

TRAVEL AND HOSPITALITY

## Vacation destinations on the cusp of change are most desired

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*Image courtesy of JetLux*

By BRIELLE JAEKEL

With consumers becoming more invested in longer vacation stays overseas, Iceland has dramatically increased in interest with not just adventure seekers but with affluent families as well, according to Virtuoso.

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**2017 Virtuoso Luxe Report** showed that Cuba is a highly sought after destination right now, but its culture and landscape might drastically change now that borders have been opened to the United States. Iceland has recently jumped up as a coveted vacation destination and is second for most desired location to Cuba, who took the top slot.

"We have seen Iceland soar in demand, and while it is popular for active and adventure travel, we are also seeing families heading there," said Misty Ewing Belles, managing director of global public relations at **Virtuoso**. "Japan is another less conventional destination we're seeing on the rise for family travel.

"We are also seeing demand for destinations that are in danger of irreversible change," she said. "With the United Nations declaring 2017 the International Year of Sustainable Tourism for Development, we will continue to see greater interest in the endangered destinations that made our list."

Virtuoso inquired with 772 advisors from its travel agency partners in North America, Latin America, Asia-Pacific, the Caribbean, Europe and Africa to discuss the upcoming travel trends in 2017.

### Travel trends

High-end travel is being purchased further ahead of time, which is causing these trips to sell out early compared to past years. Affluent consumers are booking their trips almost one to years in advanced of their vacation, likely avoiding higher fees that come with last minute booking.



*Image courtesy of Virtuoso*

Adventure trips are becoming more popular with many consumers wanting to see some action while away and take on experiences they do not get to see at home. Active adventure trips are second on the top five travel trends for next year, only being beaten out by multigenerational travel.



*Image courtesy of Virtuoso*

While Cuba and Iceland top the emerging destination list, Italy is the most coveted location overall on the global spectrum, with South Africa right behind at second. New York remains the most popular destination in the U.S., and Italy and Mexico are the most popular for families.

#### Added travel insight

Affluent parents are increasingly bringing their children with them as they travel first class and stay at luxury properties, creating a growing need for kid-friendly amenities.

In a survey of individuals with incomes of at least \$100,000 conducted by Top Flight Family, 43 percent of respondents had stayed with their children at a five-star hotel or resort. Whether looking to foster togetherness or looking to give children an educational experience, parents see travel as a valuable opportunity for their kids ([see more](#)).

Travel agents are also coming back in popularity for travel. Instead of eliminating the role of the travel agent, technology has actually increased consumers' desire for a human interaction, according to a marketing strategist from high-end hospitality network Virtuoso.

During the digital revolution about 20 years ago, many cried that the death of the travel agent was looming, as online travel agencies appeared, giving consumers the ability to book trips themselves. In a presentation during Luxury Interactive 2016 on Oct. 18, the speaker explained how contrary to this prediction, most travel agencies are looking to hire as affluent travelers in particular call upon their service ([see more](#)).

Travel agents are known to make the experience a bit more personal, which is what consumers are most looking for while vacationing today.

"The key takeaway is that travelers are seeking out highly personalized experiences, and neither time nor distance is a deterrent," Ms. Belles said. "The fact two-week and longer international trips is the most dominant shows that people are traveling longer distances and for greater lengths of time.

"While multigenerational travel has been a consistent trend identified in this report for more than six years, adventure travel has surpassed river cruising as a favorite amongst upscale travelers," she said.

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