

RESEARCH

## Holiday travel up 6pc year over year: American Express Publishing

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By RACHEL LAMB

Incentive to visit friends and families is the main motivation that boosted holiday travel 6 percent this year, according to findings from a study by American Express Publishing's Travel + Leisure magazine.

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Approximately 50 percent of respondents plan to travel during the holidays, an increase from 44 percent who said they went on vacation last year. Affluent consumers intend to go away for Thanksgiving, Christmas, Hanukkah and New Year's.

“This year, holiday travel will be up 6 percent over 2010 despite the challenging economy – this is great news for the travel industry,” said Jean-Paul Kyrillos, vice president and publisher of Travel + Leisure, New York.

“Higher price-tags are not greatly impacting holiday travel,” he said. “The priority is to connect with family and friends, and travel costs are showing little influence over holiday travel decisions.”

More than 1,200 Travel + Leisure readers responded to an email invitation to complete an online survey for this study.

Santa close

Approximately 27 percent intend to travel for Thanksgiving, 29 percent for Christmas and Hanukkah, and 18 percent for New Year's.

These numbers are up 23 percent, 28 percent and 15 percent respectively from last year.

The main motivator this year is visiting friends and family, with 62 percent of respondents responding with this answer.

The second-greatest motivation was relaxation and rest at 43 percent, and time off of work was the third incentive, with 28 percent.

The most consumers, at 35 percent, are planning to book travel one to two months in advance. Furthermore, 27 percent say that they book three to four months in advance. Finally, 15 percent are last-minute planners with intent to book less than four weeks before the trip.

"One half of holiday travelers will book less than two months in advance, so there is still time to reach this affluent audience," Mr. Kyrillos said.

For consumers who are not traveling during the holidays, 69 percent say that they are too busy to go away, 37 percent feel that there are too many others traveling at the same time and 28 percent say airfare is too expensive.

Wheels up

The findings from the Travel + Leisure study are in line with other reports regarding holiday travel.

For example, a study conducted by American Express Publishing and Harrison Group reported that luxury consumers who represent the top 10 percent of U.S. wage-earning households are forecast to increase their spending on emotional gifts for their families this holiday season ([see story](#)).

Rather than focusing on quantity of gifts, affluent consumers are more likely to spend with their entire family's interests in mind, according to the study.

Therefore, it is plausible to think that families this year especially want to travel and spend time together after a rocky year with the economy and stock markets.

"Creating memorable experiences through travel is especially important right now," Mr. Kyrillos said

"Holiday travel is no longer simply about returning home to visit family and friends," he said. "This time is also being used to take family vacations and explore the world together."

Final Take

*Rachel Lamb, associate reporter on Luxury Daily, New York*

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