

THE LUXURY TRAVEL SHIFT

 CLAIRE SOARES


Luxury travel has long been associated with expensive hotel rooms, first-class flights or even private jet hire with companies like [jetly](#), and other traditional materialistic things. In the last few years, there has been this shift in the luxury travel space from luxury "things" to luxurious "experiences." Thank the millennials for this shift as they have been charting the path for a greater appreciation of the present and pushing the industry to provide more meaning and personalization to luxury. It no longer is enough to stay at a luxury hotel; people want an exclusive, intimate, personalized, and one-of-a-kind experience along with that luxury. Luxury has extended to the personal interactions and experiences that travelers have while on vacation.



IMG: Sanctuary Retreats Sun Boat IV Lounge Area (Luxury Cruising)

The travel industry has also changed its branding around trips or vacations. Many companies refer to their offering as experiences, journeys, expeditions, exchanges, etc. Hotels now offer personalized profiles and amenities for their frequent travelers. The traveler's experience is now at the forefront versus solely focusing on the aesthetics. Details such as personalized notes, personal photos left in the room, surprise swag, and more are all areas major brands are moving to four-course give travelers that luxury "experience."

Luxury travel is precluded by having concierge service before your trip. You haven't even arrived, and someone is reaching out to you about your stay to ensure every moment is planned to its fullest. When you walk into a luxury hotel they remember your name; they know who you are. At a luxury hotel, you will have a personalized handwritten note and even personalized pictures of your family in your room at the most luxurious hotels. The turn-down service is an evening cleaning of your room with fresh ice, towels, chocolates, and restocking of the fridge. At the St. Regis, each room includes a butler, and you can have him do many things for you like unpack, draw a bath, make tea, iron clothes, find a restaurant or lounge, and much more. Everything mentioned is considered quintessential

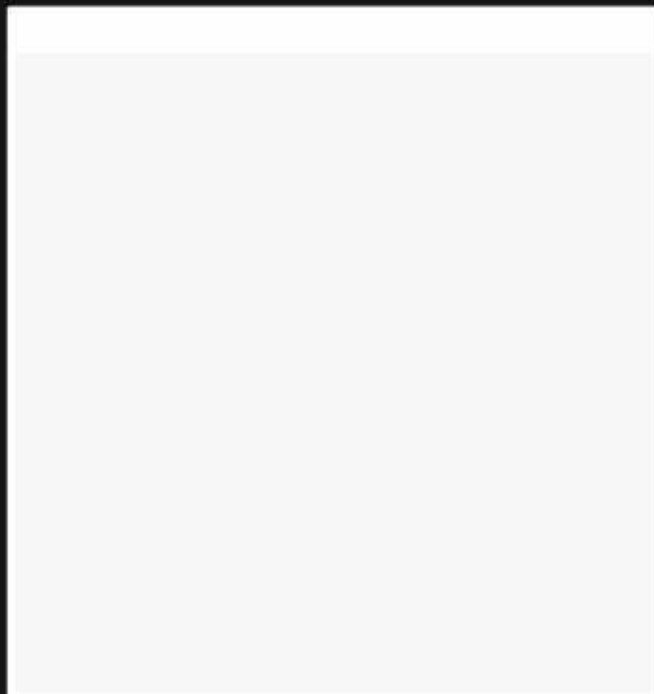
luxury that's been around for ages. Today's shift is causing disruption and it's challenging the status quo.



IMAG: Ruth Hickman riding a carriage down the streets of Luxor

In the Black travel space, luxury experiences coupled with the promise of amazing photo ops have taken over. Whether it's fine dining while dressed up, private yacht charters with crystal blue waters, or a carriage ride in Luxor, Egypt — those luxury experiences are making their way to everyone's to-do list. In addition, travel company websites have greatly improved to show people of color in faraway destinations doing it up for the Gram. For the first time in a long time, through the shift to market to people of color, we now can see ourselves exploring exotic places, lounging in amazing rooftop bars, and having the most epic experiences. I believe this visual component of seeing our face in these places and doing these things is what has opened up the luxury space even more.

Instagram alone has played a tremendous role in showcasing luxury travel in the Black travel space. According to a PMX Agency study, Instagram is now the top social media site for luxury retail shoppers in terms of both followers and engagement. Founded in 2010 and primarily used by females who typically make the buying decisions, Instagram grew from 10M users to over 80M users in a mere few years. Instagram is key for luxury travel and goods because of the strong visual component and coolness factor of the experience. There are several amazing travel brands that showcase people of color traveling such as [Up in the Air Life](#), [Travel Noire](#), and [Tastemakers Africa](#). Those brands provide visual guides coaching people on where to go and what to do.



@mackys_son.. "Y'all got served with the curve, yea, I pitched it to ya."

A post shared by Up in The Air Life, Inc. (@upintheairlife) on Dec 22, 2017 at 11:11a...

One major standout in the luxury travel shift is the increased importance of culinary tourism in the last few years. Culinary Tourism focuses on food and wine experiences while traveling. The concept of food and wine has now expanded to food and — wine, champagne, cocktails, spirits, and mocktails. Whether it be rooftop restaurants, craft cocktails at a hidden speakeasy, or the best culinary experiences around the world — the combination of food and drink while traveling has increased in importance. According to Huffington Post, the increase of culinary tourism is a direct correlation to food and wine festivals. According to the *American Culinary Traveler*, "The percentage of US leisure travelers who travel to learn about unique dining experiences grew from 40% to 51% between 2006 and 2013."

IMG: A champagne toast during a private four course dinner in the Moët cellars paired with several vintage Cuvée champagnes

At Up in the Air Life, our luxury trips have always included the aspect of food and wine. In Thailand, we dine at Red Sky one of the best rooftop restaurants where our guests are wowed with a huge tower of lobster, shrimp, fillet mignon, and more for the appetizer. In Cuba, we learn how to make Mojitos on a rooftop while watching the sunset. And last year we created a unique Culinary Tour called Champagne Life that is an intimate eight-day foodie experience spending four days visiting the famous and unknown Champagne Houses in Champagne, France followed by another four days in Bologna, Italy with an Italian Wine Ambassador. Clients get to learn about how champagne is made, have countless tastings at several champagne houses, pop champagne and watch the sunset in a treehouse, attend a master class on Italian wine, have daily multi-course gourmet meals paired with champagne and wine, and experience private shopping with the tour curator [Julia Coney](#) who is a sommelier (wine expert), and lifestyle blogger. It's these types of food and wine experiences coupled with luxury accommodations that are resonating with clients in this new era of luxury travel.

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CLAIRE SOARES

AUTHOR

Claire Soares is the founder of four companies Up in the Air Life, Urban Yacht Life, and co-founder of Inclusive Travel. Claire uses her love for luxury, champagne, and exotic destinations to provide her travel clients with once in a lifetime experiences. Claire's companies provide hosted luxury and upscale group trips, lifestyle events, and online Facebook communities allowing travelers to connect and engage. Claire and Up in the Air Life have been featured in The Huffington Post, Essence, Ebony, Rolling Out, The Grio, Wal-mart BlackGirl Magic campaign, and other online publications. You can connect with Claire on Instagram, Facebook, Twitter, or Email.



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*A few months before, Cooke has made a reservation
for his wife and band at a motel in Louisiana, but
when they arrived there they were abruptly asked to
leave since that was a "whites only" place.*

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