



Travel Daily

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Luxury *on the* move SPECIAL REPORT



LUXURY REIMAGINED: THE TRENDS SHAPING TRAVEL IN 2026
HIGH SEAS GO HIGH END: CRUISING A CLASSY FUTURE
EXPERIENCE GUIDE: IMMERSIVE JOURNEYS TO INSPIRE



A new era of luxury



Transformation, immersion and authenticity set the direction for the next generation of travellers.

BY JO-ANNE HUI-MILLER

From ostentatious hotels, private jets and Michelin-starred restaurants to silent retreats into the wilderness and polar expeditions, the definition of luxury has broadened in recent years, reflecting the shifting desires of travellers around the globe.

“What is luxury to one person isn’t necessarily luxury to the other. It’s how you feel,” explained Anthony Goldman, managing director of Goldman Travel Group.

“From a travel perspective, it’s that feeling of being looked after, being recognised as a valued client or guest of a hotel, and it’s making sure that all those touchpoints and a feeling of specialness are maintained.”

As a luxury travel agent, it means taking the time to understand the motivations behind a client’s trip and ensuring their entire journey is a luxury experience, from the moment contact is first made through to post-trip communications, he added.

“That’s hard, because as a travel advisor, you’re busy and you’re frantic,” Goldman said. “You’re dealing with cancellations and you’re dealing with this and that - and then all of a sudden, the client wants an answer on a beautiful safari, and you’ve got to shift your thinking.”

Here, we take a look at some of the upcoming luxury travel trends shaping the ever-changing industry.

The experience economy

As Goldman pointed out, luxury travel is now often considered to include exclusive experiences and private access, a sentiment reflected in a recent report from Preferred Hotels and Resorts.

“Luxury is less about accumulation - it’s about transformation. Today’s affluent travellers seek rare, authentic experiences that fundamentally shift their worldview and create lasting memories,” it stated.

These modern-day experiences “fuse artistry, intimacy, and legacy, where craftsmanship tells a story designed to outlast the moment”, said ultra luxury expert and founder of the AHA Group Antonia Hock.

For example, at high-end jewellery store Levuma in Antwerp, guests are welcome to sit in the atelier while watching a craftsman set a diamond that will outlive generations.

“It is not jewellery; it is a conversation with time,” explained Hock.

Meanwhile, during a highly exclusive private tasting at Krug’s Clos du Mesnil Chardonnay vineyard in Le Mesnil-sur-Oger, guests can hear the story of the winery, which focuses on just one rare champagne from a single plot harvested in a single year. »

According to Luxury Escapes' Adam Schwab, Sri Lanka is "the most underrated destination in South Asia".



FEATURE

"Luxury is less about accumulation – it's about transformation."



"Standing in that walled parcel as the winemaker spoke of singularity and restraint, I understood what refinement truly means," said Hock of the vineyard tour.

And at Borgo Santo Pietro in Tuscany, guests can experience what Hock described as "agricultural haute couture", where they can harvest lavender that is eventually formulated into their own bottle of bath oil, or used as an ingredient in a dish later served at the on-site restaurant.

Authenticity plays a key role in luxury travel today, too.

"Maybe in the past, luxury travel had a lot to do with status, but now it's more about meaningful and memorable experiences," said Melinda Lampier, portfolio GM at the InterContinental in Coogee, Sydney.

"Whether it's a weekend or a holiday or a business trip, it's really about experiencing authentic local insights and experiences. It's living like a local for a period of time."

At the newly opened beachside hotel, guests are given easy access to local gem Wylie's Baths and offered a beach bag with a towel, water bottle and sunscreen, as well as a list of hidden gem cafes and restaurants to visit along the way.

Meanwhile, Virtuoso's luxury report revealed that several of its top 10 biggest travel trends for 2026 include adventure, cultural immersion, expedition cruising, authenticity and culinary experiences.

Think embarking on an expedition through Morocco's 1,200-kilometre Memory Road, sweeping from the Atlantic Coast to the edge of the Sahara through deserts,

mountains and villages.

Or perhaps taking the time to foster a deep appreciation of local communities, such as spending one-on-one time with an apprentice geisha in Japan or working on a community-driven project in Colombia.

UHNW on the rise

According to the World Ultra Wealth Report, the ultra high net worth (UHNW) population is accelerating around the world and last year, it experienced a 5.4% increase, following a 12% rise in 2024. The growing demographic now holds almost US\$60 trillion in collective wealth.

For UK-based luxury agency Private 360, the demographic is becoming increasingly important for the business.

"I think that in many ways, they drive the expectations of not only what is possible, but what is really achievable," observed founder and CEO James Turner.

"We have to get creative with how to achieve the expectations of those clients, but also surpass them if we can."

The higher your net worth becomes, the smaller the circle of people that you trust, Turner continued, emphasising the importance of an experienced advisor for these guests.

"A lot of these are long-term relationships and many will recommend us to their friends - they know that we'll look after them [and] they're with us for years - it's not transactional," he said.

Forty percent of Virtuoso advisors indicated that they have also noted a rise in "ultra luxe travel", with top experiences including all-inclusive offerings, privacy, celebration travel, specialty or passion-driven travel (such as art, wine and sports), followed by active and adventure trips.

Unlike many other clients, UHNW guests have seen and owned everything and the new measure of value is "emotional yield" - trips that offer fulfilment and connection, Hock said.

For brands appealing to this clientele, the untapped opportunity lies in anticipating what they will crave before they can articulate it.

"When brands master that foresight, they move from delivering experiences to shaping the client's sense of time, relevance, and purpose," said Hock.

As for agents with these clients, it is important to become "interpreters, not intermediaries".

"Your value is not in logistics; it is in discernment. UHNW clients are not asking what is possible; they are asking what is worth it," said Hock.

Successful advisors will go beyond simply building itineraries to understanding their client's motivations "and creating experiences that align with those emotional and cognitive coordinates". »

Go big or go home

While there is still a cohort who yearn for disconnection and quiet luxury, more broadly speaking, the years of '80s maximalism are coming back into fashion, food, interiors, entertainment, consumption, and of course, travel, according to strategist Andrew Cavallaro, director of brand agency Helm.

"Big, bold, and brash is back in favour, especially for big-ticket purchases - buy louder, buy now," he said.

This particular group of guests is adopting a "go big or go home" approach to travel, which was seen in stats from Smartflyer, revealing a 26% year-on-year increase in six-figure bookings, with safari itineraries alone surging by 22%.

Meanwhile, more than 50% of Virtuoso agents in Australia and New Zealand indicated that they expect a slight rise in luxury travel demand this year, while 23% predicted a significant increase - up 12 percentage points that year. Sixty-three percent anticipated a moderate increase in spend and 16 percent predicted a substantial rise.

While global political uncertainty may turn some guests away from travelling, this is a demographic that is actually motivated by a fear of missing out in case things take a turn, driving a prioritisation towards travel spend over other purchases, added Cavallaro.

"Travellers are prioritising transformative experiences now - they aren't waiting for 'someday' to book big-ticket trips," stated the Smartflyer report.

"While spend alone doesn't dictate the level at which a trip will have emotional resonance and, in turn, impact, investment of this calibre does showcase a deeply intentional approach to how our agents and clients are partnering on travel plans."

Emerging destinations

From its breathtaking remote landscapes to its rich biodiversity, Antarctica was listed as the top destination on the rise according to Virtuoso, as well as the most popular cruising itinerary and most popular luxury adventure travel destination. »

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