



Signature Agency Intelligence

TRAVEL TREND WATCH

Experience · Discover · Intent · Immerse · Evolve

Signature
Travel Network



Five Trends Defining the Future of Travel

*Emerging Perspectives on Luxury, Exploration,
and Innovation*

1. Luxury Travel Is In Its Experience Era
2. Beyond the Bucket List: The Growth of Exploration Travel
3. Travel Booking Behavior Splits in Two
4. River Cruising Reinvents a Classic
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Travel is in a constant state of accelerated change, shaped by shifting consumer expectations, emerging technologies, evolving booking habits, and a growing demand for personalized experiences. As travel demand grows, multiple generations take to the road together, and artificial intelligence expands access to information and options, travelers are navigating an exceedingly complex decision-making landscape. Beyond choosing where and how to travel, consumers are evaluating whom to trust, how to save time, and how to ensure every experience delivers personal intention and maximum value.

While an abundance of choice has created new opportunities, it has also introduced greater complexity and decision fatigue. This environment presents a significant opportunity for travel advisors to demonstrate their value through expertise, personalization, and insider access. Few organizations are better positioned to understand these shifts than Signature Travel Network, a member-owned cooperative representing more than 300 travel agencies and 15,000 travel advisors who collectively generate over \$13 billion in annual luxury and leisure travel sales.

The new Signature Agency Intelligence Trend Watch series draws first and foremost on the collective intelligence of Signature's agency community, complemented by insights from hundreds of preferred travel partners across the cruise, hospitality, tour, and destination sectors. Together, these perspectives create a powerful view of the trends, behaviors, and market forces reshaping global travel.

In this inaugural report, Signature identifies five emerging trends, from exploration travel to luxury, marking consumer behavior and industry dynamics as the market looks ahead to 2027 and beyond.

"Together, we are always looking ahead to inspire travelers to have a broader perspective on the world," said Karryn Christopher, President of Signature Travel Network. **"Technology and access to information create a more connected world and unlock new possibilities for exploration. This expansion makes the expertise of travel advisors more essential,** helping clients discover where to go next and how to experience the world in ways that are more enriching, seamless, and memorable."

1

Luxury Travel Is In Its Experience Era

The definition of luxury travel has shifted from luxury as a product to luxury as an experience. Affluent travelers increasingly prioritize authenticity, exclusive access, and highly personalized itineraries that foster deeper engagement with destinations. What was once considered a premium enhancement has become a fundamental expectation, with consumers demanding customized experiences for every trip, from milestone vacations to weekend escapes.

Signature advisors and preferred partners are seeing growing demand for vacations that are genuinely personal and difficult to replicate.

From private cultural encounters and exclusive culinary opportunities to remote destinations and once-in-a-lifetime natural phenomena, luxury clients are prioritizing journeys that inspire, enrich, and connect them more closely to the places they visit.

While exceptional accommodations and service remain important, travelers are increasingly seeking vacations that combine authenticity with effortless execution. Opportunities to engage with local culture, explore emerging destinations, and experience events – ranging from wildlife migrations and cherry blossom seasons to solar eclipses and the Northern and Southern Lights – are becoming powerful drivers of demand.



Affluent travelers are prioritizing discretionary spending on premium experiences and luxury travel sales continue to accelerate across Signature's network.

Luxury cruise sales for 2026 departures are up 16% year-over-year, while its Destination Specialist portfolio and Hotel & Resorts Collection are growing 13% and 12%, respectively.

Based on air travel in 2026, top international destinations for the network include the United Kingdom, Japan, Italy, France, Germany, and Spain – with the highest year-over-year air lift in South Korea and Australia.

Momentum is building for travel in 2027, with luxury cruise sales pacing 27% ahead compared to 2026 and both luxury Fully Independent Travel (FIT) and luxury guided tours pacing at a combined 23% over same time last year.





Rather than prioritizing speed and convenience, luxury travelers are embracing slower, more immersive journeys that transform transportation into an integral part of the experience.

Luxury rail is benefiting from this shift, and operators such as Armstrong Collective (whose brands include Rocky Mountaineer in the Canadian Rockies and Canyon Spirit in the American West) are capitalizing on this demand

by pairing world-class accommodations with curated cultural immersion, allowing travelers to explore destinations at a more intentional pace.

"Today's traveler is seeking something far more meaningful than traditional status symbols. They value time, ease, exclusive access, and experiences tailored to their individual interests and aspirations," said Michelle Lardizabal, Chief Marketing & Sales Officer of Signature.

"As travelers become more intentional about how they invest both their time and money, luxury has become deeply personal, making the role of the travel advisor more important than ever. The new definition of value is rooted in the human element: the relationships, insights, and personalized touches that only a trusted advisor can provide. The greatest opportunities lie not only in designing extraordinary journeys, but in seamlessly connecting every aspect of the experience."



Beyond the Bucket List: The Growth of Exploration Travel



Exploration travel is rapidly evolving from a niche pursuit into one of the industry's fastest-growing segments. Whether through expedition cruising, active adventures, guided journeys, or immersive wildlife encounters, travelers are seeking authentic opportunities to engage with the natural world, discover remote destinations, and form true connections with the places they visit.

Fueled by social media, digital storytelling, and growing accessibility, demand for exploration-focused vacations continues to accelerate. **Consumers are seeking deeper engagement with destinations, prioritizing active participation over passive sightseeing,** whether that means observing wildlife in Antarctica, hiking through Patagonia, navigating the Galápagos Islands, or connecting with local cultures in some of the world's most remote regions.

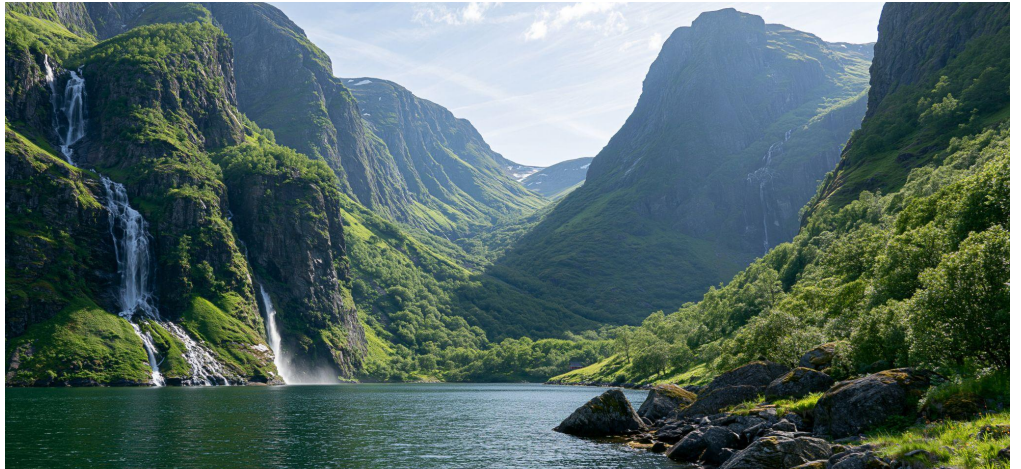
Signature is seeing strong momentum across every major exploration segment. Expedition cruises, guided vacations, and active and adventure travel all posted significant gains in 2026 and are seeing continued growth into 2027.

Expedition cruising is leading the category, with sales up 24% year-to-date compared to the same period in 2025.

The demographic for exploration travel is expanding beyond its traditional base of seasoned adventurers to include Millennials, Gen Z travelers, and multigenerational families. As Millennials enter their peak earning years, many are prioritizing transformative travel and introducing their children to unique destinations around the world.

Demand from both parents and grandparents points to growing interest in exploration-focused family travel. Reflecting this trend, Signature launched *Ready. Set. Go!*, a travel magazine specifically created for children.

Following its May 2026 debut, the first edition quickly sold out by advisors, leading to a second printing slated for October and plans for two separate editions in 2027.





While first-time explorers enter the market, experienced travelers are remaining active and adventurous later in life, helping create a uniquely multigenerational market. Rather than one generation replacing another, exploration travel is expanding across age groups, united by a shared desire for connection and life-changing moments.

“The biggest shift we’re observing isn’t where people are traveling, but why. People increasingly want experiences that create a lasting connection rather than simply adding another destination to a list,” said Karl Kannstadter, Vice President, Content Strategy – Exploration at Signature. **“What we’re witnessing is a fundamental shift from sightseeing to experience-seeking, and that trend shows no signs of slowing.”**

Signature’s preferred partners continue to innovate in response to this rising demand for travel that combines adventure, sustainability, wellness, and culture immersion.

Notably, PONANT is redefining polar exploration with Le Commandant Charcot, its hybrid-electric icebreaker capable of reaching the geographic North Pole, while Seabourn is capitalizing on the Arctic with two expedition ships sailing in 2028.

Silversea is elevating the Antarctica journey through a fully integrated experience, including the October 2026 opening of its dedicated hotel, The Cormorant at 55 South, and exclusive air service from a private terminal. Travelers are also gravitating toward purpose-built lodges, fueling growth for operators such as Explora Hotels, which continues to expand across South America with the openings of Explora El Calafate in Argentina and Explora Torres del Paine Conservation Reserve later this year. In the family travel segment, Tauck is growing its Tauck Bridges portfolio in 2027 with a new small-ship itinerary along Croatia’s Dalmatian Coast aboard the custom-designed Lupus Mare, blending land and sea exploration for multigenerational travelers.

From next-generation expedition ships and polar voyages to family-focused guided tours and immersive wellness journeys, partners are redefining exploration travel for a broader and more diverse audience than ever. As demand continues to grow, both travelers and advisors have an opportunity to view exploration not as a one-time bucket-list achievement, but as an ongoing path to discovery, connection, and personal enrichment.

Travel Booking Behavior Splits in Two

Traditional travel booking patterns continue to evolve, challenging long-held industry assumptions around concepts such as “Wave Season” and “Shoulder Season”.

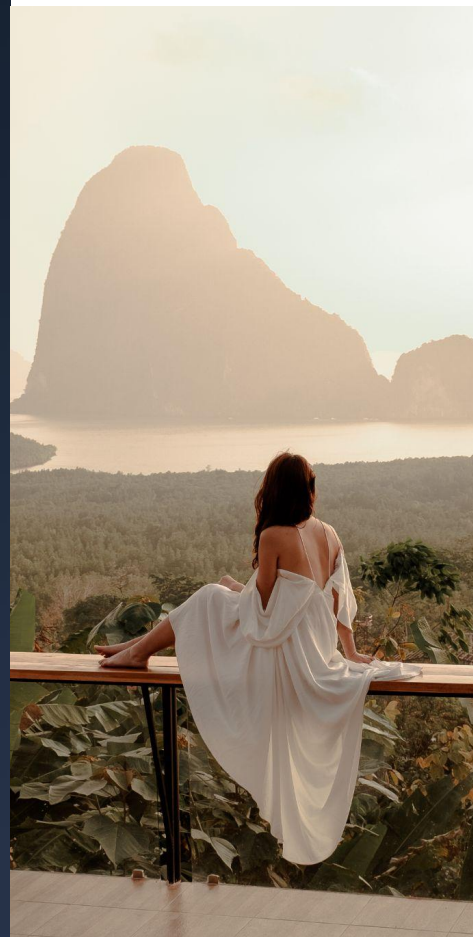
Instead, Signature advisors are observing a market increasingly defined by two distinct and seemingly opposite behaviors: clients booking much closer to departure and clients planning farther in advance than ever before.

At one end of the spectrum, shorter booking windows are becoming more common, with many travelers making decisions just 30 to 90 days before departure. At the same time, demand for fall travel continues to accelerate, helping transform the traditional “shoulder season” into one of the industry’s most sought-after periods.

Signature advisors reported strong booking activity throughout late spring and summer for fall departures, reflecting growing consumer interest in traveling outside traditional peak periods.

For advisors, these shifts highlight the importance of maintaining proactive client engagement and year-round marketing efforts, while recognizing travelers’ continued willingness to invest in meaningful trips and embrace more flexible travel patterns.

At the other end of the booking curve, travelers are planning further ahead than at any point in recent years, signaling both strong demand and a growing desire to secure preferred experiences well in advance.





Since 2024, Signature's average booking window for luxury and expedition cruises has lengthened by two to four months prior to departure. Leading cruise brands such as Oceania Cruises and Viking have already released select 2028 and 2029 itineraries, extending the planning horizon and giving travelers access to sought-after inventory years before sailing. This trend toward longer-term planning extends well beyond the cruise sector, with guided tour bookings now being secured an average of 9.1 months in advance, up from 8.4 months.

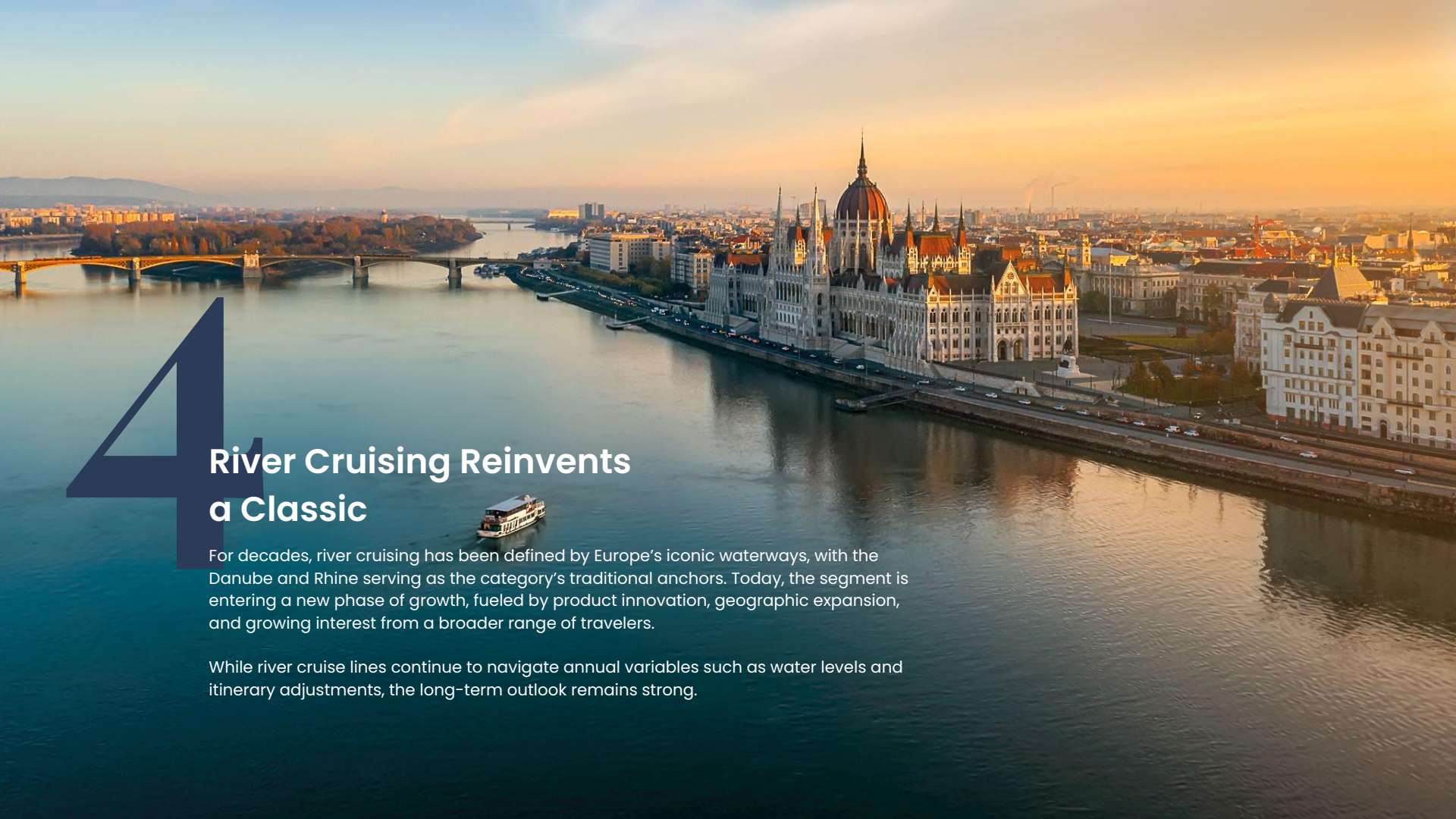
For travelers, early booking windows provide access to preferred inventory, coveted accommodations, and sought-after departure dates.

For advisors, they offer greater visibility into future demand and new opportunities to deliver value through strategic planning and exclusive partner benefits.

For preferred partners, earlier bookings create stronger booking certainty and more effective inventory management.

As a result, suppliers are positioning their most compelling value at launch rather than at the close of the sales cycle, rewarding early planners while supporting stronger yields, lower churn, and improved profitability.

"Today's consumers are approaching trip planning with greater intentionality than ever before," said Lardizabal. **"Some are making decisions closer to departure, while others are securing travel years in advance to guarantee access to the experiences they want most. In both cases, trusted Signature advisors help travelers navigate options, unlock exclusive opportunities, and plan with confidence."**



4 River Cruising Reinvents a Classic

For decades, river cruising has been defined by Europe's iconic waterways, with the Danube and Rhine serving as the category's traditional anchors. Today, the segment is entering a new phase of growth, fueled by product innovation, geographic expansion, and growing interest from a broader range of travelers.

While river cruise lines continue to navigate annual variables such as water levels and itinerary adjustments, the long-term outlook remains strong.

According to Business Research Insights, the global river cruise market was valued at approximately \$2 billion in 2026 and is projected to reach \$5 billion by 2035, representing an average annual growth of nearly 10%. Signature's travel agency network is exceeding that pace, with international river cruise departures up 14% for 2026 and 2027 currently pacing ahead at 17%.

The segment's strong momentum is attracting significant new investment from both established cruise brands and travel companies seeking a foothold in the fast-growing river cruise market. In early 2026, Celebrity Cruises announced plans to launch 10 river cruise ships by 2031, with bookings already open through 2028. Meanwhile, Trafalgar entered the category with two European river ships and announced further fleet expansion through 2028, underscoring growing industry confidence in the sector's long-term growth potential.

Current river cruise lines are also scaling to meet demand. In 2026, Uniworld Boutique River Cruises debuted the S.S. *Emilie*, its first new-build ship in five years, and unveiled its largest expansion to date, including four new ships in 2027 and three new ships in 2028.

These investments signal a broader industry commitment to expanding capacity, enhancing product differentiation, and capturing growing consumer interest in experiential, destination-focused travel.

With more choice entering the market, river cruise lines are capitalizing on the segment's distinctive appeal to attract both first-time and experienced cruisers. Smaller ships, immersive cultural experiences, and direct access to city centers offer an alternative to traditional cruising, resonating with travelers seeking a more destination-focused style of travel.





Growth is also expanding beyond Europe's established river cruise corridors. In North America, American Cruise Lines continues to add capacity across the Mississippi, Columbia, and Snake River systems.

Signature member sales for U.S. river cruising are up 28% for 2026 departures and currently pacing 40% ahead for 2027, underscoring strong demand for domestic and closer-to-home exploration.

Emerging destinations are also broadening the category's reach. AmaWaterways' expansion onto Colombia's Magdalena River with *AmaMagdalena* and *AmaMelodia* reflects growing interest in less-traveled waterways and authentic moments with local cultures, while supporting the development of sustainable tourism and economic growth in the region.

For travel advisors, the key trend to watch is the continued diversification of river cruising. As new brands, ships, and destinations enter the market, river cruises are increasingly appealing to younger travelers, solo travelers, active travelers, and multigenerational families seeking deeper cultural immersion. What was once viewed as a highly specialized segment is rapidly evolving into a mainstream gateway to exploring the world in a more intimate and meaningful way.

River cruising's enduring appeal has always been its ability to bring travelers closer to the heart of a destination. As the category expands into new rivers, new regions, and new consumer segments, it is proving that innovation and tradition can coexist, creating fresh opportunities for both clients and advisors alike.

5 The Power of Signature Agency Intelligence

Few forces are reshaping business faster than artificial intelligence. Across industries, AI is transforming how organizations analyze data, improve efficiency, and personalize customer experiences. Travel is no exception.

Throughout the industry, AI is streamlining operations, accelerating research, and helping advisors identify patterns more quickly than ever before. As information becomes more accessible and travel options continue to expand, the value of expert guidance continues to grow.

Technology can process information, but it cannot replace judgment, relationships, empathy, or the nuanced understanding required to design a custom vacation.

This dynamic is not new. Travel advisors have successfully adapted to every major technological shift, from call centers and online booking platforms to social media and mobile commerce. Each innovation has changed how travel is researched and purchased, yet the advisor profession has continued to evolve alongside it. Today's AI revolution is proving no different.



On September 29, 2026, Signature unveiled SigCompass™ and Signature Storybook™ at its annual Owners' Meeting. The two new platforms are designed to help agency owners and advisors uncover opportunities, drive growth, and deliver more personalized travel experiences. Together, the platforms represent the next evolution of Signature Agency Intelligence, Signature's growing ecosystem of artificial intelligence, network-wide insights, marketing intelligence, partner data, and advisor expertise.

"Artificial intelligence is transforming how information is gathered and analyzed, but travel remains fundamentally human," said Karen Yeates, Executive Vice President of Information Technologies at Signature. **"Our focus is on giving advisors the best of both worlds: powerful technology that improves efficiency while preserving the expertise, relationships, and personalization that create an exceptional travel experience."**





ACTIONABLE INTELLIGENCE FOR TRUE NORTH GROWTH

Developed in partnership with DataSQRl and Toggle Travel, SigCompass™ is Signature's centralized intelligence and analytics platform. It brings together data from bookings, CRM systems, marketing programs, preferred partner relationships, advisor activity, and emerging digital experiences to provide agencies and headquarters with a complete view of business performance and growth opportunities.

By replacing disconnected reports and siloed systems with a unified source of intelligence, SigCompass will help agency owners and Signature leaders identify trends, uncover opportunities, measure results, and make faster, more informed decisions.

More than a reporting dashboard, SigCompass delivers contextual insights that help users move from observation to action. The platform is designed to improve advisor productivity, strengthen preferred partner growth, and support the evolution of Signature Agency Intelligence.

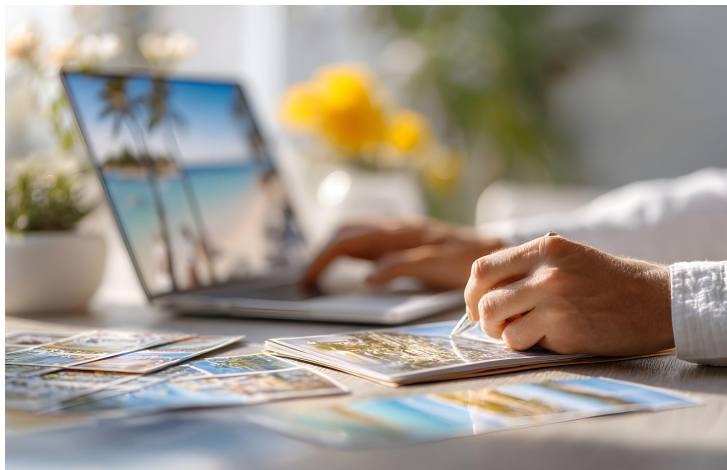
Storybook

If SigCompass reveals the opportunity, Signature Storybook™ helps advisors act on it. Together, they transform intelligence into personalized recommendations, deeper engagement, and stronger client relationships. Storybook combines artificial intelligence, advisor expertise, preferred partner content, behavioral insights, and personalization tools to help advisors create highly tailored travel recommendations and client-facing travel stories. Advisors will be able to search Signature preferred partner offerings across cruise, hotel, tour, insurance, and other travel categories, then curate those products into visually engaging recommendations designed around each travelers' unique interests and travel goals.

By surfacing relevant products and recommendations in real time, Storybook helps advisors move beyond selling individual trips and toward creating personalized travel experiences that deepen engagement and improve conversion. Rather than navigating an overwhelming online marketplace on their own, travelers benefit from a more collaborative planning journey, exploring options alongside a trusted advisor within Signature's protected ecosystem.

Launching with cruise products in Q4 2026, Storybook will expand to hotels in early 2027, followed by insurance, excursions, and land products throughout the year. Over time, Signature envisions Storybook becoming a central destination where advisors can discover, curate, share, and book offerings across its entire preferred partner ecosystem.

Together, SigCompass and Storybook reflect Signature's belief that the future of travel planning will be powered by both advanced technology and human expertise, empowering advisors to work smarter, strengthen client relationships, increase preferred partner sales, and deliver more personalized travel experiences than ever before.



The Future of Travel Is Intentional

Taken together, these trends point to a travel landscape defined not by more travel, but by more intentional travel. Travelers are increasingly prioritizing experiences over possessions, personalization over standardization, and trusted expertise over endless choice.

For travel advisors, suppliers, and industry leaders, the opportunity is clear: Success will increasingly depend on the ability to combine human insight, differentiated experiences, and intelligent technology to help travelers navigate a more complex marketplace.

For Signature Travel Network, the convergence of human expertise, trusted partnerships, and advancing technology represents one of the industry's most significant opportunities.

The trends highlighted throughout this report are not isolated developments. Together, they signal a broader shift toward a more personalized, experience-driven, and advisor-led future of travel.

"The future of travel isn't being shaped by a single destination, technology, or trend. It's being shaped by consumers who are seeking more intentional, genuine, and personalized experiences with every journey," said Signature Travel Network President Karryn Christopher. **"As choice continues to expand, the value of trusted expertise only grows. The organizations best positioned for the future will be those that combine innovation, insight, and human connection to help travelers make choices with confidence and create experiences that are unique and meaningful to them."**



Signature Travel Network® is a member-owned travel cooperative, headquartered in El Segundo, California, with a regional office in New York, New York. The network was established in 1956 and today includes more than 300 travel agencies with over 700 retail locations in the United States, Brazil, Australia, Europe, New Zealand, Mexico, and the Caribbean. Signature members include more than 15,000 travel advisors worldwide that collectively generate more than \$13 billion in annual travel sales. Signature harnesses the positive impact of travel and gives back globally through its Travel Elevates foundation. In 2026, Signature once again earned the distinction of being one of the Best Places to Work by the LA Business Journal.

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