

ASK THE experts

How likely are millennials to be the first sector to resume travel post-pandemic? **Katie McGonagle** reports



PICTURES: Stephen Parry; Visit Victoria/Robert Blackburn; Oliver McGivern

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INTREPID TRAVEL

The adventure operator runs small-group guided tours worldwide, including a range aimed at under-30s. More than half of its customers in the millennial age bracket (24-39) opt for trips from its Original range, with its budget-friendly Basix tours, 18-29s and active trips also popular.



Zina Bencheikh
managing director EMEA, Intrepid Travel

SHE SAYS

We expect millennials and Gen Z will be among the first sectors raring to travel again, after spending weeks in lockdown, unable to socialise with friends or post pictures of adventures online.

In the short term, we're anticipating increased interest in domestic and regional travel for shorter periods, such as week-long escapes within the UK. Once restrictions lift further, we expect more demand for destinations in and around Europe.

It's possible we'll see new booking trends among millennials. These could include trips booked by singles wanting to meet people after long periods of isolation; trips that offer nature and active pursuits; friends wanting to celebrate missed occasions like birthdays or hen dos; and 'bubble' trips booked in accordance with government travel regulations.

Currently, millennials still want to travel to far-flung destinations, with countries such as Peru, Nepal, India and Jordan coming top for 2021 bookings, and Mexico and Indonesia proving popular too. The average trip duration is 12 days, which is the same as last year.

Travellers will be looking for reassurance from companies post-Covid 19, so we'd encourage agents to focus on telling them about precautions around cleanliness and hygiene when they travel, while reassuring them of a brand's reputation.

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TOURISM AUSTRALIA

A quarter of all UK travellers to Australia last year were under the age of 30, accounting for 175,000 visitor arrivals – including 40,000 people on working holiday visas – and contributing more than £500 million to the country's economy.



Sally Cope
regional general manager for the UK and northern Europe, Tourism Australia

SHE SAYS

The youth travel market has always been really important to Australia, with under-30s making up 25% of arrivals from the UK. We look at them as high-value travellers because they tend to disperse through the country, explore the region and take up a lot of activities on offer.

There's a rising sense of optimism now. Once people can plan and take holidays, we believe the youth market will be one of the early returners. There are two factors to that. There's the desire to get out; I feel there will be some pent-up demand as people will want to spread their wings again, and Australia appeals to that market, with its wide open spaces, wildlife and big road trips.

Secondly, we have seen in previous economic downturns that people tend to look at taking a gap year. It's a great opportunity because the age cap on the working holiday visa is 30, so it's not just something for the traditional gap year. After the bushfires, we saw a lot of interest in voluntourism, which appeals to that millennial market.

Australia has always had quite a long lead time between planning, booking and actually travelling. Our role at the moment is keeping the dream alive – and that goes for agents as well.

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BUSABOUT

Busabout – sister company of guided holiday brands Contiki, Trafalgar and Insight Vacations – operates a flexible hop-on, hop-off coach network and range of winter trips around Europe, as well as tours, sailing, island-hopping and small-group adventures in Europe and Asia.



Duncan Robertson
managing director, Busabout

HE SAYS

The millennial and Gen Z market is certainly keen to get back out there and, reassuringly, the majority of our clients have been happy to defer their travel plans – their epic European adventure will still go ahead when operations resume.

I think a large proportion of younger travellers will have been on furlough over the past few months and, while their income will have been affected, their spending is also likely to have gone down, so many will still have a budget to travel. Agents can tap into this pent-up demand by familiarising themselves with what different operators offer.

I think we'll see a few trends emerging post-Covid 19. Firstly, I think millennials and Gen Zs will increasingly be looking for private accommodation and moving away from a hostel-based room-sharing product. We'd already been pivoting towards this and are partnering with more hotels – people want a sociable holiday, but they want their own space too. I also think sunshine and sailing will prove popular.

Holidays will become more of a cherished commodity and travellers will be less willing to be defined by someone else's itinerary or preferences. This is where our Create Your Own Adventure concept in Europe will come in to its own, with guests choosing where they go and what they do according to their own timetable.