

In Thomas We Trust



Thomas Cahalan, left, has visited the world's best hotels.

As a travel writer, Thomas Cahalan exists in rarefied air. The self-made tech entrepreneur has the means to experience the world's most exclusive properties, and as a paying guest, the freedom to write honestly about them.

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Interview **JAMES WANT**

THOMAS CAHALAN'S IMMENSELY entertaining blog *The Good, The Bad and The Luxurious* began as a passion project, but quickly gained traction among the well-heeled due to its unsanitised musings. Last year, the blog transformed into Dorsia Travel to create exceptional holidays for his ultra-high-net-worth readers. Somewhere along the way, unsurprisingly, Thomas became one of the most respected voices in luxury travel. Here he shares his thoughts...

BH: Your articles are as entertaining as they are helpful. Why do you think they've resonated with so many people?
Thomas Cahalan: "Two words: authenticity. I don't even bother checking if I make sense. People appreciate the brutal honesty, as it can be very difficult to find real insight and criticism of something expensive that advertises itself as perfection."

What is wrong with travel journalism as we know it? "It's expensive to go to the top properties, which is unaffordable for even the top magazines. So naturally, there's an inclination not to piss off the people giving away free stays by writing anything negative. On top of this, most travel journalists are freelancers, so they're trying not to piss off their publishers too."

At what point did you realise your commentary could become a business, and was it always your goal?
"It was only once my wife [Lucie] and I got together in 2016 that the idea came. Initially, I was restless on holiday and started to write about the hotels, and before I knew it I was regularly being contacted by people for advice. My wife worked in management at The Connaught, one

of the most luxurious hotels in London, so it seemed a good fit and luckily our customers agreed."

What problem is Dorsia solving for its clients? "Most UHNWI [ultra-high-net-worth individuals] are cash-rich, time-poor; for some, it might be the only time of the year they get to spend with their family. Our job is to ensure it's at the best place for them."

When it comes to travel, what is the ultra-wealthy customer prioritising?
"Exclusive-use properties. They're becoming more and more common and offer the most private, bespoke experiences imaginable."

What's the one question you receive most from clients? "Your service is so incredible – would you like to be added to my estate?" I don't think there is one specific question, as we're dealing with such a variety of enquiries. Probably the weather, though. It's gonna be the weather, even if I'm bringing it up, like I'm genetically predisposed to as a Brit."

How would you define luxury travel right now? "Highly competitive. Great for consumers, as there is more choice than ever."

In your opinion, what's the one thing hotels get wrong? "It's certainly not a problem with all properties, but consistency is the biggest challenge."

How do the top properties set themselves apart? "It's always service – the more personalised the better. A beautiful-looking property will convince you to go there, but the service will keep you coming back time and time again."

Best stay of all time? "I've got to say my wedding, don't I? Unsurprisingly, we got married in a hotel and picked Park Hotel Vitznau in Switzerland."

One country you're excited to return to?
"Rwanda. Gorilla trekking is a once-in-a-lifetime experience that needs to be experienced at least twice."

Most surprising hotel dining experience?
"OI Jogi – an exclusive-use, 11-bedroom house in Kenya. It has some of the most over-the-top dining settings imaginable, including one found behind a hidden door, which leads to an authentic bank vault, then leads into a basement."

Three properties on your hit list?
"White Desert in Antarctica, Singita Milele in Tanzania, and Reid Creek Lodge in Wyoming."

Biggest check-in gripe? "Sending out multiple requests for preferences, then getting things wrong or simply ignoring them. Also asking for your address and all other kinds of information, even though they were in contact previously and could have got all that information with the booking. It's annoying after travelling for hours to arrive and then be form-filling."

Describe travel influencers in three words... "Vacuous, gelatinous bile."

Top tip for travelling as a couple?
"Enjoy it, while you can."

And as a family? "Go somewhere with an amazing kids club. The best are hard to spot – it's rarely about schedules and what they say they're gonna do. It's about how engaging the staff are."

What's your one golden rule when it comes to luxury travel? "High prices do not always equate to a luxury property. Try to speak to people who have previously been there."

If you'd like to read Thomas's honest hotel reviews or employ his services, head to dorsiatravel.com