

LUXURY TOURISM: A PERSPECTIVE OF FACILITIES AND AMENITIES

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this study is to conduct a discussion on facilities and amenities of luxury tourism. It is a qualitative study exploring the opinions of travelers on luxury tourism. The study participants consist of 48 respondents who are members of 7 different Facebook travel groups. Data collection was carried out by posting a topic of discussion on luxury travels to the Facebook groups. The results indicate that the conventional way of understanding luxury tourism is highlighted by top class facilities and amenities. These include 5 star and above standard of accommodation, chartered flight, private jet and yacht, butler and limousine service, and spectacular structures. However, contemporarily, luxurious travel is defined more broadly, it does not always connote, e.g. marble bath tub with gold plated tap, it could mean anything comfortable or ease. Luxurious facilities and amenities in tourism are defined differently by different market segments either first, middle or lower class. Thus, there is always a luxurious element for any travel regardless of its class, e.g. a private toilet in the Himalaya is considered as a luxury; there is a luxury for shoestring travelers. It is expected that the analysis could widen the perspective and enrich the discussion on luxury tourism.

Keywords: luxury tourism, facilities, amenities, market segment.

INTRODUCTION

According to Strong (2006), an American based luxury travel provider views luxury travel as travels for the elites that involve luxurious first class facilities and amenities and VIP service, creating a lasting memory and transformative experience and enhancing the life style of the customers. Nonetheless, Johnson (2013) presents a discourse on luxury travel and argues that luxury travel is very much marked by the experiences that represent all that is authentic about a destination and the immersion into local culture; nonetheless, comfort factor still applies and high standard of accommodation and dining will always be the features.

Every tourism theme has its luxurious expression. For African destinations and for any wildlife enthusiast or safari-lover, luxury is not about the marble bath-tub or the

gold taps, it is much more about the location, the hosting, and the guides. The ultimate luxury is the exclusivity of having the experience to yourself, feeling pioneering, exploratory, included in an incredible – a relatively unexplored remote area, guided and in a private vehicle.

Perceptions on luxurious specifically facilities varied. Academically, luxury travel is relatively unexplored, literature on luxury travels is still rare, this study intends to add the reviews on this specific travel products. It is expected, the results could become a reference for tourism service/product providers who are interested in integrating the element of luxury in the travel products.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Strong (2006) argues that operating a luxury travel business means providing elite travels that create a lasting memory and transformative experience that enhance the life and the style of the customers. It could consist of the luxury of fine dining, charter jet and yacht. Further described, the elements of luxury travel could include: personalized VIP service, no queuing, people wait to provide services; personal butler, house keepers, gourmet chefs, cooking and wine classes, dining with the King, entree to a private art collection, arrangement of once in a life time individual unique event. The business is supported by experienced, expert and dedicated staff with firsthand knowledge, solid respect for discipline, logic, organization, and constant pursuits of progress.

Harding in Johnson (2013) defines luxury travel covers high class tangible and intangible aspects of the product: “The definition of luxury travel to me is to undertake a new experience and immerse oneself in a new destination whilst indulging in the very best levels of personal and attentive service, lavish and sumptuous accommodation, exquisite and unrivalled levels of gastronomy and informative and educational guides. It is travel without stress, pressure of time or daily routine, where your every need is pre-empted and your every expectation is met and exceeded.” The definition is highly relevant for cruise ship product or 5 star accommodation (Chen and Peng 2014). Nonetheless, for African destinations which feature ‘exploring the unexplored’, the luxury accommodation could vary from a 5-star hotel or a boutique property to a unique building or an eco-style lodge. For them, true luxury is a great travel experience, enjoyed in relative comfort.

Birtchnell and Caletrio (2014) argue that Urry (1973) in his early work of the 70s defines elites as people who are able to travel especially for non-work purpose which shows their status. The discussion elicits two types of elite: one being referred to as the 'Classic elite' (Urry, 1973), whilst, the other is the 'Super elite' (Strong, 2006) referred to as the 'few' by Carlton (1996).

Fitzsimmons (2017), supported by Schensul (2017), points out a perspective and explains that 'luxurious is not about materials but about experience and service, something precious, rare, invested in emotional value, such as choosing one's own room fragrance, blending your own wine, enjoy an outstanding and personal collection of art, plants, or other collectable artefacts. Her view resembles the view of 'Classic elite' with less emphasize on materials, rather on the essence of travels which is the 'experience'.

A similar perspective with the Classic elite, Thurlow and Jaworski (2014) view elite travelers as people who could afford travel for leisure. These authors discuss 'luxurious materials' and emphasise more on 'symbolic luxury' for luxury travels; because the value of materials is differentiated by '.... the eye of the beholder or in the creative mythologizing of the marketer.' (Thurlow and Jaworski, 2014, p. 2). Therefore, a question arises: is a private toilet in the Himalaya a symbol of luxury?

Lewis and Chambers (2000) identify the tangible element of products as the 'environment of product' which includes building structures, facilities, infrastructure, and amenities. The 'environment of product' includes amenities. 'Amenities are the services that are required to meet the needs of tourists while they are away from home; this would be a top class facilities considering the profile of the elites (Dagnaux and Granjon, 1990). They include public facilities, signage, retail shopping, restaurants and cafes, visitor centres, telecommunications and emergency services. ...many of the amenities are government services delivered by local...' (TWA, 2009, p. 2).

RESEARCH METHOD

This paper on facilities and amenities of luxury tourism, reports a part of a wider study conducted on luxury tourism. It is a qualitative study; involving 48 respondents who are members of 7 different Facebook travel groups in Asia. They are well travelled people; some work for travel businesses, they sell and handle luxury travels marketed around the

world; or they are the luxury travelers themselves. A request of opinion on luxury travels was posted to the Facebook groups. The discourses were closed when the discussion became exhausted or no more opinion is posted on the matter.

A ten-page tabulated qualitative data was gathered at the end of the data collection. Further, the data was classified based on theme. Some themes emerged, these include: facilities and amenities of luxury travel, services of luxury travel, market of luxury travel, standard and expectation of the luxury travel market. This paper specifically discusses the aspects of facilities and amenities of luxury tourism.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The analysis results show alignment with the literature review wherein two types of elites are identified. The physical structures, facilities, amenities, and materials which are demanded by the Super elites are of high quality, super modern high technology, and involving high cost. The Super elites comprise 3% of world-wide travelers that represent 20% of the total tourism expenditure (Mintel, 2010). On the other hand, the Classic elites view the tangible elements not only from the price tag, sometimes luxury is measured by its authenticity which price cannot be calculated (Ernawati, Murni, and Jendra, 2018, in press).

The Super Elite

A respondent described luxury inclusively involving the fine facilities and materials used, combined with the high standard of service that enable a profound experience, the exclusiveness, the spoilage that make someone feels like a very precious delicate person. The expression is quoted:

A well-established accommodation, with premium services... Luxury resembles a kind of feeling, a feeling for arts, a good taste for details... a peace of mind, that everything remains untouchable, waiting for your arrival...your name written on a towel, your best perfume in the bathroom, your favorite dish being served right on time, and everything that can be thought as unlimited to satisfy customers desires.

The Super elites require high class facilities and materials for their travels, and they are willing to pay high price. Some of the expressions are quoted below.

- A: To me luxury travel is private jets, island hopping on yachts, and hotel penthouse suites with butlers.
- B: I just spent the past 3 years setting up a luxury resort travel agency for a client and I'll tell you this: Extra room and luxuries are one thing, but those people I booked into a 2 bedroom condo for 1-week at \$65,000/week were paying for the butler, ski valet, complimentary Audi, 24/7 room service PET menu.

The Classic Elite

The physical structures, facilities and materials desired by the classic elites are not necessarily expensive and incur high cost. They put more emphasis on value, the symbolic luxury, the luxury that are not measured by the dollar. Adapting Thurlow and Jaworski's (2014) point of view on symbolic luxurious, an air-conditioned room could be a symbolic luxury in the desert. Some of the respondents' expressions on luxury materials for the Classic elites are quoted below:

- A: Secret hidden off the beaten path - of course no typical franchises - its local businesses, sustainable environmental, learning - non commercialised culture.
- B: a \$900 day hiking in dirt where someone caters raw organic food to you on a Cliff as you do mindfulness meditation and yoga there.
- C: were going to get the oldest leader of the town to open his own families straw hut for you to stay in - and this will cost you \$2k- luxury means that they get to feel like they did this the real way. It can also mean that you get to play James Bond's for the day dressing up in a tux and riding in a diablo along the coast of Italy with an Italian architect from that town as your guide.
- D: The things they wanted would have cost so much money because of the inconvenience of how they wanted it, but not necessarily the product (raw organic farm to table meal) when the pricing went over \$800.
- E: Something becomes luxurious when few others can obtain it, sometimes even regardless of the price tag associated with it.

CONCLUSION

The conventional way of understanding luxury tourism is highlighted by top class facilities and amenities. These include 5 star and above standard of accommodation, chartered flight, private jet and yacht, and limousine service. However, contemporarily, luxurious travel is defined more broadly, it does not always connote, e.g. marble bath tub with gold plated tap. There is always premium standard for every class of products. Luxurious facilities and amenities in tourism are defined differently by different market

segments either first, middle or lower class. Moreover, the value of materials is subjective, in which marketers could perform an amazing function in positioning the products.

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