

arrivia

# The New Luxury Travel Playbook

Aspiration, Access  
and the Loyalty  
Advantage

Q1 2026



# The luxury travel market in 2026: Growth takes on a new shape

Luxury travel occupies a distinct position in today's travel economy. As consumers weigh trade-offs more carefully amid ongoing economic uncertainty, luxury offerings continue to attract attention. [McKinsey](#) projects that demand for luxury tourism and hospitality will grow faster than any other travel segment, with spending on luxury hospitality set to reach \$390 billion by 2028, up from \$239 billion in 2023.

That momentum is not driven solely by the ultra-wealthy. [Roughly 35%](#) of luxury travelers fall within the “aspiring luxury” bracket, defined as households with net worth between \$100,000 and \$1 million. What distinguishes this group isn't extreme wealth, it's their willingness to allocate a greater share of spend toward comfort, access and meaningful travel experiences.

While high-net-worth travelers remain foundational and continue to shape the top tier, the interplay between established luxury consumers and those actively trading up is broadening expectations and influencing how the experience is delivered.

To understand how these dynamics are unfolding, *arrivia* surveyed 2,190 U.S. leisure travelers. The objective was to explore how travelers define luxury, what motivates them to upgrade and how preferences vary by wealth, generation and life stage.

As more travelers enter the luxury travel market, so does competition. [Deloitte's 2026 outlook](#) describes a bifurcated environment: demand at the very top remains resilient, while travelers in the middle are more selective about when increased spend feels worth it. For brands with loyalty programs, that raises the stakes and clarifies the opportunity: support trade-up moments today, then turn them into repeat behaviors over time.

## Methodology and definitions

Between December 23, 2025, and January 13, 2026, *arrivia* conducted an online survey of 2,190 travelers aged 18+ who had taken at least one leisure trip in the past two years. To focus on travelers with the financial capacity to participate in luxury travel, respondents were required to have a household income above \$100,000 (with minor children) or \$75,000 (without minor children). Results were weighted to be representative of the U.S. population.

## How this report defines traveler segments

Net worth is the primary way this report distinguishes aspiring luxury from traditional luxury travelers. Aspiring luxury travelers are defined as households with a net worth between \$100,000 and \$1 million. Traditional luxury travelers are defined as households with a net worth above \$1 million. This segmentation aligns with [McKinsey's recent analysis](#) of the luxury traveler.

Because luxury participation is also behavioral, this report uses respondents' willingness to spend on lodging as a complementary proxy. Those who are willing to spend \$300–\$499 per night are treated as a premium traveler, \$500–\$749 per night as an aspiring luxury traveler and \$750+ per night as a traditional luxury traveler. Household income is used as a contextual lens throughout the analysis, with the acknowledgement that wealth and willingness to spend do not always align perfectly.

## Today's luxury traveler: A modern definition

The *arrivia* survey suggests that luxury is a lived experience rather than a label. When asked what matters most when booking a luxury trip or experience, 34% of respondents rank comfort first.

That preference extends beyond physical amenities. In a separate question about which statement best reflects their view of luxury travel today, the largest share (29%) selected convenience, privacy and care. Another 25% pointed to unique access over high price tags, while 25% associated luxury with paying more for consistently excellent service. This split is revealing: modern luxury is not a single idea.

Luxury also shifts with age and life stage. Nearly half of respondents (49%) say they value comfort and ease more as they get older. A further 23% report being less impressed by status symbols and more focused on convenience and value, while 28% say they are seeking more meaningful or cultural experiences.

For high-net-worth (HNWI) and ultra-high-net-worth (UHNWI) individuals, seamless execution and attentive support are baseline expectations at a certain price point. Exclusivity and access remain central, but they are assumed. Aspiring luxury travelers approach the category from a different starting point. More accustomed to navigating trade-offs at lower spend levels, they tend to notice the absence of friction when they trade up. Luxury, in their view, is defined as much by ease and execution as by rarity or exclusivity.

**These differences matter for loyalty. What feels like an upgrade depends not only on what is offered, but on what a traveler is used to receiving.**



**We asked: Which statement best describes how you view luxury travel and travel experiences today?**



**We asked: Which of the following factors has most influenced how you view luxury travel today compared to how you viewed it 5 years ago?**



# The emergence of the aspiring luxury traveler

If the meaning of luxury is evolving, so too is the profile of the travelers shaping its growth. Industry research increasingly points to expansion beyond the traditional high-net-worth base. [Phocuswright describes](#) the emergence of the “indulgent traveler,” consumers who prioritize premium experiences and are willing to allocate discretionary income toward elevated travel even if they do not meet legacy definitions of wealth. This framing mirrors what appears in the *arrivia* data: participation is not confined to the top tier.

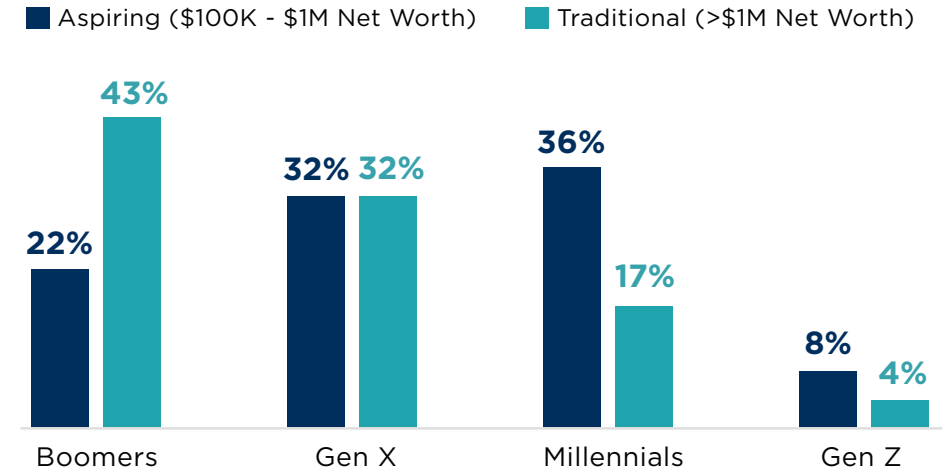
Within the survey, the distribution of wealth across generations reveals a clear pattern. Millennials account for 36% of respondents in the aspiring luxury net worth bracket, compared with 17% in traditional luxury. Gen X is evenly split (32% in each), while Baby Boomers remain more concentrated at the top, with 43% in traditional luxury and 22% in aspiring.

Wealth distribution, however, tells only part of the story. Spending behavior offers a clearer signal of engagement. Among Millennials who fall within the aspiring luxury net worth range, 17% report willingness to spend between \$500 and \$749 per night on lodging, compared with 15% of Gen Z, 9% of Gen X and 8% of Boomers in the same net worth tier. Across all net worth brackets, millennials appear more prominently in the spend tiers above this threshold.

This pattern reflects a diverse group of travelers who trade up selectively rather than uniformly. Aspiring luxury households tend to elevate specific elements of a trip while moderating others, concentrating increased investment where it feels most worthwhile.

**For travel and loyalty providers, the implication is straightforward. The aspiring luxury segment represents both present engagement and future scale. As Millennials and Gen Z continue to accumulate wealth, established travel purchasing behaviors have room to expand. The opportunity lies in recognizing those signals early and reinforcing them consistently.**

## Aspiring vs. Traditional Luxury Travelers



## The Identity of a Luxury Traveler

Aspiring (\$100K - \$1M Net Worth)		Traditional (>\$1M Net Worth)	
<b>41%</b>	Have children under 18	<b>35%</b>	Have children under 18
<b>56%</b>	Male	<b>63%</b>	Male
<b>44%</b>	Female	<b>37%</b>	Female
<b>36%</b>	Millennials	<b>43%</b>	Boomer
<b>32%</b>	Gen X	<b>32%</b>	Gen X
<b>38%</b>	Bachelor's degree	<b>34%</b>	Bachelor's degree
<b>23%</b>	Masters	<b>40%</b>	Masters
<b>4%</b>	Doctorate	<b>8%</b>	Doctorate
<b>64%</b>	Earn less than \$150K	<b>38%</b>	Earn less than \$150K
<b>28%</b>	Earn \$150K-\$249K	<b>40%</b>	Earn \$150K-\$249K
<b>73%</b>	Working full-time	<b>61%</b>	Working full-time
<b>14%</b>	Retired	<b>29%</b>	Retired

# The generational forces behind luxury travel growth

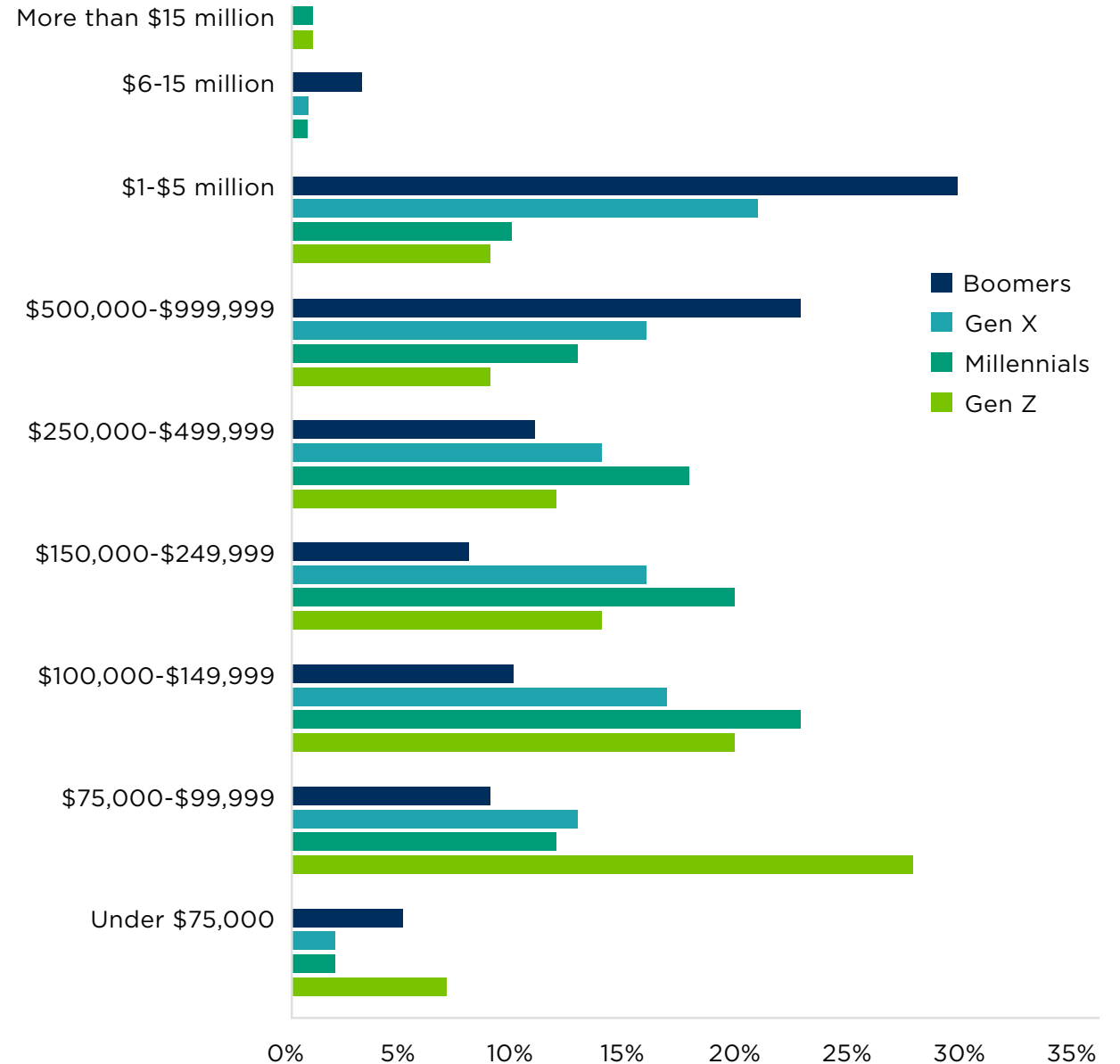
Luxury travel demand spans generations, but the composition of that demand looks very different depending on how luxury is defined.

Using net worth as the primary lens, Boomers remain dominant in the traditional luxury bracket. Thirty percent of Boomers in the *arrivia* survey report net worth between \$1-\$5 million, compared with 20% of Gen X, 10% of Millennials and 9% of Gen Z. In contrast, the aspiring luxury net worth range (\$100K-\$1M) skews younger overall, led by Millennials and Gen X—except towards the upper echelons of the aspiring category where Boomers dominate.

When willingness to spend is layered in, Millennials show up strongly across the mid-to-upper hotel spend tiers, including \$500 per night and above. A similar pattern appears in vacation activity and excursion pricing: Millennials and Gen X account for a larger share of mid-tier “aspiring” price bands for high-touch experiences, while Boomers lead in the highest tiers.

Life stage helps explain the difference. The aspiring luxury net worth segment includes a higher share of full-time workers who are still building their wealth, while higher net worth tiers include a larger share of retirees who have the disposable income to spend at the highest levels.

Net Worth by Generation



Families also show distinct behavior. Households with children are more frequent luxury activity bookers than those without children (23% vs. 9% reporting at least four bookings over the past three years). They are also more willing to spend at higher price tiers: 47% of households with children say they would spend at least \$5,000 on a private, all-inclusive safari package, compared with 37% of households without children.

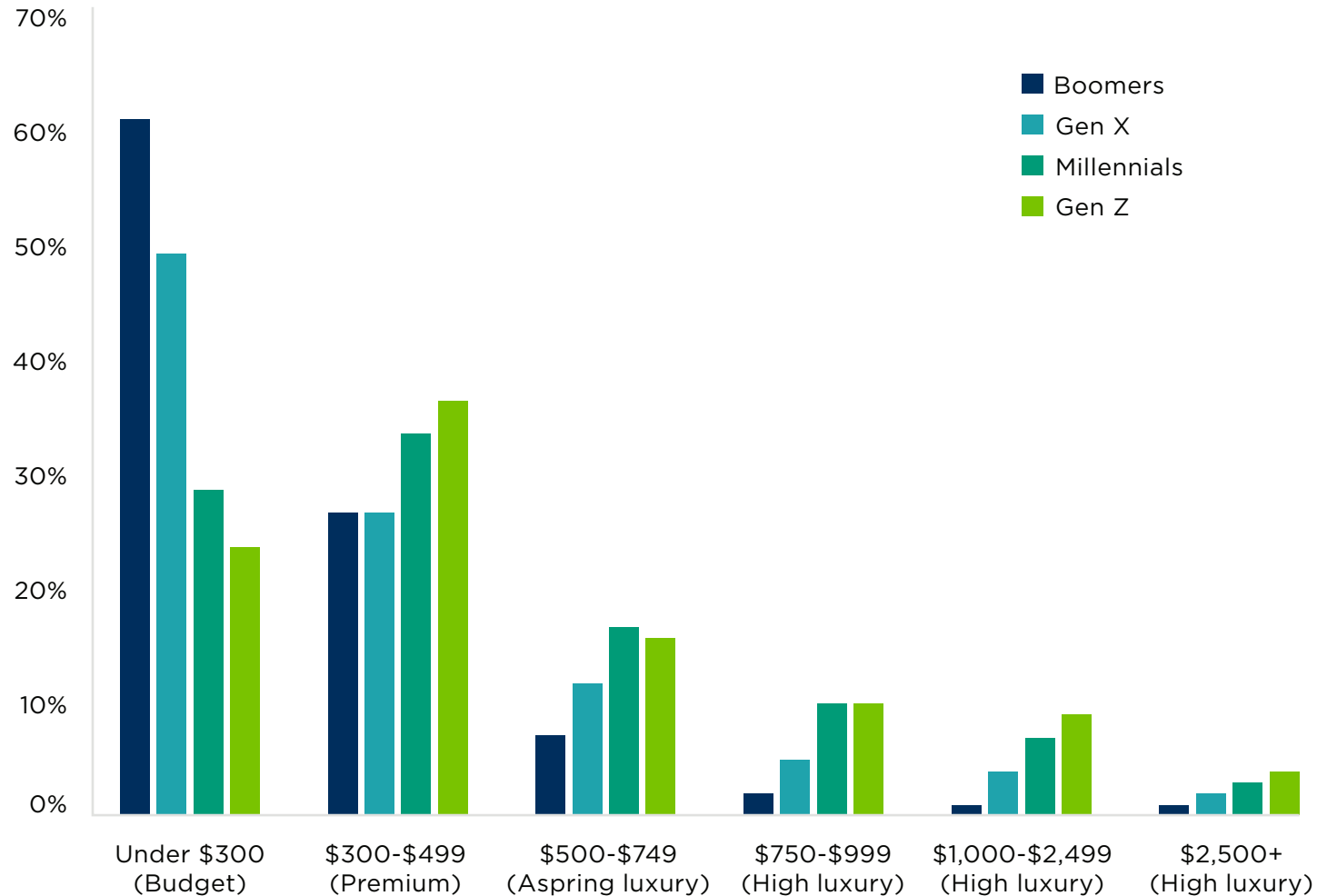
This suggests that time-constrained households are not simply price sensitive. They are often willing to allocate more of their budget for experiences that reduce complexity and deliver value in a concentrated window of time. Retirees, by contrast, may have greater schedule flexibility and accumulated wealth, shaping a different way of experiencing luxury travel.

**For loyalty programs, the implication is practical. Generational segmentation requires looking beyond age to understand where wealth is concentrated, how spending intent manifests and how life stage influences priorities. Programs that account for those distinctions will be better positioned to capture both near-term engagement and long-term value.**



**We asked: How much do you typically spend per night on accommodation when traveling for leisure?**

### Travel Spending by Generation



# What luxury means today: Convenience, comfort and reduced friction

Strip away brand names and price tags, and luxury becomes something more tactile: the ease with which a trip unfolds.

Comfort is the foundation of that experience. As we noted earlier, 34% of respondents say it is the most important attribute when booking or considering a luxury trip. Income adds nuance. Comfort leads across every tier, but its relative weight declines at the highest levels. Among respondents with household income under \$150K, 35% choose comfort as their top definition of luxury; among those earning \$500K or more, that share falls to 27%. At the same time, 19% of the \$500K+ group define luxury through having the money to spend on high-quality experiences, a framing that appears less prominently in middle-income brackets.

The question is not whether comfort matters. It does. The difference is how it is expressed. For some travelers, comfort means fewer complications and more reassurance. For others, it points to discretion, space and access that feels clearly differentiated.

**For loyalty programs, this maps cleanly to benefit design. The most effective benefits are the ones travelers can feel during the trip, such as upgrades, priority support, concierge-style assistance and access-oriented perks.**



**We asked:** The concept of luxury travel can mean different things to different people. What do you consider most important when booking or thinking about booking a luxury trip or travel experience?

## RANKED #1

**34%** **COMFORT:** A luxury trip is one in which I have prioritized purchasing the most comfortable accommodation and transportation so that my entire trip is relaxed and convenient

**15%** **MONEY:** A luxury trip is one in which I have prioritized the highest quality options that money can buy across all aspects of the trip

**12%** **UNIQUENESS:** A luxury trip is one in which I have unique, unforgettable experiences and can travel to destinations that I would not normally be able to enjoy

**11%** **TIME:** A luxury trip is one that gives me enough time to enjoy the experience instead of rushing, and to fully immerse myself in my vacation

**10%** **SERVICE:** A luxury trip is one in which my every need is served, and I do not need to handle any of the logistics

**7%** **WELLNESS:** A luxury trip is one in which I rejuvenate and repair my mind and body through spa and other wellness activities

**7%** **EXCLUSIVITY:** A luxury trip is one in which I have exclusive access to opportunities, people and events

**3%** **EDUCATION:** A luxury trip is one in which I can travel to exciting destinations while learning and discovering new things

**1%** **PHILANTHROPY:** A luxury trip is one in which I can travel to exciting destinations while volunteering to do something good "for society"

# The power of the special occasion as a gateway to luxury

Luxury travel participation is often triggered by context rather than routine. Across the full sample, 28% cite “special occasions” as the primary reason for booking a luxury activity such as a private helicopter tour, exclusive spa treatment or high-end cruise within the past three years, making it the top-ranked motivation overall. This holds across income brackets: 30% among households earning under \$150K cited a special occasion as their primary motivation, compared to 25% among those earning \$150,000–\$249,999, 27% among \$250,000–\$499,999 and 25% among \$500K+.

Viewed through net worth, this gateway effect becomes even clearer. Among households with net worth under \$75K, 37% cite special occasions as their primary motivation. The share remains elevated across and just below the aspiring luxury tiers, including 28% among \$75,000–\$99,999, 27% among \$100,000–\$149,999, 30% among \$150,000–\$249,999, and 27% among \$250,000–\$499,999 and \$500,000–\$999,999, as well as at the lowest net worth level for traditional luxury travel (29% among \$1–\$5 million). At the highest wealth levels, reliance on occasion softens: 22% among households with \$6M–\$15M in net worth and 17% among those above \$15M.

This suggests that while milestone travel matters at every tier, it plays a greater role in prompting luxury engagement among aspiring luxury households. A wedding anniversary, graduation or major family trip creates a defined window in which upgrading feels justified. Luxury becomes purposeful rather than routine.

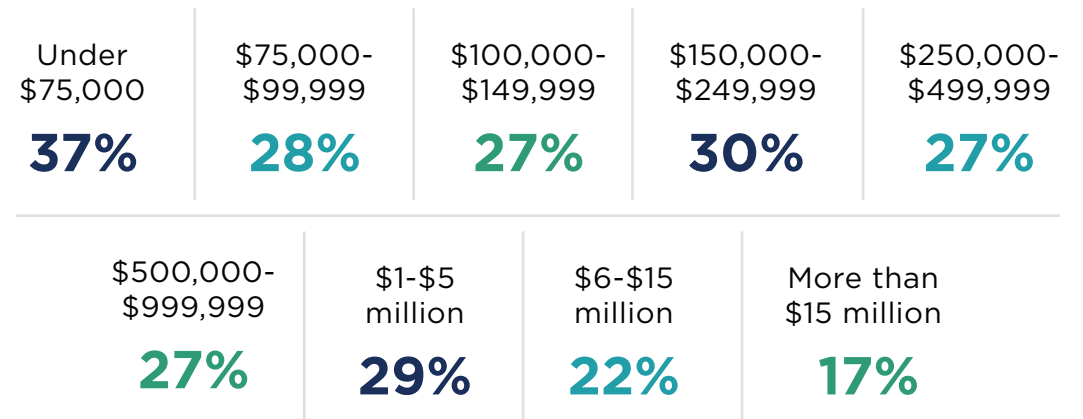
**For loyalty programs, the opportunity lies in treating the celebration trip as a starting point. A well-timed offer tied to a milestone can convert episodic luxury engagement into repeat premium behavior, especially when future upgrades feel attainable rather than exceptional.**



**We asked: What was the main reason you chose this activity?**



## The Importance of Special Occasions, by Net Worth



## The appeal of experiences: Activities and tours in modern luxury

For aspiring luxury travelers, the defining value of a trip often lies in what happens once they arrive. Across the survey, demand for elevated activities and tours is consistent. Higher-quality service or an expert guide account for 20% of primary motivations, while 14% prioritize smaller group or private formats.

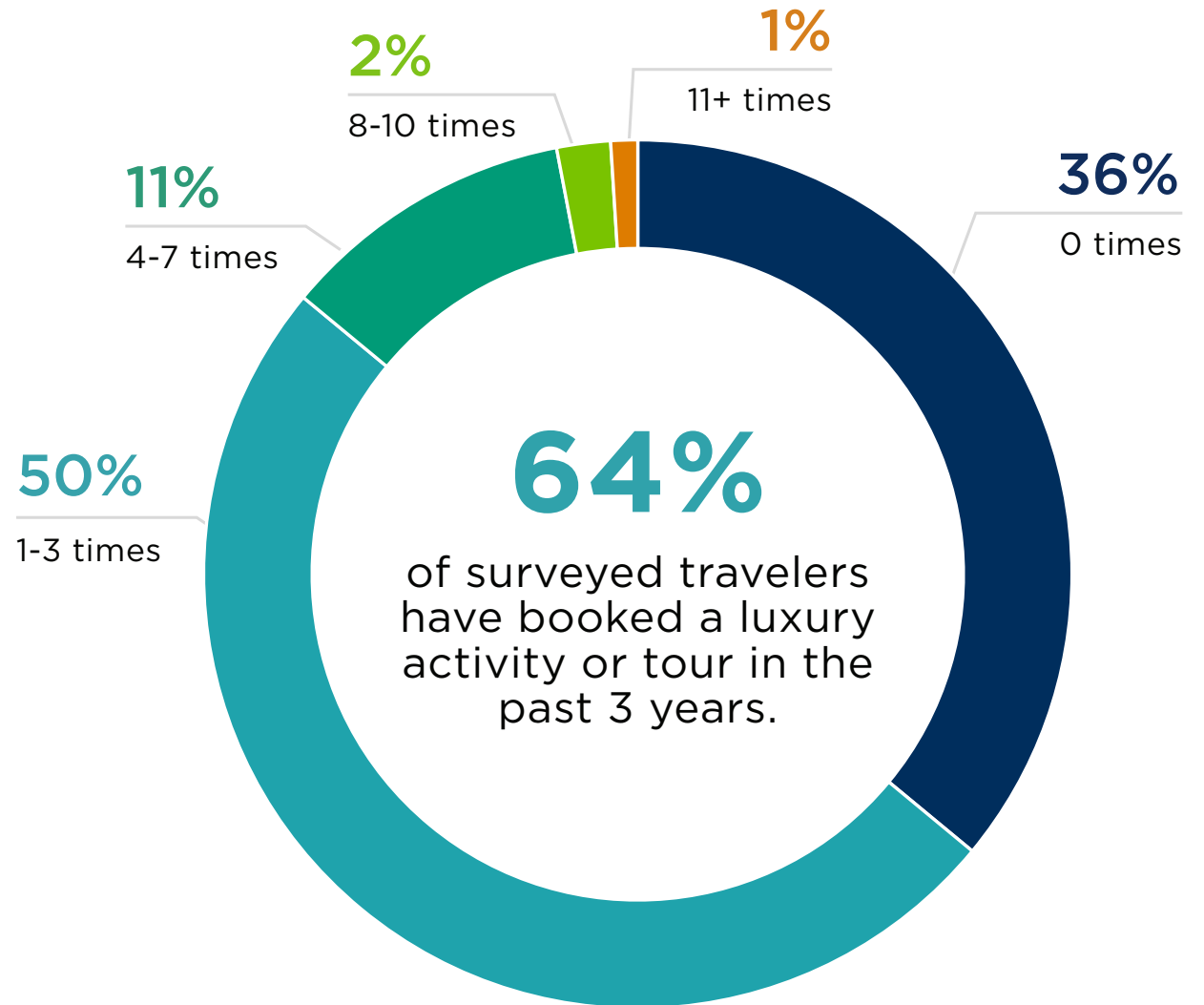
Younger generations are the driving force behind higher-end experience-led travel. Gen Z reports participation in luxury safari or wilderness excursions at 17%, compared with 12% of Millennials and 8% of Gen X. Private island or villa takeovers show a similar trajectory (14% among Gen Z, 8% among Millennials and 6% among Gen X). Luxury sporting events draw 26% of Gen Z, compared with 21% of Millennials and 15% of Gen X.

Even before reaching peak earning years, Gen Z appears engaged in experience-led luxury categories at rates that meet or exceed older cohorts. As their spending power grows, this mix of interests is likely to shape the next phase of luxury demand.

**This is also where loyalty can play a practical role. When discovery and booking are integrated into a trusted platform, planning friction declines, confidence rises and more experiential spend stays within the loyalty ecosystem.**

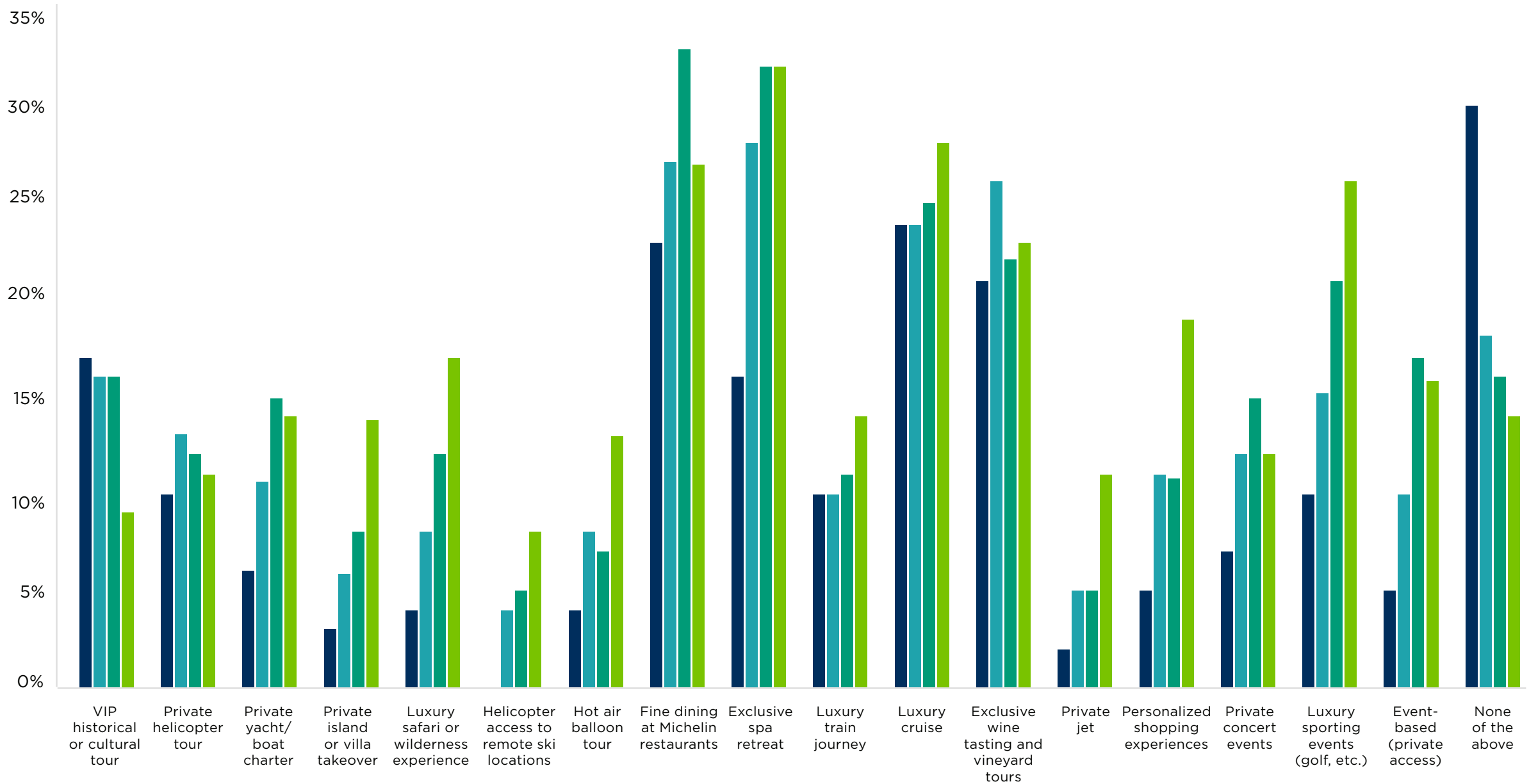


**We asked:** How often have you booked a luxury activity or tour in the past 3 years? For example, a private helicopter ride, private tour, private yacht rental, etc.



## Preferred Activities by Generation

Boomers Gen X Millennials Gen Z



# Cruise: Where modern luxury comes together

Few travel formats align as directly with today’s definition of luxury as cruise. For travelers who describe luxury in terms of comfort, convenience and reduced friction, cruise delivers many of those attributes by design.

Often it bundles transportation, lodging, dining and entertainment into one coordinated experience. It offers itinerary variety without repeated packing and unpacking. For aspiring luxury travelers—particularly time-constrained households—that structure reduces uncertainty and planning burden while still feeling worth the investment.

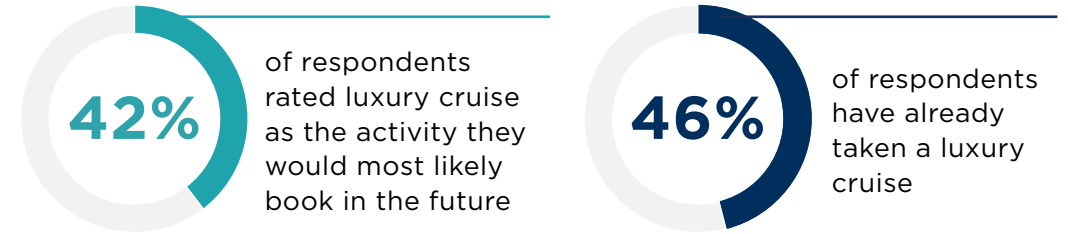
Arrivia’s survey data shows that for all these reasons, cruise resonates broadly. Forty-six percent of respondents report having sailed with at least one of the luxury cruise providers listed in the study. Participation rises at higher income levels, reaching 60% among households earning \$500K+, but remains substantial among households earning under \$150K (50%).

Among luxury cruisers, families stand out for their propensity to cruise. Sixty percent of households with minor children report having cruised with a luxury provider, compared with 47% of households without children.

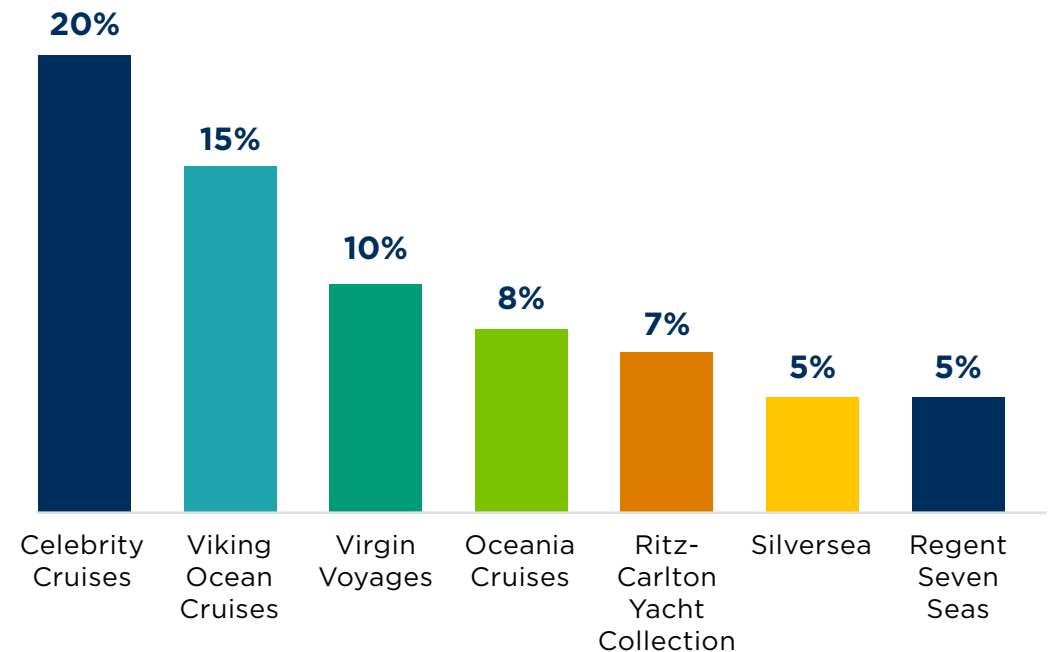
Generationally, engagement is equally strong. Gen Z records the highest participation rate in the survey at 65%, compared with 48% among Boomers. This mirrors broader industry reporting from CLIA, which highlights continued demographic expansion across younger and multi-generational audiences.

**Cruise’s relevance, therefore, extends beyond participation rates. It concentrates the elements that aspiring luxury travelers prioritize into one product. As luxury definitions broaden, cruise sits at the intersection of comfort, access and operational ease.**

## Data shows strong demand for luxury cruise



## The providers respondents in the survey had booked or sailed with in the past include:



# What makes a cruise feel like true luxury

Not all cruises are perceived equally. In the survey, travelers draw a clear line between premium cruising and what they consider genuine luxury.

When asked what makes a luxury cruise feel different from a standard or premium cruise, respondents point first to the onboard environment and the quality of the experience. A less crowded atmosphere leads (19% overall; 23% among high-net-worth travelers). More luxurious dining (18%) and personalized service (18%) follow closely, along with exclusive excursions and access (17%).

These differentiators are concrete. They describe what travelers notice: calmer spaces, attentive service, dining that feels elevated and access that feels curated rather than mass-market.

Households with children interpret value through a slightly different lens, however. In the question about what travelers liked best about their past luxury cruise, all-inclusive is selected less often by families (16%) than by households without children (22%). Rather than prioritizing bundling for its own sake, families appear to respond to a balance of service and value, whether the premium feels justified in the experience itself.

**Taken together, the findings point to a consistent theme: cruise feels luxurious when the distinction is tangible. Space, dining, service and curated access are the cues travelers use to determine whether the upgrade justifies the spend.**

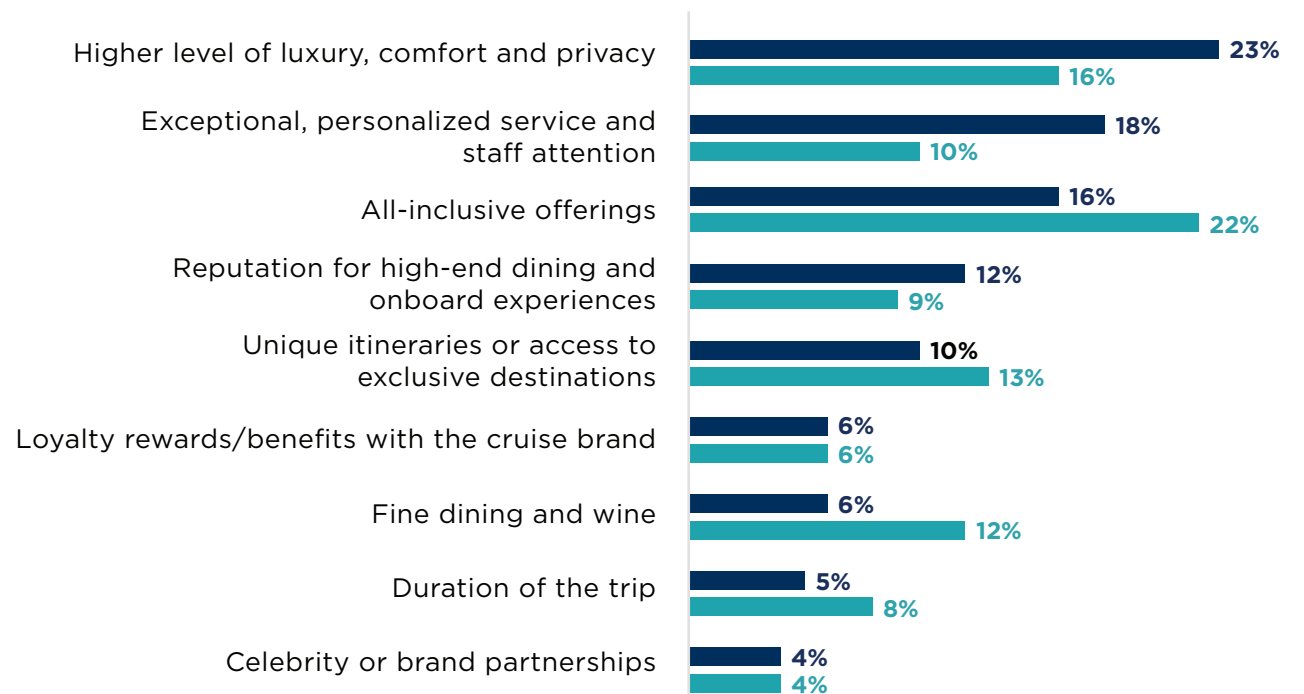


**We asked: What was the one aspect of the luxury cruise experience that felt most different from a standard or premium cruise?**



**We asked: What did you like best about your past luxury cruise experience?**

■ Households with Children    ■ Households without Children



## Converting aspiration into action

Interest in luxury cruise extends beyond those who have already experienced it. Among respondents who have not yet taken a luxury cruise, 22% say all-inclusive offerings would most influence their decision, followed by having a special occasion that provides a reason to splurge (14%).

Loyalty participation shows that the conversion pathway already exists. Forty-three percent of respondents belong to at least one loyalty program offered by a luxury travel brand (23% belong to multiple programs and 20% to one). Higher income earners and full-time workers are more likely to belong to multiple programs. Notably, 50% of students report membership in at least one program, highlighting early exposure to loyalty ecosystems despite limited earned income.

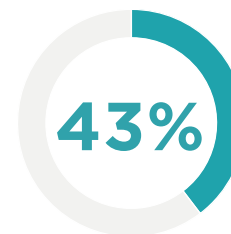
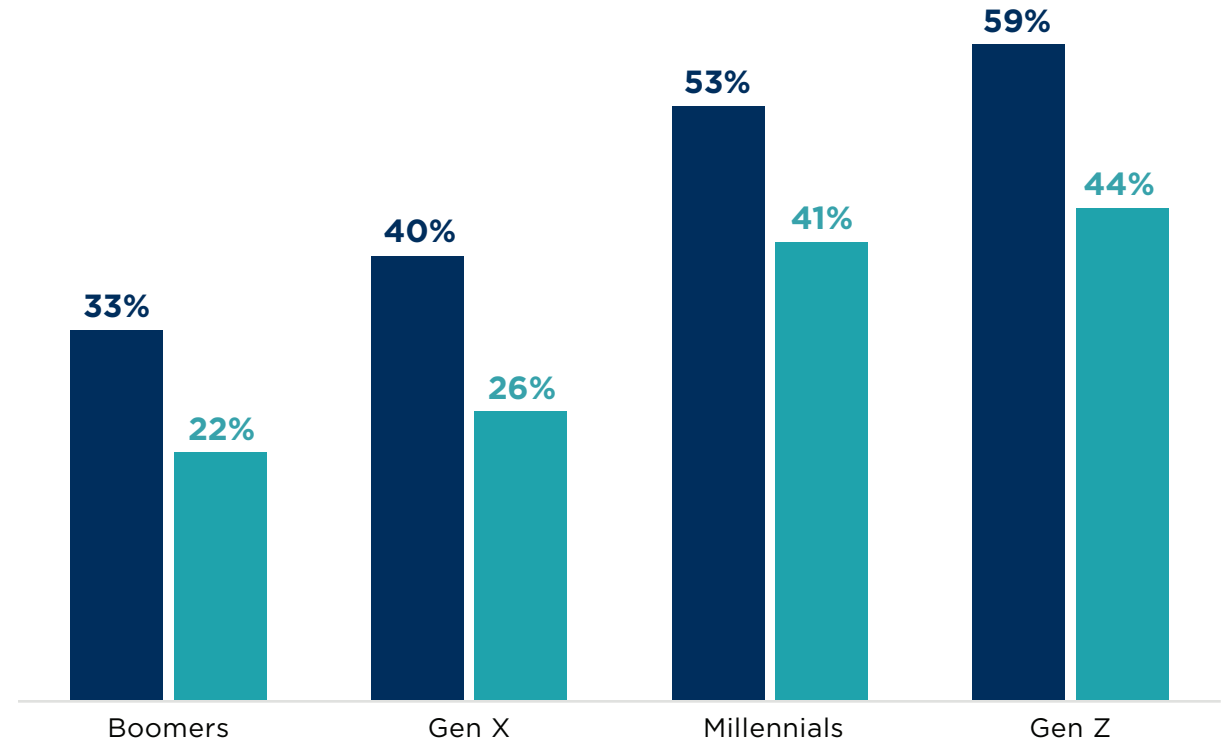
Generationally, engagement skews younger. Fifty-nine percent of Gen Z are members of at least one luxury travel brand loyalty program, compared with 53% of Millennials, 40% of Gen X and 33% of Boomers.

Booking behavior reinforces the role loyalty plays in moving travelers up the spectrum. Twenty percent of all respondents booked their luxury cruise or experience directly through a vendor and used the vendor's loyalty program (20% among aspiring luxury households; 25% among HNWI). An additional 8% booked through an online travel agency and used the OTA's loyalty program.

Among those who used a loyalty program to book, 56% report typical lodging spend below \$500 per night. This is significant, suggesting that loyalty is often used to access higher-end experiences and stretch travel value.

### Luxury Loyalty Demand

- Participation: belong to at least one luxury travel loyalty program
- Engagement: have used a loyalty program to book luxury travel



43% of respondents belong to at least one loyalty program offered by a luxury travel brand

Across all respondents, when asked which loyalty benefits matter most when booking luxury travel, complimentary upgrades rank first at 23%. Exclusive access (19%) and inclusive perks (19%) also register strongly, particularly among Millennials and Gen Z. Personalized service or concierge support rises among aspiring luxury travelers when defined by hotel spend (23% vs. 15% across all tiers).

Redemption behavior further clarifies intent. Thirty-three percent of respondents prefer to use loyalty points for suite or room upgrades (32% aspiring luxury; 41% HNWI). Boomers show a particularly strong preference for upgrades (52%), as does the \$250K-\$499K income segment (41%). By contrast, Gen Z places comparatively greater emphasis on exclusive activities and private experiences at 29%, with only 20% selecting room upgrades as their top use.

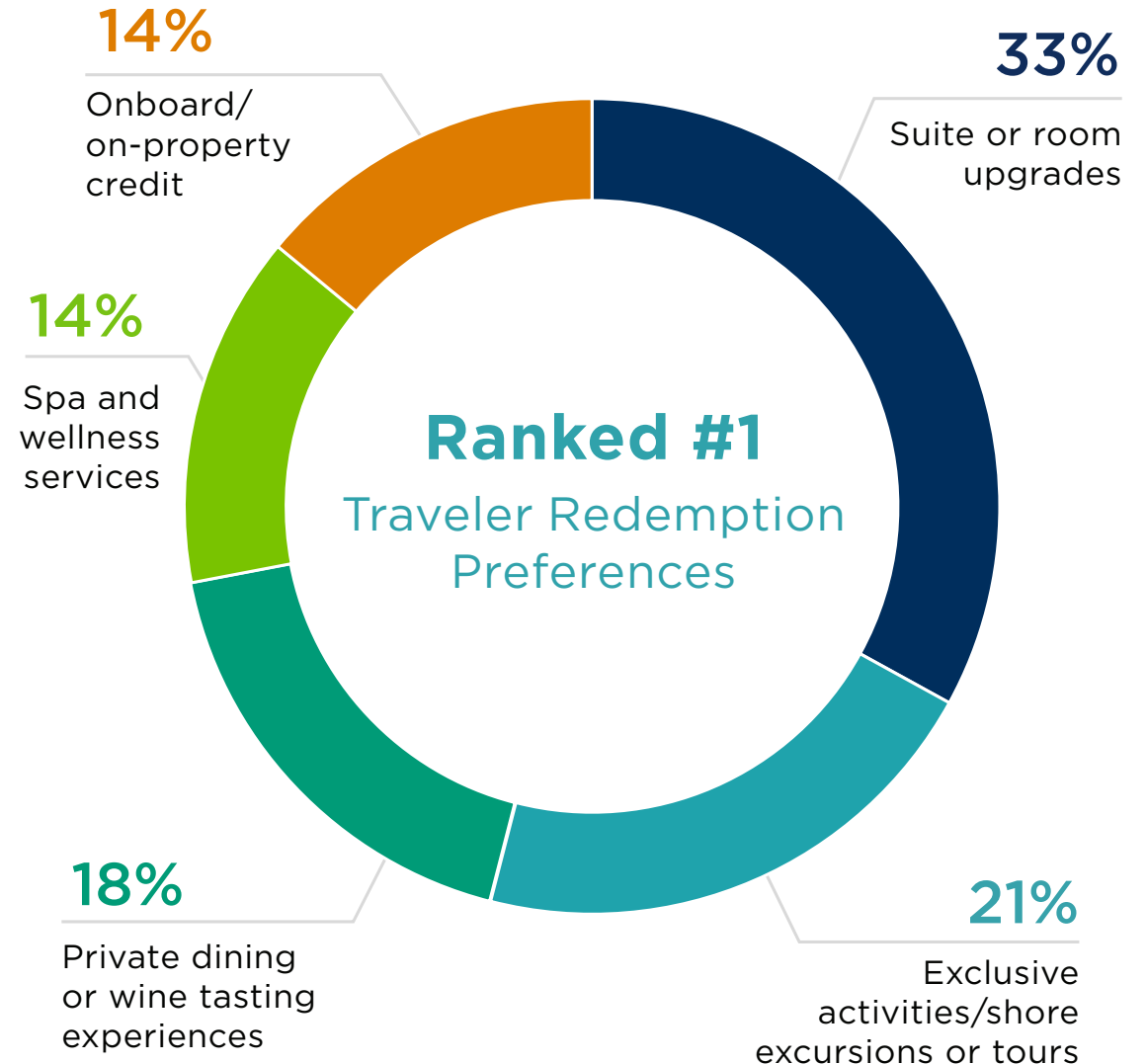
Travel budget adds another layer. Among travelers who typically spend \$2,500 or more per night, 58% book directly through cruise or activity vendors' loyalty programs. Participation across multiple programs increases with lodging budget, while single-program membership peaks in the mid-range (\$500-\$2,499 per night).

The findings reveal a meaningful divide: higher-spending travelers appear to use loyalty to enhance experiences they already intend to purchase, while lower-budget travelers often use it to introduce a luxury element, most often through room upgrades.

**Aspiration is not theoretical; the pathways to access it are already in place. The question for travel brands and loyalty programs is whether those pathways are aligned with how different segments define value, whether through upgrades, exclusive access, concierge support or experiential enhancements.**



**We asked: When you have loyalty points or perks available, how do you prefer to use them?**



## Luxury, loyalty and long-term growth

The center of gravity in luxury travel is shifting. While high-net-worth households remain foundational, a growing share of momentum comes from aspiring luxury travelers, particularly Millennials, who are actively expanding their travel spending habits. This growth signals that luxury travel is not and should not be treated as a niche within loyalty ecosystems but rather as a core opportunity for programs.

Leveraging this opportunity, however, requires understanding what influences aspiring luxury travelers to actively trade up. The *arrivia* survey makes clear that price is no longer the sole determinant of what makes luxury travel luxury. Frictionless travel, defined by comfort, convenience and ease, is the top feature valued by this group.

For aspiring luxury households, the willingness to invest is already present. What varies is frequency and the pathway to purchase. Special occasions, for instance, often serve as a powerful entry point, while travel experiences, including cruise, anchor the memory of the trip.

Travel loyalty programs that provide tangible enhancements, such as upgrades, exclusive access and concierge support, can help transform occasional splurges into repeat behavior, building long-lasting relationships with tomorrow's high-value customers.

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***Arrivia's position at the intersection of cruise, travel experiences and activities, lodging, transportation and loyalty places it within the flow of this shift. To learn how we can support your goals, get in touch with one of our experts today at [businessinquiries@arrivia.com](mailto:businessinquiries@arrivia.com) or visit [www.arrivia.com](http://www.arrivia.com).***



Luxury travel is becoming a core loyalty opportunity, fueled by Millennials and aspiring travelers.

**arrivia** is a travel technology company that provides travel loyalty, booking and marketing solutions to consumer-facing companies that want to deliver exceptional value to their customers, uncover new revenue streams and drive growth through exciting travel rewards and member benefits. The company's **Travel Privileges program** opens up the world of travel for companies like **American Express, USAA and Marriott Vacation Club** by offering their customers more value through exclusive pricing and encouraging discovery with relevant and personalized options that inspire travel and consumer loyalty.

To learn more about how **arrivia** helps companies drive growth, incentivize sales, boost affinity and reward high-value customers, visit [www.arrivia.com](http://www.arrivia.com) or contact us at [businessinquiries@arrivia.com](mailto:businessinquiries@arrivia.com).

