

# EDITOR'S NOTE



Emirates Palace, Abu Dhabi

## THE POLITICS OF LUXURY



Defining luxury is hard. To most, price is the only indicator: the dearer the price, the more luxurious. But once upon a time, not so long ago, luxury meant the prestige it bestowed: something the landed gentry and royalty had lashings of; visible in their houses around the world, fancy cars, designer clothes, expensive jewellery, an army of servants, weekend getaways to exotic destinations where they'd scoff caviar and quaff champagne. Their greatest luxury

though was the casualness with which they regarded their possessions – out of reach to the vast majority. *They* typified luxury not their possessions. *They* were the brand, not the branded product.

But times are a changing. With the rise in living standards and the vast amounts of disposable income on hand, luxury as a brand has undergone a metamorphosis. It is no longer the unattainable but the available: this is the era of mass produced luxury now accessible to the masses in a process social anthropologists refer to as the “democratisation of luxury”.

Subtlety is not the name of the game with new wealth and discretion is no longer a virtue. Brands across the board, including the most exclusive, have responded with in-your-face logos; apparently the bigger the better. But who is to say who is right, and who isn't.

Just look around you and almost every other person is flashing the brand names that once served the societal upper crust. Auto marques that once transported royalty and the well heeled now launch cars for rich punters aspiring to live the high life. And the buck doesn't stop here; it is rife in all industries, including travel.

At the recently concluded Asian Luxury Travel Market in Shanghai, while luxury was a much-discussed subject, the definitions were speckled. The director of one travel company offered this as an explanation of ‘luxury travel’: “We offer our clients whatever they take

‘luxury’ to mean. For some it is the opportunity to stay in beautiful old hotels rich with history and atmosphere. This may not necessarily be the most expensive accommodation. To others it is the prospect of staying at the latest, most hip establishment in the destination.”

Another held that luxury did not mean an expensive experience, but one that should help to expand the traveller's horizons. “It could also mean a unique tour with the traveller in control of their time and experience; a trip that is comfortable and caters to their taste and needs.”

As I see it, what we will view as luxuries in the future will be the mundane day-to-day experiences we try to get away from today. In our switched-on world it could mean a return to simplicity. In the raucous surroundings we live in, it could be a sanctuary of calm and peace. In these times of terror and disease, it could be the ability to protect yourself and the family. In a world where we are constantly on the go, ruled by Blackberrys and instant news casts, it could be the simple pleasure of an uninterrupted long lunch.

Really, luxury should be more about the ability to realise one's passion, not just the capacity for brand names.

Personally, luxury means holidaying in a secluded destination, a full-day spa experience, the time and space to read a book from cover to cover without a care in the world, the wherewithal to hear my favourite band play one-on-one, the luxury of knowing what the future holds. Hey, but I am also not averse to a Maserati Quattroporte, a Brioni suit, or a Patek Philippe chronograph. Anyone listening?

*lifestyle+travel*: Never one without the other

Happy Trails  
Gavin Nazareth  
Editor-in-Chief