

travelweek



Going micro: Why shorter vacations and cruises are on the rise

TORONTO — People are busier than ever these days, with little time to spare for extra-curriculars, much less a two-week holiday abroad. But for those hell-bent on carving out some travel time, the rising trend of ‘micro-cations’ could be a good solution.

Defined as a leisure trip of less than four nights, these short getaways are becoming increasingly popular among all age groups, with time-strapped millennial executives leading the charge. Micro-cations offer a convenient way for busy travellers to get their fix of sun and fun, without compromising time at the office or forcing them to fully disrupt their daily routines. But aside from the convenience these trips offer, what else is contributing to their popularity?

“In a word, accessibility,” says Air Canada Vacations’ Dana Gain, Senior Director of Sales, Groups & Partnerships. “With more flights and more land options than ever before, a short weekend getaway is easy for most people to work into even the busiest schedule.”

David Wright, Director of Sales, Ontario & Atlantic at Sunwing, agrees, noting that the tour operator has seen a definite increase in short getaways over the past five years. “There are now more frequent flights to many destinations from multiple airports during the winter season,” he says. “Two or three days in the sun is better than two or three days in the winter weather back home! You’d be surprised at how even a short visit to paradise can brighten your mood.”

THE UPSIDE

Besides the obvious (a weekend on the beach, anyone?), micro-cations are often a more affordable option than week-long all-inclusives, they require less planning, and they’re just so convenient. Adds Wright: “In many destinations there are resorts situated a short distance from the airport that can make micro-trips even easier. A couple examples include Royalton Suites Cancun Resort and Spa in Cancun and Riu Palace Jamaica in Montego Bay.”

Cutting down on the commute also means more time in destination, says Wilbert Mason, Managing Director of Ocean Club Resorts in Turks & Caicos. “The ability to have a direct or shorter travel time to a location in order to allow for more time spent in the actual destination plays a key role in the value of a getaway,” he says. “For example, a traveller can leave on a nonstop flight from Toronto at 9:30 a.m. and be lounging on Grace Bay Beach as early as 2:30 p.m. The value of micro-trips lies in the convenience of getting to a location and the activities/dining experiences available once there.” And that’s not all – micro-trips could be more profitable for agents, too. Rick Stiffler, Senior Vice President, Global Sales-Leisure for Preferred Hotels & Resorts, says that with the money saved on a shorter trip, travellers can enjoy a more upgradable experience complete with first-class tickets and suite accommodations. This, in turn, results in a higher commissionable rate for agents.

“Clients will often want to experience as much as possible in the short time, so advisors should check with the concierge to see if the hotel offers any commissionable activity packages or excursions,” he says.

WHERE ARE THEY GOING?

When it comes to quick getaways, Canadians prefer the Big Three: Cancun, Punta Cana and Varadero. Marie-Christine Pouliot, Public Relations and Marketing Advisor for Transat, says this is because destinations that have the greatest frequency of flights are best suited for short stays. But coming up in the ranks, she adds, are “San Diego and New Orleans, two new destinations offered by Transat.” Sunwing’s Wright also name-checks the Big Three, but ranks Montego Bay (and nearby Negril, Ocho Rios and Runaway Bay) as well as Nassau in The Bahamas as among Canadians’ favourite quick-stop destinations, too.

“Sunwing offers daily flights all winter long from both Toronto and Montreal to numerous popular destinations, including Cayo Coco, Cayo Santa Maria, Varadero, Montego Bay, Cancun and Punta Cana,” he says. “For example, travellers can enjoy a short Thursday-Sunday getaway from Vancouver to Cancun from November until April, or a Thursday-Saturday getaway from Winnipeg to Varadero from November until March.”

WHEN ARE THEY BOOKING?

Due to the spontaneous nature and convenience of micro-cations, travellers tend to book them last minute. According to Wright, over 60% of these trips are booked within 45 days of departure. “They’re often most popular for last-minute bookers as they don’t need to take as much time off work and travellers are just looking for a quick break to the sun,” he says. At Transat, travellers are booking even later. Pouliot says the median booking window for short stays is just 27 days.

MICRO-CRUISES

Micro-cations aren’t limited to just beach vacations; cruises are also on the table, like the ones offered by Bahamas Paradise Cruise Line. Launched in 2016, it’s the only provider of year-round, two-night cruises to Grand Bahama Island and Nassau, with two ships – Grand Classica and Grand Celebration – sailing daily from West Palm Beach.



Though you may think two nights is hardly enough time for a cruise, think again. Guests spend the entire day on Grand Bahama Island or Nassau before returning to the ship by 5 pm each evening. They then sail overnight back to port to maximize the time spent in destination. On how its concept came about, Francis Riley, Senior Vice President, Sales and Marketing, tells Travelweek: “We saw a unique niche in the market that was not being served, namely a quick, affordable two-night break that is destination-focused and appeals to an array of guest, whether it’s a weekend getaway, family vacation or a mid-week trip for those with more time.”

The response from Canadians, adds Riley, has been nothing but positive. Aside from the fact that its two-night cruises are both convenient (“travellers have just enough time to relax and recharge while creating lasting memories”) and affordable (“they’re a more inclusive getaway with accommodation, all meals and entertainment included”), they can also be easily extended into a four-night getaway through the company’s unique Cruise & Stay program. With this option, guests sail overnight, disembark and stay two or four nights at the resort of their choice before re-embarking the ship for the overnight sail back to West Palm Beach.

Whether they choose to sail for just two nights or four, either option takes no time at all.

“The growth of the four-night Cruise & Stay option is even more appealing and, again, the value proposition of combining a two-night cruise with a two-night, land-based resort stay is very unique,” adds Riley. “We’ve also heard that this provides a great four-night package that could be added onto flights or combined with a stay in Orlando/Miami to create a two-fold vacation package.”

There’s no doubt that Bahamas Paradise Cruise Line is further shining the spotlight on micro-cruises, which according to CLIA is on the up and up. Charles Sylvia, ECC, VP, Membership and Trade Relations tells Travelweek that CLIA travel agents have seen a spike in their popularity.

“Travellers are attracted to the idea of ‘sampling’ a cruise and being able to take a luxe vacation without the major time spend,” he says. “They get the advantage of taking a cruise without committing to a week-long vacation. Plus, those who are new-to-cruise can test drive how cruising fits with their travel style.”

With many major CLIA cruise lines offering bite-sized voyages over a three- to-five-day period, travellers have every opportunity to get their quick fix. And as is often the case with people bitten by the travel bug, they’ll likely book a longer cruise the next time around, which is great news for agents. “Just as cruising offers a personalized trip for every traveller, micro-cruising offers the same thing on a sample level,” says Sylvia. “They can test out destinations, cruise itineraries and more with the intent to return for a longer trip when time or budget allows.”