”

What happens when this is over? Ms Soh says, “Post Covid-19, there will be new ideas from designers, rethinking how people work and connect.” She cites the Westside modular sofa set from Poliform as an example, which can be configured to accommodate many users while still allowing each to remain at a distance.

While the market may not have an appetite for excessive luxury furniture in a pandemic, Mr Lim believes that with people appreciating their home more, he is hopeful that “consumers’ taste will gravitate towards quality furniture that lasts and has high regard for original design and environmental sustainability.”



(1) Westside, modular living room set from Poliform. (2) Herman Miller ergonomic chairs are now hot items.

Weekend