

## Top Selling Points for a Central and South America Travel Boom



By Ana Figueroa | April 14, 2015  
Travel to Central and South America is going through quite a growth spurt. That's due to a number of factors, all of which present opportunities for travel sellers.

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Travel to **Central and South America** is going through quite a growth spurt. That's due to a number of factors, all of which present opportunities for travel sellers.

"South America is of bottomless interest," **Carl Gray**, owner of **Gray & Co.**, tells **Travel Agent**.

**Phyllis Steller**, founder of **The Women's Travel Group**, is hoping to tap into that interest. Her company specializes in trips for professional women in the 55 and up age group. She's put together a new trip to **Chile** for this winter that includes the **Andes**, **Patagonia** and the **Atacama Desert**. And there's an optional extension to **Easter Island**, home of the mysterious ancient moai sculptures.

"Obviously, a trip like this appeals to the more outdoorsy types. I'm not sure if the market is the same as the market for **Europe**. But, South America is an easy trip. It's in this hemisphere and there's minimum jet lag. It seems easier to get there with frequent flyer miles. And the value is strong," Steller tells **Travel Agent**.

For Gray, the relative ease in traveling to South America means clients can "go to Chile one year and **Argentina** the next."

Though **Argentina** is hurting due to the political situation, other destinations are on the rise.

"**Uruguay** is a super shining light that's very good for families. They have terrific beaches and fabulous hotels. Everybody likes to pick on the slow pace of life in Uruguay, but they're made some amazing strides there," said Gray.

Another of Gray's favorites at the moment: **Pucon** in the Chilean Lake District. It's known for volcanic peaks, forests, rivers, waterfalls and Lake Villarrica, among other attractions. All appeal to Gray's high-end adventure clientele.



"We're biking out of Pucon, where the volcanos are spectacular and the climate is great. But it was lacking a true luxury property. The new **Vira Vira Lodge** provides clients with a big incentive to stay. It was built by a Swiss-Chilean couple and it's off the charts," said Gray.

Other properties Gray singles out are **Vina Vik**, a 22-suite wine spa and retreat on the **Vik** vineyard in **Millahue**, Chile. It's set on an 11,000-acre vineyard in the shadow of the **Andes**. And **Tierra Hotels** has taken over the former **Refugia** and re-opened it as **Tierra Chiloe**. The boutique hotel is located on an island in Northern Patagonia surrounded by fishing villages.

Tours combining **Nicaragua** and **Costa Rica** are new favorites, as well.

"It's a fun combination. Our clients are interested in surfing, hiking and yoga. We get asked a lot to bring in yoga instructors, because people need to stretch out after all the activities," said Gray.

Clients also like to be pampered after those activities.

"What a lot of people don't know is that they can stay at **Mukul**, a true luxury resort in Nicaragua. From there, it's only an hour and a half drive to **Papagayo** and the **Villa Manzu** in Costa Rica. That's an amazing villa with unbelievable service. It's another example of how the region is opening up for the high-end traveler," said Gray.



**Richard Harris** agrees that new luxury experiences make South America particularly attractive at the moment. Harris is senior vice president of product content and operations for **Abercrombie & Kent**.

"You have a steady stream of new, innovative, luxury modernist lodges opening up in places like Patagonia. Combining that with the unspoiled wilderness that you still find there, it's no wonder travel is expanding," Harris tells **Travel Agent**.

At A&K, travel is particularly expanding in the family market. New programs into **Ushuala** and **Punta Arenas** will be announced this summer. Bookable now in the **Family Journeys** portfolio is a new **Family Costa Rica** luxury small group journey.

"Costa Rica is always a great place to take kids. You have the giant crocodiles, cloud forests, four-wheel drive adventures, baby sea turtles. The country is known for excellent service. People are also attracted to its intriguing commitment to the environment and to peace," said Harris.

A&K Connections Family Journeys feature a price point that's 30 percent lower than the company's luxury journeys. **Peru** is one of the most popular Connections programs.

"What kid doesn't love **Machu Picchu**? The whole area is nice, warm and there are lots of llamas. There's also train travel involved for the added adventure," said Harris.

One aspect not so popular with the little ones: guinea pigs on the menu for dinner.