

LUXURY TRAVEL TRENDS

in a new travel landscape



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Luxury travel—in light of COVID-19, what luxury travelers are looking for when traveling has changed exponentially. Yes, top-notch accommodations, feeling pampered, inspiring locations, unique experiences, exploring hidden gems...those are still all part of a luxury vacation, but today's luxury travelers are also looking for the health and safety protocols that destinations, hotels, cruise lines and other suppliers have put in place, and they are seeking places that allow them to social distance safely.

In a COVID-19 world, luxury travel has been turned on its head—as Aimee Price, deputy director for key & national accounts, **Seabourn**, says, “In the environment we’re living in today, luxury travel is about two primary things: One is the simple ability to travel and create new experiences, in a way that takes health and safety into account of course. The second thing is privacy combined with space. That combination helps instill a sense of confidence that ‘I can control the environment around me more than if I am in a place where there tend to be more people.’”

In this report, we’ll focus on how COVID-19 has changed the luxury travel segment. For this **Luxury Travel Trends in a New Travel Landscape Report**—a complement to the **Luxury Travel Trends 2020 Survey** conducted on recommend.com, as well as the **Get the Know-How on Luxury Travel Webinar**—we reached out to experts—cruise lines, destinations, hotel groups, tour operators and travel advisors—in the luxury travel segment to gain insight into what luxury travelers want and to help you better sell to this market in this new travel landscape.





ASHLEY BATZON/UNSP/ISTOCK

A SHIFT IN THIS NEW LANDSCAPE

"In a world of social distancing," says **Cayman Islands'** Hon. Minister of Tourism and Deputy Premier, Moses Kirkconnell, "we think the luxury consumer is craving seclusion and personalized itineraries now more than ever," with Susan Shultz-Gelino, v.p. of trade relations for **American Cruise Lines**, emphasizing "small and personalized."

Travel advisor Mary Head, of **Magic Memories, LLC**, says right now less is more, noting that, "luxury equals less. I mean this in terms of drop off of fresh linens vs. daily maid service; concierge club amenities that are replenished and abundant vs. individual room service; elegant buffets vs. independent plates being served."

In fact, says John Long, v.p. of sales & business development, USA, **Iberostar Hotels & Resorts**, "The returning luxury customer is more demanding and looking for flexibility, good value and a high level of overall quality, safety, hygiene and service," pointing to such resorts as the **Coral Level at Iberostar Selection Bavaro** in the Dominican Republic as one of ➤



Half of the respondents are optimistic about 2021 bookings, with more than half saying that their luxury clients will be traveling in early 2021



Coral Level at Iberostar Selection Bavaro

the top recommendations for travel advisors' luxury travelers. As one of the first resorts to open in the hotel group's portfolio, it "showcases Iberostar's commitment to providing a safe, healthy, sustainable and innovative luxury vacation experience."

Brad Dean, CEO for **Discover Puerto Rico**, adds that "travelers are willing to spend more money for privacy, health and cleanliness—that's the new luxury."

All of the experts we spoke with for this report and the **October Luxury Issue** pointed to health and safety as the number-one priority right now for

"The returning luxury customer is more demanding and looking for flexibility, good value and a high level of overall quality, safety, hygiene and service."

John Long, Vice President, Sales & Business Development, USA, Iberostar Hotels & Resorts

all travelers. In other words, you can have the most gorgeous, high-end accommodations and offerings, but if the new protocols are not in place, travelers just won't book it.

As Laurie Palumbo, COO for **Island Destinations**, says, luxury

travelers "are seeking ease of traveling and are anticipating the highest levels of safety and measures enforced—all without having the luxury experience and service levels that they have come to expect be compromised."

Most of the respondents' clients booking luxury vacations in early 2021 are Baby Boomers



LUXURY TRAVELERS: 'TRAVEL IS IN THEIR DNA'

"Luxury travelers seem to be more optimistic about future trips, making plans, and holding onto reservations," says Pilar Arizmendi-Stewart, v.p. of sales and marketing for the Americas, **Palladium Hotel Group**. "Having more of a financial buffer allows this travel segment to rebound faster than others."

Seabourn's Price adds that, "Historically speaking, luxury travel has always helped lead broader market recovery when

"I believe luxury travel will be the first segment to recover. We look at the luxury traveler as experienced purchasers of travel as they travel more consistently and see it as a right instead of an option."

Jon Grutzner, President, Luxury Gold

we experienced downturns. The situation with COVID-19 is unprecedented during our lifetimes but we're confident that luxury travelers will be poised to help

energize the industry as it reopens, provided they feel comfortable and safe in the places they stay."

In fact, says Ann Chamberlin, v.p., sales, **Scenic Group USA**, ➤

Beach destinations in Mexico and the Caribbean are currently the most popular types of luxury bookings for our survey respondents





"Luxury travelers see travel as a personal 'right' to see the world and have life-changing experiences. For this reason, luxury travel will continue to be successful."

Travel advisor Head also believes that luxury travelers will be leading the pack, pointing to "the amount of discretionary income

in the Baby Boomer retirement segment that has been allocated in portfolios for travel. They are anxiously awaiting the day they can fulfill those bucket list items while they are in good health."

Jon Grutzner, president of **Luxury Gold**, agrees: "I believe luxury travel will be the first

segment to recover. We look at the luxury traveler as experienced purchasers of travel as they travel more consistently and see it as a right instead of an option. We feel they will be more comfortable getting back to travel instead of a standard traveler. Travel is in their DNA."



More than half of the respondents said that their clients will be traveling in a "bubble" with close friends and family

LUXURY CRUISING MOVING FORWARD



photo credit: Seabourn

Challenges present opportunities—we've heard this phrase time and again when interviewing industry executives during the past few months. At Seabourn, Price notes that "COVID is giving us an opportunity to really shine a light on the advantages of a true ultra-luxury cruise. For example, on a Seabourn ship guests will find inviting accommodations with plenty of space in an all-suite environment. Every room is oceanfront and most

have a private furnished veranda so guests can have space truly all to themselves. Since our ships sail with just 458-600 guests on board, public areas are never overcrowded and there are many corners of the ship that feel like they are your own.

"Those features become advantages for the luxury traveler who wants some added reassurance about the trip they are booking. From a health and safety standpoint, our company has always

50% of survey respondents say that luxury clients will be leading the pack when it comes to travel

The number-one priority for survey respondents' clients is flexibility when it comes to cancellations and rebooking policies





Denali National Park (photo credit: Jocelyn Pride / Travel Alaska)

“We know first-hand that there is quite a bit of pent-up demand that should start showing in the form of bookings over the coming months. We’re already seeing strong interest in 2021 and 2022 across the board, with Europe, the Mediterranean, and Alaska all seeing significant interest next year. Education of both the client and the travel advisor will play a key role in ensuring they feel comfortable to cruise once the restrictions are lifted.”

Aimee Price, Deputy Director, Key & National Accounts, Seabourn

placed a high priority on the health and safety of our guests, crew and the people in the destinations we visit. Going forward, we will do even more to help provide a healthy environment while guests travel with us.”

In fact, says Scenic’s Chamberlin, the “luxury market can often respond more quickly to the needs and wishes of their guests,

due to the smaller size ships, higher crew-to-guest ratio and a culture of individual attention.”

One concern travel advisor Head is hearing from her clients who book luxury cruises is “the management of shore excursions vs. freedom to disembark a ship and independently explore. The excursions offered by tour and cruise companies will need to be highly curated to allow people

space, especially via motorcoach in ports.”

She also says that COVID has “totally flipped our timeline bookings. Where they used to be over a year in advance deposited, they are now six months prior at best. I expect this to improve once travel opens for a month or two and deemed safe again. My clients are still looking for those unique experiences afar.”

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Small ship and river cruising — that’s the most popular mode of cruise booking requests among the survey respondents’ clients, with many saying they’ll cruise within three to six months of restrictions being lifted



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Elevated luxury should be experienced, tasted, and breathed each day. From a personal butler to a pillow menu and even a personalized in-room minibar, guests will have the opportunity to customize their entire stay. And when the resorts are all-inclusive, the experiences are savored even more.

With over 300 safety measures for hygiene and safety throughout all properties, Iberostar has operated with the highest standards, and now in these uncertain times, it is enriching and strengthening procedures and protocols with the advice of a Medical Advisory Board without compromising the ecosystem.

At Iberostar Grand Paraíso, where the turquoise Caribbean waters meet the white sandy beaches of Playa Paraíso, guests will be able to experience culinary endeavors from local gourmet cuisine, an exclusive 18-hole golf course, or a relaxing day in the exclusive Spa Sensations.

Within Bavaro, Dominican Republic guests will be able to discover Iberostar Grand Bavaro right on the beachfront of the Caribbean. Guests will be able to explore gourmet culinary offerings, dance the night away in the authentic replica of a galleon ship, or play golf in the exclusive 8-hole golf course designed by P.B. Dye.

At Iberostar Grand Rose Hall guests are greeted by the refreshing sea breeze and the sights of the incredible Montego Bay beachfront. Guests will be able to taste local as well as international gourmet cuisine, enjoy a facial, massage, and even try out the hydrotherapy circuit within Spa Sensations.

Visit any of these Grand properties to experience the ultimate all-inclusive luxury.

About Iberostar

With 100+ four and five-star hotels in destinations such as Mexico, the Caribbean, and Europe, Iberostar offers an elevated luxury experience, unlike any other all-inclusive getaway. From award-winning beaches to bustling cities, Iberostar aligns itself with sustainable and circular policies, offering the strictest safety and hygiene measures for a once-in-a-lifetime vacation.

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Book through your favorite tour operator, call 888-923-2722 or visit iberostarpro.com. Visit iberostaragents.com for the latest promotions and updates.



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Seabourn pioneered small-ship ultra-luxury cruising with all ocean-front, all-suite ships offering guests a club-like atmosphere enhanced by such innovations as open-seating dining, inclusive cocktails, wines and spirits and a no-tipping policy.

From the beginning, the line recruited and trained its staff to practice an intuitive, highly personalized style of hospitality focused on individual recognition of guests. This approach, which began with quickly addressing guests by name, has evolved into a signature attribute of the brand, and has attracted a loyal audience of frequent repeat guests.

Prestigious partnerships with other luxury brands such as Molton Brown, Michelin-starred chef Thomas Keller, Wellness expert Dr. Andrew Weil, Broadway lyricist Sir Tim Rice and UNESCO World Heritage reinforce its reputation among discerning travelers who recognize and value top quality. A leader in destination innovation,

Seabourn was early to develop itineraries in Vietnam, Cambodia and Myanmar, and has further expanded the range of destinations available to ultra-luxury devotees to include Patagonia, the Amazon, Antarctica, Iceland and Greenland. In 2021, Seabourn will again extend the range of options for luxury-loving travelers by launching Seabourn Venture, the first of two intimate PC6, purpose-built ships designed and equipped specifically for ultra-luxury expedition cruising in the world's most remote and coveted regions.

Staffed with a world-class expedition team of scientists, scholars and wildlife experts, it will also boast unique features such as two six-person submarines capable of carrying guests to depths of nearly 1000 feet. In January of 2022, Seabourn Sojourn will sail a 145-day World Cruise from Los Angeles to Athens, visiting 72 ports in 28 countries. To succeed in luxury travel you must consistently exceed the expectations of your most discerning clientele.

About Seabourn

Seabourn's ultra-luxury resorts at sea represent the most advanced evolution of small-ship cruising with all ocean-front suites and exceptional amenities. The official cruise partner of UNESCO World Heritage, Seabourn offers immersive destination experiences on all seven continents. Prestigious partnerships enhance our award-winning cuisine and world-class spa, and our heartfelt hospitality provides unforgettable Seabourn Moments on every voyage.

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