

Beat: Travel

VIRTUOSO CHAIRMAN S EVENT - This Year in PARIS November 13-17, 2016

Press Conference PARIS November 16, 2016

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USPA NEWS - 'Virtuoso' is a network of luxury travel agencies, with more than 11,400 advisors worldwide, with a portfolio of nearly 2,000 partners (top hotels, cruise lines, tour operators,...). CEO Matthew Upchurch and 85 of some of the best travel agencies affiliated to Virtuoso's Network, were in PARIS...

'Virtuoso' is a network of luxury travel agencies, with more than 11,400 advisors worldwide, with a portfolio of nearly 2,000 partners (top hotels, cruise lines, tour operators,...). CEO Matthew Upchurch and 85 of some of the best travel agencies affiliated to Virtuoso's Network, were in PARIS during four days (November 13-17, 2016), celebrating the 12th Anniversary of 'Chairman's Recognition Event' organized every year by Virtuoso. 2015 was record year concerning the American Tourists welcomed in FRANCE. With 3,3 million Americans (+ 4,2 % compared to 2014), USA become the n° 1 Long Distance Market for FRANCE and profits of 2,4 billion Euros.

During their stay, the group enjoyed many activities and Events including Gastronomy, Fashion, Arts and High Cultural Places. The representatives of Virtuoso were coming from Australia, Brazil, Canada, Chile, Dominican Republic, Mexico, Switzerland, United Arab Emirates, United Kingdom, United States of America.

While Virtuoso organizes every year 'Chairman's Recognition Event' celebrating the Virtuoso's Network Travel Agencies, every year focus is made on presenting a City which has welcomed the network in an educational and attractive way. This time, the Network Virtuoso enjoyed Parisian starred restaurants, most famous Fashion Houses, hidden Treasures of the Jewelers at Place Vendôme, private visits of high Parisian places of culture...

One of the reasons why Virtuoso has chosen Paris as welcoming City is to allow Virtuoso's Travel Agencies to see this Luxury Travel destination with a fresh look and a new perspective, hoping to boost sales which have slowed down in 2016. Virtuoso notes a decline of 17% of bookings in its favourite Hotels in Paris. Nevertheless, Virtuoso also announced a strong point in its '2017 Virtuoso Luxe Report' (forecasting emerging travel developments and top destinations for the coming year), FRANCE is at the third position on the list of the most popular worldwide destinations, just after Italy and South Africa.

- Virtuoso's recommendations for five must-have travels in 2017 :

* Head now for destinations with a sense of urgency : ones that are changing rapidly or even disappearing. Cuba tops the list as both an emerging destination and one in danger of losing its distinctive character. The Arctic is another must-see, with melting glaciers impacting the region's unique wildlife. Closer to home, now is the time to visit Lanai before it gains more popularity.

* Seek out active journeys, as adventure travel soars even higher this year as a dominant trend. Virtuoso's advisors recommend a variety of adventures, including an African safari, swimming with whale sharks in Mexico or Australia, or hiking the Swiss Alps.

* Splurge on an over-the-top exclusive experience : hire a personal guide for a city tour or board a private jet for an unforgettable round-the-world journey. Exclusive-use travel is a key trend for 2017, whether it is renting a villa in a prime destination such as St. Barts or even a private island, or chartering a yacht for a Croatian sail.

* Savor the flavors and eat like a local wherever you roam. Take a cooking class, peruse the markets, hunt for truffles, dine at a world-class restaurant or opt for a private, in-home dining experience.

* Take a cruise that matches your preferences and personality. Virtuoso advisors recommend cruising for its convenience, value and range of options. River cruising offers greater cultural immersion and the opportunity to explore the heart of a destination. Expedition cruising continues to gain popularity for its nature-focused and more intimate, experiential itineraries to remote destinations.

- Travelers are seeking fresh territory, with exploring new destinations serving as the coming year's top travel motivator. And no short

jaunts for the affluent, as international trips of two weeks or longer topped the list of trips seeing increased demand. Multigenerational travel also remains a defining trend, with Japan making its way onto the emerging destination list for the first time due to its rising interest as a less traditional location for family travel.

- Travelers today crave active experiences that are customized to their interests and abilities, and are venturing all over the globe to find them. South Africa retains its spot as the world's top adventure travel destination, followed by the Galapagos Islands, Costa Rica and New Zealand. Peru and Iceland (new to the top 5 this year) tied for fifth place, and Iceland in particular is seeing remarkable growth as an adventure destination.

- The 2017 Virtuoso Luxe Report also revealed that upscale travel is thriving as trips are selling out earlier than in past years. Many travelers are booking farther in advance, even one to two years for bigger trips. Virtuoso is also observing more requests for business and first-class air travel, as well as nonstop flights. Late bookers face higher rates and fewer flight options.

Source : Virtuoso Press Conference, Hôtel Four Seasons George V, with :

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- * Anne-Laure Tuncer : CEO Atout France USA
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