

The Meaning of Luxury in Tourism, Hospitality and Events

John Swarbrooke

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Dedication

I dedicate this book to a number of people without whom I would not have been able to enjoy the life I have enjoyed or the 'luxury' of being able to write books, which has given me so much pleasure, not least through the reaction of those who have read them.

My wife Susan, who has stood by me for over twenty-five years and supported me every day. It has also been great that we have had the opportunity to write together which has also given me enormous pleasure.

Our son, John, who is a constant inspiration to me, a great travel companion, and has provided me with more intellectually stimulating conversations than I have ever had in any university!

My mum who made great sacrifices so that I could get where I am today and my dad, who taught me to question everything and who introduced me to the joys of reading and debating.

Acknowledgements

Every book I have written, including this one, have been motivated by a desire to inspire students around the world to find the phenomenon of tourism as fascinating as I do and to encourage them to want to discover more about it for themselves.

During my years in higher education I have had the pleasure of teaching students in many countries from China to the UK, the USA to Switzerland, Brazil to Russia, and Indonesia to Mexico. Teaching has always been my first priority and the success of my students my greatest reward.

As educators we are in a privileged position for what we do helps people transform their lives for the better.

I would like to take this opportunity, therefore, to thank all of my former students who have enriched my working life and whose thoughts and questions have often been the trigger for me to start thinking about a new book project. Indeed it was the excellent young people I taught at César Ritz Colleges in Switzerland between 2008 and 2011 who first put the idea of this book in my head.

I would also like to thank all of those academics and industry professionals who have, over the years, given me the pleasure of their company all around the world.

Sadly, too much of my time in academia has been spent in meaningless meetings and seeing great teachers being pressurised for career reasons into pursuing the 'fool's gold' of journal publication. The research which tourism, hospitality and events academics could do has the potential to make the world a better place if it was focused on influencing government policy-makers and industry leaders. These are largely vocational areas and no less valuable for that. We need the confidence to celebrate the fact that our research could make a difference to people's lives and the future of the planet.

Finally, I would like to thank Goodfellow Publishing, the only publisher I have worked with that is interested in what a book says rather than just what it earns! First, Tim Goodfellow, for commissioning this work, it has been a delight working with a publisher who is committed to disseminating knowledge and stimulating debate. Second to Sally North, who I have worked with over a number of years and has always been supportive even when she was trying desperately to tie me down to a completion date!

Preface

Well this is, I believe, my tenth book and it has been a joy to write.

I have never written a book just for the sake of it. I have only ever written them when there was a subject that interested me and I thought there was something I could contribute to our understanding of the subject.

More important, perhaps, I have always written books with the express aim of encouraging researchers to become interested in these subjects and push the boundaries of our knowledge so we understand them better. I never see what I write as a final output but rather as part of an organic process of knowledge creation and generation.

I also do not want my readership to be limited to academics and researchers; I write primarily for students and also for practitioners. I firmly believe that if we truly wish to disseminate knowledge and engage students and other citizens in intellectual activity then we need to communicate in language which will not alienate or confuse potential readers. Any fool can make the simple seem complex with a poor or pretentious writing style; the skill is in managing to make the complex understandable. While I may not often succeed, that has been my aim in the way I have written this book.

You will also notice that in general there are fewer references in the text than would normally be the case in an academic text, and this is for three main reasons. First, there is a general dearth of recent literature on the evolution and future of luxury in tourism, hospitality and events. Second, much of the literature in tourism, hospitality and events is on a micro-scale, focusing on particular places or a type of hotel or restaurant, for example, whereas I have tried to produce more of an overview, a macro-scale perspective. Finally, I wanted to try to look at the subject with a fresh eye without the pre-conceptions that often come from undertaking a major literature review. Nevertheless, some thoughts about possible further reading are provided at the end of the text.

The idea of luxury is all around us and we are bombarded daily with images of luxury designed to motivate us to spend our money, and often our valuable leisure time too. Luxurious living, it seems, is something that it is believed that we all aspire to enjoy. Certainly when I taught in Switzerland my fantastic students were literally obsessed with luxury in the form of designer label clothing, fast cars, business class air travel and five star hotels. For some of them, even at their age, a luxurious lifestyle was their everyday reality.

Yet when I moved to Manchester some of my students had never even been on an aeroplane or stayed in a hotel. However, they still had an image of luxury, and aspirations of what living a luxury lifestyle might be like and a desire to experience such a lifestyle. Their perceptions of luxury were largely derived from

the media and the lives of celebrities, and seemed to be best described by words such as glitz and glamour, and by ostentatious displays of wealth.

At the same time, I saw travel companies charging tourists lots of money – luxury price levels – to stay in a tent in the desert or on a mountainside without even running water. Simultaneously hundreds of people were being packed into concrete box hotels that described themselves as luxury, while online travel agents offered five star hotel rooms at heavily discounted prices. I read of five star hotels in Paris that have been bywords for luxury over decades saying they were losing business to private apartment owners, with no training or experience in hospitality, offering their homes through Airbnb. And on my television I saw Michelin starred chefs extolling the virtues of street food which until now tourists had been advised to avoid for hygiene reasons.

I was thinking about all this one evening at our home in Cornwall in the UK, looking out over the Atlantic Ocean. It is in an area of stunning beauty with thousands of years of history still evident in its landscape, and it attracts hundreds of thousands of tourists every year. Suddenly the sky turned an amazing shade of red as the sun went down, the scents of the garden filled my nose, the freshly caught local sea bass was sizzling on the barbecue and all you could hear was the sound of the waves. At that moment I thought I was experiencing the ultimate in luxury, a stunning moment when everything came together to create perfection. Yet it cost me nothing and did not involve any tourism, hospitality or event organisation.

At that moment I concluded that there was more to this idea of luxury than I had thought and that was when I decided to write this book. My aim was to explore what luxury in tourism, hospitality and events means today, how it is changing and what it may mean tomorrow.

I hope you enjoy reading the book and that it makes you want to find out more about the subject whether you are a student, academic, industry professional or tourist.

John Swarbrooke
Trewellard, Cornwall
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