**Top Luxury Travel Trends for 2016**

Luxury travelers are looking toward Europe in 2016.

As part of its annual Travel Trends Survey, Travel Leaders Group polled 1,316 U.S.-based travel agency owners, managers and front-line agents about the top trends they’re seeing for 2016, including in the growing area of luxury travel. Three European destinations were among the top five luxury vacation spots.

European river cruises are at the very top, at 32.5 percent; followed by Italy, 25.5 percent; and Mediterranean cruises, 19.4 percent. Rounding out the top five are Caribbean cruises, 19.2 percent; and Australia, 11.5 percent.

When it comes to up-and-coming vacation destinations, European river cruises also come out in first place, at 11.2 percent. But after that, there’s quite a bit of variety, indicating that luxury travelers are interested in a range of experiences. Cuba comes in second, at 8.3 percent; followed by an African safari, 4.6 percent; Australia, 3.9 percent; and Costa Rica, 2.9 percent.

Whether you’re talking about sailing along a European river, through the Mediterranean or in the Caribbean, luxury cruises have some things in common. The voyages are generally all-inclusive and the ships tend to be smaller, with more spacious accommodations and a greater level of amenities such as gourmet dining, a high staff-to-passenger ratio and unique shore excursions. For example Crystal Cruises, which will launch the Mozart, an all-suite vessel, on its maiden voyage along the Danube River in July, focuses on longer stays, allowing travelers to immerse themselves in European history and culture.

For land-based destinations, such as Italy, a luxury vacation offers travelers more opportunities to customize their trip. They can select top-of-the-line hotels and resorts, smaller tours and an itinerary that appeals to their interests. For some, that could be a specific region such as sun-drenched Tuscany, the gorgeous Amalfi coast or the grand cities of Venice, Florence and Rome. Others may want to focus on a particular topic, such as wine and food or art and history.

Luxury travelers in search of unique experiences, who yearn for a taste of adventure, may want to try one of the survey’s top up-and-coming destinations.

A trip to Cuba can be priceless for Americans who want to be among the first to visit the island in the wake of normalized relations. People-to-people tours allowed under U.S. law give visitors a level of interaction they wouldn’t get on a typical vacation, with visits to schools, businesses and cultural organizations. An African safari affords an unparalleled chance to see wildlife up close.

Australia offers the opportunity to explore a vast continent, from bustling cities to the Great Barrier Reef to the rugged Outback. For something truly unique, try the Margaret River wine region in Western Australia where you can enjoy some of the best wines that never make it to the U.S. A visit to Costa Rica is a chance to focus on eco-tourism, whether that means exploring the rainforest or a breathtaking view of a volcano, while enjoying one of the Central American country’s many luxury resorts.

For help planning a luxury vacation anywhere in the world, contact your travel agent.