

TRAVEL AND HOSPITALITY

## Latin America, Middle East see largest booking increases for holiday season

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*Bookings to Uruguay have grown almost 300 percent. Image credit: Virtuoso*

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By SARAH RAMIREZ

Affluent travelers are planning to stay close to home this upcoming holiday season, with Americans primarily opting to travel domestically in the fall.

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According to a new report from Virtuoso, the United States is the top destination this fall while European countries remain popular after the summer travel season. Warm weather destinations, however, have seen the most significant growth in bookings.

Virtuoso's report is based on U.S. clients' travel plans from September to December 2019. The high-end hospitality network ranked the top 10 destinations as well as the locations with the strongest growth for the end of the year.

### Unexpected holidays

The U.S. topped the Virtuoso Top 10 list for the second straight season. Some of the country's popularity as a travel destination can be attributed to the range of climates, cities and sub-cultures to explore without requiring lengthy travel ([see story](#)).

Italy, the United Kingdom and France follow the U.S. as popular fall and holiday destinations. Germany, which is known for its festive Christmas markets, also made the top 10 list.



*A Christmas market in Munich. Image credit: Virtuoso*

Outside of Europe, popular locales included South Africa, Israel, Australia and Japan. Since South Africa and Australia are in the southern hemisphere, they offer travelers a warm-weather alternative, as does Israel.

Uruguay saw the greatest increase in bookings year-over-year, growing at 286 percent. The South American country is alluring because of its pleasant climate and opportunities for both adventure and relaxation.

Tropical destinations the Maldives and Puerto Rico also saw significant growth in bookings, at 171 and 120 percent, respectively. Puerto Rico's luxury tourism industry has begun to rebound after the U.S. territory was hit by two major hurricanes in 2017 ([see story](#)).



*Puerto Rico has seen bookings more than double. Image credit: The Ritz-Carlton*

Other warm weather countries that have grown in popularity include Egypt, Rwanda and Qatar, which offer travelers opportunities to explore new climates, cultures and cuisines.

European countries outside of the western part of the continent also saw growth, with Malta, Romania and Norway all landing on Virtuoso's Hot 10 list.

#### Expanding footprints

Hospitality brands have been growing their portfolios outside of perennially popular destinations as affluents continue to expand their travel horizons.

Marriott International is planning to grow its luxury presence in the Middle East and Africa by more than 70 percent by the end of 2023.

Through the course of 2019, the company is planning to open seven new luxury hotels in the region. Across the group's portfolio, it is expecting to have almost 270 properties and more than 60,000 rooms in the region by the end of the year.

Among the upcoming openings are The St. Regis Amman in Jordan and The St. Regis Cairo in Egypt ([see story](#)).

St. Regis Hotels & Resorts is also opening its first property in Australia, catering to the market's growing demand for luxury travel. Australia saw 9.1 million international tourists in the year up to June 2018.

Owned by Century Group Aus, The St. Regis Melbourne will be located in a mixed-use residential development Flinders Bank. Slated to open in 2022, the hotel is situated nearby to retail and cultural experiences ([see story](#)).

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