

TRAVEL AND HOSPITALITY

Affluent travelers seeking personalization, celebration: Virtuoso

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Popular 2022 destinations include African safaris, Caribbean islands, international cities and ocean cruises. Image credit: Virtuoso

By KATIE TAMOLA

Affluents are actively contemplating what they need from their trips in 2022, with personalization and privacy at the top of the list.

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According to new research from hospitality network Virtuoso, 76 percent of travel advisors have seen an increase in "ultra-luxe travel." The increase is reflective of the pent-up demand for travel, as affluent consumers have been craving exclusivity, unique experiences and trips to celebrate milestones or long-desired excursions.

"The intent to travel is incredibly high and people are looking at spending more by booking bigger, longer, more luxurious types of trips," said Misty Belles, vice president of global public relations for **Virtuoso**, New York.

"When we look at the reasons people want to travel, there can be any number of factors and many times there is crossover in the various categories," she said. "We distinguish them by looking at the key motivators what's driving someone to take this trip."

Virtuoso surveyed more than 20 percent of its community advisors, who qualified through sales of \$1 million over 12 months, for this survey. Virtuoso's invitation-only network consists of more than 1,200 travel agency locations with more than 20,000 travel advisors across 50 countries.

Traveling together

Many luxury travelers are looking for similar accommodations, such as VIP transportation services, one-of-a-kind experiences, exclusive access and world-class service.

Baby Boomers and Gen X were among the generations who are leading the pack in ultraluxe travel. The top three ultra-luxe travel companions were ranked as couples, immediate family members and multigenerational families.



Travelers want to reconnect with their loved ones. Image credit: Marriott International

Most surveyed advisors reported that their clients are spending an average of \$25,000 - \$50,000 per trip, while 26 percent of advisors said their clients are spending more than \$100,000 per trip.

Many affluent travelers are looking to make up for lost time, aiming to reconnect with loved ones or celebrate milestones. Celebrations were ranked as the top reason for travel, with hyper-personalization and Wanderlist Virtuoso's list of desired travel destinations for travelers and once-in-a-lifetime experiences coming in second.

Most travel advisors said that when composing travel itineraries for their clients, privacy and personalization were top priorities.

Advisors are being called to curate highly personalized trips for travelers that reflect their specific interests and needs.



Travelers are ready to splurge on personalized experiences. Image credit: VistaJet

Popular destinations include African safaris, Caribbean islands, international cities and ocean cruises.

Top luxury accommodations sought include suites at hotels and resorts; private homes/villas; suites on cruise ships; private yachts; and private islands.

Making up for lost time

Affluents are traveling for an array of reasons, including the eagerness to make up for the time that has been lost during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Consumers are seeking meaningful trips paired with top-quality service, in an acceleration of the pre-COVID desire for experiential travel. Hospitality brands are responding by emphasizing these values in their marketing campaigns and offerings ([see story](#)).

Keeping this in mind, resorts and hotels can highlight packages and offerings that aim to meet clients' specific needs.

For instance, private aviation firm VistaJet is helping clients create special moments with a new offering, The Surprise Reunion.

VistaJet is collaborating with event planners Sharky & George in providing a series of adventures and surprises for passengers. Participants will receive mysterious packages in advance of their flights, including maps, cryptic messages and clues as to their final destinations where they will spend time with their loved ones ([see story](#)).

Some travelers may not have one specific reason for an excursion, but many affluents are excited for the ability to look forward to returning to the skies, islands and beyond.

"Travel advisors have proven their worth time and again during the pandemic," Ms. Belles said. "In the early days, they helped people navigate border closings, cancellations, postponements and refund policies.

"While their knowledge and access to real-time information through their worldwide connections have always been invaluable, it's the reassurance they provide in navigating challenging situations while balancing their clients' best interests that has led to their increase in demand with travelers."

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