

## 2021 in Review - The top 8 travel trends of 2021

*With 2021 ending, many are wondering what to expect of the New Year as the Omicron variant breaks news headlines around the world. The team of analysts at ForwardKeys, step back to examine some of the key learnings as they review 2021 from the perspective of a travel professional and highlight the top trends.*

### 1. US Leisure travel drives recovery

A comparison of the world's top destination cities, before the pandemic in 2019, and throughout 2021, illustrates the strong trend towards leisure travel leading to the recovery.

Several major cities have been pushed down or out of the top 20 rankings, whereas major leisure destinations, particularly for US holidaymakers, have climbed high.

While Dubai remains at the top of the list (it is a major leisure destination as well as a substantial travel and commerce hub), the most notable rises include, Miami, from 18<sup>th</sup> to 5<sup>th</sup>, Madrid from 16<sup>th</sup> to 10<sup>th</sup> and new into the list, Cancun (Mexico) at 2<sup>nd</sup>, Cairo (Egypt) at 9<sup>th</sup>, Punta Cana (Dominical Republic) at 12<sup>th</sup>, San Juan (Puerto Rico) at 13<sup>th</sup>, Lisbon at 14<sup>th</sup>, Athens at 15<sup>th</sup>, Mexico City at 16<sup>th</sup>, Palma Mallorca at 17<sup>th</sup>, and Frankfurt at 20<sup>th</sup>.

The two highest risers, Cancun, and Miami are both major leisure destinations popular with US holidaymakers. Most of the new entrants lower down the list are also leading leisure destinations, popular with European holidaymakers. Doha, which entered at 7<sup>th</sup>, has done particularly well as a hub for transits,

Major pre-pandemic destinations, which have fallen out of the top 20 list include ten major cities: Bangkok, Tokyo, Seoul, Singapore, Hong Kong, Taipei, Shanghai, Jeddah, Los Angeles. and Osaka.













## 8. New variants pose a potent threat

A chart plotting the recovery in air travel shows relatively steady growth from the first quarter of 2021 when traffic was less than 20% of 2019 levels to the fourth quarter when it had climbed to over 50%.

However, there were two setbacks: the first began during the week of 12 March, when the growth in weekly bookings turned from +11% to -10%, as the Delta variant began to sweep around the world.

The second began in the last week of October when weekly bookings reached their highest point, 64% of the same week in 2019. Bookings have been slowing down ever since; and in late November, they were down to 54% of 2019 levels, which was closely correlated with a fresh rise in COVID-19 cases since late October.

It is now likely that the emergence of the new Omicron variant, and the travel restrictions introduced in response, will inhibit demand for last-minute travel over the Christmas period.

Olivier Ponti, VP of Insights at ForwardKeys, said: “2021 has been a year of travel recovery; but that recovery has been bumpy and patchy, with many established destinations displaced and several tourism-dependent destinations making valiant efforts to retain the patronage of leisure travellers.”



“It has also been a tug of war between a strong pent-up demand to travel on the one hand and travel restrictions, imposed by governments to inhibit the spread of COVID-19 on the other.”

ForwardKeys has been pioneering travel intelligence for peers in tourism, hospitality, finance, and media since 2010 with its innovative approach to traveller statistics, from terminal level at airports to transits and final destinations. Stay informed and subscribe to our newsletter or contact us, [www.forwardkeys.com](http://www.forwardkeys.com)