



LUXURY TRAVEL

Exclusivity, Uniqueness, Disconnecting

For the **Luxury Travel Trends Report**, we reached out to a handful of industry experts to get the pulse on how luxury travel has been redefined due to the pandemic. When we asked the experts to define luxury travel, this is the sprinkling of words we heard: “exclusivity,” “disconnecting,” “customization,” “personalized,” and “authentic experiences.” Defining luxury travel isn’t easy, and it shouldn’t be because every client is different. To be able to offer true luxury you need to understand what a luxury client wants, or, in fact, be two steps ahead of what they think they want. As travel advisor Julie Danziger, founder & managing partner of **EMBARK Beyond**, tells **Recommend**: “Understanding that luxury travel doesn’t mean one specific thing is truly understanding luxury travel.”

For this Luxury Travel Trends Report—a complement to the **Luxury Travel Trends Survey** conducted on recommend.com, as well as the **How to Wow Today’s Savvy Travelers with Luxury Experiences Webinar**—we’re reporting on top trends in the luxury travel segment as well as what the affluent traveler is seeking in 2023. This report also contains survey data, where, we found out, beach getaways, cruises and city escapes are high on the interest bar for luxury travelers.

Most importantly, though, as travel advisor Tiffany Hines, president & CEO, **Global Escapes**, notes, “Luxury travelers are looking for unique, curated experiences,” no matter what destination they plan their getaway to. It’s about “fitting the traveler’s interests and preferences to create a truly meaningful and memorable experience,” explains Gavin Landry, executive v.p., The Americas, **VisitBritain**.



Explora
JOURNEYS



SAINT LUCIA
LET HER INSPIRE YOU

Defining Luxury Travel



Once upon a time—a few generations back—luxury travel was simply about being pampered and top-notch service, but travelers have “grown up” and they know that suite accommodations, butler service, champagne and a bubble bath are only part of what makes a luxury vacation just-perfect.

In fact, says Hines, “The definition of luxury travel has changed exponentially over the past two-four years. No longer is it about a brand name or price point, but luxury is now more closely linked to exclusivity, top-notch quality and service. Luxury travel products share many common features—limited space and opportunity, unique and bespoke design, and very tailored, customized service.” Adds Danziger, “Luxury travel is a mindset, a feeling. For some [it] means disconnecting yet for others it means learning how to connect better. For some it can mean access to the most incredible VIP experience at the hottest show in town, and for others it can mean staying at a lavish hotel and having breakfast in bed. For some, luxury is getting lost in a destination, and for others it’s about introducing

a well-known destination to someone special who may not have experienced it.” Experts agree: Today luxury travel is so very personal.

It’s easy to get lost in a price point and think that’s what deems a vacation a luxury one, but Richard Moss, sr. sales manager at **Saint Lucia Tourism Authority**, is quick to point out that “time is also a luxury in today’s busy world—and on vacation, your [client’s] time becomes even more valuable. We see luxury travel being not only pampering and upscale experiences but treating your [client’s] time as the valuable asset that it is.”



A luxury vacation, adds Pilar Arizmendi-Stewart, v.p. of sales and marketing for the Americas, **Palladium Hotel Group**, “is all about quality, exceptional service, personalization and authentic experiences,” with Ann Chamberlin, v.p. of sales for **Scenic Group USA**,



noting that these days luxury travel is “about the experience. Along with that ‘unlike-any-other’ type experience is the manner in which it is delivered. Regardless of the nature of the experience—whether it is roughing it on a deep safari and sleeping out under the stars or going deep under the Sough Georgia Islands in a submarine or sailing over French vineyards in a hot-air balloon—it has to be delivered on the best platform available. The service must be impeccable with a proactive understanding of the guests’ needs and the ability to satisfy those needs in a seamless manner.” Chris Austin, chief sales officer for **Explora Journeys**, concurs, pointing out that “when travelers know that everything on their journey is taken care of, they can truly take time to rejuvenate and immerse themselves in new destinations, creating unforgettable memories.” He adds, too, that “for many, luxury travel is characterized by curated, personalized experiences that allow travelers to relax and unwind, knowing that everything is taken care of by top-notch hospitality experts. For others it can be defined by transformative elevated moments that allow travelers to connect with what is most important to them and for some it could simply be time to oneself, where they are catered to and allowed to reflect on the world.”

“Part bragging rights and part the need to push the envelope to where others have yet to go, it is the exclusivity that drives the true luxury guest.”
-- Ann Chamberlin,
Vice President of Sales,
Scenic Group USA



What's Buzzing

And as difficult it is to pin down what truly defines luxury travel, since it's truly unique to each client, trends cast a wide net as well. In terms of general trends, Danzinger is seeing clients wanting to re-experience destinations that were on hold for a while, and clients are no longer spending on revenge travel. Additionally, says Danzinger, "one trip is not enough. Neither is two or three." People, she says, "are traveling more often—weekend trips, staycation, long journeys. We are seeing folks traveling more often and working from the road." And when they're traveling, says Hines, they are seeking out villas, private homes and suite-style accommodations within hotels/resorts. Another trend that hasn't gone away, having blown up, like villa stays, during the pandemic, is "private jet charters," says Hines.

Pre-pandemic, we were hearing a lot about multigenerational, wellness and sustainable travel, and it looks like these trends are still on fire, in part as a result of the pandemic. I mean, it seems pretty obvious—families weren't able to see each other for a couple of years, so they are reuniting and celebrating those special moments they might've only been able to celebrate over Zoom. "As families continue to plan reunions and gatherings," says Arizmendi-Stewart, "multigenerational trips are forming with everyone from the grandparents to newborns coming along. This means that travelers are booking properties and experiences that offer something for all ages and every member of the family—from

babysitting to sports to world-class dining—plus expansive space." Yes, says Moss, "people are especially keen on spending time with family, getting together, making up for lost time, living their best lives together. Life has shown us to be so fragile. In terms of the accommodation styles, the luxury client on a multigenerational trip is not just seeking to have connecting rooms with connected doors. They are looking to have independent or private villa spaces."

During the height of the pandemic, staying healthy became top of mind for many, in part to stay clear of COVID, but also because we had more time on our hands to improve ourselves physically and mentally. To continue that regimen, many clients are seeking out wellness vacations, with Landry telling Recommend that "as international travel returns, we are still seeing a desire among travelers to spend time caring for their mental and physical wellbeing."

And as we sought out our optimum selves, we realized, too, that although we love to explore the globe, we don't always leave a clean footprint, and sustainable travel became even more important to travelers.

"International travelers are thinking more about their social and environmental impact as they plan trips," says Landry, "and many businesses in [the] luxury visitor economy are already putting sustainability at the heart of what they do." Adds Austin: "Many luxury travelers are looking for sustainable

travel options, as they hope to not leave a mark on the destination they visit." Tying into sustainability is the mindset of traveling in smaller groups, for example, on small ships and exploring more intimate ports of call. Austin points out that, "luxury travelers are looking for more exclusive experiences, longing for more time and space and going slower and deeper. Smaller ships allow them to engage in more unique and intimate travel experiences, allowing them to visit destinations that cannot be reached by larger ships. This offers the opportunity for unique excursions like gaining exclusive access to the Royal Swedish Opera, because luxury is about access to places, spaces and faces, without the crowds." Chamberlin, too, points to the small ship experience, noting that with small ships travelers can access "small, intimate ports of call, hidden harbors and small island experiences."

Another trend that has come out of the pandemic, says Moss, are "split trips. Sometimes people really want to have a myriad of experiences and feel the need to explore two hotels on one visit in order to fully satisfy their requests, depending on the mission of the particular trip or occasion being celebrated. So, what you find—and this is very popular with the Millennial travelers who are very plugged into social media—is that they want to have two different accommodations."

Options for everything including transportation are what the ultra-luxury clients want. They do not want to be told that it has to be this or that. They would like to have a choice and do it their way, their style."
— Richard Moss, Senior Sales Manager, Saint Lucia Tourism Authority



Luxury Travelers — Enriching Their Lives Through Travel

A seamless vacation. That is what your client wants you to provide to them, whether it's 2019 or 2023. That said, travel became increasingly more difficult due to the pandemic and although restrictions have eased, there are still many obstacles to creating that "authentic" vacation. In fact, authentic is a word we kept hearing from those we interviewed for this piece. An authentic experience, says Moss, is just as important as a "trip that is as

seamless as possible." The luxury traveler, he adds, is also seeking something that is "very experiential." Hines concurs, and notes, too, that luxury travelers, as unique as each traveler is, do tend to share several priorities: "'They want their time to be well-spent, they want accommodations and experiences customized to their preferences, and they want exclusivity and authenticity as part of the equation.'" Danzinger adds, "Overall, the luxury traveler is

looking to enrich their lives through seeing and experiencing the world."

For that enrichment, says Landry, luxury travelers are seeking out "new ways to engage with their destination and the local community.... It's the small things, the personal connection and attention to detail that elevates a guest's stay to a higher level," adding that, "you do not always need a big budget to fit into the luxury category."

/// [Luxury travelers] want to enjoy authentic culinary experiences, embrace time-honored cultural traditions, delve into rich history and wander through the natural beauty of a destination."

— Chris Austin, Chief Sales Officer, Explora Journeys





Survey Says!

We wanted to hear from you—you gave us the 4-1-1 and here's what the Luxury Travel Trends Survey says:

Good News: You and your peers are VERY optimistic about bookings right now, with 70 percent of survey respondents saying that bookings are looking good and are hitting those pre-pandemic numbers. More than half of survey respondents are catering to the **Baby Boomers** (58+ age group) when booking luxury, and most of those clients are, according to the survey, opting to travel with their partner.

So, which type of luxury bookings are you currently working on for travel into 2023? Our survey points to a **beach destination in Mexico or the Caribbean** as the most popular, with a **cruise**—either ocean or river, domestic or international—following close behind (good news for the cruise industry). In fact, one of the survey questions points to a neck-and-neck race among ocean and river when it comes to cruise bookings. The essential must-haves while on a luxury vacation? According to the survey, luxury travelers are still expecting **top-notch customer service, top-tier amenities, superior culinary offerings** and **access to cultural sights**, and the pandemic has propelled them to seek

out places with ample space to roam as well as **villa accommodations**, allowing for customization.

And the luxury clients of the travel advisors surveyed are hungry to get to **Europe**, with more than 50 percent of those surveyed pointing to this region of the world as being the most asked about when it comes to future bookings.

Booking windows, which has been a challenge for many, is starting to trend longer, with those surveyed saying that their clients are understanding that they have to plan early to get their preferred hotel, etc. And it looks like not even

the challenges we all dealt with this past summer—delayed or canceled flights, long lines at airports—as well as higher hotel rates, are stopping people from traveling, with 70 percent of survey respondents saying yes, their clients just want to travel.

“// Today's travelers want to have personalized experiences that cater to their travel styles and needs.”
— *Pilar Arizmendi-Stewart, Vice President of Sales and Marketing for the Americas, Palladium Hotel Group*





The cruise line is “all-inclusive from gratuities, transfers and laundry service to premium wines, liquor and beverages.” And, she says, salt rooms on board the Scenic river ships are complimentary for guest relaxation and rejuvenation. She also reminds advisors that within Scenic Group there are river ships, ultra-luxury yachts *Scenic Eclipse I* and *II*, as well as luxury yachts *Emerald Azzurra* and *Sakara*. The yachts, she says, offer a watersports marina with SeaBobs, stand-up paddleboards, Zodiacs, etc., and the *Eclipses* offer helicopter and submarine exploration.

- Over in **Great Britain**, Landry points to a few hotel recommendations, including **The Beaumont** in London, which debuted its new Le Magritte Bar and revived Art Deco interiors in late 2021, or the newly refurbished **Boys Hall** in Kent, featuring a recently opened restaurant and welcoming hotel guests this December. For wellness-seekers, look, he says, to Edinburgh’s new hotel and members’ club **Gleneagles Townhouse**, which offers guided experiences for holistic wellness including a cryotherapy chamber and infrared sauna, and **Grantley Hall** in Yorkshire, with an overnight *ELITE Retreat* package designed to focus on guests’ health, fitness and wellbeing. Other cool options are an exciting driving experience with Land Rover or a scenic barge cruise through Loch Ness.

The industry experts who weighed in on this trends report also have a few recommendations you’ll want to tell your clients about.

- In **Saint Lucia**, recommend your clients hop on a scenic water taxi to get to their resort. “Instead of taking a drive to the north in a luxury car or taxi,” says Moss, “many more luxury consumers are ramping up their transportation and either taking scenic water taxis or helicopters to their hotel accommodations. With the water taxi, just five minutes away from Hewanorra International Airport, they can enjoy sparkling wine and snacks with the wind in their hair. Guests experience Saint Lucia from the coastline and see the Pitons as they sail to accommodations.”

An on-island specialty are the food tours, with Moss saying that “several hotels grow their own organic ingredients and guests are able to join the chef in a walk to the market as well as to the farm or garden at the hotel and get a really interactive culinary lesson.” And for multi-gen families, he recommends the day-long *Super Adventure Cruise*, which takes visitors to the island’s mud baths and waterfalls and includes a local lunch.

- With **Explora Journeys**, says Austin, “there are so many immersive experiences available for guests to enjoy the authentic culture of a destination. Travelers can explore, for example, the captivating beauty of Iceland and Greenland as they discover

how geothermal energy is used to create innovative cuisine, explore centuries-old folklore and discover the mythical Northern lights. In South America, travelers can delve into tantalizing cuisine focused on regional flavors, explore colossal religious monuments and engage in enchanting wildlife. Each of these experiences takes our guests to the less-explored and off-the-beaten-path destinations that meet the desire for more immersive travel experiences.”

- When it comes to luxury all-inclusive offerings, Arizmendi-Stewart says **Palladium Hotel Group** offers world-class amenities at its properties, including a Rafa Nadal Tennis Center in the Costa Mujeres property, featuring eight clay tennis courts, a soccer field, a paddle tennis court and a museum. There’s also the *Zentropia Palladium Spa & Wellness center* available at each property. It’s the “perfect vacation from vacation,” she says. “Guests will find state-of-the-art spas, offering exclusive services based on ancient techniques combined with the latest technology as well as extensive hydrotherapy circuits and luminous pools that soothe tired muscles.” She also reminds advisors that Palladium offers its adults-only properties, **TRS**, which offer butler service, “taking the all-inclusive experience to the next level,” she comments.

- Clients looking for an all-inclusive experiences on the waters should, says Chamberlin, look to **Scenic**.





Explora

JOURNEYS

How is Explora Journeys contributing to luxury travel?

Luxury travel uplifts us, for it opens us to joy and discovery.

Connecting a new generation of discerning travellers to this transformative feeling—what we call the “Ocean State of Mind”—is at the heart of every Explora Journeys experience. So, through our steadfast guest-centric approach, we are introducing a distinct new choice to luxury travelers, creating not just another traditional option but a category all our own.

Our founders, the Aponte-Vago family, engaged world-renowned architects to build innovative ships that encourage renewal through space, choice, privacy and destinations.

Accommodations—“Homes at Sea”—begin at 377-sq.-ft. *Ocean Terrace* suites—among the industry’s largest, with private terraces that bring guests closer to the ocean.

Guests can do whatever they choose—like savoring sophisticated experiences across 18 distinctive food and beverage venues.

In destinations, we inspire guests to travel further and linger longer.

We are equally focused on travel advisors, with industry-leading policies recognizing that success is a team effort best expressed with respect and joy.

Industry-first programs include *By Appointment* and *By Appointment +*, which eliminate waiting time and welcome the inclusion of clients. Our *Rolling Commission* program provides handsome commissions of payment of deposits and final payments right away.

In travel and in business, luxury is the sense that the world and one’s experience of it, is limitless. Our ocean journeys aim to spark this in our guests, and our travel advisor policies aim to instill a similar sense of opportunity, discovery and elation in our partners.

About Explora Journeys

Explora Journeys, the privately owned luxury lifestyle brand of MSC Group, connects discerning travelers with the sea, themselves and like-minded people, while remarkable itineraries inspire discovery through a blend of renowned destinations with lesser-traveled ports. To learn more, visit explorajourneys.com or follow us on Instagram, Twitter, Facebook and LinkedIn.



explorajourneysofficial



explorajourneys



ExploraJourneys



SAINT LUCIA

LET HER INSPIRE YOU

A key factor fueling the growth of luxury travel is a significant rise in the demand for exclusive and interesting travel experiences. Saint Lucia has these in abundance thanks to our stunning mountainous landscapes and diverse, culturally rich attractions. Alongside our world-class cruise and yachting facilities, the island also boasts five-star hotels, each offering a one-of-a-kind experience.

Tourism on the island is thriving. Behind the encouraging numbers is important legislation in progress which will help to strengthen the resilience and equitability of the sector and will allow for the spread of benefits across the wider sector. This is the Tourism Development Act which is a framework to empower as many sectors and people as possible to benefit from the tourism industry. At the heart of this act is the drive of sustainable tourism.

Sustainability is a vital consideration factor for a post-pandemic luxury traveller and one of our most rewarding developments in this field is Community Tourism. We are developing this based on international tourism trends, which show an increased demand for Saint Lucia's authentic and all-encompassing experiences, events, and activities such as more intimate accommodations, dining options, and compelling events such as Saint Lucia Carnival.

We have recently launched a program to showcase our 400-plus smaller properties for visitors. The *Collection de Pépites* guide features luxury villas and unique high-end properties with 35 rooms or fewer. These offer distinct opportunities for visitors to discover culture, culinary and wellness experiences.

Visit stlucia.org/en_UK/collectiondepepites.

About Saint Lucia

Saint Lucia is known for its natural beauty and diverse attractions, including its Piton Mountains—a UNESCO World Heritage Site—a tropical rainforest and a drive-in volcano. Culturally rich offerings include the bustling marketplace in Castries and quaint fishing villages. Saint Lucia's wide range of accommodations includes world-class five-star resorts, all-inclusive resorts, and intimate inns.

Visit stlucia.org.



TravelSaintLucia



travelsaintlucia