

T H E

# GUEST EDIT

SERIES · 2026  
THE FUTURE OF  
LUXURY HOSPITALITY

CHAPTER 01

# 01

## The New *Definition* of Luxury

*From opulence to meaning.*

JEROEN JANSSEN

€39 · One of Six

THEGUESTEDIT.NET

*Luxury has quietly stopped being about what you own and started being about what you can protect — your time, your attention, your privacy, the coherence of your own life.*

FROM CHAPTER 01

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BY JEROEN JANSSEN

# The New *Definition* of Luxury

*From opulence to meaning — and why the old five-star checklist is quietly becoming the thing a luxury guest now wants removed.*

A property on the Côte d'Azur recently did something slightly unfashionable. It measured what its most valuable guests actually did during a three-night stay. Not what they paid for — what they did. The answer was quiet, and it was arresting.

They ate one long meal that mattered. They slept. They cancelled a spa treatment and walked instead. They ignored the minibar, opened the windows, and read in bed for an hour before coming down. Across three nights and a bill just under nine thousand euros, they had touched perhaps a quarter of what the property had built for them. And they left a note calling it the best trip of the year.

Every senior person in luxury hospitality has a version of this story. We repeat it to each other at dinners and conferences, and we dismiss it as a nice anecdote — until we notice that the same note, in slightly different handwriting, keeps arriving. The guest at the very top of the market is not using the things we think they came for.

Something has shifted in the quiet space between what a luxury property sells and what a luxury guest actually buys. It is the most important shift in our industry this decade, and it is hidden in plain sight because it looks, at first glance, like a reduction. It is not. It is a redefinition — and the operators who understand it will hold their rate, their repeat, and their relevance through the next cycle.

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## The scarcity *has moved*.

For most of the modern history of luxury hospitality, scarcity was material. Marble quarried from a specific hillside. Linen woven in a specific village. A concierge who could produce a specific bottle within the hour. These things were expensive because they were rare and difficult to deliver, and the people who could afford them had already reached a point in their lives where material scarcity was the only scarcity left.

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## What the market has not yet *fully absorbed*.

Three shifts are hiding inside this redefinition, and each one has operational consequences that most properties have not yet acted on.

**First: the rise of the sovereign guest.** The modern luxury traveller increasingly dictates their own day. They arrive with an itinerary of their own, often prepared with the help of a team. They do not want a daily programme. They want friction removed from their own programme. The distinction is subtle and important. The properties winning now are not offering richer activity menus — they are offering more competent backstage work, so the guest's own day runs without interruption.

That is no longer true.

The scarcity now sits somewhere else entirely. It sits in uninterrupted time. It sits in silence — and the engineering of it. It sits in privacy that cannot be bought on Amazon. It sits in the competence of another human being who is not reading from a script. It sits, most of all, in a guest's sovereignty over their own attention: their right to not be interrupted, broadcast, photographed, categorised, or sold to.

Our most valuable guests are wealthier than any previous generation of luxury traveller, and they are poorer in exactly those four things. That asymmetry is the redefinition. Everything else in this chapter is a consequence of it.

**Second: discretion as amenity.** Ten years ago, a five-star property demonstrated service by being visible — the butler at the door, the greeting by name in the lobby, the line of staff waving at departure. Today, the most discreet hotels are the most prized. The guest wants to be known without being announced. This is a different kind of service discipline, and it is hard for legacy operators to adopt without feeling like they are offering less. They are not. They are offering more — of the thing the guest now actually values.

**Third: meaning over spectacle.** The era of the Instagrammable hotel is not over everywhere, but it is over in true luxury. The guest at the top of the market now reads the broadcast-ready interior design of the last cycle as downmarket, and the installation-for-the-feed restaurant as insecure. They want properties that are confident enough to not perform.



*Our most valuable guests are wealthier than any previous generation of luxury traveller — and they are poorer in exactly the four things that now define luxury: time, silence, privacy, and attention.*

THE SCARCITY HAS MOVED

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## The five-star checklist, *inverted*.

One of the most useful questions a luxury property can ask itself in 2026 is not *what should we add to our guest offer?* but *what should we remove from it?* It is almost never the answer a brand team wants to hear, because removal does not look like ambition on a slide. But for the guest, removal often reads as confidence — and confidence reads as status.

Consider the daily turndown, unrequested. Consider the number of times your team speaks to a guest

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## The commercial *consequence*.

This is not a soft argument. It has rate implications and repeat-guest implications, and both matter.

**On rate.** The luxury guest is prepared to pay more — significantly more — for a property that protects their time, their attention, and their privacy than for one that offers a longer list of things. In the properties we have worked with, premium over competitor set correlates more strongly with how well the property gives the guest their own day back than with the quantity of amenity inventory. Properties that

between arrival and the room. Consider the laminated compendium in the drawer. Consider the sheer quantity of paper, signage, and silent selling that the guest walks past in the corridor. A lot of this is inherited. Some of it is specified by the brand standards of a flag whose meaning has drifted. Very little of it is earning its place in the experience the guest actually wants.

Removing the right things — quietly, at taste level — is one of the highest-return moves an operator can make this year. It costs almost nothing. It flatters the guest. And it frees the team to concentrate on the handful of moments that genuinely matter.

understand this can price on the basis of protected experience rather than feature inventory, and they tend to hold that premium through softer cycles.

**On repeat.** The meaningful number in luxury is not first-stay conversion. It is return rate within twenty-four months, and it is almost entirely determined by whether the guest felt, on their first stay, that the property had understood them. Properties selling sovereignty generate the highest repeat rates in the market, often well above sixty per cent, because their most valuable guests have no better option. That number is the single most useful leading indicator of long-term asset value in a luxury hotel portfolio, and almost nobody is managing directly for it.

# Where the redefinition *is* *already visible.*

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01

## The long silence

Aman, Six Senses in their quieter keys, the single-key retreats emerging across Provence and Japan. Properties whose design brief begins with acoustic performance, not with photography.

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03

## The quieter campaign

The shift in five-star brand advertising from product and feature toward atmosphere and absence. Fewer suite tours. More weather, light, and stillness.

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05

## The disappearing amenity

The welcome plate, the laminated compendium, the unrequested turndown — quietly retired, one by one, from the properties at the very top of the rate card. The guest prefers it.

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02

## The unmarked door

Members-only restaurants with no signage. Hotels that deliberately do not accept direct bookings. A re-emerging taste for properties that require you to know someone to find them.

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04

## The return of the private client team

From fashion maisons to luxury hotels — a renewed investment in small, senior, uncompromised client-side teams who never use a script and rarely appear in the lobby.

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06

## Rate held through softness

Under genuine demand softness in 2024–2025, properties selling sovereignty rather than spectacle held rate twice as well as their competitor set — the clearest commercial read on this shift we have seen yet.

# Five questions for *Monday morning*.

*Bring these to your next leadership meeting. None of them requires budget. All of them will tell you more about your property than last quarter's guest satisfaction scores.*

- 01 Walk your guest journey with a stopwatch. Count the number of times a staff member speaks to the guest between the car door and the room key. If it is more than four, ask the harder question: which ones would the guest genuinely miss?
- 02 Sit for an hour in your own lobby at 5pm on a weekday and list every visible thing — signage, menus, flyers, event boards, laminated cards — that a guest at the top of the market would find below them. Then remove three within the month.
- 03 Pull the last fifty in-room dining orders. How many came from the printed menu, and how many asked for something not on it? If the ratio is tilted towards the latter, your menu is no longer your product. Your kitchen's taste is — and your menu should reflect that, quietly.
- 04 Ask your private client team which three guests they think will not return. Then, separately, ask them why. The answer will almost always be about friction or visibility, not product.
- 05 Run the removal exercise with your leadership team. Everyone picks one thing the property does that the guest did not ask for, and no longer needs. Kill it, quietly, within thirty days. Then measure what the guest does not miss.

THE EDIT

Stop selling  
things.  
*Start selling  
sovereignty.*

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# This is *one* of six.

## ABOUT THE SERIES

The Future of Luxury Hospitality is a six-chapter editorial series from The Guest Edit — written for general managers, owners, brand directors, and F&B leads running properties at the premium and luxury end of the market.

It is the kind of thinking you would normally only get inside a two-day strategy offsite with a senior advisor. Each chapter is built to be read in one sitting and used in the next week.

## ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Jeroen Janssen is the founder of The Guest Edit, a senior advisory practice for luxury hotels, resorts, and F&B. He works with properties in the premium and luxury tiers to close the gap between their brand promise and the experience their guests actually receive.

Previously, luxury and lifestyle brand leadership across hotels and F&B in Europe.

## UPCOMING CHAPTERS

02 The Invisible Service Revolution

03 Designing for the Senses

04 Wellness as Infrastructure

05 Regenerative Luxury

06 The Human Edit

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T H E

# GUEST EDIT

END OF CHAPTER 01

Precision is the *luxury*  
*brand* of language.

Thank you for reading. Chapter 02 — *The Invisible Service Revolution* — follows.