



VIRTUAL REALITY

Disrupting the Travel and Tourism industry

Table of Contents

1. Intro	3
2. Virtual Reality is a New Dimension in Travel Marketing	3
3. New Virtual Insights Before Booking a Hotel	4
4. Virtual Reality Marketing for Regional Tourism	5
5. Avoiding the Crowds With Virtual Stay at Home Vacations	6
6. Interactive 360° experiences made simple: The VRdirect Platform	8
7. Conclusion	9
8. References	10

1. Intro

Tourism marketing aims to present a traveller with a vision of a destination, hospitality accommodation or event that will raise his intention to travel and hence lead to a booking.

Virtual reality (VR) is a software-created artificial environment presented to the senses in a way that makes the user feel that they are immersed in a real environment; one in which they can navigate, and with which they can interact.

Previously the preserve of early adopters, VR technology availability has now dramatically improved, whilst costs have tumbled to a level that makes VR development a viable economic investment for even small tourism marketing operations.

This whitepaper will derive that the mixture of VR and tourism is an explosive combination that will revolutionise the way that the industry will market its destinations, and could potentially change the very nature of tourism itself. To support this assertion, this white paper will present ideas and real case studies on how different areas of the tourism industry are likely to be regenerated and transfigured by the use of VR technology.

2. Virtual Reality is a New Dimension in Travel Marketing

Inspiration for travel destinations has previously been sought through traditional media such as travel agent brochures, guidebooks, and TV documentaries. Latterly the internet has come to the fore, and the potential traveller now has instant access to any hotel or resort that can publish online photos of the destination, write enticing descriptions, and offer their booking details.

These channels for conjuring up destination ideas are often an enjoyable experience in themselves. However, they are passive experiences that can be picked up and put down, or be a webpage or YouTube video that a fickle mouse-click can move away from to something entirely different.

By contrast VR is an active medium. It is instantly engaging. It keeps the user's interest whilst the marketing message is delivered. Even at it's most basic – for example a webpage-embedded 360° view of a location, with mouse-controlled movement and interaction – VR gives immediate control to the user, enabling them to explore a location for themselves. And with an Oculus Go headset, VR floods the senses with

visual and aural sensation; it is as close as possible to feeling like you are actually in a remote place.

The potential of VR to offer realistic visualizations is recognized by travel industry customers: Back in 2015, VR market intelligence experts Greenlight Insights conducted a consumer survey in the US of what people most want to do with VR. Gaming and then Travel were ranked top by Generation Z and Millennials. Generation X and Baby Boomers placed Travel in top rank. [1]

Using VR, journeys to virtual destinations become part of the traveller's autobiographical associative network: they become embedded as memories of having been there, which stays with them long after the actual experience. When it comes to choosing whether to make a destination a real visit intention, the experiential memory of VR will have a far greater influence than traditional marketing consisting of 2D images and non-interactive videos.

In 2016 German optical systems manufacturers ZEISS researched 'How open are German business decision-makers to the new, virtual realities?' and predicted that in the future 73% of Germans will make purchasing decisions using VR for travel destinations, hotels, and holiday apartments. [2]

The pleasure derived from leafing through copies of Rough Guides will always be there, but in terms of converting Wanderlust into actual travel destination purchase decisions, the immediacy and emotion of VR will take the tourist industry by storm.

3. New Virtual Insights Before Booking a Hotel

Regular media such as 2D photos and videos have been used traditionally to promote hotel accommodation and facilities. VR revolutionises these old marketing materials, by providing immersive 360° views together with user interactivity and control. Potential guests have the freedom of movement to examine a hotel room from any angle, to take in the details of furniture and furnishings, to have an understanding of its spaciousness, to see the view from the window even. Collectively; to get an emotional feel for what it would be like to occupy the room in actual reality.

For selling standard, utilitarian travel accommodation, VR is thus already an exponential hike up over established media. VR's freedom of movement can confirm to the potential guest that they are making a considered evaluation of a place, and give them confidence that they are dealing with a honest vendor with nothing to hide, before arriving at a purchase decision.

For hotels and resorts with a real wow factor, VR comes into its own in conveying the unique selling points of a place, and in boosting the desire of a potential guest to experience the location for real.

One actual case example is **The Flushing Meadows Hotel & Bar** in Munich, Germany. This chic boutique hotel has eleven spectacular rooms inspired and created by selected designers, musicians, and artists. On the hotel's top floor, a terrace bar presents guests with a stunning panoramic view of the cityscape of Munich all the way to the Alps. To convey the ambience of such a place using just words and photos would be a challenge, but by capturing the experience in an immersive virtual interactive tour [3] it allows a potential guest to explore the rooms and visit the bar for themselves, feeling as if they were really there. View The Flushing Meadows Hotel & Bar VR experience here <https://apps.viond.io/player/?cinex-token=flushingmeadows> or by entering the keyword "Flushingmeadows" into the VRdirect App.



View the full experience by entering the keyword "Flushingmeadows" into the VRdirect App.

4. Virtual Reality Marketing for Regional Tourism

Tourists flock in their thousands to the big-hitting destinations, because they feel like they already know the places from countless travelogues and film-sets and want to see those places for themselves. As a consequence, less famous towns and regions miss out, despite having a plenitude of cultural attractions to satisfy the experience-hungry traveller.

The exasperation of tourism marketers is that they would attract larger numbers of visitors if they could only set the potential tourist down in the region and show them first-hand what was on offer. Static photographs can only go so far to convey a visual

sense of a place, and are ill-equipped to impart less tangible feelings like, for example, the novelty of a Bavarian Christmas market spread out along a lake that you can get around by boat. Such was the case with the Christmas Markets held along the shores of Lake Tegernsee during Advent [4].



View the full experience by entering the keyword “Tegernsee” into the VRdirect App.

Their solution was to use VR to create an interactive experience. With this, visitors could get a foretaste of exploring the markets for themselves; virtually mixing with the crowds and for example listening to band music, watching waffles being made, and riding on a ferry across the lake.

This kind of immersive VR experience has exponentially greater impact on increasing visitor intention, and at relatively small cost.

5. Avoiding the Crowds With Virtual Stay at Home Vacations

The question that inevitably arises when considering VR and travel is, “what happens when VR gets so good that people don’t want to leave their homes?” Will people forego the hassle of airport security and waiting areas, snarled up highways, delayed trains, the crush of other tourists, if they can experience being there from their sofa? Will they pay for a virtual staycation?

Generation Z and Millennials, who have grown up with the internet, already spend a large proportion of their time online. According to research by Adobe into the UK’s content consumption habits, millennials spend an average of 8.5 hours a day reading, watching, creating and engaging with content on their devices. Generation Z spend even more time at 10.6 hours engaging with online content every single day. [5]

These are the increasing cohort of consumers of tourism products, and future generations are likely to continue the trend. If they spend so much of their lives online, why not vacation online too?

The objectors to this view argue that no matter how good the VR simulation, nothing beats actually being there for real and taking in the sensations first-hand. If a traveller's personal situation allows for real-life travel, they'll simply be more convinced of their desire to go after taking a virtual reality "test run." VR won't be able to substitute the emotions when we meet people, the odours we smell when strolling along streets, and the taste when we eat food. But it gets very, very close. So close, it'll be just enough for some.

And, there are situations where a VR vacation might be offered as the preferred travel package. As examples, places like Jerusalem and Venice that are literally crumbling under the mass of overflowing visitors they get each year and /or are simply difficult or expensive to reach. Also, for environmentally sensitive destinations like the Galápagos Islands where unique pristine eco-systems are under danger from human intrusion. In cases like these, VR can be sold as a valid and satisfying substitute for the real experience.

In addition, VR can create destinations yet to be built or revive historic places or events that travellers can experience, for example giving potential visitors a preview of a planned resort before construction has begun or letting tourist travel to the ancient rome.



Visit ancient rome by entering the keyword "Colognecathedral" into the VRdirect App.

6. Interactive 360° experiences made simple: The VRdirect Platform

For practitioners in the travel industry, the key question arises, how they can get started using or at least exploring the opportunities of Virtual Reality in their space. The good news is, its way easier to start, than one might think:

The VRdirect platform is an easy-to-use solution that allows anyone to create and publish Virtual Reality projects without any expert skills.

Whether you want to create a VR experience for a hotel tour, or for marketing a tourist region, just follow the following 5 steps to develop and publish your very own Virtual Reality experience:

STEP #1

Use any 360° camera to shoot and film new 360° content or use existing 360° material.



STEP #2

Sign up for free on www.vrdirect.com and download the VRdirect Studio.



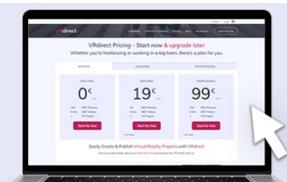
STEP #3

Create and preview the Virtual Reality projects using the VRdirect Studio. Easily add interaction, text, sound, images and videos.



STEP #4

Once the Virtual Reality project is ready, choose a license in the VRdirect User Portal to distribute it to the world.



STEP #5

Publish the Virtual Reality project and share it with all audiences via the VRdirect App and/or directly to any website.



7. Conclusion

Advances in VR have opened up a whole new world of possibilities for the tourism industry to market their destinations in an exciting and engaging way that enthruses potential travellers and informs their accommodation choices and destinations.

From exploring a destination before travelling, to choosing where to stay, the VR experience has a clear advantage over traditional media. The opportunities for the stay-at-home vacationer to have a VR holiday experience are growing too, as VR developers create higher quality interactive content that feels just like being there, obviating the impact of mass tourism on overflowing locations.

A new generation of consumers are growing to maturity for whom digital technology is deeply embedded in the way they interact with the world. They are demanding more from the travel industry than just the traditional marketing channels, and VR is an exciting experiential medium that fits in to their always-online lives.

VR is exploding all over the tourism industry, and as a stakeholder and player you cannot escape its impact. It is time to act! Get started now.

A word from our clients:



„Virtual Reality for Tourism – it is very obvious that the medium offers great possibilities. Buying decisions are often emotional ones and VR again is perfect to support this. At the same time, we always want to offer our clients marketing ideas that are reasonable within a more complex strategy and a step ahead of the competitors. With VRdirect as a proven platform, we can quickly implement our creative ideas in this area and provide our clients with very professional, stable and cost efficient Virtual Reality projects (VR apps and Web Player solutions).”

- Stefan Thomsen, Managing Partner Travel Marketeers

“Virtual Reality / Interactive 360° is a key medium when it comes to tourism and city marketing. Successfully working with hotels, cultural institutions and tourism authorities in Germany and also Spain, edataconsulting is always exploring possibilities in how to add “virtual value” to a campaign. From our experience VR does significantly support the sales process and as an emotional medium can really drive purchase decisions. Our mission is to enable all of our clients to exploit the great potential of Virtual Reality - by offering efficient, scalable and still very stable solutions. As experts in 360° production and marketing we can fully rely on VRdirect here. By using the platform to build and distribute our projects we are saving clients the enormous costs of individual programming.”

- Carlos Ayala Jiménez, Sales Consultant at edataconsulting



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Download the VRdirect App for a selection of already published experiences

Get in touch: contact@vrdirect.com

