

The Washington Post

BY THE WAY

The top travel destinations for 2023, according to experts

Italy will be hot again next year, along with a re-opened Asia, sunny beaches and the Mountain West



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December 31, 2022 at 8:00 a.m. EST

At the beginning of 2022, the outlook for travel felt uncertain. A new [coronavirus](#) variant had tripped up society again, and it was still a roll of the dice to plan a vacation — let alone take one. But once the omicron wave waned, travel roared back with a vengeance: Testing requirements fell, borders opened and it seemed like every other person you knew went to Europe.

As we head into 2023, all signs show the collective appetite for travel remains huge despite concerns over inflation and recession. Industry experts are forecasting certain 2022 trends will carry over in the new year, such as people taking longer trips, going on more of them and [spending more](#) to take them.

Julia Carter, founder of [Craft Travel](#), says her typical client would usually book one big trip a year. Now, two or even three are the norm, with one person already locked in for four major trips: Morocco, Switzerland, Botswana and a tiger safari in India. For Brittany Campbell, owner of [Bucket List Holidays](#), most clients are booking trips for at least 10 days, and some as long as 32.

A notable change in the new year is a willingness to book long in advance again, even as far out as 2024 for clients of Stephanie Blume at [Personal Escape Travel](#). That may be because more people are interested in taking bucket-list trips, which require more planning. Or it could be because many people couldn't get what they wanted in 2022 thanks to high demand for travel, says Liz Einbinder, spokesperson for the biking and hiking tour company [Backroads](#).

So where are people going in 2023? We asked dozens of travel advisers, tour operators and booking platforms to find out. Some of our findings won't surprise you — "Europe is still very hot," Alisa Cohen, founder of [Luxe Traveler Club](#), says — while other breakout destinations might. Zambia, anyone?

Italy

The absolute, undisputed most popular destination for 2023 is Italy. And if you thought everyone went in 2022, buckle up.

Fulvio De Bonis, president and co-founder of [Imago Artis Travel](#), says they're bracing for "way more" business in the new year.

De Bonis puts Italy travel trends into three categories: people, nature and sports. Travelers want to meet interesting locals such as chefs or fishermen. They want see beautiful places by going foraging in the mountains near Lake Como, for example, or hitting the beach. And they want to [have exciting sports experiences](#), maybe by catching a soccer game or touring a team's training facilities.

Shayna Mizrahi, founder and CEO of [Vive Voyage](#), says her clients are also highly interested in connecting with Italian culture through cooking classes, boat excursions and artisan workshops.

For private tour operator [Access Italy](#), the Amalfi Coast, Lake Como, Tuscany, [Puglia](#) and [Sicily](#) are clients' most requested destinations. These classics are the most popular for Imago Artis as well, but De Bonis notes travelers want off-the-beaten path experiences within these well-known places. They don't just want to go see Tuscany highlights; "there is a world outside of Florence," De Bonis says, and travelers want to explore it.

Other European destinations trailing behind Italy next year (but still in hot pursuit) are Greece, Portugal, and the United Kingdom.

Japan

As the last region in the world to reopen during the pandemic, East Asia is expected to have a banner year for tourism, with Japan poised to be the fan favorite.

While people want to go to the "Golden Triangle" — [Tokyo](#), Kyoto, Osaka — Mike Salvadore, a travel agent with Travel Leaders, recommends adding a stop to see Japan beyond its best-known cities, such as mountainous Sapporo in the north or beachy Okinawa in the south.

If you'd like to go during cherry blossom season, you may be out of luck. Jeffrey M. Krevitt, vice president of marketing for Inside Travel Group, which owns [InsideJapan Tours](#), notes this will be the first spring in four years the country will be open to international travelers, so big crowds can be expected.

For a cheaper alternative with more availability, Rani Cheema, chief executive and travel curator at [Cheema's Travel](#), recommends traveling to South Korea to see the flowering cherry blossoms this spring instead.

Southeast Asia

Behind Japan, Southeast Asia is also high on travelers' wish lists with Thailand, Bali and Vietnam at the top.

The travel subscription service [VIP Traveler](#) has seen a 200 percent increase in interest in Bali, perhaps following the country's [newly launched digital nomad visa](#).

It could also be that Bali appeals to the growing number of travelers interested in trips focused on wellness. Salvatore says most of his clients want to go to Ubud, Bali's lush jungle town in the center of the island. But some have been open to suggestions to try the lesser-visited eastern coast or northwestern Bali, "which is a little bit more secluded but also really beautiful," Salvatore said.

The Caribbean

A perennial sunshine-filled favorite that tends to be easy for Americans to reach, the [Caribbean](#) will remain sought-after in 2023.

"A lot of people will go to the typical places like the Dominican Republic or Jamaica or the Bahamas," Salvatore said, but eastern Caribbean countries are some of his favorites, like Barbados, Saint Lucia, and Anguilla and Antigua, Grenada."

Egypt

Jonathan Alder, owner of the luxury travel company [Jonathan's Travels](#), has booked more Egypt trips for clients in the last two years than he has over the entire decade, and requests are picking up speed in 2023. "We've had one after another after another after another," he said.

Some of the renewed interest may be attributed to the anticipated opening of the Grand Egyptian Museum, says Jasmine Padda, Egypt destination expert for [Kensington Tours](#). She also pointed to the increase in major cruise lines adding sailings in the region.

Carolyn Addison, head of product for the luxury travel company [Black Tomato](#), credits Egypt's trending status to people who want to check classic trips off their bucket list.

"We have lots of people who are like, 'I've always wanted to see the pyramids. I've always wanted to cruise the Nile,'" she said.

The American West

Jen Moyses, VP of product for the travel app [Triplt](#), says that while international travel is having a moment, Americans will continue a return to iconic cities at home that are still rebounding from the pandemic.

Of the top five most-booked domestic destinations on the travel booking platform [Hopper](#), four are out west: Las Vegas, Denver, Los Angeles and Phoenix.

For [SkyScanner](#) bookings, Las Vegas and Los Angeles took the top spots for most booked flights in the new year, with San Francisco, Honolulu and Denver also making the top 10.

The vacation rental platform [Vrbo](#) says demand for homes in western U.S. destinations is on the rise, as customers look for trips in the great outdoors.

Mexico

Mexico has been breaking tourism records throughout the pandemic and will return as a powerhouse destination in 2023. Its most popular and easy-to-get-to beach destinations are major contributors to that success.

“People are welcoming that beach vacation,” Cohen said. “They want to go to Mexico and just relax.”

Cancún, on Mexico’s Caribbean coast, is the most-booked international destination next year for Hopper, [SkyScanner](#) and the airfare search engine [Skiplagged](#). However, demand for cultural capitals will also continue to rise.

[Oaxaca](#) is the second-most popular destination for the travel company Modern Adventure, and [Mexico City](#) ranks high as well.

Costa Rica

Another carry-over from 2022, Costa Rica is attracting travelers — from families to honeymooners to retirees — with its abundance of affordable flights, outdoor adventures, wildlife and coastline.

For Zicasso customers, the most sought-after places to visit are Arenal, Manuel Antonio, Monteverde, Tortuguero and the Osa Peninsula — [which line up with our expert recommendations](#) as well.

The [most-booked 2023 itinerary](#) for Road Scholar, a group tour company for senior travelers, is a Costa Rica vacation that hits many of those places, too, as well as Punta Leona on the central Pacific coast and Sarapiquí, a renowned birdwatching region in Costa Rica’s Caribbean lowlands.

The Galápagos Islands

Another dream trip becoming reality for travelers in 2023 is the Galápagos Islands. The biggest seller for [Astonishing Travel](#) owner Heidi Bocianowski, the Pacific Ocean archipelago appeals to people who want to see something new every day, from black lava rock and red sand to rare wildlife.

Brian Tan of the travel planning company [Zicasso](#) says customers are keen on combining a trip to the Galápagos with other South American highlights.

That may be Patagonia, which has been “by far one of the most popular destinations” for Craft Travel owner Carter. It helps that travelers [can once again cross](#) between Chile and Argentina by road; borders were closed during the pandemic. Carter has been planning combination trips for clients to Torres del Paine National Park on the Chilean side with the charming villages of El Calafate and El Chalten on the Argentinean side.

African safaris



*Many luxury travelers are going on safaris in multigenerational groups as graduation presents or family reunions.
(Ana Gram/Shutterstock)*

Keeping with the once-in-a-lifetime theme, Brian Pentek, owner of [Luxe Life Travel](#), says “Africa is huge,” for his clients.

Most are going in multigenerational groups who use the trip as graduation presents or family reunions. They may be going to Cape Town, South Africa, as well as Botswana (for game reserves) or Rwanda for gorilla trekking.

In addition to safaris, Salvadore incorporates ways to experience local culture, or check out the food and drink scenes, for his clients in Africa, or bush camping instead of staying in luxury lodges. In 2023, he’s sending travelers to Zimbabwe, Kenya, Tanzania and Zambia — a country listed as one of the top up-and-coming travel spots in a summary compiled by [Scott Dunn](#) luxury travel planners.

The most-booked destinations for [Niarra Travel](#) also include South Africa, Victoria Falls (which sits on the border between Zambia and Zimbabwe) and Kenya, while trips to the Serengeti in Tanzania dominate reservations for [Deeper Africa](#). The company’s owner, Karen Zulauf, said she has noticed upcoming

travelers are more interested in adding active excursions like “walking safaris, mountain biking, horseback riding, you name it.”

For those who have already done a traditional safari vacation, Carter recommends Namibia, a country seeing a resurgence in interest, where travelers can go on self-driving road trips (versus ones with a guide) between eco-lodges or take small planes to some of the world’s most remote places, like the Skeleton Coast and Hoanib Valley.

Morocco

Even before the north African country [drew international attention](#) in the World Cup, Morocco was emerging as a major travel hot spot. Currently the most booked country for [Intrepid Travel](#), “we expect Morocco to continue to be incredibly popular in 2023, given the increase in flights into the destination and the ability to get out and have great experiences in one week, 10 day or two-week itineraries,” said the company’s CEO James Thornton.

That’s also true for Modern Adventure. Liz Boudreau, vice president of experiences for the company, says they’ve had a 53 percent increase in bookings compared to 2022.

If you’re worried about your travel budget, consider visiting as a work exchange volunteer [like reporter Andrea Sachs tried](#) in Fez.

Small cruises

Cruises are making a strong comeback, even for travelers who might not consider themselves cruise people. But instead of taking megaships, they’re looking for smaller options operating expedition trips (think Antarctica and Alaska) or luxury voyages, mainly river cruising in Europe and Egypt.

For destinations with the highest interest — like Portugal — Emma Cakmak, owner of the cruise-focused company [A Passport to Travel](#), is warning clients that May through September is practically sold out across all the top cruise lines, although there’s some availability in low-end stateroom categories.

If you’re striking out, keep shopping around. As they notice demand climb, some cruise lines seem to be “bringing on significant capacity as they move into next year,” [Priceline](#) CEO Brett Keller said.

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