

TRAVEL AND HOSPITALITY

Trust, transparency crucial to today's travelers

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The Caribbean is seeing a resurgence in tourism. Image credit: Knight Frank

By SARAH RAMIREZ

NEW YORK While today's affluent travelers are increasingly drawn to new experiences, customer service and data protection are also growing concerns.

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A strong economy kept people traveling in 2018, and some destinations are poised for a comeback in 2019 after recent difficulties. These changes are also reflected in the growing importance of travel advisors, according to industry experts at a panel hosted by Travel Leaders Group on Jan. 23.

"The consumer is driving the need for confirmation and affirmation," said John Lovell, president of Travel Leaders Network and Leisure Group at [Travel Leaders Group](#).

Trust in travel

The relationship between traveler and advisor is built on trust and transparency, travel experts agreed during a panel moderated by Wendy Gillette of CBS News.

According to Cindy Schlansky, copresident at [Tzell Travel Group](#), advisors are encouraged to keep open lines of communication with their travel clients. Even more experienced agents are embracing social media, mobile applications and text messages to keep in touch with travelers.



Seabourn is now traveling to Cuba. Image courtesy of Seabourn

Not only do advisors offer advice and personalize experiences, but they can also be a resource in times of distress. During a sudden natural disaster, for instance, an advisor can reach out to clients to confirm they are safe and help with changes in travel arrangements.

Following periods of recovery or unrest, destinations including the Caribbean and Egypt are seeing an upswing in interest.

The Caribbean has typically been a go-to destination for luxury travel, yet more than a year after Hurricanes Irma and Maria ravaged many of the islands, the region is still working to win back some of the tourists who have steered clear following the storm's destruction ([see story](#)).

Travelers also share concerns about data safety with their advisors.

With security breaches on the rise, consumers want to work with brands they trust, explained Becky Powell, president at [Protravel International](#).

In November 2018, hospitality group Marriott International revealed it was dealing with a data breach affecting about 383 million guests' information. The majority of the data taken on guests pertained to details such as names, mailing addresses, phone numbers, passport numbers, date of birth and gender ([see story](#)).



Marriott faced scrutiny after a large-scale data breach. Image credit: Marriott International

According to Peter Vlitaz, senior vice president of airline relations at Travel Leaders Group, more airports are also incorporating biometrics to increase safety and security. As governments share biometric information, travel will become more seamless.

"Transparency and choice is critical to the agent and traveler," Mr. Vlitaz said.

Emerging destinations

In addition to destinations that are in recovery, large-scale events are also drawing travelers.

With the Olympics approaching in 2020, Tokyo is preparing for an influx of tourists, and local officials are seeking to showcase the city as a beacon of cosmopolitanism. Japan is looking to more than double tourism to the country by 2030, using the Games as a showroom of sorts for what outsiders can expect ([see story](#)).

France is also expected to see a boost from the FIFA Women's World Cup this summer.

Cuba remains a popular destination as well.

With the United States 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 previous 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 story](#)).

"More experienced travelers want new experiences," said Tzell Travel Group's Ms. Schlansky.

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