

Mastering the art of giving people what they want in 2019



By [Teresa Richardson](#)

13 Dec 2018

Personalisation has become a buzzword in the travel industry with the rise of the digital age. As travel businesses, we are increasingly challenged to build a personal connection with the consumer or risk losing them to businesses that do.



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And while that in itself can be a challenge, we should never focus so much on the consumer that we ignore the personal connection we need to build with our employees and with our partners in the travel channel, like travel agents and advisors.

Part of that personal connection is listening to and really hearing what our customers, staff and channel partners are telling us. What do they really want?

Our recent study on 'The Good Life', conducted by global guided holiday experts, Trafalgar, sought to identify what it means to travellers from around the globe and how travel contributes to it.

We identified three things that customers want:

1. Real ease
2. Real connections
3. Real joy

Real ease

Today's South African consumer wants the very best value for money. There's nothing new there. They also want convenience and in the world of travel, that means not being requoted every time the rand exchange rate changes, getting stopped because they don't have the right travel documentation, or being forced to change travel plans because they booked a hotel in the wrong part of town or a connecting flight with too short a connection.

The rollercoaster rand puts a lot of pressure on travel companies and their customers and we've tried to mitigate this by putting a rand guarantee in place so that no matter what the rand does, consumers know their holiday budget isn't going to have to stretch to match it.

You may also be surprised to hear that with the vast amount of information available on the Internet, consumers are returning to travel advisors and experts to book their end-to-end holiday experience so that they don't get caught out and eliminate the stress of planning and booking the right holiday for them.

Real ease comes with knowing you're working with a travel expert who can anticipate your requirements and match these with the best possible holiday for you and your family.

Our role as a supplier of guided holidays is to make it as easy as possible for our customers and travel industry partners to work with us. We've invested in creating travel apps, improved online booking platforms and eliminated printed documents to reduce our impact on the environment.

We also train our travel agent partners continuously through e-learning and familiarisation trips such as our Trafalgar Acclaim trip to Spain, Busabout All Stars incentive and Contiki Rock Around the World. This is to ensure that the travel agents you are relying on to book your holiday have first-hand experience of the destination and the guided holiday.

Real connections

In addition to wanting their holiday to be seamless from beginning to end, customers want to make real connections, whether that means being with people they love or making a real connection with local culture.

Our study on 'The Good Life' revealed that almost half of travellers polled felt guilty when they hadn't seen all the sights. Tick-the-box travel experiences and an overwhelming checklist of 'things to do' stand in the way of travellers enjoying meaningful connections with each other and with the people and places they encounter on their travel.

For good travel to happen, our survey revealed, people need to be childlike again – surprised, learning new things and exploring what's different when they travel.

Recognising this need for connection, Trafalgar has introduced a range of opportunities for travellers to connect with the people and places from their travels - Be My Guest dining experiences see guests break bread with locals in their homes and overnight stays are hosted in accommodations that are more than just a bed for the night; rather an important piece of local heritage.

Making meaningful connections is just as important when it comes to your employees and your industry partners. The happier your staff are, the more productive they are. The more they love what they do, the more your customers benefit.

You've heard Richard Branson's philosophy: "Happy staff equal happy customers."

At TTC, we take this very seriously and are privileged to work in some of the most respected and awarded travel brands globally, building on the legacy of our founding family, the Tollmans.

Being part of a recognised brand will only get you so far with your industry partners. In South Africa, the travel industry is small and has experienced stagnant growth over the past five years.

Our industry partners know that in this tough environment, we are committed to supporting them through knowledge and high-quality service so that they can deliver professional service and behave in a trustworthy and ethical manner, as is the promise made to consumers by the Association of Southern African Travel Agents, of which we are a proud member.

Real joy

If the prospect of switching off and relaxing fills you with real joy, it should. This is one of the criteria mentioned in our study contributing to 'The Good Life'.

Participants in our global survey said they wanted to have the time to remember their own values, personally and philosophically on life. To find real joy, we need to remove ourselves physically and mentally from the stress of our daily routines.

Travel is the one thing they believe gives them the distance they need to reconnect with themselves and discover what's important to them.

Think about the real joy you experience from receiving a material gift – the new iPhone, a pair of Gucci pumps or a mall voucher – vs time spent with friends and family on the Spanish Steps savouring an Italian *gelato*.

I know which one I really want in 2019. Have you asked your customers what they want?

ABOUT TERESA RICHARDSON

Teresa Richardson is the Managing Director of The Travel Corporation (TTC) SA, a Group of Companies which include Trafalgar, Cost Saver, Insight Vacations, Luxury Gold, Contiki, Uniworld Boutique River Cruises, U by Uniworld as well as the brand, Busabout introduced to South Africa by Teresa.

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