

In a recent article on social trends site fastcoexist.com, the sister site of US publishing behemoth Fast Company, it was noted that science has proven why paying for experience, and not things, equates to happiness.

The feature references the work of pioneering psychologists Tom Gilovich and Leaf Van Boven who have conducted studies for more than a decade. It was shared and liked more than 50,000 times in a few weeks, no doubt mostly by generation X's (those born between the early 1960s-1980s) who are leading the charge in this movement and driving new trends in experiential travel to destinations further afield than ever before.

According to US-based global luxury travel network Virtuoso, which writes US\$14 billion in annual sales, Generation X's spend more for every day of travel than any other demographic category.

While seniors tend to travel for longer periods, so spend more overall, the thirties-to-fifties spend at a daily rate of \$US627, which is nearly 20 per cent higher than Millennials at \$US527, and significantly more than seniors at \$US471.

Virtuoso has its eye on the prize of the Pacific region having recently announced that its Sydney office would lead the regional expansion into Asia-Pacific. It already books more than 12 per cent of its turnover from Australia and New Zealand and has seen both countries post top 10 listings for overseas visitors, especially during the warmer climes around New Year where northern hemisphere travellers head south following the sun.

Along with volume, travel tastes are evolving and luxury travel is no longer defined by an expensive price tag, a big brand hotel or celebrity endorsements.

Away from it all

With a falling Australian dollar and a shift in generational travel trends, the Australian luxury tourism market is experiencing a boom time, reports Gina Johnson



QANTAS' LUXURY OFFERING GOES TECH

In an effort to deliver world-class experiential services to its luxury class of passengers, Qantas announced earlier this year the trial of its new virtual reality (VR) headsets, designed in collaboration with Samsung Electronics Australia. The VR technology offers first class customers interactive content showcasing the airline's network of destinations, Qantas products and inflight movies and entertainment.

As part of the trial, a number of Samsung Gear VR headsets have been made available to customers in Sydney and Melbourne International First Lounges as well as in the First Class cabins on select A380 services, making Qantas the first airline globally to offer a virtual reality entertainment experience inflight.

Tourism NT is the first tourism group to partner with Qantas on the content creation, with a special 3D experience from Kakadu National Park.

The Samsung Gear VR headsets make up a suite of personalized offerings for luxury travellers including the airline's Sydney-based First Lounge with 30 metre vertical garden, Aurora Spa and open kitchen restaurant with menus from acclaimed Rockpool chef Neil Perry.

For more information go to Qantas.com.au



BEST OF THE BEST

Rent the owner's cottage of one of the New Zealand lodges such as Matakauri Lodge (where The Duke and Duchess of Cambridge stayed). Relax in the four beds and gaze at a priceless Picasso sculpture for \$US10,000 a night.

Charter a private chopper for heli-skiing, trout fishing and diving for crayfish in Fiordland National Park (approximately \$16,000 daily).

Book one of four chalets at Minaret Station Alpine Luxury Lodge from \$US1,500 a night each.

For more information go to exclusivetravelgroup.com



Many of the properties are represented by Luxury Lodges of Australia, a collection of independent luxury lodges and camps located in some of the most stunning – and often remote – locations on the continent.

They include Emirates One&Only Wolgan Valley, an example of extreme 'glamping' set in the conservation-led foothills of NSW's Greater Blue Mountains World Heritage region with 40 private pavilions, heated plunge pools and – take a deep breath – no mobile phone access. Emirates invested more than US\$125 million in the project, which is believed to be the first carbonZero certified hotel globally.

Further south on Tasmania's east coast overlooking Great Oyster Bay and the Hazards Mountains, Saffire Freycinet's 20 individual suites span out from the main lodge, architecturally resembling a giant stingray. Apart from seclusion and wildlife eco-adventures, guests have access to fine dining options lauded the best in the state and a small but exclusive spa with treatments designed by celebrity facialist Marianne De Candia and acclaimed

doctor of chiropractic and bodywork therapies, Dr Jean Laing.

The visually breathtaking Southern Ocean Lodge is perhaps one of Australia's most celebrated in the luxury lodge class, featuring 21 'organic luxe suites' with lavish sleeping areas, sunken lounges and glass-walled ensuites. Perched on an exposed bluff overlooking the Southern Ocean on South Australia's remote Kangaroo Island, the resort features a Great Room with suspended fire pit and floor-to-ceiling glass panoramic windows – a hallmark of the North American and South African lodge concept which promotes both secluded privacy and communal gathering in equal measure.

At the extreme edge of boutique luxury you have Hobart's Museum of Modern and New Art (MONA). You can stay at MONA – 'not in the museum (unless you're dead)' the website chides – but in one of only eight hi-tech, architecturally astounding 'dens' overlooking the River Derwent and named after Australian architects and artists. Coloquially, only their first names are used: 'Brett' (Whitely), 'Arthur' (Boyd) and so on.

The foundations for the growth in Australian luxury tourism are strong

Clockwise from left: Emirates One&Only Wolgan Valley main building; Southern Ocean Lodge; Southern Ocean Lodge, Kangaroo Island Ocean retreat; Hayman Island pool beach accommodation; Park Hyatt Sydney

According to the 2015 Australian Luxury Travel Survey commissioned by Hamilton Island-based resort qualia and Virtuoso, 74 per cent of high net worth travellers (HNWIs) believe Australia has become more of a luxury destination in the past five years – and 85% of those travellers believe luxury is defined by a property's personal attention to detail, understated elegance, exclusivity and privacy (75 per cent) and an extraordinary natural location and sense of place (59 per cent).

EXCLUSIVE EXPERIENCES

One of the greatest benefactors of this movement in Australia is a small but growing group of ultra luxury lodges that have tapped in to the *zeitgeist* for people seeking out more unique, authentic – and therefore more meaningful – travel experiences; ones for which they are prepared to pay top dollar.