



# Brave New World

How will the next generation of intrepid globetrotters change the way we travel? BY HOLLY RIDDLE

**ON TRACK:**  
*Young traveler using app at train station*

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**GEN Z HAS OFFICIALLY TAKEN** over the world. The generation, defined in many studies as those born after the year 2000, currently makes up 32 percent of the global population of 7.7 billion, according to a late-2018 Bloomberg analysis. The generation surpassed millennials and, as its buying power increases, more industries look to how they can better serve the unique, digital-savvy and self-aware generation. The travel industry is no exception.

According to a recent study from Expedia Group Media Solutions, Gen Z boasts up to \$143 billion in buying power and is set to become the largest generation in the world by 2020. Though younger, members of Gen Z take nearly as many trips per year as millennials and take longer trips than millennials on average. They're more likely to travel

domestically, and travel decisions are more heavily influenced by social media. Even though they've just recently entered the workforce, members of Gen Z are already jumping on business travel trends, such as bleisure travel, with a gusto unmatched by millennials.

"Gen Zers bring a unique set of values and a different perspective to the travel world," commented Rob Karp from MilesAhead, an affiliate of Valerie Wilson Travel, a Virtuoso Agency. "Airbnb, Hotel Tonight and Google Maps are their best friends. They can be some of the most demanding travelers in the market, although currently without the spend to support it. Rationale is sought behind each travel decision, whether it's purchasing basic economy versus normal economy or eating in the 2nd versus the 8th Arrondissement in Paris. ... They are craving authenticity, seeking experiences beyond the norm and advocating for environmentally friendly travel in a way other generations haven't before. For Gen Zers, it's about making each experience their own and having ownership in it — eating the food, connecting with like-minded locals and navigating the streets like it's where they grew up."

Many different aspects of life formed this unique generation of travelers. Members of Gen Z grew up in a world saturated with technology, where connection to and knowledge of anyone or anything is right at their fingertips; in a post-9/11 country where airport security has simply always been the way it is currently; and on a planet threatened with global warming and other environmental dangers. No wonder Gen Z developed into a group of intrepid, adventurous travelers with a penchant for sustainability and a heavy reliance on technology to guide their paths.

“Gen Z grew up around technology, around unlimited access to information and in a world of instant gratification,” said Karp. “So when they take a trip — before, during and after — the online world plays an important role. Whether it’s reading TripAdvisor to pick a restaurant, posting a cool photo on Instagram or adding a video of their trip on Facebook after their trip, these are key parts to a Gen Zer’s experience and also their peers. Previous generations sent postcards and handwritten letters — not to say those aren’t great! It’s just not the world Gen Zers grew up in.”

Tom O’Hara, general manager, Busabout, a youth-aimed travel and tour provider, said Gen Z’s intrepid nature also increases because many grew up in diverse communities or families, lessening the cultural shock previous generations may have felt while abroad.



EXPLORING:  
*Travelers enjoy trying local foods like waffles in Belgium (left) and documenting adventures like boating on the Mekong River on social media (below)*

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PHOTO OPS:  
*Young tourist standing under the Petronas Towers in Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia (right); and a group of friends in front of Cloud Gate in Chicago (below)*

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“Gen Z travelers are growing up in societies where, increasingly, cultural diversity is normal within their own communities, and therefore the fear factor when it comes to visiting new cultures doesn’t exist as much as it would have, particularly in older generations,” he said.

Fran da Silva, marketing manager, MarBella Collection, a group of luxury properties in Greece, further reiterated Gen Z’s moxie. “From our experience, this generation reacts immediately to any sort of challenge or adventure, which is something we have not seen so clearly in previous generations.”

With Gen Z making its vibrant mark on the travel landscape, it can leave some older travelers wondering how they’ll be affected. As brands turn their attention to this new generation with all its buying power and packed travel schedules, will previous generations be left in the dust? Or do they stand to benefit from Gen Z’s influence?

Karp pointed out Gen Z travelers already influence parents’ and grandparents’ travel spending habits a great deal, as they play a large role in purchase decision-making during both family travel and multigenerational travel.

“Research has shown that Gen Zers play a significant role in family travel decisions. Many times the Gen Zer will suggest where the family should go, why they should go there and what to plan to do there. At MilesAhead — and in our industry as a whole — multigenerational trips are growing in popularity and desirability. These trips are a wonderful opportunity to bring a family together, which in this day and age is a real luxury. Usually grandparents





initiate the idea of the trip and then hand off the planning to their kids or grandkids. Gen Zers elevate travel planning to a new level, setting a new standard.”

Mark McSorley, general manager, The Magnolia Hotel, Quinta do Lago in Portugal, backed this up with first-hand experience. “Studies show that Gen Z [members] heavily influence their families’ travel decisions. Here at The Magnolia Hotel, we can see that to be true — their experience needs to be as rewarding as it is for the parents financing it.”

And parents are certainly doing the financing. According to Expedia’s 2018 Generations on the Move report, 58 percent of Gen Z respondents’ parents pay for trip expenses when they travel together, compared to 24 percent of millennials stating parents pay for travel costs when traveling together.

Is all this influence a bad thing, fueled by social media likes, or will it make all our travel — and our world — better?

“My belief is that the changes in travel trends being led by Gen Z travelers are a positive for all generations. The drive for travel companies to improve their technology ultimately means travel becomes more accessible and easier for all generations, which

means more people have access to explore the world. With Gen Z taking the lead on social and environment issues, the knock-on [e]ffect will be increased awareness of every traveler’s footprint, which should ensure travel opportunities and famous sites are around for future generations to enjoy, too,” said O’Hara.

David Solnet, associate professor of service management, University of Queensland Business School, leads the workforce research team in the tourism group at the school and pointed to Gen Z’s sustainability as particularly commendable. “This generation has major — more than ever — concerns for sustainability and the future. So they will become more responsive travelers than the older generation[s]. Gen Z see[s] natural disasters happening all the time, and so they also want to be environmentally responsible. Sustainability initiatives, real ones for the right reasons, will make a huge difference to Gen Z, which can only make the world a better place.”

“Through craving authenticity, preserving the environment and looking to be more than being a tourist, Gen Z will change the way we all travel. I think our travel will become more fulfilling and substantial if we travel like Gen Z,” agreed Karp.

**TEAMWORK:**  
*Family on a rafting trip on  
the South Bug River, Ukraine*

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