

Sustainable Luxury Tourism: *Is such thing possible?*

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Intelligent Luxury?

- *Soneva* is committed to offer luxuries of the highest standard in an environment that nurtures the indigenous feel in design, architecture and service. A Soneva resort has a limited number of accommodations, allowing for exceptional and inspired service. Furnishings and finishes are crafted from renewable and sustainable sources, while generous personal space and the fusion of nature with guest experiences create destinations unto themselves - intelligent luxury



This presentation

- Is about intersecting trends in three core constructs
 - Sustainability
 - Luxury
 - Tourism
- Based on a presentation
 - International Conference on Global Sustainable Tourism. Nelspruit South Africa, November 2010



What is sustainability

- An approach to personal, business and collective decisions and actions that is guided by the following principles:-
 - Taking a long term orientation and considering the environmental, social and economic consequences of our decisions and actions;
 - Making a commitment to change the way we behave;
 - Considering ways to balance the needs of current people with the needs of future generations;
 - Being aware of and managing our resource use;
 - Recognising that there are multiple forms of capital that contribute to the quality of life and well-being of individuals and communities and that we need to contribute to all these; and
 - Paying particular attention to the conservation and enhancement of natural capital which is difficult to replace or substitute

Sustainability: Key trends

- Move to balance past emphasis on environmental issues
- Increased public interest
- Tensions between hard & soft approaches:
 - Between incremental & acceptable change and fundamental and challenging change
 - Between adapting consumption versus challenging consumption

Luxury : Definitions and Trends

- Debate about what luxury is
 - High price, iconic brands, conspicuous consumption
 - Perceived high quality, uniqueness & scarcity
 - Exclusivity and prestige
- Democratization of luxury
 - Traditional - very expensive, exclusivity and prestige
 - New - less expensive, more widely available, desire for social status through conspicuous consumption
- Confusion about the idea of “new luxury”
“intelligent luxury”, “sustainable luxury”

Tourism and Luxury

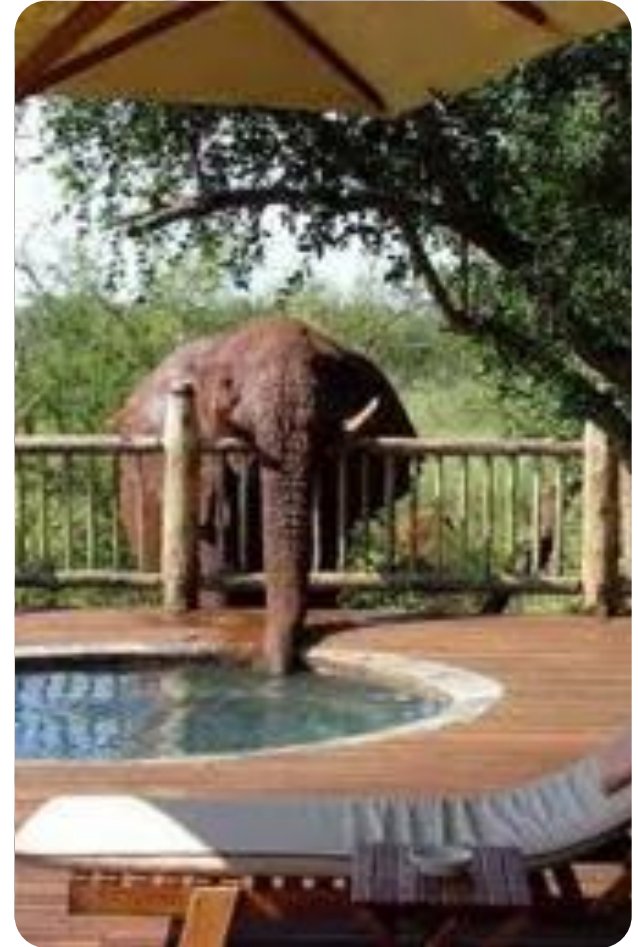
- Part of the democratization of luxury
 - Tourists as temporary participants in the luxury world
 - Making the most of cheaper costs in the destinations
- Commonly adopted business model in wilderness/eco-tourism in more remote places
- But is it sustainable?

Linking the three constructs

- Conflicting claims have been made:
 - The traditional/all luxury consumers are seeking more sustainable travel options based on authenticity and experience
 - That improving the sustainability performance of luxury tourism products is a practical approach worth pursuing
 - That luxury tourism is driven by conspicuous consumption and these tourists do not want their experience limited by sustainability measures
 - That offering luxury tourism is still not addressing the core issue of unnecessary consumption

Existing evidence

- Not much is available because we haven't looked at luxury tourism very much
- What is available tends to suggest that:
 - tourists paying for luxury experiences have some interesting ideas about what sustainability practices are acceptable and worth pursuing.



This Study

- Explore the links tourists themselves make about luxury and sustainability in the context of specialist accommodation such as wilderness lodges, safari lodges, eco-lodges.
- A qualitative analysis of tourist reviews of their experiences at these types of accommodation available on the web



Finding the reviews

- **Step 1:** searched for accommodation reviews containing the keywords sustainable, environment, ecotourism and related words
 - identified >8000 reviews.
- **Step 2:** selected from this pool that containing the words luxury, luxurious and synonyms
 - Final see of 776 reviews (282,888 words)
 - Luxury and sustainability were linked in approximately 10% of the total set of reviews



51% Hotel
35% Specialty Lodging
14% Bed &
Breakfast/Inns

Top Five Destinations

- South Africa
- USA
- UK
- Costa Rica
- Kenya

Describing the Reviewers

- Mostly between 25 and 49 years (78%)
- Mostly travelling for leisure (83%)
- Mostly visited in 2010 or 2009 (75%)
- Travelled with
 - Spouse/partner (58%)
 - Family (19%)
 - Friends (11%)



Analysing the Reviews

- Computer assisted semantic content analysis technique using **Leximancer**
- Provides information on
 - Presence, frequency and co-occurrence of words, phrases or concepts
 - Relationships between concepts
- Maps out these relationships



Concepts related to Luxury

All Reviews

Related	Count	Likelihood
comfortable	88	29%
experience	78	20%
location	53	20%
shower	50	20%
bed	68	18%
view	67	18%
bathroom	48	18%
private	32	18%
place	107	17%
environmental	55	17%

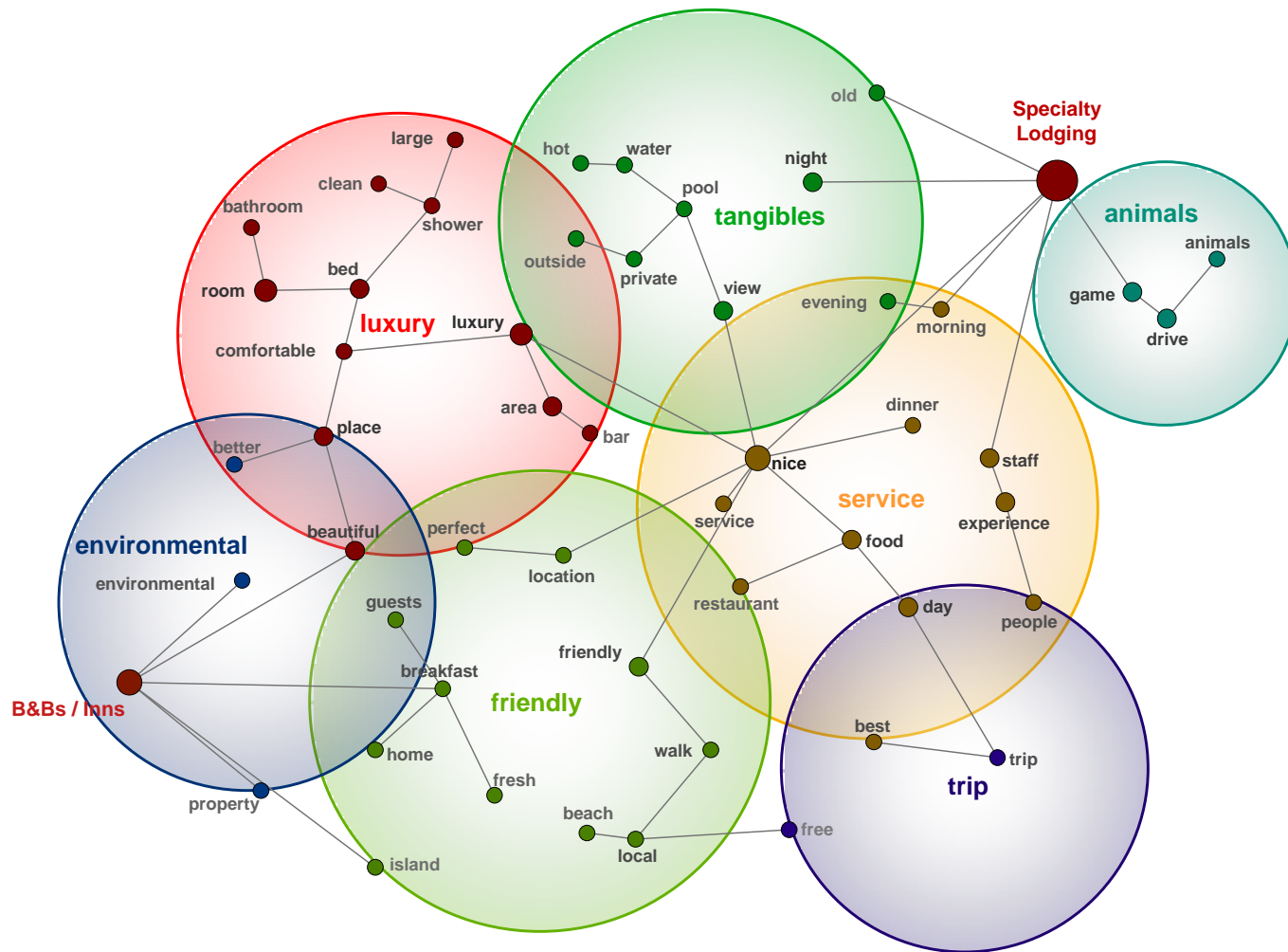
Hotels

Related	Count	Likelihood
comfortable	41	26%
property	16	22%
experience	33	17%
shower	22	15%
home	9	15%
view	32	15%
location	25	15%
bathroom	26	15%
bed	33	14%
environmental	33	14%

Specialty Lodging & B&Bs/Inns

Related	Count	Likelihood
comfortable	47	33%
location	28	28%
shower	28	27%
service	28	27%
perfect	21	24%
private	24	24%
bathroom	22	23%
hot	14	23%
bed	35	23%
room	76	23%
experience	45	23%
environmental	22	22%

Specialist Accommodation



Implications & Conclusions

- Overall not many tourists link luxury and sustainability
 - Not likely to be influencing tourist beyond their holiday
 - Concern with environmental and sustainable issues is notably absent from the more remote and exclusive safari and wilderness options
- Luxury in this case is associated with perceived quality of tangible features, high levels of service, and limited access to special locations - not sustainability
- If this is indicative of tourism more generally then this is a threat to sustainability especially as we see more travellers from places such as India and China seeking luxury and status from travel
- There is some hope in the specialist but not luxury realm



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Learning Activity

- Use google/another search engine to find websites for 10 luxury tourism businesses
- Read the online marketing information for each and count
 - the number of times sustainability and related words (green, environmentally friendly or socially responsible) are used
 - What features are most often linked to luxury? - quality service, physical features, consumption, indulgence and social status, or quality of experience and uniqueness
- Do you think these luxury tourism businesses are promoting sustainability?
- What type of luxury do you think they are promoting?
- For each question write a page explaining your conclusions and linking it your audit of the websites.