

BARRON'S

Travel Trends for 2022

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Interest in Nordic destinations has surged recently. One of the top attractions is the Northern Lights, seen here over Kirkjufell Mountain in Iceland.

COURTESY OF UNTOLD STORY TRAVEL

Due to the global shutdown and a litany of travel restrictions, tourism crumbled in 2020, which came in as the worst year on record according to the World Tourism Organization. But with myriad international borders opening in 2021 travel is now on a rebound.

Although airline, hotel, and tour bookings have seen an uptick in the past six months or so, trips these days look decidedly different than in 2019. From transportation to accommodations to activities, the travel landscape continues to shift, as the coronavirus mutates—including the fast-spreading Omicron variant—requirements and restrictions evolve, and a new normal takes shape.

According to a trends report compiled by Zicasso, an online luxury-travel referral service headquartered in Mountain View, California, travelers are staying in one location longer, searching for more local experiences, and spending more money on vacations than they did pre-pandemic.

For a glimpse of what to expect this year, we consulted a select group of luxury-tourism experts who provided insight on four travel trends that have been building momentum and are likely to seize the spotlight throughout the year.

Organized Solo Travel

There has been a steady climb in the number of people booking solo trips in the past decade because the perks of traveling alone are numerous. Solo travelers can tailor an itinerary to personal interests, make their own schedule, and switch plans quickly. Plus, taking a trip alone often encourages folks to meet new people and pursue adventures they wouldn't otherwise.

After all the uncertainty over the past two years, more travelers are choosing to book trips for themselves, sometimes jetting off for solitude, but also to forge new connections. Lauren Bates, founder and CEO of Wild Terrains, a Washington, D.C.-based travel company organizing women-only trips geared to solo travelers, says women, in general, are no longer postponing their holidays. Rather than wait for a partner, friend, or family member to embark on that much-needed escape, people are going solo. "If they have a bucket-list trip they want to take, they are booking it now," she says.

But solo travelers are game to meet up with others on organized trips, so they're not by themselves 24/7. For this year, women "are prioritizing travel experiences that will introduce them to other like-minded women," Ms. Bates explains. She believes that women who may have traversed the globe alone before the pandemic are now on the hunt for community travel experiences.

"Travelers tend to be curious, open-minded, adventurous, and optimistic souls, or they would stay home," adds Melissa Biggs Bradley, founder and CEO of Indagare, a members-only, boutique travel-planning company in Manhattan. "They tend to share a lot of values and form deep friendships. Many have found lifelong travel companions because they signed up for a solo trip and now have a community to travel with."

Multigenerational Trips

Whether they're flying off to a far-flung place or venturing on a road trip, generations of families are traveling together. Zicasso reports that bookings for six or more people increased 57% from 2019 to 2022. Sometimes these vacations are celebration trips in honor of an anniversary or milestone birthday. And some are merely an excuse to reunite and make up for lost time.

"Multigenerational family trips are more popular than ever," says Brian Tan, CEO and founder at Zicasso. "Especially with grandparents planning to take grandkids on international trips in 2022." Due to their natural beauty, culinary scenes, and cultural offerings, trending destinations include Italy, Greece, Portugal, and Spain. Beyond Europe, there's tons of interest in Costa Rica, Ecuador, and Egypt, Zicasso reports.

Ms. Bradley agrees. "We are definitely seeing an uptick in family reunions and families wanting to travel together again now that there are fewer travel restrictions," she says. "We recently planned a multigenerational trip to the Galápagos for a family with 22 people of all ages. People are really craving shared experiences and quality time together because of the time spent apart or time isolated in one place."

Another trend Ms. Bates has noticed is intergenerational travel for groups of women, more so than before Covid-19 struck. "We're seeing increased demand from women of different ages wanting to travel together," she says. Because the pandemic prevented families from gathering for so long, more mothers and daughters and friends of various ages are joining Wild Terrains' trips.

Private Travel

The pandemic triggered a surge in private travel, from aircraft to yachts to villas and remote getaways, as folks looked for certainty and more elbow room while fleeing reality.

“With private aviation, there is no risk of an inconvenient last-minute flight cancellation,” says Andy Christie, group private-jets director at U.K.-based Air Charter Service. In the age of changing travel restrictions, private aircraft skip the stress factor, with the ability to change flight times or even switch to a different destination, he explains. Similarly, chartering a yacht provides freedom to move a trip at one’s own pace while reveling in the lap of luxury.

Chris Brunning, co-founder and managing director of London-based Untold Story Travel, a team of travel specialists focusing on private travel and over-the-top journeys, reports a surge in interest in Nordic destinations, particularly for the Northern Lights in Iceland and the Lapland region of Finland, “with at least 25% opting for private charters or private wilderness properties with dedicated chef and staff.” He also confirms that clients making travel plans for summer 2022 are booking their own guides and private villas or suites, including butler service. Meanwhile, Mr. Brunning says private-island takeovers have increased 15%–20% for 2022.

One example is Guana Island, a private resort in the British Virgin Islands. The Caribbean hideaway, which features seven beaches, space for 36 guests with 28 acres allotted per person, and no public facilities, promises a blissful setting and privacy galore. The property has a host of reservations on the books through the spring, says Andrew Marston, Guana Island’s managing director. “Travelers seem to be seeking that sense of comfort that comes with staying on a private island,” he says.

Wellness Tourism

The Global Wellness Institute states that the wellness market will grow 10% per year and reach \$7 trillion by 2025. That’s no surprise, since the importance of well-being has become crystal clear during the pandemic. All that accompanies an active, healthful lifestyle has infiltrated our way of living and has entered the travel space as well.

“Covid has definitely shown us that there has never been a better time to focus on self-care, health, and wellness,” Ms. Bradley says. Her clients are looking to escape to renowned wellness retreats such as Schloss-

Elmau in Germany, Blackberry Mountain in Tennessee, Miraval and Canyon Ranch in the Berkshires of Massachusetts, and Cal-a-Vie in Vista, California. These retreats stand in remote environs, offering idyllic surroundings and a departure from everyday life, while allowing time to concentrate on oneself.

“People are drawn to them because they provide nourishing environments where wellness experts can introduce routines of self-care and the latest learnings around a healthy lifestyle,” Ms. Bradley adds. Travelers are immersing themselves in the great outdoors and relaxing, Zenlike habitats.

Ms. Bradley says that activities in demand range from cooking classes to group hikes and meditation circles.

“I think you’re going to see this idea continue as people look for ways to feel rejuvenated and improve the quality of their lives through travel,” she says.

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