

Vacations of the 1%: Trends from luxury travel agents

Excerpted from an article by Jill Schensul, Special for USA TODAY

The rich really are different from you and me — at least when it comes to travel.

For ordinary travelers, the Presidential Suite might sound like the ultimate luxury. For the traveler with the 25,000-square-foot home or office, though, it's not much of a wow.

"It's going to look like a closet," says travel adviser Bobby Zur, owner of Travel Artistry in Franklin Lakes, N.J. His agency is part of Virtuoso, a worldwide network of luxury travel advisers, whose membership is by invitation only. Zur's clientele includes rock stars, billionaires, CEOs and pro-sports icons.

Luxury travel isn't about the biggest and the most lavish anymore. The rich have been there, bought that. Today, they're spending their money — investing it, actually — in experiences rather than material possessions. "It's really about intangible things," Zur says. "It's about how they're made to feel."

Small is big today in luxury travel: boutique hotels, private airline terminals, special-access tours and those little touches that have always been part of the "VIP treatment."

And more Americans are in that VIP category now than at any point in U.S. history: There were an estimated 10.8 million millionaires by the end of 2016 — up 400,000 from just the year before. The wealthy travel more, and spend more per trip; the luxury market is growing almost a third faster than the overall travel industry.

The established brands in the luxury market — from accommodations like Aman Resorts and Four Seasons to cruise lines like Silversea, Crystal and Uniworld, and tour operators like Butterfield & Robinson, Abercrombie & Kent, Lindblad Expeditions and **Micato Safaris** — are adapting to the new luxury traveler in ways big and small.

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