

TRAVEL AND HOSPITALITY

As Paris reels from terrorism, peaceful nations see increased interest from affluent travelers

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Pine Cliffs Hotel, a Luxury Collection Resort, Algarve, Portugal

By JEN KING

The trendiest travel destinations double as the world's most peaceful nations, which in turn has resulted in surging interest and appeal among affluent travelers, according to a new report from Travel Leaders Group.

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Looking at the top ranked countries in the "2016 Global Peace Index," **Travel Leaders Group** found that Iceland, New Zealand and Portugal rate the highest among international destinations for wealthy American travelers.

Understanding on-trend destinations that appeal to luxury travels can help high-end hospitality brands establish a presence or revamp existing experiences in a given location due to an influx of foreign visitors.

"We found the correlation between the top countries on the Global Peace Index and the level of interest for affluent travelers, identified by our luxury travel agents, to be significant - especially for Iceland, New Zealand and Portugal," said Gail Grimmert, president of **Protravel International** and **Tzell Travel Group**, both of which are part of Travel Leaders Group, America's largest travel agency company.

"Within both Tzell and Protravel International, we see incredible opportunities for affluent travelers wishing to experience destinations such as Iceland, New Zealand, Portugal and others," she said. "This also provides us with a window of opportunity to ensure our travel agents are well-versed in travel to these countries, so that they are providing the utmost expertise, guidance and firsthand knowledge possible."

The Global Peace Index ranks 163 independent states and territories based on their level of peacefulness. The ranking is compiled by the Institute of Economics and Peace, an independent, non-partisan and non-profit think tank.

In times of peace

Traditional luxury destinations, most notably Paris, have seen a steep decline in tourism due to fears of terrorism. Paris' economy has seen a ripple effect from its lower tourist numbers, as many visitors would make high-end purchases in the city's many luxury boutiques.

Understandably, travelers are looking for destinations that have fortunately escaped global terrorism. Keeping safe, but being able to enjoy the culture, scenery and experience of a destination, is common.

Accordingly, nations that have had longstanding times of peace are rated as high interest destinations among affluent travelers.

Speaking with high-end travel agents, Travel Leaders Group found New Zealand to be the "clear leader" in terms of affluent interest with 32.3 percent of respondents showing high enthusiasm for taking a vacation in the country.



The Luxury Collection is one of the only high-end hotel brands to manage a property in Portugal

New Zealand was followed by Iceland and Portugal in terms of highest interest. Almost 28 percent of respondents are intrigued by traveling to Iceland, while 14.1 percent have a high interest in a trip to Portugal. Despite increasing interest among the affluent, the top luxury hospitality brands have yet to enter these markets, or do not offer high-end properties for the wealthy tier.

The remaining seven countries ranked to be most peaceful, and which have high interest from curious affluent travelers, include Austria, Canada, Czech Republic, Denmark, Japan, Slovenia and Switzerland.

These countries in particular have seen a spike in new hotel development.

In Japan, for example, Four Seasons Hotel & Resorts is strengthening its presence in Japan with the announcement of plans for a second property in Tokyo.

The hospitality group has operated a Four Seasons in Tokyo's Marunouchi business district for the past 25 years, and will soon open its second Japanese property in nearby Kyoto this coming fall. Four Seasons' latest venture will be located in the heart of Otemachi, another bustling business district in Tokyo, allowing the hotel group to cater to business professionals ([see story](#)).



Four Seasons also operates a property in Kyoto, Japan

Destinations that have had conflict, diplomatic and otherwise, have also emerged as popular destinations among the elite.

With the U.S. government's travel ban to Cuba lifted, the island nation has quickly climbed into the top 15 of desired destinations among affluent American travelers, according to a separate survey conducted by Travel Leaders Group.

The Caribbean country is a destination unseen by many U.S. travelers due to the past travel restrictions imposed by

the government, but many affluent travelers have Cuba high on their bucket lists now due to the exclusivity ([see story](#)).

"Affluent consumers turn to travel agent advisors for a variety of reasons beyond just price and time-savings," Ms. Grimmert said. "They seek extremely high-quality, personalized travel expertise from professionals they trust to take care of every last detail.

"Because of their financial resources, these well-heeled travelers have an overwhelming array of travel options from which to choose," she said. "These clients place considerable value in having their travel agent expert design the perfect vacation for their needs and tastes. In addition, they readily acknowledge that time is money and they can save both by working with an expert.

"Finally, they know what others are learning to be true: travel agents offer both expertise and a human touch, and they are advocates for their clients providing 'peace of mind' in knowing that an expert is merely an email, text or phone call away to help the client every step of the way."

Moving forward

On Nov. 13, 2015, armed militants attacked Paris, leaving 130 dead and hundreds of other injured. This had a notable impact on Paris' tourism.

A survey by Travel Leaders Group released in the month following the terror attacks found that for the first time since 2011, Paris was not among the top 10 international destinations

Tourism is central to Paris' economy, accounting for 500,000 of its jobs. The city, which has been the top destination globally, makes about 13 percent of its GDP from tourism.

For destinations such as Paris, which has been plagued by a number of terrorist attacks, tourism campaigns can help attract affluent consumers.

Paris is looking to increase its tourism numbers with a promotional film that tours the multifaceted city through the eyes of locals and visitors.

The film will be screened in Galeries Lafayette stores in Paris, Berlin and Beijing, as well as on Air France flights and screens in international cities. Following fatal terror attacks in November, Paris' influx of tourists has dwindled, but the city's government and key business players invested 2 million euro, or about \$2.250 million, into a recovery plan ([see story](#)).

"Perhaps what's important to highlight and understand is that Europe remains the most peaceful region in the world, according to the Global Peace Index," Ms. Grimmert said.

"Additionally, when we asked our luxury travel agent advisors to name the [top three destinations](#) either by country or cruise itinerary that their most discriminating clients are booking or inquiring about over the next year, Italy, European river cruises, Mediterranean cruises and France were all among our top 10," she said.

"Millions of travelers are still seeking to go to Europe. Our job as travel agent advisors is to educate our clients, so they may make informed decisions about their travel plans. For a significant percentage of our affluent travelers, Europe is still very much on their radar as desirable travel destination."