

TRAVEL AND HOSPITALITY

Advisors help travelers wade through options: Travel Leaders Group CEO

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New Zealand is becoming a more popular travel destination. Image credit: Hilton

By SARAH RAMIREZ

NEW YORK Affluents continue to turn to travel advisors to better tailor their experiences as they navigate through a wider range of choices than before.

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At the Travel Industry Outlook on Jan. 23, host and Travel Leaders Group CEO Ninan Chacko explained that today's travelers have more options in terms of destinations and means of transportation. Even millennials are working with travel advisors to help create unique experiences.

"The world has shrunk and so many places are now accessible to travelers while, at the same time, the price of travel continues to be extremely competitive, creating strong value for consumers," Mr. Chacko said.

"Add to that the level of personalization in travel now available which is driving consumers to increasingly seek the expertise of professional travel advisors to ensure their journey is tailored and fulfilling," he said.

Traveler demands

Despite being more comfortable with digital technologies than most of their older counterparts, 51 percent of millennial families use travel advisors. They want experiences that their friends or parents have not had, but also want to be able to share their new adventures on social media.

Consumer demand for travel continues to grow as well. According to Travel Leaders Group's 2018 Q4 Consumer Survey, 91 percent of users expect to travel the same amount or more in 2019 than the previous year.



Hospitality groups are expanding their portfolios. Image credit: Marriott

Hospitality and travel brands are responding in kind.

The hotel industry saw its fifth straight year of record occupancy, and groups continue to invest in new properties, renovations and personalized experiences.

Cruising is also expected to grow by 6 percent. Out of the new vessels hitting the water in 2019, 12 are smaller expedition ships that make new destinations more accessible than larger liners.

A majority of luxury cruise sales, 82 percent, are booked with the help of travel advisors.

With airlines unbundling ticket options and launching new routes, distant destinations are growing in popularity. Travel Leaders Group clients named Australia and New Zealand among their most-desired international locations.



Travelers continue to splurge on culinary experiences. Image credit: Four Seasons

Advisors are also working more closely with destinations and visitor bureaus to better personalize itineraries. For instance, someone who has a strong interest in food and wine would have different priorities than an art aficionado if they both are traveling in Paris.

Seventy percent of travelers are interested in exploring culinary offerings, and 77 percent consider meals as their top splurges. Additionally, 63 percent want to sample local wines, and 44 percent want to try local craft beers.

Advisors' staying power

Travel advisors have shown longevity even as technology continues to disrupt the tourism industry.

Contrary to popular belief, technology has actually increased consumers' desire for a human interaction.

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. The luxury traveler is especially interested in tapping the expertise of a travel advisor ([see story](#)).

Advisors are also an asset when it comes to planning ultra-personalized trips.

While authenticity has been a leading focus for heritage hospitality and travel brands, ultra-personalized experiences are set to overtake it.

For affluent travelers, these personalization requests go beyond upscale accommodations and events and instead include specific meals and personal photographers. Social media continues to play a major role in travel planning,

from inspiring some adventurers and motivating others to seek out under-the-radar experiences ([see story](#)).
"2019 has many opportunities for the travel industry," Travel Leaders Group's Mr. Chacko said.

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