

What Travelers and Advisors Can Expect as Tauck Celebrates 100 Years in 2025



The coming year will be a big one for **Tauck**, as the iconic travel company celebrates 100 years of operations. And the anniversary couldn't come at a better time, given the strong state of the overall travel industry, according to Jeremy Palmer, who was recently promoted to president of the company.

“I think the good news for our industry is we are in an incredible position of strength,” Palmer said. “Whether it's Tauck or other folks, 2024 generally exceeded pre-pandemic levels. So, when you think about [recovery from COVID-19](#) and getting to the other side, we are definitely there.”

Palmer's new position comes as part of a wider strategic shift in leadership at Tauck: After 18 years as CEO, Dan Mahar has transitioned to a new role as chairman of the board, former president Jennifer Tombaugh became CEO, Palmer took on the title of president and Arthur Tauck Jr. became chairman emeritus.

We sat down with Palmer at the United States Tour Operators Association's (USTOA) recent [2024 Annual Conference & Marketplace](#) to learn more about the company's direction moving forward and its plans for celebrating 100 years.

How did 2024 go for Tauck, and what's the outlook for 2025?

We exceeded 2019 levels [this year], and looking forward to 2025, we are running 20-30% ahead. It's not pent-up demand anymore. The fundamental drivers of our business are strong; they're aligned. Our clientele feels wealthier, they feel healthier, they have the time, they are traveling. It's great news.

“ Our clientele feels wealthier, they feel healthier, they have the time, they are traveling. ”

Are there areas where Tauck is seeing particularly strong growth?

One of the things that Tauck is known for is our “small is big” philosophy, right? And we've been leaning into that hard. Whether it's our small groups or our river cruise ships — which carry less people than others on the rivers — those two niches are trending even higher in terms of percentage growth year over year. We are approaching almost 50% growth, for example, on the French rivers, and almost 50% growth for our small groups relative to last year. I don't think this is unique to us, but that theme of wanting to be more intimate, wanting to leave a smaller footprint on the communities you meet is absolutely moving forward.

Shoulder season is another one. We are adding capacity, and demand is growing faster than we can add capacity. Across all of the different products that we offer, we are seeing people waking up to the fact that, “Hey, this is a time that I want to travel.” I hear that from our industry colleagues, so that's also a wider theme.

In terms of geography, Europe remains on fire. It is still the No. 1 destination. But we have basically seen most of the world come back to pre-pandemic levels, and we go to all seven continents. The only places where we're seeing a little softness are Australia and China.



Jeremy Palmer was recently appointed president of Tauck.
Credit: 2024 Tauck

What do you attribute the Australia softness to?

Everybody has an opinion. I'll tell you what I think it is. One thing is that airfare is still very expensive to get to Australia. It's almost \$15,000 to \$20,000 per person in business class, and the airlines still have reduced capacity. So, getting there isn't as easy as it used to be.

Australia is an amazing country. We have a very healthy business and a very long-term relationship there, but unfortunately, they've also had a couple of tough years. When they came out of COVID-19, they were one of the last to remove restrictions ... and they've had a lot of natural disasters. Everybody loves Australia, but [they seem to be thinking] let's give them another year or two to settle in terms of pricing and stability.

What are you most excited about for the business now and in the near future?

We are excited because it's our 100th anniversary — not many companies make it that far. We are absolutely full of gratitude, and we're thankful for the trust that our patrons put in us. But we're so thankful, as well, for all the partners we have that have helped us get here. So, whether it's the travel advisor community, the hotels or whoever we work with, we wouldn't be here without their relationships and strength.

“ Whether it's the travel advisor community, the hotels or whoever we work with, we wouldn't be here without their relationships and strength. ”

And business-wise, if you look at any key metric for us, more people are traveling than ever, and they're coming back to us at a higher repeat rate than ever. They are booking earlier than ever. All of those signs are bright green — touch wood — in terms of how we are looking. And I hope that flows through the entire industry.

And as we turn 100, we're not resting on our laurels. There's so much new stuff coming. I won't go through all of them, but [we're building new ships](#) with our partner Scylla. We have, between 2025 and 2026, I believe it's 15 new tours that we're launching.

But it's not just existing destinations. We are launching a new, even smaller groups product line. And we are revamping our operating systems. We're investing in direct marketing. We are absolutely leaning in hard and there's lots of exciting stuff that, as an agent, not only will you be able to sell, but we're going to better serve our guests, which is great for both of us.

So, when you say even smaller group tours, what are we talking?

Our classic line is about 40 people on land, then our small groups average about 24 guests on land. [The new tours] are going to be 15 or less. And this is something that we hear on a daily basis from our guests, which is they'd like to go smaller and smaller. So, we started with a few trials in 2024, but we're going to have almost 100 departures in 2025. They're selling well and the guest satisfaction is good, so I'm excited about that.

Do you have any goals or priorities in your new position as president?

I have to speak of the [whole] leadership team to answer that. One of the reasons that we've gotten to 100 years is that the Taucks — who still own the company — not only want to do the right thing by guests but do the right thing by their employees. And part of doing the right thing is making sure you have a structure that people understand, believe in, have faith in. And that there's continuity.

So, long story short, this transition plan has been a long time coming. And with Dan [Mahar] moving up to chairman and Jennifer [Tombaugh] moving up to CEO and me moving up to president, it's like we've all kind of gone up the escalator a bit. But the important part is it's not about Dan, it's not about Jen, it's not about me. It's about continuity for the organization. So, our plans are to keep doing what we're doing. But as we move into our second century, there is a vision of growth, innovation and investment that I'm super excited to be part of to help keep us moving forward and hopefully be even better in the next 100 years.

Speaking of that milestone, are there any special celebrations planned?

There's all sorts of stuff coming, but the central focus is that in less than 45 days, everybody who works for Tauck — hundreds upon hundreds of people — are gathering in Florence and we're going to throw a party.

And for travel advisors, there are a few things. We will be having special academies, which are like fams, where we'll be asking advisors to come with us to celebrate. We'll be doing a roadshow where Steve Spivak, who heads up our sales effort, and other members of the leadership team are going to go to destinations, and some family members are going to show up. The schedule isn't 100% finalized, but a lot of those touches are coming and when we have details, we will share them.

<https://www.travelagewest.com/Travel/Tour-Operators/tauck-100-years>