

TRAVEL AND HOSPITALITY

## European cruises, Italy, Cuba remain top luxury vacation destinations for 2017: report

February 1, 2017



*European river cruise, image courtesy of Travel Leaders Group*

By BRIELLE JAEKEL

Luxury travel bookings are seeing a hefty bounce back for 2017, with more than 81 percent of high-end travel agents claiming their bookings for this year were higher or on par with 2016, according to Travel Leaders Group.

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The 2017 Luxury Travel Trends report shows that European river cruises are leading the way in terms of destinations from affluent consumers. Vacations to Italy and Cuba are also increasingly strong, which is mirrored by a common fear of the Trump presidency seeing to the embargo on Cuba being reinstated.

Luxury travel destination

The top destinations outside North America include European river, Mediterranean Sea and Baltic Sea cruises among country destinations such as Italy, Australia and France. Australian and New Zealand cruises are also popular as luxury travel destinations, coming in at number ten.

Top North American vacations include cruises in the Caribbean, travel to Mexico, Dominican Republic, Jamaica and Costa Rica.

As a growing interest in cruises arise, luxury cruise line Cunard encouraged 2017 bookings through a stylish film capturing its "Everything you wanted, nothing you expected" mantra.

Cunard's film of the same name takes viewers through the experiences she may have while onboard its cruise ships. Broken down into three key themes, the film highlights time, space and a life less ordinary to underscore the experience had while cruising with Cunard ([see more](#)).



*Cunard Queen Elizabeth*

Travel agents claimed their most affluent consumers in terms of Italian travel were interested more so in the cities of Italy. For instance, Rome, Florence and Venice take the top spot, with the Amalfi Coast and Vatican City coming in second and third, respectively.

Australia's most-popular vacation destinations from the affluent include Sydney at number one, followed by the Great Barrier Reef, Melbourne, Cairns and Brisbane. Consumers are interested mostly in sightseeing for Australia and then cities/towns, history, beaches and wildlife.

#### Reasons for travel

In general for all destinations, Luxury travel customers are interested in travel related to culture and history, sightseeing, dining, wine and cities and towns, respectively.

Customers visiting New Zealand visit Auckland the most, followed by Queenstown in second, then Milford Sound, South Island, and Rotorua at five. Similar to Australia, most affluent consumers are interested in sightseeing in New Zealand, but the culture and history second instead of the cities and towns.



*Gothic revival mansion in Australia*

Approximately 29 percent of agents claim that cruise suite bookings are up since 2016, and 55.5 percent claim they are the same. Premium air bookings have remained the same for 56.3 percent of agents and increased for 28 percent.

As Cuba is now open to travelers from the United States, affluent consumers are flocking to the destination. But this lifted embargo could be threatened by President Trump's administration and might prompt even more popularity in the travel for now in fear of it closing.

Private aviator Wheels Up is now offering service to and from Havana, Cuba. The island nation has quickly climbed into the top 15 of desired destinations among affluent American travelers, according to a luxury 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 more](#)).

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1.           says:

**May 16, 2017 at 5:17 pm**

A recent study found that younger generations, as well as people born in the Eighties and Nineties, can embrace cruise travel over ever before, rating it as higher than land-based vacations, all-inclusive Hotels, Tours, vacation house rentals or camping.

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