

## Travel

# What do millennial travellers really want?

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OCTOBER 20, 2016



Peranakan influences abound in room and hotel decor of Hotel Indigo Katong. — Pic courtesy of Hotel Indigo Katong/TODAY

SINGAPORE, Oct 20 — Do you make travel plans on the fly, like the convenience of private residential rentals, but also don't mind shared facilities?

If these ideas make you shudder, you're officially not a millennial — and probably old(er) as millennials are generally defined as young adults born after early 1980s. They are also a prized demographic for the travel industry.

So prized that some hotel brands are developing properties specifically targeted at them. The latest hotel brand to do so is the Accor group, which launched Jo&Joe three weeks ago targeted at millennial travellers. It is pretty much an all-in-one — “a brand that blends the best of private-rental,

hostel and hotel formats” said Accor, adding that Jo&Joe's properties would have features such as “collaborative kitchen where guests can cook for themselves or each other” as well as shared sleeping arrangements.

In a 2014 report by Forbes magazine, director general of the World Youth Student and Educational (WYSE) Travel Confederation David Chapman, said that by 2020, 320 million international trips are expected to be made by youth travellers each year. Closer to home, Asian millennials are set to spend US\$340 billion (RM1.41 trillion) on international trips by 2020, according to hotel digital marketing agency Brand Karma at the Millennial 20/20 summit, held in Singapore last month.

### The millennial invasion

“Millennials are very much a part of the disrupting mechanism for a lot of businesses. They've managed to alter the landscape of the way things are 'usually done', and thrown in fresh and simplified expectations — these expectations are driving innovation across the travel industry,” observed Ross Veitch, co-founder and chief executive officer of travel search engine Wego, who presented at the Millennials 20/20 summit. “Millennials aren't easily fooled, they see through the hype and appreciate the authenticity of a travel experience, well-designed hotel, or great-value airfare.”

Millennials' needs are multi-faceted, almost contradictory, at times. Veitch highlighted that while millennials may desire comfort and luxury just like their parents, their definition of them are very different.

“Millennials on the most part can afford to travel, and are happy to pay a bit extra for something special such as a helicopter flight over the Grand Canyon, or a beachside villa in Bali,” explained Veitch. “They balance their travel budgets differently from their parents, perhaps taking a low-cost flight but staying in a pool suite for a night or two, before moving to a city property that costs less so they can explore their surroundings and spend their money on local food and shopping.”

Chiming in on this game-changing demographic is Paul Whiteway, commercial director APAC, Skyscanner. “When it comes to millennials, (there is) no one size fits all. A common trait that we've seen is that millennials have or seek a sense of independence and freedom, including in the area of travel. This spans across the traveller journey — from

where they get their initial inspiration, where they get their travel content and information from, when they book, and how they customise their travel itinerary. They want to be in control and technology enables them to do this.”

### Catering to millennials

Naturally, the industry has responded. Whiteway pointed out Skyscanner has made an effort to include millennial-friendly features in its app such as Everywhere, which helps them find the top deals from their chosen departing airport as millennials are more likely to take last-minute trips.

Major hotel brands are also wooing millennials with unique, authentic and local offerings. Take InterContinental Hotels Group’s Hotel Indigo brand. First launched in 2004, Hotel Indigo properties are distinguished by being located in buzzy neighbourhoods and sporting distinctive trendy decor that reflects their surroundings. One of its latest properties, the Hotel Indigo Katong, features heavy Peranakan influences in a nod to the culture of the neighbourhood.

“Millennials are restless and curious — they are looking for something memorable and personal when they travel,” said Bruce Ryde, head of luxury & lifestyle brand marketing for Asia, Middle East and Africa, InterContinental Hotels Group (IHG), adding that the Hotel Indigo brand has evolved as it better understands the needs and demands of millennials. “There are (currently) 62 Hotel Indigos, every one of them in its own unique environment and neighbourhood. Cities are made up of neighbourhoods and we want our guests to have a relationship with what’s local and unique when they travel.”

He cited how Hotel Indigo has even looked into neighbourhood guides and the hotel’s F&B offerings. At Hotel Indigo Katong’s Baba Chews Bar and Eatery, the menu is “respectful of its environment — giving guests the best of local food in a stylish heritage building”. There are locally inspired cocktails and coffee using the beans from homegrown distributor Common Man Coffee Roasters.

For the upcoming Hotel Indigo Seminyak opening early next year, Ryde reveals that it is the brand’s first beach property, but one that duly pays homage to the eclectic Seminyak neighbourhood through modern Balinese design instead of the typical, traditional Balinese influences.

### Making the effort count

While brands may try to earn the trust and loyalty of millennials through such tailored offerings and products, this demographic is notoriously fickle and empowered to make their own decisions. They can see through advertising — traditional and even social media ones. According to a Gallup Mobile Retail Panel Study done on American consumers two years ago, only seven per cent of millennials polled said social media has a great deal of influence over their purchasing decisions. A majority 48 per cent said it has no influence at all.

“Millennials seek and have access to huge amounts of information and they are no longer focusing on a brand name alone,” noted Whiteway. “Instead, they are looking at the overall customer experience.” Veitch said that millennials take their travel cues from everywhere — from family and friends to the social media communities they belong to.

Avid traveller Jasmine Sze, 26, probably speaks for her generation when she proclaims she is inspired by everything and nothing. “I read articles from magazines and newspapers to blogs and Instagram posts. Then I’d chat with my friends about where’s cool to go. I’d research and not blindly trust everything I see,” elaborated Sze on her travel choices. “And I like mixing things up — sometimes I’d stay in a really nice hotel, sometimes Airbnb, sometimes whatever is cheapest. It all depends. The more variety, the better the travel experience, right?”

Right. The travel industry has to reimagine and reinvent to keep up. Not a bad thing at all. — TODAY