

RESEARCH

86pc of travel agents report rising or consistent bookings: report

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By JOE MCCARTHY

The European River Crossing came in as the hottest 2014 destination travel trend, according to a new survey by the Travel Leaders Group.

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"The 2014 Travel Trends Survey" also found that 94 percent of respondents report that clients' spending will be the same or higher in 2014. Eighty-three percent of respondents also declared that they are optimistic about the upcoming year, versus 2 percent expressing pessimism.

"What luxury marketers can leverage from this information is that authentic and unique travel experiences are appealing to more than just the uber wealthy," said Kathy Gerhardt, manager for public relations at Travel Leaders Group, Plymouth, MN.

"Many Americans want to make certain that their hard-earned vacation time and discretionary income is spent on something truly memorable," she said.

"In addition, there are opportunities to tie-in popular culture with upscale or lux travel experiences. New Zealand's place atop our up-and-coming destination list for the Pacific is well-deserved for its beauty and diverse offerings, but its position is likely enhanced even further by high-profile films like this year's 'The Hobbit: The Desolation of Smaug.'"

Travel Leaders Group's latest survey uses actual booking data and was conducted Nov. 11 - Dec. 14. It includes responses from 1,358 United States-based travel agency owners, managers and frontline travel agents from the flagship Travel Leaders brand, along with those affiliated with Travel Leaders Group's Luxury Travel Network, Nexion, Results! Travel, Travel Leaders Corporate, Tzell Travel Group and **Vacation.com** units.

Open skies

While 48.1 percent of respondents said that their bookings have risen, 37.7 percent said that they have remained the same and 14.4 percent said that bookings have decreased. In 2010, 28.2 percent of respondents said that their bookings had increased from the year-ago period, while 37.8 percent said that bookings had decreased.



Four Seasons Maui

Travel destinations that are gaining popularity include Croatia, New Zealand, Vietnam and Peru.

Hot spots

Las Vegas, Orlando, Maui, an Alaskan cruise and New York came in as the top five U.S. destinations based on actual bookings. A Caribbean cruise, Cancun, a Mediterranean cruise, Rome and the European River Crossing came in as the top five international destinations based on actual bookings.

Although the river crossing did not rank at the top of the international destinations, it has surged in popularity from three years ago when it came in at 21.



Gramercy Park in New York

The favorite U.S. destinations of travel experts interviewed were Maui, New York, Las Vegas, Orlando and cruise in Alaska. The favorite international destinations of travel experts were European River cruise, Mediterranean cruise, Caribbean cruise, London and Rome.

"What we found pleasantly surprising was the up-and-coming destination information," Ms. Gerhardt said.

"Destinations such as Myanmar, the Maldives and Seychelles may not necessarily be the easiest to travel to from the United States, but travelers are finding that these truly exotic locations are worth their investment in travel time, money and ultimately experience," she said. "It's always ultimately about the experience.

"While there are destinations that will perennially be among our top destinations, the up-and-coming lists clearly demonstrate that a growing number of our Travel Leaders Group clients are open to new experiences in great destinations from Croatia to Peru and Iceland to Vietnam."

Final take

Joe McCarthy, editorial assistant on Luxury Daily, New York

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