



## EUROPE BOOKING TRENDS: MID-LIFE COUPLES ARE A HOT MARKET

by Monique Burns / April 23, 2014

Part one of two parts.

Iconic Europe – from the Eiffel Tower in Paris to Rome’s Coliseum – is the theme for agents selling the Continent in 2014.

Mid-life couples are booking stays in one or two capitals, signing up for multicity grand tours and embarking on Europe river cruises, agents told *Travel Market Report*.

Having worked hard to raise their young families, they’re ready to explore Europe – sometimes for the first time and often with teens in tow, travel sellers report.

### ‘Always wanted to go’

“I’m seeing parents in their 40s and 50s with teenage kids. A lot are first-timers,” said Jennifer Leventhal, president of Sentinel Travel, an Ensemble agency in Northbrook, Ill.

“In one family, the mother had been to Europe, but the father had never gone. He worked hard and always wanted to go.

“The hot summer trip for my agency is London-Paris,” added Leventhal. “I booked one family on a nine-night trip with five nights in London, four nights in Paris. Another family did a 14-night trip just to London.”

### Women on the road

Multigenerational families, often with a decidedly feminine mystique, are booking Europe in big numbers too.

“I have two young women in their 20s going to Italy for a sister getaway,” said Charynn Marshall of Partners in Travel in Bel Air, Md., a member of the Affluent Traveler Collection.

“They didn’t want to go on their own, so they’re doing a Globus tour.”

Leventhal also noted the trend toward women-only multigenerational trips to Europe.

“A grandmother, mother and daughter booked a trip to Paris for the daughter’s 10th birthday. And a mother in her 80s and two daughters in their 60s went on a trip to Switzerland followed by a Rhine river cruise,” she said.

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*“We’re seeing people in their 40s and 50s who have never been to Europe going for multicity tours. They’re saying, ‘I want to see the Eiffel Tower. I want to see Big Ben.’”*

Jennifer Halboth, Globus

## ROLLING DOWN THE RIVER

River cruises in Europe continue to be a hot ticket, along with traditional cruises to the region. Here’s a snapshot of the trend.

“Business is up 18% for our Avalon Waterways brand,” said Jennifer Halboth, director of channel marketing for Globus. “It’s a very hot vacation style.”

What’s the appeal of river cruises? “People can step right off the ships into city centers. It’s also very intimate. There might be 3,500 people on a large cruise ship, but we have 128 or 164 people on our river cruises,” Halboth said.

### Extending the stay

In a trend that’s good news for agents, a growing number of river cruisers are adding pre- or post-cruise land stays.

“Our agency is seeing a 10% to 15% increase in people combining a European land tour with a river cruise,” said Jennifer Leventhal, president of Sentinel Travel.

“To celebrate a 40th birthday, two couples went to Amsterdam, and Basel, Switzerland, then took a Rhine cruise.”

### Ocean cruises too

Europe cruises aboard big liners are still very much afloat.

“We just sold four cabins on a 21-day cruise of the Eastern

### Where's everyone going?

Sales to some European countries are particularly hot, travel sellers said.

"This year, we're doing a bunch of trips to Italy," said Marshall of Partners in Travel. "I have three couples going for a couple of weeks to Rome, Tuscany and Venice."

At Zicasso, an online company that matches travelers with travel agents and tour operators, "Italy continues to be, by far, the most popular European destination," said CEO Brian Tan.

"Greece has seen huge growth this year, and 2014 might be a record year," he added.

For Globus, "Italy is up 30%. France is also really hot. We're seeing a lot of interest in very iconic destinations," said Jennifer Halboth, director of channel marketing.

### Experienced travelers branch out

As is often the case, seasoned travelers are branching out to outlying regions.

"If they've done Paris, they might go to the south of France," said Halboth. "Or do a Paris-Nice tour with either Globus or Monograms."

Scandinavia, Eastern Europe and more northerly Western European destinations like Belgium and the Netherlands are also drawing experienced travelers.

### Something different

"I've been getting a lot of inquiries about Belgium," said Leventhal of Sentinel Travel. "One client likes to do something different every year. This year, he wants to do Berlin, Amsterdam, Bruges and Ghent, maybe with a little time in Paris."

Halboth said that Eastern Europe is up for Globus, which in 2013 introduced Exotic Europe tours featuring off-the-beaten track destinations for more seasoned travelers.

"We're seeing interest in Croatia, Poland and the rest of Eastern Europe as well as Northern Europe. People want to branch out," she said.

### High airfares no deterrent

"Airfares are crazy!" exclaimed Marshall of Partners In Travel. But high airfares aren't deterring travelers.

"Expectations have been reset regarding airfares to Europe," Halboth said. "People are no longer expecting \$800 roundtrip airfares."

Leventhal agreed. "These days, \$1,100 to \$1,200 roundtrip to London or Paris seems reasonable."

### Culture, history, food and wine

Europe's bread-and-butter attractions – historic sights, cultural attractions and food and wine – are the perennial draw.

"We're seeing two strong motivations—culture, and food and wine," said Eugenio Magnani, chair of the U.S. Operations Group of the European Travel Commission (ETC), the chief marketing group for 33 countries.

Along with Europe's cultural attractions – historic buildings, art museums and archeological sites in Greece and Turkey – "music and opera festivals are popular," Magnani said, "and open-air events where visitors can enjoy a very special European al fresco experience."

Anniversaries attract visitors, too. "We had someone asking about going to Normandy for the 70th anniversary of D-Day," said Leventhal of Sentinel Travel.

Other big 2014 celebrations include the World War I centenary in Belgium's West Flanders, as well as in France and Great Britain; the 950th anniversary of the founding of Pisa's Cathedral, and the Dylan 100 Festival in Wales, celebrating poet Dylan Thomas.

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### Gimme that old-time religion

One niche market for Europe that continues to grow is faith travel. Religious

and Western Mediterranean," said Charynn Marshall of Partners in Travel.

According to Eugenio Magnani of the European Travel Commission, for 2014 "a doubling of the cruise market is expected in the Mediterranean and Northern Europe."

And, he added, "they're still building new ships."

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vacations in Europe offered by Globus and Cosmos are up 60% over last year, according to Halboth.

The options are numerous, including trips to Italy, the Greek Islands, Turkey, Spain, France and Portugal.

"In Germany, you can follow in the footsteps of Martin Luther in Mainz, Worms and Leipzig, and take in the Obergammerau passion play outside Munich," Halboth said. "In Poland, there's the legacy of Pope John Paul II, and in Ireland, the legacy of St. Patrick."

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