

# How to Sell to Millennial & Gen Z Travelers

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#### Paloma Villaverde de Rico

How are Millennial & Generation Z travelers the same? How are they different? What makes them tick when it comes to travel planning and booking? Are these two generations that sit side-by-side looking for the same travel experiences and destinations? What role does social media and technology truly play in their travel decisions?

For your business to continue to grow well into the 21st century, these are the questions you need to be asking yourself. Millennials, even with a growing family, aren't leaving the travel scene behind, and Generation Z, those born from the mid-1990s to the mid-2000s, are being called "Millennials on steroids" when it comes to their travel plans. Two generations; two mindsets—here, we've got some of the tips and tools you'll need to effectively serve these dynamic, globally minded, travel-smitten generations.

For this report, we reached out to tour operators who sell to these specific demographics, as well as travel advisors, including some who are Millennials themselves; and we conducted a Millennial & Gen Z survey on **recommend.com** to get your take on what's happening with these demographics.

#### Exploring the World Beyond the Road Most Traveled

"Millennials," says Jacob Marek, founder & chief explorer of **IntroverTravels**, an affiliate of **Tafari Travel**, a **Virtuoso** member, "tend to be motivated mostly by uniqueness and a bit of travel envy. The word 'authentic' I think tends to get thrown around too often, but Millennials want to experience the world through the eyes of a local; if there is a scenic, Instagrammable image to go along with it, all the better."

In culling through all of the responses we received from both tour operators and travel advisors, you get a sense that both of these generations aren't afraid to embrace the world and its myriad cultures. They want to explore, not just go on vacation; they want to understand the world, not just eat at the best restaurant. At the core, they want immersion, not just a visit to a destination. Kelly LaSlavic, a sales team lead with **STA Travel**—a student and youth travel agency—notes that "Millennial travelers, and even Gen Z travelers, that I have worked with seem to be most motivated by their desire to get more out of their travel than just a vacation. A majority of my passengers are traveling to be a part of something bigger and are visiting more remote areas to provide assistance and volunteer."

As Adam Cooper, president of **Contiki**

“Whereas Millennials are drawn more to the perennial fascinator that is Europe, Gen Z looks to explore the places with starkly different cultures and countries than their own. In a survey of the two generations, the three destinations with the biggest disparity between Gen Y [Millennials] and Gen Z responses were Japan, central Europe and Russia. Gen Z was far more interested in these places, willing to overlook long distances and controversial politics for the resulting experience.”

-- Adam Cooper, President, Contiki USA

USA, says, "Millennials want trips where they can see the most iconic sites, but also immerse into the local culture and dine at local restaurants, bars, etc. They want to go exploring, but also incorporate relaxation.... Generation Z travels to scope out the most off-the-beaten path and undiscovered experiences, such as sleeping in a floating river hut in Khao Sok, Thailand's dreamiest yet undiscovered national park, or enjoying some local wine and cheese at a hidden restaurant in the backstreets of Ios, Greece." Remote and undiscovered are indeed key motivators, with Leigh Barnes, **Intrepid Travel's** director of North America, adding that "Gen Z travelers want the 'backpacker' style of travel, truly immersing in a destination and all it offers, whether that's sleeping in a tent in Botswana's Khama Rhino Sanctuary surrounded by zebras, giraffes and wildebeest, or sitting on the ground of a cave to eat with the Berber nomads in a cave in Morocco's Atlas Mountains." Travel advisor Shelley Oliver, of **Holidays by Jane**, an affiliate of **Your Travel Center/Montecito Village Travel**, points out that her last Gen Z booking was "for a

young couple to an Icelandic working farm that has been converted into a hotel. They are thrilled to be able to live and eat as locals in this trending destination. Not your typical pub crawl."

Travel designer and **Recommend** contributor Susan Farewell goes even further, explaining that "travel plays a much bigger role in the lives of Gen Zs than Millennials. Gen Z's parents got them a passport when they were born. They're growing up with friends around the world and it's expected that many study abroad (or will study abroad)...multiple times. This generation is also motivated to understand the world more, to build bridges, to help with world problems. There is a real passion for traveling and a natural tendency to think and live globally."

#### It's All in the Experience

Experiences, experiences, experiences—that's been a buzzword in the travel industry for quite a number of years, with Millennial travelers giving new meaning to the word in terms of how it relates to travel. Says travel advisor Cassandra Harris, with **Accent on Travel**, "As a Millennial-aged traveler myself,

I value experiences over material things. If it means sacrificing a nicer hotel for more room in my budget to enjoy certain tours and attractions, that's something I'm willing to do. It's not enough now to just go to Cancun and swim at the beach or chill by the pool. Millennials want to take tours riding ATVs, go parasailing, swim in cenotes, they want to visit Chichen Itza."

Travel advisor Blaire Kochar, an independent affiliate of **Brownell Travel**, a **Virtuoso** member, concurs, stating that, "My parents and their friends feel that their time to travel is when they are empty nesters and retired. Before then, their paychecks went towards their big houses and country club memberships. Millennials feel differently. They don't want to wait to experience bucket list destinations and don't need big houses or fancy cars. They are putting their bonuses towards a safari to celebrate their fifth wedding anniversary, or a trip to Italy to celebrate their 30th birthday. They are realizing the importance of experiencing the world at a younger age."

Money, too, comes into play, of course, with travel advisor Allison Kobasky, ►

All photos: Millennials and Gen Z travelers are eager to explore every corner of the globe and are opting for immersive experiences wherever they are.





“Generation Z has come of age in the wake of an economic recession, but also in a world that is more globalized than ever—the result is a generation of new travelers who want to journey farther, have more meaningful experiences, and dig deeper into a culture’s nuances. But they are also very realistic about the means of doing so.”

-- *Tiffany Harrison, Senior Marketing Manager, STA Travel*

owner and co-founder of **Over The Moon Vacations**, saying that “most Millennial travelers are motivated by price—they are researchers who want to know they are getting the absolute best price for something vs. being value-driven.” Gen Z travelers, she adds, “are going on smaller-budget trips with friends, or even solo backpacking trips.”

Says Tiffany Harrison, senior marketing manager for **STA Travel**, “Compared to Millennial travelers, Gen Z travelers are even more conscious of budget; they are just as keen as Millennial travelers to have authentic, localized experiences, but they also want to make sure they’re being fiscally responsible about it.” And with Millennials now starting to have children, they, too, are looking for great deals, which is “one reason,” according to Connie Miller, v.p. of business development for Your Travel Center/Montecito Village Travel, “Millennials like using travel agents who have access to certain upgrades and unique experiences. They want to explore without

breaking the bank. They have worked hard and want to have experiences to show for it.”

**Sharing the Experience**

Social media plays a role before, during and after a trip for both Millennials and Generation Z. They use social media to decide where to take their next trip, whether because an Influencer has been there or because it will resonate on their feeds, and for them it’s second nature to share their experience during and after the trip.

As travel advisor Samantha Schultz, a **Cruise Planners** franchise owner, says, “You have to go where your clients hang out—Millennials love being on social media sharing their lives with the world, attending events and enjoying new experiences. There is a massive influence from social media, so I believe this trend will continue with future generations as more platforms continue to evolve. However, because Gen Z has never known a world without technology and social media, it’s even more important to have a presence; the challenge is that Gen Z can be harder to target because they aren’t as engaged on platforms like Facebook, but are very comfortable with Snapchat.”

“Millennials appreciate an advisor who is relatable, who can speak their language—someone who knows what is trendy and current, who is flexible in their planning style, who knows how to find the best prices in the market.”

-- *Allison Kobasky, Owner & Co-Founder, Over the Moon Vacations*

Emily Mikus, **G Adventures’** 18-to-Thirtysomethings brand manager, adds that “Gen Z followers are more particular about who they choose to engage with. They are shifting toward content that is more visual, as everything is on their mobile devices. They are doing travel research through social and are heavily influenced by social media during the trip inspiration and planning phases. We think they are inspired by the opportunities to experience places like some of their favorite personalities on social media do, and to then show those experiences off to their friends to boost their own reputation.”

STA Travel’s Harrison notes, too, that “being able to showcase their [Gen Z]

experiences in a visual format (think: Instagram, Snapchat, YouTube) is one of the main reasons they want to get out and see a place for themselves. Like Millennials, they don’t just want to read about what’s out there, they want to capture their travels to share with friends and family during and after the fact.” Travel advisor Kochar points out, too, that Generation Z’s travel choices are influenced by social media in that they want to go to “hotspots they see on Instagram.”

In fact, according to Cooper, Contiki USA’s president, “Gen Z is far more attuned to and influenced by social media, paying close attention to the lifestyle Influencers they follow.... When an Influencer recommends a certain travel destination or they see someone’s beautifully filtered picture, they are more likely to make that a future travel destination and change any preconceived notions.”

“Gen Z,” says travel advisor Kasra Esteghamat, of **Eden for Your World**, an affiliate of Your Travel Center/Montecito Village Travel, “desires to stay somewhere cool but inexpensive, and will use technology for many of their travel components in the belief that they can better become local on

Left: Unlike their older counterparts, Millennial-aged parents aren’t waiting to become empty nesters to discover a new destination, instead opting to travel with their children. Left, bottom: Social media plays a role before, during and after a trip for both Millennials and Generation Z.

their own by finding things on Instagram and other social media sites.” But, says Harrison, “Gen Z won’t fall for marketing tactics that don’t feel personalized or resonate with their tastes. Just because a place or tour looks cool in an Instagram ad, doesn’t mean they won’t do their research first to make sure it suits their budget.” In fact, travel advisor Oliver says she’s seen some social media backlash as of late. She says clients are saying that they don’t want to consider areas or destinations when it appears that a resort (or destination) paid for celebrities or the “Internet famous” to promote.

**The World is Their Oyster**

With ages that range anywhere from 12 or 13 to about 23, Generation Z isn’t going all-solo on vacation. Many are still quite young and are still traveling with their parents and immediate family. But remember what travel advisor Farewell mentioned, these young teenagers had passports as soon as they were born, and their recommendation plays a big part in where the family goes for vacation. In fact, says Rainer Jenss, president & founder of **Family Travel Association**, “52 percent of U.S. parents say that their children are involved in the vacation-planning process. The bottom line is that kids today have more of a say than they used to, which is a good thing because it helps ensure the kids will enjoy the trip as they were involved in the decision-making—thus are more invested and engaged in the experience.” Adds Farewell, “Kids are calling the shots. They are smart travelers and see the world as their backyard. They’ve learned so much about the world through social media that they have clear ideas on where they want to go, what they want to see and how they will spend their time when they travel.”

“Throughout my travels, I post pictures of the destinations and write captions that explain the benefit of each hotel or what type of perks you would receive if you booked your vacation to this destination through me.”

-- *Blaire Kochar, Independent Affiliate of Brownell Travel, a Virtuoso member*

Since they live on the web, the knowledge they are receiving can’t be ignored by parents, and, says Max Ali, **SITA World Tours’** director of group operations, “The information and knowledge that Gen Z acquires from the Internet will naturally, to some extent, affect and enhance their families’ travel planning; for example, which destination to choose.” With that in mind, it makes sense that you, as a travel advisor, include them in the vacation-planning conversation, because “Gen Zs are digital natives,” says Jared Alster, v.p. of marketing for **Cox & Kings, the Americas**. “They are much more well-researched when it comes to choosing a destination due to the enormity of information on the Internet.”

Miller, of Your Travel Center/Montecito Village Travel, points out, though, that Gen Z’s influence is greater felt during the vacation, “the activities and experiences that are selected. For example, Gen Z’s influence would be shown by a teen’s desire not to visit places that affront their value systems.”

**Tips from Millennial Advisors**

Millennial-aged travel advisors have shaken up the travel industry; they are brash, confident, have traveled extensively, know the ins and outs of social media, and know exactly what their peers want. And ➤

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Gen Z travelers are more independent, more willing to do the hard research and more willing to travel alone—they have all the techy gadgets and devices, so if you want to work with them you must be techy as well.

-- Lauren Medelberg, Medelberg's Travel Services,  
Your Travel Center/Montecito Village Travel



## Survey Says...

For the Millennial & Gen Survey, which we conducted on **recommend.com**, we reached out to **Recommend** readers to see what's happening in their agencies when it comes to Millennial and Gen Z bookings:

- **48%** of survey respondents said that their Millennial clients are motivated to travel to visit a new destination, with FIT tours being the top request.
- **25%** of respondents say that their Generation Z clients are looking for adventure travel.
- **55%** of respondents said that their Millennial clients are taking 1 to 2 trips a year, with 33 percent of respondents noting that their client base in this age group is taking 3 to 4 trips a year. 72 percent of respondents, meanwhile, said that their Generation Z clients will be traveling 1 to 2 times this year, not surprising given that many are still in college and are less financially sound.
- **68%** of respondents say that they are finding Millennial clients through word of mouth, with 17 percent stating that social media is the channel that leads this age group to them.
- **40%** of respondents said that for their Millennial clients, social media plays a very important role in their clients' travel planning, with 47 percent of respondents saying it is very important for Generation Z.
- **63%** of respondents note that younger-aged Generation Z travelers (those 17 and under) have a moderate influence on family vacation planning, with 23 percent saying it's actually quite high.

### Where are They Going?

Interestingly, according to our readers, both age groups are going to the very international destinations that always poll high on "must-visit destinations": Caribbean, Mexico and Italy, although many of our respondents also pointed to Croatia, Ibiza, France, and Vietnam/Cambodia as places of interest for Generation Z. For Millennials, Australia, Cook Islands, New Zealand, Iceland, and Greece are a top draw. When it comes to their own backyard, both Millennials and Generation Z have an affinity, according to the survey respondents, to Florida, with Generation Z also heading to California, Las Vegas, and New York City. Millennials are jetting off to Hawaii, as well as Las Vegas and New York City, and they are interested in exploring the national parks, perhaps because they are starting to grow their family and this is a great option for parents with little ones. ■

**Both Millennials and Generation Z want to seek out new cultures, and Millennials are opting for cruises for their vacation.**

because they are Millennials, they understand the mindset of young travelers.

Millennial travel advisors recommend having a pulse on the latest trends, because, as Kobasky notes, "Destinations are constantly evolving. The best restaurants, buzzworthy places for Instagram pics, the coolest hotels to stay at are not the same now as they were 20 to 30 years ago. They might not even be the same as they were two years ago." Marek says, too, that it's important for travel advisors serving Millennials to "create innovative types of experiences."

And with Millennials and Generation Z thriving on social media and apps, knowing how to use these tools to attract clients and keep in contact with them throughout the process is key. In fact, Kochar mentions that someone recently told her that, "your social media is your digital storefront," and Marek communicates with his Millennial-aged clients "on WhatsApp or Skype while they are on their trip." Harris says, "Instagram is a great tool, because it's so image-heavy. I enjoy promoting tourism on that social channel with pictures of my travels or of my clients' travels."

That said, many of the advisors we spoke with mentioned that email is a fundamental part of how they communicate. "I've found that our younger clients are more inclined to communicate through emails and chats rather than on phone calls," says STA Travel's LaSlavic. "Email allows," says Schultz, "both parties to communicate any time of the day and night."

Young advisors also suggest creating several access points to clients, too, whether that's creating a "communication inquiry link on a website, a quick text to answer outlying questions or providing access to a smartphone app that has integrated your personalized itinerary," says Kochar. Kobasky even says that she works out of Google docs "so that clients can see changes as they're being made in real time, and can also contribute comments, feedback and edits in one living document. Millennials LOVE planning this way."

But perhaps Schultz says it best: "At the end of the day, they want an expert, they want you to know as much or more than they do, and they want you to be engaging because that is going to shine through with what you can craft for their trip." ■

*\* For this report, USTOA assisted Recommend in gathering responses from some of its members, including Cox & Kings, The Americas; Intrepid Travel; and SITA World Tours. Your Travel Center/Montecito Village Travel polled its 400+ employees and independent contractor travel advisors for insight to our questions.*