

THE COMPASS

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VacationAccess

SPRING 2026

WHAT'S NEW?

Openings and launches worth paying attention to

BEYOND COOKIE-CUTTER

These underrated destinations offer fresh adventures

THE NEXT GENERATION OF TRAVEL

How Gen Z is shattering expectations



UNDERSTANDING TRAVEL ANXIETY DON'T LET WHAT-IFS STOP CLIENTS FROM EXPLORING

NEW OPENINGS, NEW ROUTES, NEW REASONS TO BOOK

FROM LUXURY RESORTS TO RAIL
ROUTES AND RIVER SHIPS, HERE'S WHAT'S
OPENING, LAUNCHING AND WORTH PAYING
ATTENTION TO NOW.

WORDS / JONI SWEET

WHEN CLIENTS ASK WHERE THEY SHOULD GO next, what they're really asking is what's changed since the last trip you planned for them — and what's actually worth traveling for this year.

That might mean a new stand-out hotel in their favorite region, a route that finally makes a bucket list destination accessible or a tour designed with their preferences in mind.

As 2026 unfolds, these are the updates across the travel industry that give you new options to work with as you design trips and new reasons for clients to book.



COURTESY OF CIE TOURS

01

A Luxury Landing in Kigali

Got a client dreaming of gorilla trekking? Until now, one of the trickiest parts of planning trips to Rwanda has been finding a hotel in Kigali that feels as luxurious as the lodges near Volcanoes National Park.

Fortunately, The Pinnacle Kigali filled that gap when it opened in January. Practical perks – like close proximity to the airport, complimentary access to hotel facilities for returning guests on departure day and even free laundry and hiking boot care – make the property especially useful for smoothing long-haul arrivals and post-trek departures. Each of its nine rooms and suites is filled with pan-African art and offers views of Kigali’s green hills.

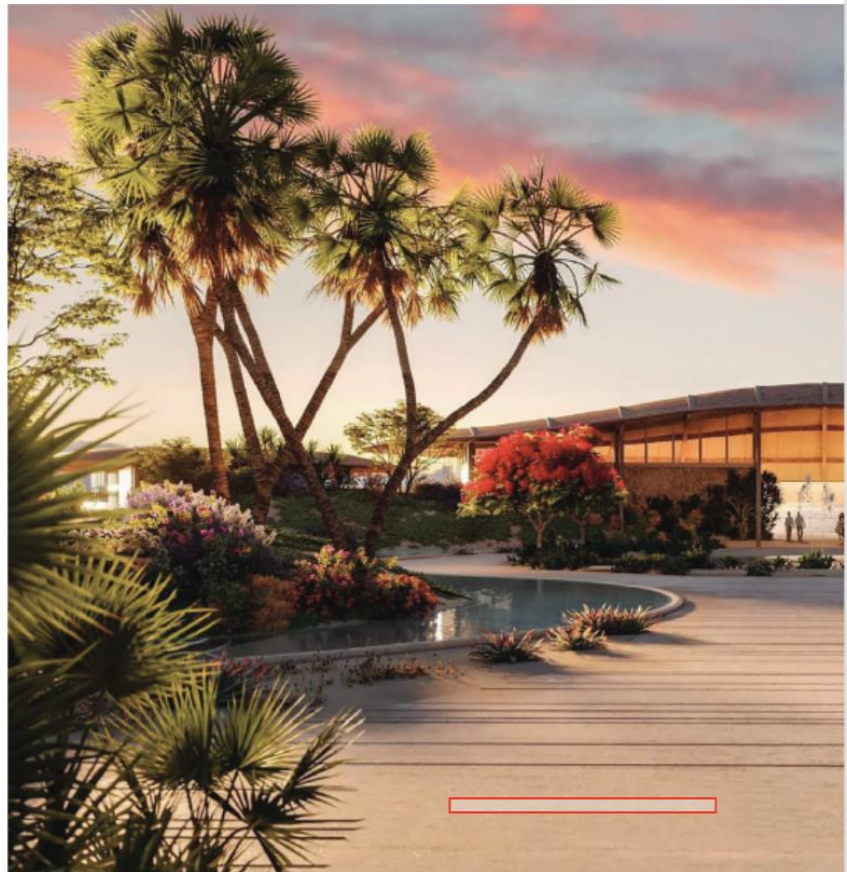
“What struck me most about the Pinnacle is how it combines five-star comfort with the warmth of a private home,” said Gayle Higginbotham, founder of Oculus Travel, who attended a pre-opening FAM trip to the property. “It offers a seamless transition from international arrival to gorilla trekking or safari and helps travel advisors provide a city-based option that aligns with the expectations of luxury clients.”

**02**

Stay Steps Away From the Sundance Lift

Clients who want to hit the slopes next ski season will be excited to learn about the recent opening of the Inn at Sundance Mountain Resort, a 63-room inn just steps from the lift, located northeast of Provo, Utah. The property gives advisors a new place to book skiers who want to stay close to both the mountain and the amenities of Resort Village.

“Sundance Resort is a very special place, and with this new addition, guests now have direct access to the lift, making it a true ski-in/ski-out resort,” said Ilmir Alder, travel advisor at Jonathan’s Travels. “The property offers an intimate experience while still providing all the incredible amenities of the resort.”



BOTTOM: COURTESY OF MIRAVAL RESORTS & SPAS; TOP LEFT: COURTESY OF THE PINNACLE KIGALI; TOP RIGHT: COURTESY OF NILE CANOPUS/RELAIS & CHATEAUX



Left: After opening in January, The Pinnacle Kigali has filled a gap for luxurious accommodations for Kigali-based gorilla trekking; Above: Nile Canopus is a Relais & Châteaux-affiliated sailing on the Nile; Bottom: Miraval The Red Sea is set to be the only wellness-focused hotel on Saudi Arabia's Shura Island.



03

Wellness on the Red Sea

Miraval Resorts & Spas makes its international debut this year with a new property in Saudi Arabia. The only wellness-focused hotel on Shura Island, the 3-million-square-foot Miraval the Red Sea includes 180 guest rooms, suites and villas; a 39-room spa with globally inspired treatments; and access to a championship golf course. With Saudi Arabia ramping up tourism, the opening gives advisors a familiar wellness brand to help clients explore a destination they're increasingly curious about.

"The [resort] is a truly immersive retreat that feels unmistakably Miraval, while offering something genuinely rare within the region," said Tamara Lohan, global brand leader of the luxury portfolio at Hyatt.

04

New Options on the Nile

Advisors have new ways to create Egypt itineraries in 2026 with the debut of two upscale river cruises on the Nile. Late this year, the Waldorf Astoria Nile River Experiences will offer itineraries from Luxor to Aswan (or the reverse), stopping at Luxor, the Valley of the Kings and other major sites. It's the first river cruise option from the iconic hotel brand.

Nile Canopus, a Relais & Châteaux-affiliated sailing on the Nile, is also launching toward the end of the year. It takes cruisers aboard vessels that resemble "dahabiyas," traditional sailboats that were prominent on the river in the 18th and 19th centuries. The all-inclusive option gives advisors a unique way to match clients with a Nile experience that feels rooted in the river's history while still delivering modern comfort and convenience.



Selar's purpose-built, sustainable sailing vessel is primarily powered by wind and solar energy, allowing guests to get up-close with wildlife.

LEFT: COURTESY OF SELAR; RIGHT: COURTESY OF ROYAL CARIBBEAN



05

River Cruising Gets a Refresh

River cruising continues to evolve in 2026. Uniworld Boutique River Cruises is in the midst of its largest fleet expansion to date, with the launch of the S.S. Emilie on the Rhine in March as part of a broader move toward an all-Super Ship fleet, scheduled for completion in 2027.

"In addition to the launch of the S.S. Emilie, Uniworld is celebrating its 50th anniversary in 2026, giving travel advisor partners a new reason to engage their clients during a milestone year for the brand," said Ellen Bettridge, president and chief executive officer of Uniworld.

She added that every sailing will feature special "Golden Anniversary" parties and opportunities for guests to be part of the celebrations.

Meanwhile, Trafalgar is bringing

Royal
Caribbean's
Legend of
the Seas



07 *The World's Largest Waterpark at Sea*

Looking for a headline cruise option for families? Launching in July 2026, Royal Caribbean's Legend of the Seas gives families a ship that delivers big on onboard experiences – most notably the largest waterpark at sea. On-board attractions also include seven pools, an obstacle course, mini golf, rock climbing and more. It starts in the Mediterranean and makes its way to the Caribbean later this year.

08 *A New Post-Trip Touchpoint*

This year brings a fresh way to help clients remember the trips you planned for them – and keep you top of mind for their next vacation. Several cruise lines, including Carnival, Norwegian, MSC and Lindblad, have partnered with Treering Memories to deliver custom keepsake photo books to guests after their sailing – a tangible way to commemorate a milestone trip. Advisors can also partner directly with Treering to offer photo books for any trip their clients take, which can help set them apart from the competition and build loyalty. “Advisors who help clients preserve memories strengthen relationships long after the trip ends,” said Kevin Zerber, chief executive officer at Treering. “Automated photo books make this effortless, letting advisors focus on creating meaningful experiences.”

its guided vacation experience to Europe's rivers with two inaugural itineraries debuting on the Danube and the Rhine this spring. For advisors, the move offers a straightforward way to introduce river cruising to Trafalgar loyalists while keeping the style and pacing they're used to.

River cruising's growing appeal is also drawing in other new players. National Geographic-Lindblad Expeditions will launch its first European river cruises aboard the new Connect in 2026, bringing an expedition-style approach to two itineraries on the Rhine River and deeper destination discovery. Cruisers will have the chance to experience private tours and exclusive tastings with a National Geographic Expert on each cruise.

Looking slightly ahead, Celebrity Cruises has announced plans to

enter the European river market with two ships in 2027 and later expanding to 10, signaling continued growth and expanded options for advisors across the category.

06 *A Low-Impact Arctic Expedition*

Launching expeditions in 2026, Selar reimagines Arctic travel with sustainability at its core. The company's purpose-built sailing vessel is powered primarily by wind and solar energy, dramatically reducing emissions and noise – an approach that resonates with travelers who want to visit fragile polar ecosystems but are concerned about the environmental impact of ships. Its maiden voyages will offer travelers opportunities to dive with whales and ski slopes straight from the deck of the ship.



Backroads offers clients in their 30s and 40s active, yet luxurious tours curated for travelers sharing the same life stage.

09 Family Parks Raise the Bar

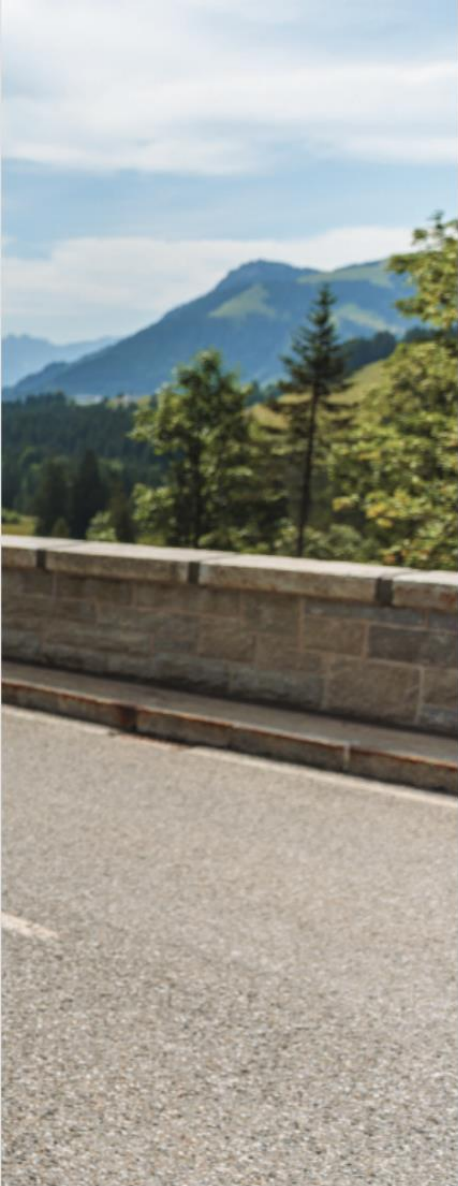
LEGOLAND recently debuted its first new rollercoaster in more than 20 years with Galactic coaster, now open at both the Carlsbad, California, and Winter Haven, Florida, locations. The space-themed ride lets kids customize their own digital spacecraft in more than 625 ways before blasting off through cosmic scenes. The new attraction makes it easier to position the park as a great

vacation destination for families with children of mixed ages, from those as young as two up to teens.

"Lego Galaxy has been in development for more than three years, and the investment reaffirms our commitment to the ongoing transformation of Legoland into a world-class destination resort in Carlsbad," said Kurt Stocks, president of

LEGOLAND California Resort.

That same shift toward bigger, more ambitious family attractions is playing out at other amusement parks as well. This spring, Dollywood in Pigeon Forge, Tennessee, will debut NightFlight Expedition, the largest single attraction investment in the park's history. The award-winning ride blends coaster elements, water features and



10

A Theme Park Built for Younger Kids

Anticipated to open this year in Frisco, Texas, Universal Kids Resort is a new option for families planning a theme park trip with younger children. Unlike Universal's other parks – where height requirements can sideline kids from popular rides – Universal Kids Resort is designed around age-appropriate attractions and gentler rides, allowing the entire family to have fun together. After hanging out at the park's seven themed lands, which focus on popular characters like the Minions and Shrek, families can wind down at the 300-room on-site hotel.

12

Adventure Tours for 30s and 40s

Long underserved by operators who've historically focused on retirees or those in their 20s, clients in their 30s and 40s have a new tour option to consider in 2026. Backroads is launching small group luxury adventure tours specifically for these travelers. The new trips balance active days with comfort and camaraderie among travelers in the same life stage, offering experiences like hut-to-hut hiking in the Dolomites, lodge-to-lodge trekking in Peru and cycling coastal routes in Spain.

"Many clients in this age group want meaningful, immersive experiences, but they also value traveling with people who share a similar life stage. These trips offer that sense of connection alongside logistical ease," said Alicia Kjeldgaard, senior manager of sales and guest services at Backroads.

11

Explore Ireland by Foot

If your clients are asking for new ways to experience Ireland, CIE Tours has you covered. It's launching new walking and hiking itineraries that take small groups through the Emerald Isle's Northern Coast or from Cork to Kerry by foot over the course of nine days. Designed around manageable daily distances and small groups, the tours blend scenic walks with cultural stops – making them well suited for travelers who want a more active trip that's still comfortable and immersive.

"For curious travelers with an adventurous spirit, they'll find that Ireland naturally lends itself to this style of exploration, where its character is often best discovered in small villages and along its coastal paths," said Rosanne Zusman, chief commercial officer at CIE Tours.

13

A Smoother Way Across Europe

A new rail link connecting Prague, Berlin and Copenhagen launches in May, allowing clients to see more of Europe without hopping on another flight. The year-round daytime service and seasonal nighttime service cuts travel time to roughly seven hours end to end and includes additional stops in Hamburg, Berlin and Dresden, all in the new ComfortJet trains.

multimedia storytelling inside a climate-controlled space, creating a five-and-a-half-minute experience designed to feel like a nighttime flight over the Smoky Mountains.

"This hybrid adventure coaster is just one of many elements that makes Dollywood an ideal multi-generational getaway," said Cordelia Morrell, director of sales at Dollywood Parks and Resorts.



Dream of the Desert is a high-end train that plans to offer slow-travel itineraries in Saudi Arabia

16

Air Routes That Unlock What's Next

New nonstop routes from the biggest airlines in the U.S. are making it easier to book clients on trips to places that once required extra connections and take advantage of their frequent flier status benefits on long-haul flights to dream destinations.

United Airlines will be the first in the country to launch nonstop flights from Newark to Split, Croatia; Bari, Italy; Glasgow, Scotland; and Santiago de Compostela, Spain. It's also launching new nonstop year-round service between Newark and Seoul, as well as flights from Washington, D.C., to Reykjavik, Iceland.

In May, Delta is offering direct flights from Boston to Madrid and Nice, France. From New York City, Delta will be providing nonstop service to Valletta, Malta; Porto, Portugal; and Olbia, Italy. Clients on the West Coast can also hop on nonstop Delta flights from Seattle to Rome and Barcelona starting in May.

For its part, American is adding six new routes to Europe. From its Dallas Fort Worth hub, this includes summer seasonal nonstop flights to Athens, Greece, and Zurich, Switzerland, along with extended service to Buenos Aires, Argentina, from late May through early August. Travelers in Miami can take direct flights to Milan year-round as of March. The airline is also expanding departures from Philadelphia.

14

Luxury Rail in Saudi Arabia

When Dream of the Desert launches in the second half of this year, the high-end train will offer travelers a slow-travel immersion in Saudi Arabia through five distinct itineraries, ranging from one to two nights. The country's first luxury train features 31 suites (including two presidential suites), a pair of restaurant cars and panoramic observation cars for visitors to soak up the desert scenery – without the logistics of driving or internal flights.

15

Highway 1 Is Back

Here's some news that will delight your road tripping clients: California State Route 1 (also known as Highway 1) finally reopened Big Sur in January after a nearly three-year shutdown. The reopening makes it easier to confidently plan California itineraries that link San Francisco, Big Sur, the Central Coast and Los Angeles without detours. For clients craving classic scenery with minimal friction, the reopening of this scenic road puts a long-requested drive firmly back on the table for 2026.