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### SOMETHING TO DECLARE



**GOLD STANDARD**  
Personalised service has become more important than star ratings

SIRI STAFFORD/GETTY

## The definition of luxury can't be found in the stars



**Lindsey Ueberroth**

How we define luxury can differ dramatically depending on our individual life and style demands. Consumers are better informed, with more options than ever before. As a result, luxury travel has evolved to take on a much more personalised philosophy.

Traditionally, travellers relied on a hotel's star rating as a guide to its suitability for their needs. However, in today's travel landscape, grading through tiers and stars does not always align with personal opinion of a luxury experience. Each of us has our own perception of different types of hotels, and the significance of the services and amenities that they offer. The little, often personal, touches are what make memories, for example, the concierge who can get a restaurant reservation at short notice, or recommend the best vista in town for a selfie.

For me, luxury is all about time, and the finer details that make me stop in my tracks and want to return to a hotel. I often feel time-deprived, so a hotel that makes me feel like time is standing still, where I don't have to do any of the work, represents my definition of luxury. One detail that will always stay with me came from a hotel that made the thoughtful effort to place my favourite scented candle and a photo of my dog next to my bed with a "gift bag" of treats to take back for her. They offered the ultimate luxury for a long trip - home comforts.

Hotels are also recognising that the "one size fits all" five-star model of luxury does not match each guest's distinct perception. Luxury ceases to be viewed as such when it becomes ordinary, uninspiring, and one-dimensional.

Independent hoteliers have long understood this aspect of hospitality, and are taking advantage of their unique positioning. Modern travellers should understand that a star-based system, or any rigid classification of luxury, may not fully indicate the quality of a hotel offering, or the more important facets such as experience, personalisation, and "style". Sometimes I prefer a more casual and approachable luxury experience, and at other times I want a more immersive or formal experience.

When researching their next getaway, travellers should consider what luxury really means to them - whether it's the space needed for a multi-generational break, the privacy of a romantic escape, or the connectivity of a business trip. By indulging at the research stage, they can seek out what's most important to them and which aspects will really enhance their stay.

The growing significance that we place on finding or using brands that reflect our varied needs and aspirations is also echoed when it comes to travelling, as consumers increasingly move away from conventional hotel chains in favour of unique and authentic accommodation.

Even the big chains are diversifying with less identifiable sub-brands. With such a vast array of hotels and resorts to choose from, there is no reason to settle for anything less than wonderful.

*Lindsey Ueberroth is president and CEO of Preferred Hotels & Resorts ([preferredhotels.com](http://preferredhotels.com)).*