



THE ALUMNI
NETWORK

ILTM + TRAVEL+
LEISURE

**RISING
STARS**

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Since 2012, Travel + Leisure and ILTM have partnered to designate an elite group of travel advisors as Rising Stars who are excelling within the industry.

To date, 69 talented young professionals have passed through the program—each one adept at handling complex itineraries for an affluent clientele, from adventure-seeking solo travelers to a multigenerational family 32 members strong. A recent survey of the program's alumni reinforced just how diverse their businesses have become. Ranging from one-and-a-half to 24 years in experience, the the Rising Stars

alumni include boutique operators working with just a handful of clients as well as heads of large companies who communicate with as many as 350 clients a year.

The results also revealed that the members are constantly honing their craft and building on their expertise through their own travels, which, in the past year, have spanned every continent and 43 countries. It's no surprise, then, that the Rising

Stars have observed several trends among their clients and across the travel industry. Given their unique access to the needs and desires of discerning travelers, they are well positioned to observe some of the most significant trends driving the industry today, and they recently shared these insights with us.



WORD OF MOUTH REIGNS



Despite the advance of technology, the majority of new leads still come from word-of-mouth referrals from former and current clients. “Many clients travel with another couple, and I usually retain them for future business,” explained one advisor, who regularly engages with clients through calls and meetings, even when they’re not actively planning a trip. Testimonials—both solicited and not—have been another useful tool in attracting like-minded travelers. Several respondents also indicated that strategic partnerships have been beneficial, as have industry networks such as T+L’s A-List network of travel advisors and Virtuoso.

No surprise, social media has become a hot-button issue among travel advisors, with opinions about the efficacy of Facebook and Instagram varying from person to person. While many respondents noted that these platforms have little to no impact on building their careers, others have found it a valuable tool—both for client inspiration and communication and for broadening their reach. As one advisor noted, “We often get direct messages asking questions about a post, which often becomes a new lead.” Another echoed the point, noting that not only has Instagram yielded new clients, but that they have been people willing to visit “off-the-beaten-path destinations.” A few Rising Stars also mentioned that social media has, in a way, led to a new form of word-of-mouth where first-time clients reach out after spotting the advisor (or his/her agency) tagged in a friend’s Instagram post.

A NEW LEVEL OF PERSONALIZATION— AND A NEW DEFINITION OF LUXURY

Travelers have long seen the value of working with an advisor to build an itinerary that reflects their tastes and interests, but the Rising Stars have noticed a growing desire to take that a step further. According to one Rising Star, clients want ultra-personalized experiences: “They don’t want to repeat anything that’s been done before.” That attitude reflects clients’ changing definition of luxury. Rather than adhering to one overarching interpretation, advisors must now dig further into an individual client’s interests, preferences, and priorities. One advisor said it’s now about “coveted, authentic experiences and a deep connection.” Another gave the example of “beautifully appointed accommodations matched with

philanthropic activity with locals and lunch at an off-the-beaten-path street cart where they’ll eat the best noodles they’ve had in their life.”

While a number of Rising Stars saw “clients wanting smaller or lesser-known hotels instead of the familiar chains,” the advisors also emphasized that these choices go beyond the nuts-and-bolts of a hotel to the core of hospitality. “Luxury means quality, authenticity, and genuine service,” said one advisor. “I’ve had clients who can and will spend as much as 2,000 euros per night move away from staying at ‘luxury’ hotels because the atmosphere is stuffy and the staffs have egos.”



DEEPER, MORE COMPLEX ITINERARIES

Rising Stars are increasingly asked to help avid travelers discover places and participate in activities that go far beyond the usual tourist highlights. In the past year, destinations like the Azores, the Galapagos, and Antarctica have popped up with more frequency, and river cruises have become highly sought-after. Many clients also felt a pull toward Japan, classic Europe, and Africa, expressing particular interest in immersive experiences that delve into the heart of specific regions or personal passion points. With more traditional destinations across Europe, Asia, Latin and South America, and Africa, travelers often crave itineraries that involve photography or local cuisine and culture. One advisor designed a 15-day, four-person adventure in Bhutan and Thailand that included a picnic lunch with monks and private meditation lesson with a master teacher. Another Rising Star executed a trip to Guatemala

for two parents and their adopted child who was interested in his heritage—a special trip made even more memorable by a helicopter excursion to the El Mirador ruins, which few people ever see because it requires a week-long hike to reach by land.

With multigenerational and group travel becoming increasingly popular, the Rising Stars have also been asked to arrange itineraries for larger parties and for longer stretches of time. For a 28-person trip to Paris over the Christmas holiday, one advisor negotiated booking an entire boutique hotel, as well as a private dinner cruise down the Seine with live music and a photographer. A different Rising Star arranged a two-week birthday extravaganza in China for a family of 32 people, who ranged in age from nine to 80 years old. Advisors have also been working with a large number of millennial parents, who are more willing than past generations to travel with young children and babies.





TRAVELING WITH PURPOSE

Multigenerational and celebration travel remain among the most dominant types of bookings handled by the Rising Stars—many of whom noted clients' growing preference to mark milestone occasions with a trip, rather than a party or physical gift. Travelers have also been gravitating toward itineraries that are wellness-focused and environmentally responsible. Some have shown interest in contributing to sustainable initiatives or staying at properties that adhere to sustainable practices. Others, often looking to create a long-term lifestyle change, inquire about wellness amenities, such as yoga, meditation, and Pilates classes, and the dietary options on offer.

Dining has also driven travel, according to the Rising Stars. One advisor booked many clients on trips to Tulum simply because they wanted to dine at the Noma pop-up restaurant. Multiple advisors also cited the popularity of market tours, cooking classes, and tasting sessions for clients who had researched a destination and wanted to immerse themselves more fully in local flavors.

THE CHALLENGES OF SETTING EXPECTATIONS

As beneficial as technology has been in some respects, the volume of information available to travelers and the new culture of immediacy have proven frustrating at times for many Rising Stars. “Clients can have unrealistic expectations of how quickly we can work on something for them,” said one advisor. A second respondent voiced a similar concern of clients “not understanding that itineraries are not generated instantly, especially when they can go on the internet and get immediate pricing from hotels.” In that vein, multiple advisors have noticed a growing demand for transparency and itemization from clients who “want a pricing breakdown of every detail.”

Budgetary issues often stem from online booking engines, which lead travelers to question the accuracy of hotel and flight quotes. As one advisor explained, the websites can perpetuate expectations of always receiving discounts and freebies.

At the same time, several Rising Stars have had clients bring recommendations from friends or ideas they came up with after seeing an Instagram post, both of which can be problematic in terms of costs and travel style. “We, as advisors, get to know the client and what will be the best fit for them” explained one advisor. “We constantly need to advocate that we know which of the available properties will be the best match.”

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Our Rising Stars have an average of 7 years as a travel advisor, 90 active regular clients and their most visited countries are Mexico, France, Germany and Italy

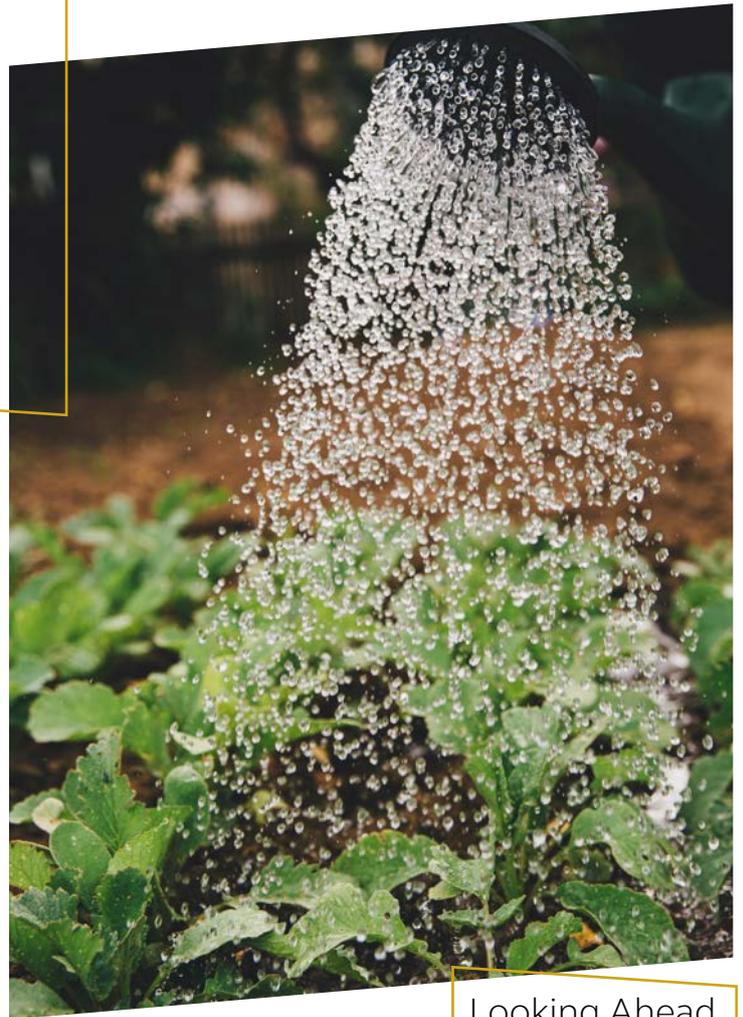
Looking Ahead

How do you see the travel industry changing in the next five years, and how do you plan to adapt to those changes?

“Technology is going to play a significant role in the future of luxury travel. We live in a time where information is available instantly and our patience is dwindling because of this. We must explore new avenues of how we can get accurate, insightful information to our clients quickly and also amend our accessibility.”

“Our clients are becoming more and more savvy and therefore we need to work harder, push the limits, be creative; and not get stuck in the daily grind of churning out variations of the same things.”

“I think we’ll see more experiences and a deeper understanding of the destinations—and better relationship with hotels in order to fulfill a more intimate and tailored experience.”



Looking Ahead

What do you most wish you could change about the travel industry?

“On a business scale, I wish we could make the industry more environmentally responsible but at the same time explore the ‘unknown’ destinations and ensure they can hold onto that innocence.”

“That all platforms could more seamlessly talk to each other! We are so stuck in the past technologically.”

TRAVEL + LEISURE & ILTM: RISING STARS, THE ALUMNI NETWORK

Travel + Leisure

Travel + Leisure is the world's leading travel content brand, dedicated to inspiring and empowering the most curious and passionate travelers to travel more and travel better. Its flagship print edition is the largest-circulation and only monthly consumer travel magazine in the United States, with an audience of 6.3 million. Its website, [TravelandLeisure.com](https://www.travelandleisure.com), has approximately 10 million unique visitors monthly, and the brand's social media footprint across all major channels encompasses more than 12.5 million followers. Travel + Leisure currently has four international editions—in China, India, Southeast Asia, and Mexico—as well as a suite of newsletters, clubs, retail stores, and partnerships, including, most recently, Travel + Leisure Great Adventures by Butterfield & Robison.

ILTM

ILTM (International Luxury Travel Market) is a collection of global, local and specialist luxury travel events taking place in some of the world's most fascinating destinations—Cannes, Cape Town, Dubai, the Riviera Maya, São Paulo, Singapore, and Shanghai. Each event introduces an unrivalled selection of luxury travel brands to ILTM's network of handpicked luxury travel advisors, through bespoke appointment programs and networking sessions. As invitation-only events, dedicated teams in London and São Paulo vet all attendees. For the leaders in the world of luxury travel, attending ILTM events is a must, if they are lucky enough to be selected.

Contact

ILTM & Travel + Leisure are explorers of the future. Through our events and magazines, we bring you the people, trends and big ideas that will change the way we travel.

For more information on ILTM and how to make the connections you need to grow your business, contact iltmsales@reedexpo.co.uk



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REPORT