

EDUCATION ON ONLY MONEY CAN BUY EXPERIENCES

The Exclusive Travel Group is on a regional mission to educate Middle East travellers on what luxury travel really means when visiting isolated New Zealand

BY DANIEL ANDREWS

New Zealand-based inbound destination-management company The Exclusive Travel Group has firmly established its routes in the region and is looking to further expand its Middle East collaborative network within the coming months.

Recent air links and a growing interest in travel to Australasia has led to the company signing partnerships with UAE-based Utravel and Travel Attaché.

The Exclusive Travel Group aims to channel further business through these agencies and cash in on consumer demands for luxury travel to Australasia.

Founder and managing director Rob Young notes that he aims “to open the eyes of the world to the beauty and sophistication of New Zealand, Australia and the South Pacific. “Australia is already a popular destination for many GCC nationals, with 80,000 visiting the Gold Coast every year. We want to encourage this group, and others from the region, to explore multi-journey vacations,” he added.

MIDDLE EAST STRATEGY

The two partnerships are just the start of the company’s strategy for the region with further plans to link with other Gulf agents.

“We are still to find the right partners, but it is finding the right people. The people who have the right clientele. Clientele who are right for our business,” Young notes.

Over the past few months both Young, and the company’s director of business development Stephen White, have made a number of visits to the UAE and Saudi Arabia.

Young explains that they are planning to build upon the company’s current ties in the region and are keen to look at all opportunities that suits the business model.

“It is finding partners who basically have a portfolio of clients that fit into the luxury travel sector,” he notes.

As well as further partners in the UAE, they have been meeting with a number of companies in Saudi Arabia.

“The first 12 months for us is really about learning about the market and finding out the channels and where the business opportunities lie,” Young adds.

“We have always identified that there is significant business opportunity for New Zealand, Australia and the South Pacific in this region and the more time we spend here, that has been galvanised and there is significant opportunity.”

BREAKING DOWN BRANDED WALLS

Young notes that while they were proving successful with identifying potential partners, one of the challenges he was finding was that residents in the Middle East “tend to stay, or like to stay in hotel brands”.

He adds that for Australia and New Zealand, global hotel brands are limited to the cities and “once outside of the city there is nothing else”.

“The challenge is trying to tell the story and let people know about the lodges because that is what New Zealand and Australia are really known for – boutique, luxury lodges that are amongst the best in the world.”

White adds that it was also a challenge when it came to explaining the cost of staying in some of its properties.

“It is a complete re-education, especially for Europeans. You can stay in Claridges for £400 (\$655.77) and the Savoy for £500 (\$819.71), but you cannot stay in one of these lodges for £500, it is more like £1,200/1,500 (\$1967.31/2459.13) and that is the standard room,” he said.

ABOUT THE EXCLUSIVE TRAVEL GROUP: The Exclusive Travel Group is a specialist, inbound destination-management company designing bespoke and personalised travel experiences to Australasia, New Zealand and Asia Pacific. Headquartered in New Zealand, the company was founded in 2002 and has sales representatives in the GCC, Russia, UK and North America.

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▲ Rob Young and Stephen White have worked together developing The Exclusive Travel Group since 2010.



Rob Young,
managing director
British-born Rob Young established Exclusively New Zealand in 2001 following a move to the country with his family. Ten years later, in 2011, the addition of Exclusively Australia and Exclusively South Pacific led to the creation of The Exclusive Travel Group. Young has since resumed the position of managing director of The Exclusive Travel Group and is responsible for the overall strategic development and management of the luxury company.

“What you are paying for is the solitude, you are paying for privacy, and you are paying for something that only money can buy.” Stephen White.

“You are not paying for living on Bond Street or Claridges, what you are paying for is the solitude, for privacy, and you are paying for something that only money can buy.

“That is why this region is quite exciting because everyone loves the thought of buying something that not everyone else can buy and that is probably our biggest selling point. You are buying the most pristine view in the world, and it is amazing,” White adds.

EXPERIENCES ONLY MONEY CAN BUY

Middle East residents traditionally tend to stay at resorts and remain there for the duration of their trip. However, Young added that

there was a trend emerging towards gaining more from a holiday.

“It is a little bit cliché now, experiential travel, but that really sums it up. Where people are looking to engage a little bit more with the destination. Where they are looking to actually experience what the destination has to offer,” he adds.

He reflects upon a recent travel show he attended in Marrakech, noting: “The trend in luxury travel now is not necessarily just about plonking yourself in a luxury destination; it is about what you do and how you do it.”

An area that was proving successful for The Exclusive Travel Group was the unique appeal and isolation of the properties it represents.

“It is the level of attention to detail in these properties, the decor, the fittings,” Young says.

“You are fully catered, the service is outstanding and you are in some outstanding, incredible locations,” he proudly adds.

One of White’s personal favourites is the Kauri Cliffs, a 6,000 acres lodge situated in the bay of islands on New Zealand’s north island.

“You can have your picnic on a pink beach where the shells have been broken by the waves and the whole beach is pink and you’re the only people there for about five miles,” he notes.

One itinerary White recalls putting together for a family last Christmas included staying in a tented lodge, requiring flying in by helicopter. The children then spent the afternoon in two helicopters to choose the right tree and that was then cut down for them. They then flew over rivers and forests and landed on a rock in the Tasman Sea where one of the owners of the station dived for crayfish for their dinner. They then flew back, landed on a glacier, and got ice for their drinks.

“That is experiential travel in New Zealand,” he adds.

PEACE OF ISOLATION

White adds that: “One of New Zealand’s greatest assets is its solitude.

“You can drive from Christchurch to Queenstown for four hours and not see another car.”

Young agrees adding: “We do not have the big branded hotels but that means we do not have the hundreds and hundreds of rooms. The properties are exclusive



Stephen White,
business development director
White joined The Exclusive Travel Group as a partner in early 2010 and is responsible for the overall strategic business development of the company. His past experience includes a number of senior positions with hotel groups following hotel management training in England and Switzerland. Most recently White served as the director of in-flight services for the private aviation company NetJet, after 14 years with bmi.

and so you are never going to have hundreds of people around you.

“The type of travel we do is never going to be mass-market and again destinations are so private. So if you want to be by yourself and never see another person, you can be.”

ADVICE FOR TRADE

Young recommends that the region’s trade start to react to the steady growth of people looking for experiential travel to destinations such as New Zealand.

“They need to start promoting it because you are either a leader or a follower, and the hope is that they take on board the fact that there is a shift. It is not going to be a complete movement but it is a shift.” **AN**