

This past year turned the world upside down, but now we are somewhat dusting ourselves off and getting ready to enter a phase that many say comes with extreme pent-up demand to travel. Your clients want to get out, they want to explore once again, and in some cases, they want to travel differently. How will travelers travel differently now that the light at the end of the tunnel is almost blinding? How will the pandemic have shaped travel, and for the purpose of this particular trends report, romance travel in particular? What does a return to travel look like?

For this Romance Travel Trends Report—a complement to the Romance Travel Trends Survey conducted on recommend.com, as well as the Expert Chat on Selling Romance, Weddings & Honeymoons Webinar—we reached out to experts in the romance travel segment to gain insight into what romance travel looks like now and into 2022. This report also contains survey data, where, we found out, the Caribbean, all-inclusives and beach getaways are still trending when it comes to romance-laced vacations.















"People are ready to celebrate again," says Erica Doyne, sr. v.p. of marketing & communications for **AMResorts**, "and anxious couples are ready to wed. We are both anticipating and actively seeing a wave of 'revenge travel' as many are beginning to rebook previously canceled trips; in a similar way, couples are beginning to recoup their wedding plans. For those who canceled or postponed traditional weddings due to COVID-19 and moved forward with a small legal ceremony at home, many are still planning to throw a reception or make-up ceremony in the year ahead." Iberostar's director of romance for the Americas. Loreto Lazo, notes that "couples, especially ones that had to put their wedding on hold, are looking forward to restarting their wedding planning with us. As the world gets more access to vaccines, there is an urge for

them to celebrate their wedding or simply have an enjoyable romantic weekend."

Travel advisor Christen Perry, owner of Classic Travel **Connection**, also says that romance travel is once again heating up. "Our destination weddings business has increased significantly. We are also finding that couples who weren't able to travel or honeymoon in 2020 are traveling now. The pent-up demand/revenge travel is a real thing." And when today's couples travel, she says, they are "prepared to splurge a little more on their getaway. They are more inclined to upgrade their seats on the flights, upgrade in room category, private transfers, VIP Fast Track service when available."

Travel advisor Lauren Doyle, president of **The Travel Mechanic**, adds that today's "honeymooners are looking

for an all-inclusive place where everything they need is right there. They don't have to travel to different restaurants and move around much—it is also easy to do it socially distant and safely." She adds that during the pandemic year of 2020, some of her only travelers "were honeymooners who are typically younger in age," and she notes that right now what seems to be

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-- Christen Perry, Owner, Classic Travel Connection

Reservations that used to be from Thursday to Sunday are now from Sunday to Sunday. Since many people (including couples) are working from home, it allows them to extend their stay and enjoy an office with an ocean view or in a romantic destination such as San Miguel de Allende." -- Ambar Molina, Regional Wedding Manager, La Coleccion Resorts

trending, or on the rise, are "couples' getaways sans the kiddos."

Speak to Richard Moss, sr. sales manager for the **Saint** Lucia Tourism Authority, and you can feel how excited he is about upcoming bookings—the pent-up demand, he says, is palpable. "The pent-up demand for romantic getaways is evident in the number of queries we have from agents about packages and offers for couples." He adds that the pandemic has led to hoteliers and suppliers to up the ante. "Romance travel has continued to challenge the offerings of accommodation and experiential providers. As a result, they responded by adding even



more options for couples. More square footage, more outdoor living space, infinity pools, sexy bathrooms and innovative designs and technology typically wow romance travelers—and the hoteliers have come up with packages that showcase these must-see amenities. We see these clients looking at higher categories to maximize their experience and no doubt document their experience on social media for all the world to see that they are finally traveling again."

And, says Ambar Molina, regional wedding manager at **La Coleccion Resorts**, "couples are now asking for activities related to wellness, breathing therapies, meditation and spiritual ceremonies, and contact with nature."

Regarding destination weddings in particular, Molina says that this segment has "definitely grown in popularity as vaccination efforts continue to be successful. For the remainder of 2021, the months of October, November and December have the highest number of weddings to be celebrated." For next year, she says the heavy hitters are February to May, and adds that "couples are not only looking for weekends, but also weekdays."

Lazo savs that Iberostar has "seen more short-term bookings. Before the pandemic, the standard was a year in advance, now we're seeing six months or less," with Lanette Torres, director of sales at **The** Confidante Miami Beach, noting that booking windows have indeed "become smaller." She points out that the hotel has seen a "consistent increase of over 400 percent compared to 2019 with destination weddings month over month this year. Destination weddings are booking into the fall 2021 and into the first quarter 2022."



- Elopements, which are weddings from two to 10 people, and microweddings, which range from 10 to 30 invitees, have increased. As we know, even if couples go for an intimate gathering, they still want the rest of their friends and family to participate of this special moment of their lives."
 - -- Leslie Frausto, President, Puerto Vallarta-Riviera Nayarit Wedding Planners Association

DESTINATION WEDDINGS WITH A TWIST



"Definitely destination weddings became more trendy in the wedding industry because of COVID," says wedding planner Leslie Frausto, president of the Puerto Vallarta-Riviera Nayarit Wedding Planners Association. "The unprecedented situation we are going through this pandemic has made people who would traditionally have wanted to host a mass wedding, ranging from 300 to 1,000 guests, in an

elegant hall or hacienda in large cities, look for alternatives. Due to health concerns, finances or travel issues, the pandemic has led to couples around the globe re-think the way they celebrate in openair locations with more intimate groups and providing more meaningful and fun experiences through the wedding weekend."

Moss concurs, pointing out that "more than simply ensuring satisfaction for the bride, groom and their close family, there is the heightened expectation of numerous mini-events to make up the whole. Traveling for a destination wedding now means a full itinerary of activities. Guests are invited to participate in a full host of group events and so, much more customization and coordination is expected by today's clients."

Right now, intimacy is key, with Molina pointing to elopement weddings, "where each couple sought to have



- The sentiment of the consumer is to 'get their moment' and make the long-awaited romance trip feel absolutely special."
 - -- Richard Moss, Senior Sales Manager, Saint Lucia Tourism Authority
- Though it is a segment that we are actively seeing recovering strongly, it is also important to note that wedding guests may still be wary of travel. Hoteliers can ease this stress by providing details on their hygiene and cleanliness procedures to give guests peace of mind and allow them to just enjoy the couples' big day."
 - -- Erica Doyne, Senior Vice President, Marketing & Communications, AMResorts



unique experiences," as well as microweddings (between 10 to 30 quests) as "it allows couples to celebrate with their immediate family while keeping the ceremony small." She says social distancing has forced hoteliers—and it's a positive response—to think of creative ways to offer outdoor venues, pointing to garden table set-ups that have become very popular, even with the easing of social distancing due to the vaccine rollout. She also points out that the "rehearsal dinner that used to be immediate family members and the wedding party, is now for all guests." Another trend that is here to stay, says Torres, is the "virtual site tours. Not only are they able to see the hotel from wherever they are, but it allows them to meet our team and connect with them first-hand without having to travel here." And, in fact, says

Doyne, "small but spectacular

Booking windows have become smaller and wedding inquiries are trending towards the larger events once again. With restrictions easing and couples feeling more confident of a higher turnout to their weddings, the events are starting to increase in size. In addition to shorter booking windows, customization is key."

-- Lanette Torres, Director of Sales, The Confidante Miami Beach

weddings with a virtual component to share with those who are not ready to travel yet are a trend that we expect to be around for some time."

When it comes to F&B offerings, Lazo says that the pandemic forced hoteliers to pivot, with the hotel group "adapting to new times by reinventing the way to serve a buffet-style reception, with single touch items and having more chefs in the buffet line catering to clients, which makes the service more personal."



SURVEY SAYS...

We wanted to hear from you are the couples you create travel dreams for ready to travel; are destination weddings making a comeback; what destinations are your clients dreaming of; where are they cruising to now that cruise bookings are back? You gave us the 4-1-1 and here's what the survey says:

Even with a halt on travel this past year, over half of the survey respondents say that **travel is coming back and the future looks bright**, with 68 percent noting that their destination wedding/honeymoon/romance clients feel more confident traveling/planning now that the vaccine is being rolled out. And

more than half also said that when they look at their 2022 romance travel bookings, they forecast sales to be similar to pre-COVID numbers.

The most popular bookings right now are **couples**' **getaways**, says the survey, with honeymoons trailing not too far behind. When asked to choose amongst an assortment of vacation styles, from a beach getaway to an exotic locale, 86 percent of survey respondents said that their clients have their eyes set on the beach. And when they head to the **beach**, the most popular accommodation choice is an **all-inclusive stay**. In fact, says travel advisor Perry, "many

of our younger couples are still very drawn to the all-inclusive type resorts, while older couples are more interested in a smaller, quiet boutique experience."

Travel restrictions might be easing, but our survey respondents say that it's still top of mind for their clients—in fact, 76 percent say it's the numberone concern when compared to being exposed to COVID-19 and/or any financial concerns they might have. Flexibility when it comes to cancellations and rebooking policies is also top of mind, according to 75 percent of survey respondents.

As the hotelier and destination executives mentioned. the number of guests attending a destination wedding is decreasing, with 68 percent of respondents noting that this even extends into 2022. And with countries reopening, honeymoon bookings, say 60 percent of survey respondents, are leaning toward international destinations, with Caribbean cruise bookings, for example, being the most popular. And those honeymoons are on average 7-13 nights.



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-- Loreto Lazo, Director of Romance for the Americas, Iberostar

Exclusive LGBT Weddings at La Colección Weddings by Fiesta Americana

[This article has been created in collaboration with Gay Traveler's Guide]

Mexico has an endless variety of settings for a destination wedding, and no other hotel group has captured the essence of Mexico like **La Colección Resorts by Fiesta Americana**.

La Colección offers something for everyone to enjoy in a welcoming atmosphere for LGBTQI+ people: A sensorial experience at Live Aqua properties in Cancun, San Miguel de Allende and Punta Cana; luxurious facilities at Grand Fiesta Americana hotels in Cancun, Puerto Vallarta and Los Cabos; the perfect blend of Mexican hospitality and activities for the whole family in Fiesta Americana hotels in Cancun, Cozumel and Puerto Vallarta; and an adventurer's paradise at The Explorean in Cozumel and Kohunlich.

The beautiful settings that each hotel has created make them ideal for romantic getaways, marriage proposals, honeymoons and fabulous weddings. The venues are stunning and the service top-notch, and La Colección has created La Colección Weddings by Fiesta Americana to make sure that all of your client's needs and desires are completely fulfilled during the planning of their special day.

La Colección offers excellent service, warmth and professionalism, and the staff makes your clients feel at home from the moment of first contact, before your clients have even stepped foot in the hotel. All the services and packages have been carefully selected to cater to all types of events, including Equality Weddings. If your clients are looking for something specific, they can customize a package to cater to the needs of their party.

The team at La Colección maintains and updates the budget, helps with vendor recommendations and pricing, carries out the day of coordination, manages the logistical timeline scheduling, and takes care of decor set up and styling so your clients can feel at ease and enjoy the process. They offer unlimited communication from the get-go, not just during the last few months before the wedding. They're honest and only recommend suppliers that provide the best services for the LGBTQI+ community. The wedding planners at La Colección have been accredited by the Equality Weddings Institute. In the case that your clients prefer to hire outside help, they have partnerships with the best wedding planners in each destination.

It's worth mentioning that they only host one wedding per day so that they can make sure that your client's wedding is their day and only theirs.

For recommendations on what to do in each destination, whether it's tours and activities during the day or events and parties at night, visit gaytravelersguide. com. We'll make sure that your client's experiences in Mexico are as fabulous and unique as they are.

We know that your client's wedding is one of the most important moments in their lives, and for this, La Colección is the top choice.



AMResorts is Contributing/Aligned to Weddings, Honeymoons & Romance

Your success in destination weddings depends on matching the right couple to the right resort and working with experts to create their perfect day. For 20 years, **AMResorts** luxury beachfront locations have been the ideal backdrop for symbolic and legal ceremonies and all types of romantic milestones. With dedicated, onsite wedding coordinators and travel agent resources, we're your trusted partner to grow your destination weddings business. We offer:

- Elevated, all-inclusive luxury to recommend with confidence
- 60+ adult- and family-friendly resorts no matter who's on the guest list
- Customizable wedding packages to incent couples to select you
- Free anniversary nights to nurture repeat clients
- FAM trips to deepen your destination expertise
- Complimentary training for Master Agent distinction
- AMRewards loyalty program to earn rewards beyond the commissions
- AMRAgents resource portal for online access to wedding resources

About AMResorts

AMResorts is a collection of luxury resort destinations, each with its own unique personality. Every one of our resorts features sun-soaked beaches, elegant accommodations, a world-class spa, gourmet dining, unlimited premium drinks, and many other pampering amenities.

amresorts.com



ASTA's Contribution to Romance, Honeymoon & Wedding Travel

The American Society of Travel Advisors (ASTA) contributes to romance, honeymoon and wedding travel through its ASTA membership of travel advisors selling various packages of the sort. ASTA provides dedicated education through its webinars, business resources and offers a lead generating platform, travelsense.org, for potential clients to search honeymoons, romance vacations and destination weddings.

Travelsense.org delivers a consumer-facing opportunity for ASTA members to interact and establish relationships with new and recurring travel clients. ASTA members on this platform are Verified Travel Advisors who have successfully completed the VTA certification program.

With this platform, almost 2,000 travel advisors offer destination wedding travel, and 3,000 advisors sell honeymoon or romance travel packages. ASTA is dedicated to being the number-one advocate for the travel industry and the advisors working hard to provide these types of travel options to their clients. Being a member of ASTA unlocks the benefit for advisors to work closely with suppliers who assist in offering romance, honeymoon and wedding travel, and grants travel advisors firsthand access to new and upcoming ways to increase business sales. Travel advisors and those who are interested in receiving resources for romance, honeymoon and wedding travel can follow ASTA on Facebook @ASTATravelAdvisors or on LinkedIn at linkedin.com/company/american-society-of-travel-advisors. For information on upcoming education opportunities with ASTA, check out asta.org.

About ASTA

Rebranded in 2018 as the American Society of Travel Advisors, ASTA is the leading global advocate for travel advisors, the travel industry, and the traveling public. ASTA facilitates the business of selling travel through effective representation and the enhancement of professionalism.

asta.org



Iberostar Hotels & Resorts

Iberostar Hotels & Resorts offers a variety of wedding packages and a la carte options for a couple's most special day in Mexico, Dominican Republic and Jamaica starting from US\$999.

The traditional Star Packages allow couples to create memories that will last a lifetime, complete with the wedding service, minister, venue, ceremony items, flowers, reception dinner and more. Iberostar also offers a collection of unique wedding packages for each destination.

Couples can also take advantage of the Iberostar Romance Experience with new engagement packages, including proposals in beautiful settings such as the beach, a suite and the spa, among others, starting at \$250, with a la carte options also available.

At Iberostar, wedding specialists take care of every detail, from a private ceremony to a celebration with the entire family. In addition to the special wedding packages, Iberostar offers new active promotions, including:

Wedding Preview Packages: Couples can experience a tease of their celebration at Iberostar, receiving perks, benefits and credits towards their wedding ceremony.

Waves of Love: To help couples create their dream wedding, Iberostar offers this complimentary package.

I Still Do: For a limited time, Iberostar offers more. Through this promotion, clients will receive up to US\$2,000 in bonuses for their special day and can choose one extra perk and one activity for the wedding party. Travel agents will receive 15% commission and a special bonus of complimentary nights based on wedding packages booked.

About Iberostar

With over 100 hotels in major tourist destinations like Spain, the Mediterranean and Caribbean, Iberostar offers its guests wonderful stays on the beach, with golf, spa and wellness. It has positioned itself as an international benchmark in responsible tourism by promoting a more sustainable business model focused on the care for people and the environment, and boosting circularity policies.

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Saint Lucia — One-of-a-Kind Romance

Ideas for planning a romantic vacation to Saint Lucia abound: The island is almost an embarrassment of riches when it comes to awe-inspiring scenery, memory-making experiences, soft adventure activities, and secluded hideouts for private moments together. Whether clients are planning their first couples' trip together, island nuptials complete with bachelor/bachelorette activities, a honeymoon with guaranteed lifetime memories, or celebrating an anniversary, Saint Lucia has options as diverse and unique as the island itself.

The **Saint Lucia Romance Expert Program** puts the spotlight on top romantic resorts, as well as top places around the island for proposing, for destination weddings, for active honeymooners, for bachelor & bachelorette parties, for romance-infused hidden corners, for a candlelit dinner, for spa retreats, for anniversary options and for vow renewals.

Graduate from the Saint Lucia Romance Expert Program and start receiving new sales rewards and special benefits offered exclusively to Saint Lucia Romance Expert graduates!

The Saint Lucia Romance Expert Program will give you the opportunity to sell the most romantic and one-of-a-kind vacations to your clients. Learn and earn today!

Benefits include:

- Participation in the **Saint Lucia Expert (SLEx) Program by the Saint Lucia Tourism Authority** offering complimentary and discounted FAM trips, incentives from participating hotels, including complimentary site inspections
- Credits from The Travel Institute or the Association of Canadian Travel Agencies (ACTA)
- Personalized certificate
- Printable education packet
- Access to SLAM Saint Lucia Agent Month rates (June-November)
- Listing of qualified agents on Saint Lucia Tourism Authority Website **stlucia.org**

edu.recommend.com



Your Retro-Glam Miami Beach Getaway

On iconic Collins Avenue between the hustle of South Beach and the bustle of Miami's hip art districts, **The Confidante Miami Beach** captures the midcentury quality of life in retro-glam style. The oceanfront oasis provides a kaleidoscope of ambiance such as vibrant mid-century modern décor, direct access to famous Miami Beach, a chic backyard pool vibe and cool cocktail scene. Part of The Unbound Collection by Hyatt, guest rooms feature iconic Art Deco architecture and colorful 1950s-inspired design. Wake up to stunning views of the Atlantic Ocean with ocean-view and oceanfront rooms and suites for every preference. A variety of layouts and features include oceanfront patios and extended turf-covered terraces with lounge furniture.

Known for its Art Deco-inspired pastel beach chairs, umbrellas and daybeds, guests can lounge beachside or head to the pools, with both areas offering dedicated food and beverage service like cocktails in fresh coconuts, inventive craft cocktails, salads, sandwiches and more. Opt for breakfast, lunch and dinner at the newly debuted Ambersweet, offering fresh, local ingredients and modern indulgences with an elegant dining room and moonlit outdoor patio. Day and night entertainment includes a rotating local art exhibit with a complimentary weekly art tour for guests, weekly wine tasting, as well as live music several days a week. After lounging on the beach and poolside with locally sourced craft popsicles, borrow a complimentary bicycle to explore nearby South Beach or venture to the artsy Wynwood, the Design District shopping mecca and foodie haven of Little Havana, all within a 15-minute drive.

About The Confidante Miami Beach

On iconic Collins Avenue between the hustle of South Beach and the bustle of Miami's hip art districts, The Confidante Miami Beach captures the mid-century quality of life in retro-glam style. The oceanfront oasis is part of The Unbound Collection by Hyatt and provides a kaleidoscope of ambiance for travelers. You can send guests to **theconfidantehotel.com**

