

# When personalised luxury holidays go wrong - and how to get it right



Luxury travel is about people - clients and staff - said the Telegraph Travel panel CREDIT: GETTY

Follow **By Hugh Morris, TRAVEL NEWS EDITOR**  
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**L**uxury travel has entered an age of “bespoke 2.0” but it is vital that personalisation does not become intrusive, a panel of experts has agreed at Telegraph Travel’s inaugural Differentiator Series event.

Speaking about the future of high-end holidays at the discussion held at the Telegraph offices in central London, Philippe Brown (the founder of luxury tour operator Brown and Hudson) said it was increasingly important that holiday providers, airlines and hotels understand that customer preferences can change on a whim, and they have to be ready to provide for that.

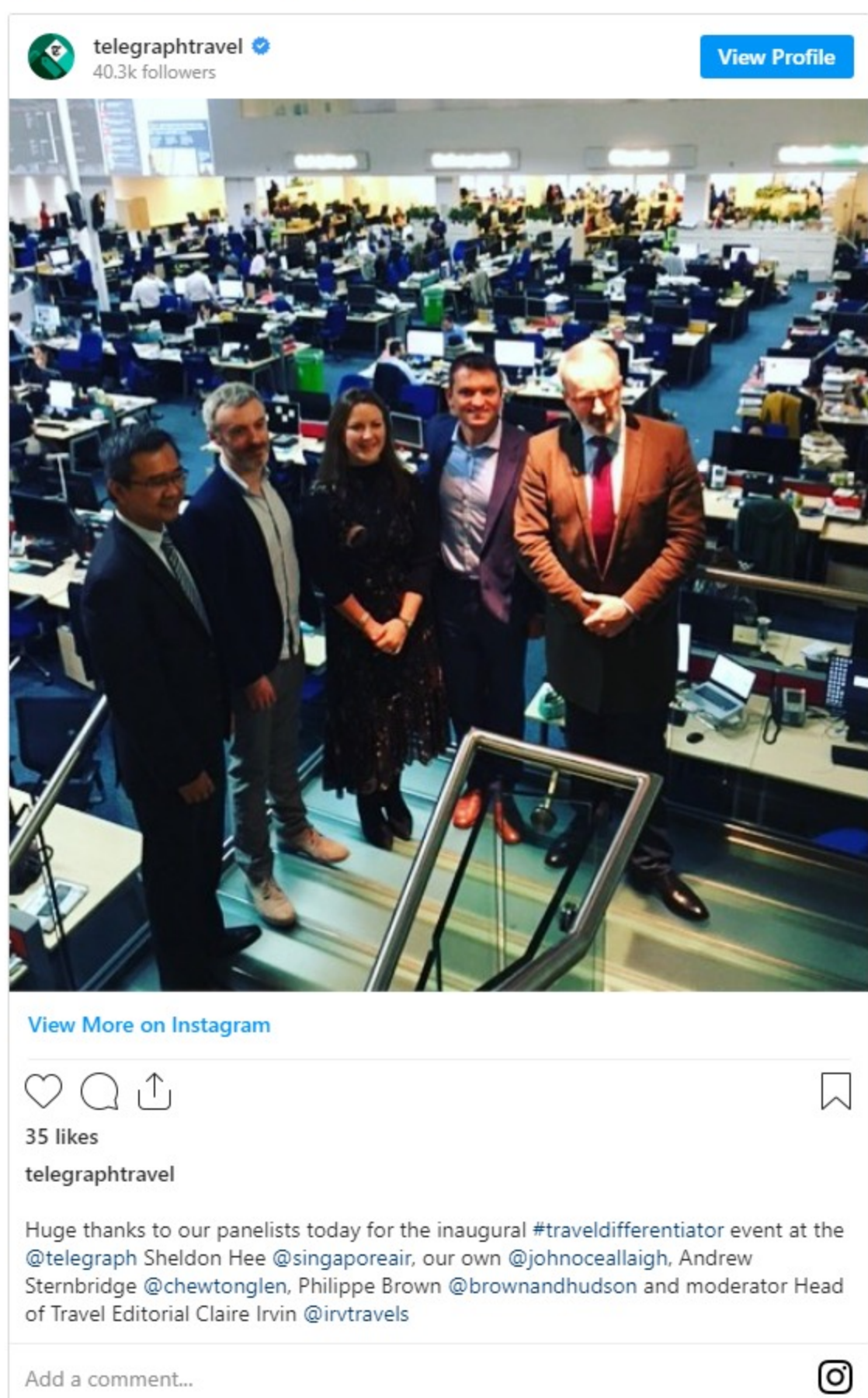
“We’ve entered an age of bespoke 2.0 and it’s realising whether you’re an airline or a hotel, that we’re humans dealing with other humans and their needs and motivations can change like that, and we need to be able to cater for that,” he said.



The luxury travel industry is becoming increasingly adventurous CREDIT: GETTY

“We need to fit customer needs impeccably. In the travel realm we have an opportunity to redefine what bespoke is by delivering a service that is everything. It is also about empowering staff to be able to be themselves and interact with customers as humans.”

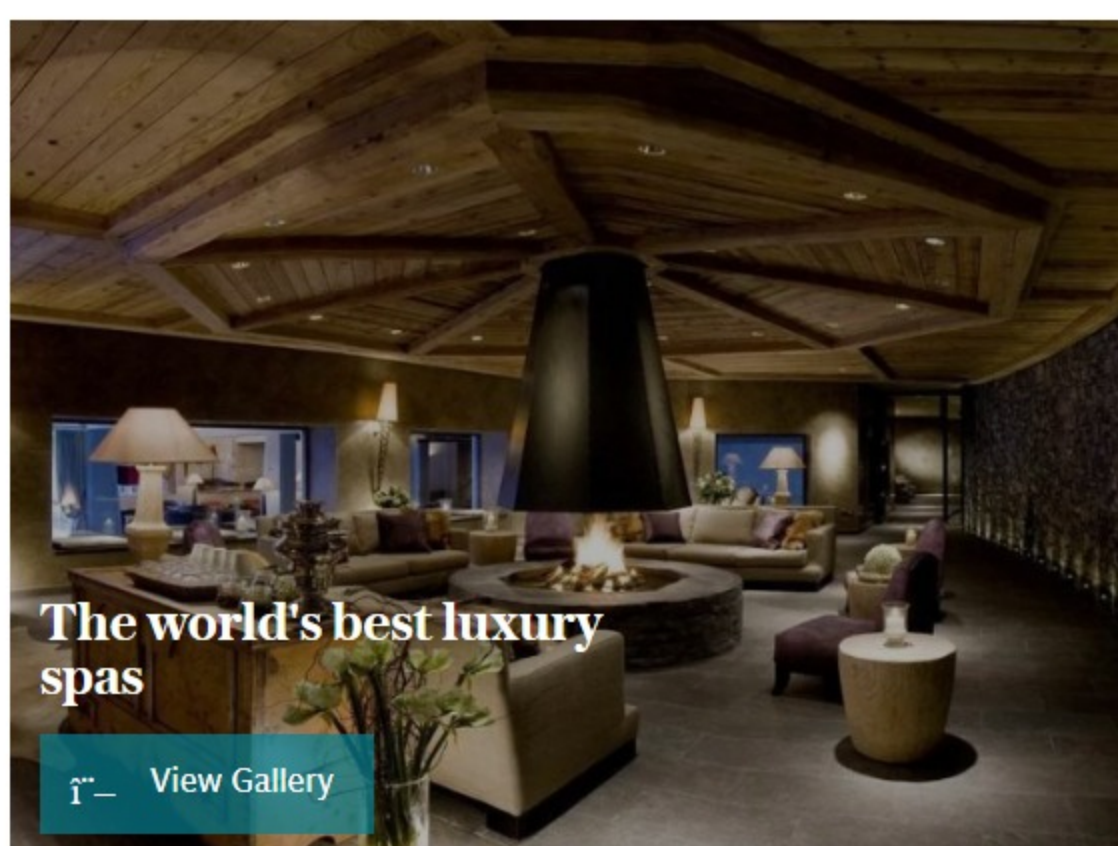
Sheldon Hee, the GM of Singapore Airlines, who was also on the panel, said he wanted his staff to be “thoughtful, helping customers along without being presumptuous”.



Andrew Stembridge, the managing director of luxury hotel Chewton Glen, completed the trio of guests at the discussion which also involved Telegraph Travel’s luxury editor John O’Ceallaigh and was chaired by head of travel editorial Claire Irvin.

Some of the topics broached in front of an industry audience included how technology is changing travel, how to differentiate between business and first class, and how to remedy a situation that’s gone wrong.

The increased personalisation of facilities and services for luxury customers took up much of the hour’s debate, after John O’Ceallaigh revealed that assumed knowledge of staff and operators can go too far, such as when he arrived in a hotel room to find a chocolate cake with a picture of his face on.



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“A lot of hoteliers need to be careful about how they apply the knowledge they accrue,” he said. “It is destabilising to consume yourself.”

“What I would expect, in terms of personalisation, is that the waiting staff remember that I would like sparkling instead of still water, but them assuming what I would like to eat for breakfast can be presumptuous and excessive.”

Andrew Stembridge said he knew of a situation when a woman had arrived at a restaurant for dinner to be greeted with a photo of where she spent her honeymoon - only the staff were unaware that she had been divorced for 10 years.

Similarly, Sheldon Hee said that his staff had presented a customer who once ordered a special blend of camomile tea with the same drink every time he flew only for him to complain that he was sick of the tea and wanted whisky.

“Today a lot of our emphasis is trying to understand exactly what our customers want,” said Mr Hee.

The event was the first in The Differentiator Series being run by Telegraph Travel. Look out for details of the next discussion at [telegraph.co.uk/travel](http://telegraph.co.uk/travel).