

A large elephant is wading through a river, carrying two people on its back. The people are seated in a wooden basket. The elephant's trunk is visible, and the surrounding area is lush with green foliage and trees.

Hotels are increasingly offering once-in-a-lifetime experiences to reward customers – even elephant rides in the jungle



THE SHAPE

From reactive hotel rooms to alternative commutes, we identify the business travel trends you need to know about for the year ahead

OF THINGS TO COME

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tide, so you may as well accept the benefits of a less stressful journey through the terminal as recompense.

Last summer, Delta Air Lines introduced its first biometric bag-drop stations at Minneapolis-St Paul International airport, requiring a facial scan at the self-service points to verify the passport holder. Dubai airport, in partnership with Emirates, is going further by creating camera-lined facial recognition tunnels that you walk through without pausing to stare at a screen. The first tunnels should be in place at Dubai's Terminal 3 by the end of summer 2018.

Meanwhile, British Airways is the first airline to use self-service biometric

Carriers such as Qantas and Air France have cancelled orders for the A380 superjumbo

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EXPERIENTIAL REWARDS

Hotel loyalty is moving away from rewards in the form of room upgrades and free stays to money-can't-buy experiences and hyper-personal gifts. Small Luxury Hotels of the World, for example, redesigned its loyalty scheme in September, renaming it *Invited* and introducing preferential treatment to elite members in the form of birthday gifts and invitation-only events.

Intercontinental Hotels Group, meanwhile, has joined forces with Opentable and Grubhub to allow guests to earn and redeem points on meals in restaurants. Global Hotel Alliance's Discovery programme offers "local experience" rewards for Platinum and Black members, such as seabob snorkelling in the Maldives or scenic cycle rides around Bali. The scheme also applies to Kempinski hotels. The hotel group says: "Whether it's a rare elephant ride in the jungle, a private tour of a Geneva watch factory usually closed to the public, a traditional Adumu dance with Maasai warriors in Kenya, or a tour of Malta's presidential palace and gardens, these experiences present the best of local gastronomy, culture and craftsmanship."

ABOVE: Facial recognition tech is changing security
RIGHT: Commuters are adopting new travel methods

FACIAL RECOGNITION

The iPhone X isn't the only employer of facial recognition as a means of identification and added security. Airports and airlines are increasingly integrating the technology into their biometric boarding and immigration systems to help reduce queues, paperwork and the required staffing levels on checkpoints. While you may be anxious that this undermines your privacy, there is no way to turn the

boarding gates on international flights out of the US, starting with Los Angeles International. BA has been using biometric gates at London's Heathrow Terminal 5 for domestic flights since March 2017. Amsterdam Schiphol airport and KLM are working on a similar initiative, as is JetBlue, which has replaced boarding passes with facial scanning at Boston Logan airport.

British Airways said that its new technology, created by Vision-Box, "will



RIGHT: In-room fitness makes exercise more appealing
BELOW: Natural disasters are ever more common

create a smoother journey for customers, as they will no longer need to present their passport or boarding pass at the gate – only at check in and security. Instead travellers can simply look into a camera prior to boarding, wait for their biometric data to be verified, and then walk onto the aircraft”.

In the US, Customs and Border Protection is trialling its Biometric Exit US in a handful of airports (such as Chicago O’Hare and Las Vegas McCarran), but there are plans to install it at every airport in the country within three years. The endeavour is being pushed forward by President Trump, who wants to use facial recognition to track visa holders as they leave the country (or not).

ALTERNATIVE COMMUTES

With congestion on roads getting ever-worse and train services frequently unreliable, especially in the UK, getting to work has become a daily ordeal that pushes stress to unhealthy levels and eats into time that could otherwise be spent more productively. Some commuters (about four per cent of people in the UK compared with 40 per cent in Copenhagen) have turned to cycling as an alternative mode of transport.

Data from the Mayor of London shows that pedal power has increased by 56 per cent since Cycle Superhighways and Quietways were introduced, with 670,000



rides made every day. Ashok Sinha, CEO of London Cycling Campaign, said: “Cycling is taking off and TfL’s new figures prove that Londoners flock to high-quality cycle lanes and routes where they’re built.”

A recent study from the International Journal of Workplace Health Management has found that cyclists arrived at work feeling less stressed than people who had driven. Reflecting increased awareness of ways to improve mental health, a growing

This looks to be the year that high-tech smart luggage with built-in batteries is banned from being checked in

subset of people are being more creative in the ways they get from A to B, often using their commute as an opportunity to get fit. Some people are running to work, while others, in cities such as Munich, Basel and even London, are kayaking, surfing, paddle boarding or even swimming down the rivers, packing their laptops and suits in waterproof bags.

UNPREDICTABLE MOTHER NATURE

Business travellers need to prepare for flight delays and cancellations in the year ahead by having appropriate insurance, up-to-date duty-of-care policies and watertight back-up plans ahead of disruptive weather conditions sweeping the planet. Many experts are putting this down to global warming (the last three years have been the hottest recorded), and 2018 is expected to be just as bad, if not worse.

Last year, Hurricane Harvey caused deadly flooding in Houston, leaving 80





Air France subsidiary Joon is ushering in a new era of trendy aviation aimed at the younger generation

chairs, plus a screen for bespoke on-demand exercise classes created by Aktiv Solutions.

Ryan Crabbe, former senior director of global wellness at Hilton, said: "The variety of activity the room enables is motivating. One morning a guest can decide to roll out of bed for a quick guided stretch and yoga poses. Then later that evening, they might return from a stressful day and take a brisk bike ride while catching up on a favourite show or the day's business news."

NEXT-GEN AIRLINES

Aimed at millennials, Air France launched a new low-cost subsidiary airline for hipsters in December, ushering in a new era for trendy aviation created for the younger generation. Richard Branson did a good job of making flying sexy with Virgin Atlantic, but Air France's Joon is looking

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people dead and £140 billion worth of damage and, along with Irma and Maria, wreaked destruction on many Caribbean islands. Some of California's worst-ever wildfires led to mass evacuations across the state – the Thomas fire, in December (not normally a month prone to many blazes), proved the largest on record, burning more than 272,000 acres of landscape, while mudslides killed 15 in January. Severe monsoon flooding in Bangladesh took the lives of 1,200 people and affected more than 40 million people – aid agencies said it was one of the worst humanitarian crises the region had seen in years.

Seismic activity is also causing problems. Two earthquakes hit Mexico last autumn, one of which proved the deadliest in 30 years; and a 7.3-magnitude earthquake in Iraq and Iran killed up to 580 people not long after. Scientists predict that due to a periodic slowing of the Earth's rotation, there will be more quakes in 2018.

IN-ROOM FITNESS

Hotels know all too well that the gyms they invest in often aren't used – people can be inherently lazy, yet the desire for better fitness remains. With that in mind, some brands are taking steps to make it as easy as possible for guests to workout during their stays by putting fitness equipment in bedrooms instead. A growing number of Marriott's Westin Hotels & Resorts in the US, for example, are now offering some

rooms with Peloton exercise bikes and online spinning classes streamed live or on-demand to built-in screens.

At the same time, Hilton has been rolling out its Five Feet to Fitness concept to hotels in North America, featuring mini studios with Wattbikes, Gym Rax units with TRX straps, medicine balls from Lyft, Hyperwear Sandbells, yoga mats and meditation



ABOVE: The hip uniform of trendy new airline Joon
RIGHT: Citizen M hotels offer affordable luxury

FUTURE TRENDS

THE SHAPE OF THINGS TO COME

workout. Last autumn, Lennart Meri Tallinn airport in Estonia became the first in Europe to install a pop-up gym within its terminal near gate 6 (complete with runway views). Operated by My Fitness, the light, expansive gym has high ceilings, with Technogym weight machines, an elliptical trainer, a rowing machine, exercise bike, treadmill and staircase trainer. The only problem is there are no showers.

Roam Fitness is also taking gyms for jet setters seriously, having opened its first in Baltimore airport last year. The 109 sqm facility has cardio equipment, free weights, medicine balls, TRX suspension straps and space for stretching. Mercifully, there are four private bathrooms with showers. You can also buy healthy snacks and drinks on-site, and even rent Lululemon fitness clothing if you haven't packed any of your own. Roam Fitness says it plans to open three more US locations this year and, within five years, hopes to have 20 locations including some overseas.

REACTIVE ROOMS

Marriott International has partnered with Samsung and Legrand (a specialist in electrical and digital building infrastructures) to create a prototype internet of things (IoT) hotel room, which it hopes to one day bring to its portfolio of properties. Marriott believes in a sci-fi future where mirrors talk and your shower recognises you when you walk in. It says the IoT Guestroom Lab allows users to ask a virtual assistant for a wake-up call, to start a yoga routine on a full-length mirror, or set the shower to the temperature stored in their customer profile.

The Irvine Marriott in California has been experimenting with a smart shower door, whereby people can draw or write down ideas in the steam on the glass, and then have them beamed to an iPad. A select number of Marriott's Aloft hotels already have voice-activated rooms.

BUSINESS CLASS TAX HIKES

This year, business class tickets are set to become more expensive as UK air passenger duty (APD) is increased again. In November, chancellor Philip Hammond announced a freeze on short- and long-haul rates, bumping up taxes on premium tickets instead. From April this year, APD on business and first class fares (plus any premium economy cabins fitted with seats with more than 40 inches of legroom, such as Norwegian) for flights of more than 2,000 miles will be £156 instead of £150, going up to £172 in April 2019. Alan Wardle, director of public affairs at ABTA said: "We believe this is a missed opportunity to decisively cut this tax. We will continue to have the highest levels of APD in Europe and among the highest in the world. We will continue to push for a substantial cut, which will help travellers and ensure the UK is well placed to trade with the rest of the world post Brexit."

AFFORDABLE LUXURY

Good news for budget-conscious business travellers is the continued growth of affordable luxury in both hotels and airlines. Boutique hotel mogul Ian Schrager launched his new high-design Public hotel brand in New York's Lower East Side in

2017, with 367 pared-down rooms, open plan co-working spaces, a florist, cocktail bars, a deli, rooftop events space and free wifi. The idea is you get everything you need to work and relax on-site and in style, but for lower prices than you might expect in New York City (from \$195 a night).

In a similar vein, Dutch chain Citizen M offers just one category of compact room and no in-room dining, swimming pools or gyms. Instead, guests benefit from generous amounts of communal space for working and eating, and a hip canteen open 24 hours. Again, there is an emphasis on creating a trendy but homely environment. A night at the new Citizen M La Défense in Paris costs from €71 a night, and the chain plans to expand across North America and Asia over the coming years.

The new Moxy Times Square (from Marriott) is another example of a hotel chain that has chosen to invest in imaginative interior design, lively social spaces and superb dining at unusually low rates (from US\$124 a night) by eliminating extraneous facilities and levels of service.

Affordable luxury is coming to airlines too. The Lufthansa Group's budget subsidiary Eurowings has announced it will be installing a business class cabin – with fully flat beds – on board its long-haul wide-body aircraft departing Dusseldorf from the end of April 2018. Oliver Wagner, the airline's CEO, said: "That's not a contradiction for Eurowings. We see strong demand for another top product on routes with high business travel, for example from Dusseldorf to New York, Miami and Fort Myers." And, he says: "We'll be entering the Bizclass race with our usual budget-priced tickets." 