

Web sight

In a world increasingly dominated by the internet, it is absolutely essential for resorts to have websites that are attractive, informative and fit for purpose. Are luxury resorts providing high-quality experiences for virtual visitors? Emily Fildes, a Research Consultant at Locum Consulting, reviews the websites of ten leading resorts.

Established resorts

Resorts are scattered across the world but they all share the same marketing and sales domain: cyberspace. How each of them presents themselves to tourists and prospective investors through their website plays an important role in their future success. How do they rate?

Sotogrande, Spain

www.sotogrande.es

The home page has been designed to fit around the Sotogrande brand identity and works well, but the pages that follow do not back up this strong start. Unfortunately only a bare minimum of helpful information is provided, and the only facet of the resort given a thorough description is the 'Health Experience'. Also, the site's only detailed information is published in Spanish, which seems unnecessarily exclusive.

Navigating around the site is not easy, largely because the sub menus are not located consistently on all pages and the volume of images results in a painfully slow page loading time. Anyone wanting detailed information must contact the resort by telephone or e-mail, but the quality of experience in using the site doesn't inspire doing so.

Definitely a missed opportunity.



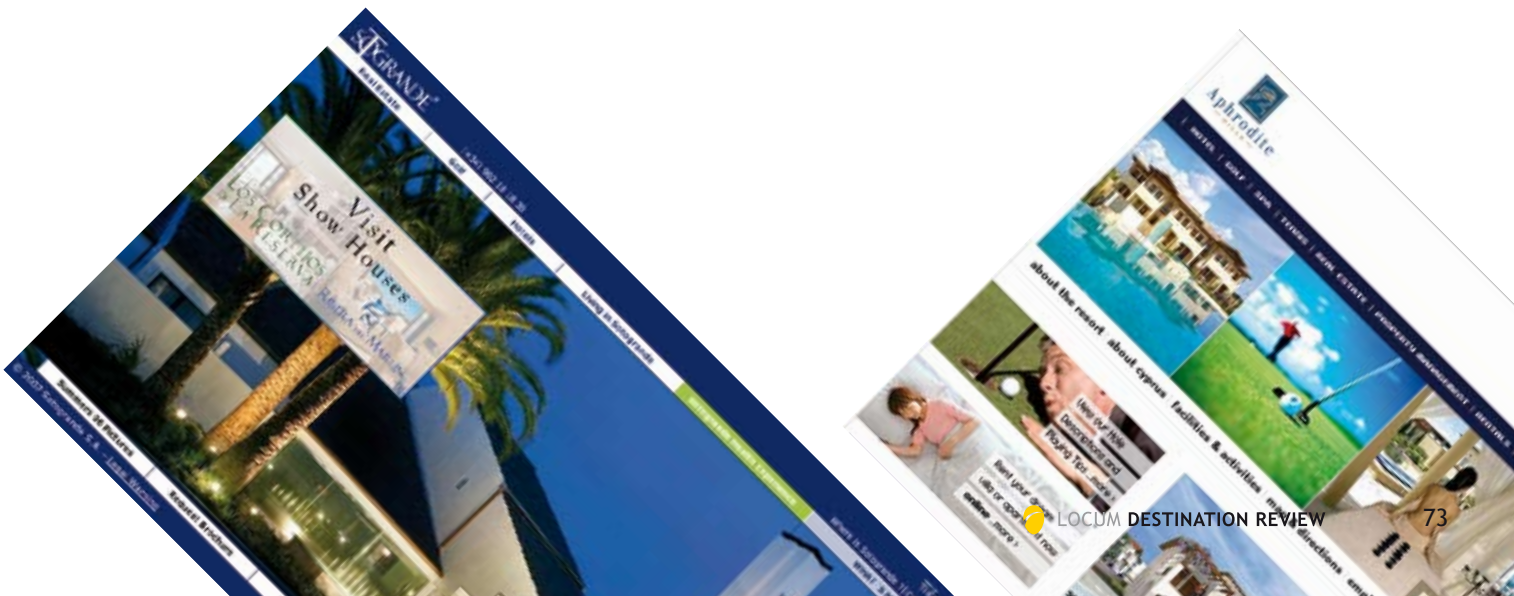
Aphrodite Hills, Cyprus

www.aphroditehills.com

This site focuses more on information than simply cultivating a strong brand image. The home page is far too busy but the site as a whole is largely user-friendly. The menus are simple and the categorisations are focused on the resort's main selling points - property, golf and tennis. Each section has either a fact sheet or an overview page that highlights the most important information. Two of the many useful features are a buyers' guide to tax issues and mortgages and a special download detailing the rules of renting a property.

The site's members' only section allows access to online booking and newsletters. This helps to tailor the information shown on the website, allowing it to inform and whet the appetite yet not overload potential customers. As with Sotogrande, the site does not provide any price information, but at least it provides a range of useful facts and descriptions.

Useful up to a point.



Praia D’el Rey, Portugal

www.praia-del-rey.com

This site has a simple, effective layout, with clear branding and a logical, easy-to-follow colour scheme - general information is blue, the golf pages are dark green and the holiday-related pages are orange. This links pages together neatly without interfering with the presentation of the information. The pitfall of slow page-loading is also avoided.

The information on the site can be wordy at times, but it is generally very helpful. The page about buying in Portugal runs the risk of information overload, but other pages provide good concise information. A comprehensive directory of all property available at the resort, complete with size, price and floor plan information, is also a welcome inclusion.

Overall, the scope and transparency of information gives those browsing the site a greater sense of power through information.

Low on gloss, high on useful information.



Royal Phuket Marina, Thailand

www.royalphuketmarina.com

The first thing you encounter is a glossy animation that says 'Have It. Feel It. Be It. Live It.' What, you may be wondering, is 'It'? Well, it's the Marina, of course, but in an age where style is often the victor over substance, this sort of vacuous opening is the last thing that most punters have the time to indulge. If you can be bothered to wait while this rather meaningless compilation plays out, you're probably in a very small minority. If, like most, you decide to skip straight to the good bits, you'll find a wealth of impressive photographs, illustrating the resort's luxurious and sophisticated surroundings. By and large, the information on the site is detailed and well presented, even though the emotive language and cheesy tag line can be a bit much.

Great visuals but too much hot air.



Gleneagles, Scotland

www.gleneagles.com

This very handsome site is a strong tool to complement the Gleneagles brand. On top of sections for the hotel, the golf courses and the range of other facilities, a section of the site is for Glenmor, the luxury holiday village that has been developed on the grounds of the Gleneagles estate. This has been made to look and feel quite distinct from the parts dedicated to the hotel, yet effectively sets Glenmor as a new member of the Gleneagles family.

The language throughout is unpretentious and straightforward, and the layout is clear, consistent and easy to follow. Gleneagles may be one of The Leading Hotels of the World, but this is mentioned only once or twice - a wise decision, because the quality of the resort is allowed to speak for itself.

Unpretentious yet maintaining an appropriate air of exclusivity.



New resort developments

Websites can be used to promote and sell a resort well before it physically opens for business. Even in the absence of detailed information, a website offers a golden opportunity to develop the resort brand and to create a shop window for the resort. Here, we look at the sites of three new resorts currently in development, to see how well they are achieving these goals.

Serrenia, Egypt

www.serrenia.com

To begin with, you are presented with an animated set of graphics, all resembling some sort of futuristic James Bond-style film set, with music to match, and at this point you don't even know where the development is located. The aim is to grab your attention, and in that respect this site is an undoubted success. As a brand-building exercise, the effort has clearly paid off, not just because of the Flash animations that litter the front end but also because of the site's structure and the language employed to tell the Serrenia story.

This website uses just the right balance of information and graphics and the further you move through the pages, the more informative the site becomes, with property specifications, brochures and masterplans that can be downloaded. Some sections have yet to be properly developed, but there is no denying the overall quality and ambition of the site.

Ambitious and over-the-top, but highly effective.



Zala Springs Resort, Hungary

www.zalasprings.com

You might want to turn the volume on your PC down when you log on to this website as a rather loud orchestral piece of music accompanies the opening animations on the home page. Once the music has faded away though, the site reveals itself to have a standard layout with fairly subtle branding and detailed information. The clarity of language is good: key facts are repeated throughout and information is often presented in bullet lists. There are also downloadable brochures and slide shows, containing all the information that potential purchasers would require concerning property locations, sizes and prices.

Like the Serrenia site, this website is only partially complete but the problem here is specifically to do with missing pages or links that don't work. Despite this, the website is to be applauded for its simple and clear approach.

Does what it says on the tin.



Punta Perla, Dominican Republic

www.puntaperla.com

Characterised by a slightly bizarre clash of design styles, this site starts well but quickly loses its way. The entry page is simple, with a generic, sweeping view of beach and palm trees in the background, but the next pages are too busy and fast moving. Some parts are constantly in motion while others refuse to load up properly. The initial impression of serenity is therefore short-lived. Even the development logo is hidden by the brighter colours and messages on a different layer.

The site is restricted to very general information and does not really enhance the resort's overall image. There is a detailed section on the Dominican Republic but beyond that the site needs lots of work. The existing search facility aimed at potential investors does not feature the option to browse all properties, which is a shame. As far as shop windows go, this one is unlikely to tempt you in.

A good start but too busy and rather disappointing.



Vacation ownership

Websites for vacation ownership have two challenges: not only to explain the nature of vacation ownership but also to entice customers to specific resorts. As such, there is a real danger that these sites overload people with information. Interestingly, both of the websites below choose to reserve detailed information for those who specifically request it, meaning that they are simple and easy to use. Both of these sites also already build on well-known resort brands, meaning that the logo or tag line is enough to associate the product with an established perception of quality and service.

Starwood Vacation Ownership

www.starwoodvacationownership.com

This very impressive site carries luxurious image galore, not just of the resorts available but also of people enjoying lovely surroundings on the beach, on ski slopes and by the pool. It provides a good overview of the ownership process and basic information about the resorts where this is available. The language and categorisation is clear and the information is concise, with detailed information to be found on individual resorts' websites as you'd expect. The site though offers visitors 'A better way to see the world', yet only the US and Caribbean are offered at the moment.

A good example of how to avoid information overload.



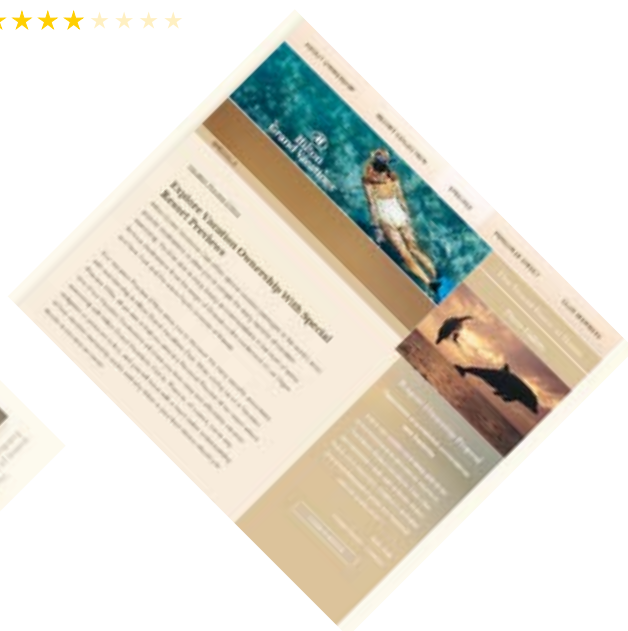
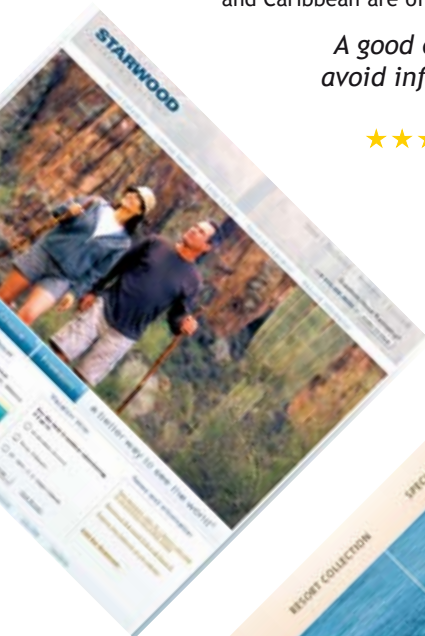
Hilton Grand Vacations

www.hiltongrandvacations.com

As well as carrying lots of standard Hilton branding, this site sees heavy use of the tagline 'This is the life'. There are plenty of generic photographs and the information is carefully divided up and presented in bullet lists.

While the section on 'How Vacation Ownership Works' is useful, not all of the features are a success. The resort 'Quickfinder' appears to be a good idea on the surface but actually turns out to be a fairly cumbersome search tool, hardly ideal for visitors with little time on their hands. Also, similarly to Starwood, the resorts offered are predominantly in the US only.

Pretty but lacking the personal touch.



In conclusion

In the phenomenally competitive world of online tourism marketing, how do you create a website that does justice to the sights, the facilities, the emotions and the brand values of your resort, without overloading your virtual visitors with information or, at the other extreme, leaving them with an overriding impression of emptiness? How do you deliver the right balance of style and functionality? And how do you keep the site fresh enough to keep visitors coming back for more? These remain the key questions that all resorts need to answer, but of the sites that we've reviewed here, the clear winners are Serrenia, Praia D'el Rey, Gleneagles and Starwood.