

HAUTE VILLEGIATURE: RE-IMAGINING LUXURY'S EDGE

From May 29th to June 1st, the first edition of The Edge of Luxury Travel Gallery was held in Mykonos. Echoing the Haute Villegiature research presented by Traveller Made in Deauville last March, “Edger” suppliers and travel designers were invited to present their travel masterpieces ranging from 100.000€ to 1.200.000€ per week. If some focus on finding the perfect accommodation for their clients, others pay extra attention to the destination. In any case, it is the uniqueness of the experience lived that prevails.

By Sarah Belmont

The Edge of Luxury Travel Gallery was held at the Myconian Collection.



Experience by Exclusive Tour, a luxury travel agency from Czech Republic



The Viceroy Villa in Bali, Indonesia

“In Greece, the choice of hotel is often what matters most,” confides Kallia Tsitse from the VIP department of Kyvernitis Travel. What the ultra-wealthy are usually looking for is a secluded place where they can keep to themselves. Villas are what come to mind first. As experience providers in that area, The Viceroy Bali, The RoyAlp & Spa in Switzerland, the four-storey Greek BlueVillas Luxury Concept (which can sleep up to 22 guests),

the Kivotos Mykonos, the Myconian Collection, the Park Hyatt St Kitts in the Caribbean and the Cheval Blanc Randheli’s private island appear to be a perfect fit when looking for the ultimate private home. The Murakam at the Conrad Maldives Rangali Island, for instance, is the world’s first undersea bedroom with a panoramic ocean view.

Unlike many accommodations in South Africa, the marvellous 26 Sunset Villa Cape Town presented by Journey Beyond welcomes children under the age of 12 and is a real blessing for families. Other hotels prove to be a reference per se. With its top floor suite – the largest in Madrid at 290m² – the Villa Magna, from Mytha Hotel Anthology, also stands out. As for The Mark in New York, it houses the largest penthouse suite in North America – 930 m² plus an additional 185 m² private rooftop terrace – not to say one of the most expensive in the world (\$75,000/ night).



Rooftop terrace at the Penthouse of the Mark in New York, USA

For these well travelled customers, agencies need to find the right destination before choosing the accommodation and will call on local expertise to do so. Banyan Tours, specialized in designing tailor made trips to India, recommends staying in royal palaces and flying across Rajasthan. Similarly, The 1492 Company focuses on showing a different side of Paris. Their concept is defined through private tours of the Louvre or the Louis Vuitton family home, to name just a few of the doors they can open for their clients. Peru Empire Co. from Latin America, can arrange a solo fishing trip in the Amazon rainforest while The Essentialist will design a week-long cruise to the Galapagos to fulfil the entire family's desires. In Venice, The San Clemente Palace Kempinski is the starting point of a romantic getaway in the city with just you and your loved one. All alone, except for your private jet pilot, gondolier and personal shopper ready to satisfy your

next extravaganza. In the Maldives and the Seychelles, Pure Escapes imagines smooth itineraries from island to island, from mega suites to ultra private villas with the objective to find the perfect accommodation for each client. Ahipara Travel enjoys taking their guests to meet Maori carvers in New Zealand to create once-in-a-lifetime souvenirs. Peplum has put together an exclusive dinner featuring 12 bottles of the rarest, oldest and

most prestigious French wines. Around the dinner, a two-day experience with helicopter flight and privatisation of a Château stages the French gastronomic ideal life.



Ahipara, a DMC specialized in New Zealand trips

Similarly, Jarek Kruszka (Sonriso) tells us about the 19-day programme he designed for a family of six in South Africa. Quite a challenge, according to him, as the journey required 24/7 improvisation and adjustments as the travellers kept deviating from the original plan. Though the more the unexpected places to integrate, the better, multi-destination trips are particularly challenging to plan, especially when travellers decide to change the itinerary along the way. “One of our clients texted us one morning to say that he wanted to fly out of Prague that same day for



A private jet from the UK-based private aviation company, Vista Jet

a week-long world tour, which we had to plan from day to day,” explains Petr Udavsky from Exclusive Tours. This kind of flexibility is exactly what luxury travel designers thrive on, as it allows them to make a difference at the end.

Sometimes it is the journey itself that makes for the experience. Transfers alone can be a source of amazement. For example, Yachting Partners International ranks among the three oldest full-service super-yacht brokerage houses in the world. In parallel, the UK-based private aviation company Vista Jet, arranges flights to over 180 countries for private individuals, corporations, entrepreneurs and government officials.



A super-yacht chartered by the Yachting Partners International

A trip even more appreciates in value when it is personalised. “We customise our offers as much as we can. They have to be filled with memories,” explains Paige Wilson (Boost Journeys). She arranged a 50th birthday party for a federal judge who wanted to spend some time with a group of close friends, then with her sorority sisters. “We sent them personalised invitations and gifts, asked for any dietary restrictions beforehand...” As the deputy Director at Ego Travel, Elena Mukhina is currently working on a 9-month world tour. As her client loves history, she has designed a chronological route from “Greece, the cradle of Western civilization, back to Los Angeles, a modern city”. Honeymooners can also expect to have their breath taken away. For a trip to become unique, one must start from scratch. “We do not have any brochures, only blank sheets of paper,” confirms Isao Numano, Chairman & CEO of Regency Group Inc., who curated a field trip for a man in the search of the flower of his dreams.

Most luxury travel designers will need to get off the beaten track to exceed their clients' expectations. As there are no mini vans in the Peloponnese, Alexander Vanyukov (Sunny Travel) had to turn to a Myconian company to ensure that the celebrity he was looking after could move around anonymously. "Our job is to coin a concept that has never been done before, something radically new," says Sylvie Aimé (Peplum). Founder & President of Onikiros, Stefano Bajona, had a camp built from scratch for a family who wished to watch the polar bears of the Canadian Arctic from up close.



Experience by Geografica XXI, a luxury travel agency from Spain

For some travellers, finding the comfort of home in a new destination is part of the luxury experience. Austin Shen, Founder of D-Lux Travel in China, tends to recreate familiar spaces to provide his guests with as much comfort as possible. In Cannes, he had a room completely redecorated with Hello Kitty items, so that its young occupants would feel at home. "The more you get to know your clients, the more creative you can be," he adds. "Delivering more than what people expect from us is the best part of our job," states Caroline Coetzee (Bailey Robinson), who bought a Christmas tree and presents for a family spending their winter break in Cape Town. "The best experiences are still free of charge," claims Elisa Alday (Geografica XXI) who had a private beach measured to check that one of her clients could maintain their daily work-out routine on it.

No wonder the 45 Edge of Luxury participants have 90% repeat clients as they all strive to fulfil their clients' wildest desires as well as to surprise them at the same time. "I love to pamper my guests," says founder and CEO of The Q Travel Experiences, Vasim Shaikh, who planned a trip for 100 people to Antarctica and had a special perfume made as a souvenir for them. "I will fly out to meet them, if I need to," says Ergül Altinova from Tom's Premium Selection, who curated a 50th birthday celebration in Portugal for a famous businesswoman. Simone Urracci, travel designer at Dreamsteam, sees his customers as close friends which is why he wishes to remain available 24/7 - like most of his counterparts. Former lawyer Namai Bishop, who now runs LuxePrivé with her sister, only takes care of people whom she has always been close to. "This is why we understand their tastes so well. Think of our audience as a Christmas card list." Founder of U Group Worldwide, Marwa Rizk Jaber, treats everyone as she would herself.



Experience by The Q Travel Experiences, a luxury travel agency from India

“I take them only to places that I have been to and that I know are worth it. In the end they have a clear picture of who I am.” When travellers really get to know their advisors, and the advisors get to know their clients, a relationship of mutual trust is formed. Reem Shaath, Honeymoon Expert and Founder of WhyWander, considers her customers as family. “Some I have never met but we talk on the phone several times a week. I only recommend them places that I have tried myself.” Olivier Weisse (Weisse Travel) often uses photographs of his own trips to trigger his clients’ interest, which for some of them even feature his own children.

Identification and recognition go both ways. Travellers are grateful for the priceless memories they get from their travels and travel designers are getting more recognition from their customers when they are pushed to think out of the box. “You have got to stay up to date with what is new, to be able to share it with your clients. I like to say that every day is a school day, one in which I learn something new”, says Giorgio Scaramuzza (Viaggi Moleskine). The same goes for clients where it is one thing to meet someone’s needs and another to exceed them and awaken new desires. This philosophy conveys the Greek aphorism “Know thyself”, which is displayed on the Temple of Apollo in Delphi. And so, everything seems to come full circle in Greece.