



Editorial

## Challenges in Emerging Research on Luxury Destinations

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Since the end of the Cold War, many of the economies in the world have proceeded with market reforms and integrated into the world economy by spurring domestic free enterprise, promoting openness to foreign direct investments and intensifying international trade. All these have resulted in a general uplift of income levels and dynamic changes in many destinations such as Singapore, Dubai, Bangkok, Kuala Lumpur and Ho Chi Minh City to name a few. Over the last two decades, there has been sporadic but steady growth of literature focusing on luxury consumption and destination development. This brief editorial examines challenges of conducting research on luxury destinations while exploring opportunities for research in three key areas: travel consumption patterns, destination policies, and comparative studies.

Firstly, to identify which destinations are considered luxury may be challenging. For the Americans travelling to Europe, find Norway, Denmark, Portugal Sweden and Spain as luxury destinations [1]. Park and Reisinger [2], in a study of a cross section of internationals observed varied consumer behaviour towards purchases of luxury goods. Just as international travellers have different preferences to luxury consumption, similarly, it is true that there is no standard characteristic to define and identify a luxury destination.

One way to distinguish a luxury destination is to apply one or a combination of product and market approaches as espoused by Wiedmann and Hennigs [3]. Providing substantive evidence associated with a luxury destination and rationalizing the choice through the lens of tourists' perspective, quality of attractions, destination management and marketing approaches or the functional approach that examines the drivers of high-end experience, will provide a meaningful analytical framework. Except for the Indian domestic market, much of the world does not see Mumbai as a luxury destination. However, in my recent visit to Mumbai, I learnt that wealthy tourists do visit Mumbai and are enamoured by the slums in part influenced by the movie "slum dog millionaire."

Whether it is mass or luxury tourism, the destination is surely to experience an impact. Often, destinations adopt a policy of upgrading the tourism landscape by emphasising up-market tourism, at the expense of social and environmental costs [4]. The case of luxury tourism developments in Cyprus and Mallorca are examples where the resources used, have had actual debilitating outcomes on the natural environment [4] and can often agitate local opposition as in

the case of Bali [5]. It is also evident in the policies and practices of in the hospitality sector that of corporate social responsibility impacts that are unclear in real positive terms [2].

Aside from destination impact studies of luxury development and luxury travellers to a destination, another key area of luxury tourism research that is yet to be explored. Comparative studies between two or more destinations. There has been quite a few publications on destinations that highlight the conundrums that luxury destinations often are caught up. The examples of India [6,7], Monaco [8] provides an emerging literature on luxury destinations and the challenges faced. Dubai, for instance faces a hidden challenge of securing much of the upmarket property areas and shopping malls away from the Indian subcontinent workers who are housed in less appealing conditions in the outskirts of the city to create the luxury and exclusivity feel for the privileged class [9].

The challenges to conducting research in the luxury travel destinations are often an issue of approaches. At the micro level, understanding travellers behaviour or business responses to the high-end market or societies' accommodation of serving wealthy visitors are simply not easy to collect data [10]. The study of high-end travellers for instance, the market is small, exclusive and private. To access these visitors through identification is one of the biggest challenges let alone the use of pseudonyms.

There is also the methodological challenge of defining luxury travellers. Not all luxury travellers behave in the same way that we could assume: chauffeur driven, private tourist guide and penthouse suite. This may not always be the case. Some of them, may stay in the penthouse but choose to take a taxi and mingle in the night markets or street side dining to absorb the destinations local flavour [11]. To differentiate this up-market segment while may be easier based on assumptions, it may not be possible in reality. The 5 or 6 star hotels may not want to divulge their guests' details nor volunteer to recruit the guests for a set of research questions.

At the macro level, exploring issues related to development and policies might be less challenging as long as the national data is readily available. However, as more works emerge on luxury destinations corollary with economic expansion and international exchanges, issues related to luxury branding of the destination will become more important. The fashion industry and other consumer businesses in the high brand are always concerned with locating their events and retail outlets where domestic aspiring class is growing as well as the destination has a promise of high tourists traffic. In a matter of time more emerging destinations will actively start to position themselves in the luxury segment.

For researchers who wish to compare and test the resilience or competitiveness of luxury destinations, there are a number of theories and concepts they can operate with: Porter's [12] and Ritchie [13] and Crouch's model of destination competitiveness, and Wiedmann and Hennigs [3] earlier mentioned approaches. The issue remains when assembling available data on high-end businesses or the High Net Worth Individuals' personal travel habits, data at the micro level is still highly inaccessible to aggregate beyond the knowledge available in public domain.

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