

# News & Notes

TRAVEL • MANUFACTURER • RETAIL

TRAVEL

## Strong Dollar Makes 2015 a Better Year for American Travelers

Americans traveling abroad this year will benefit from a strong dollar. Relative to currencies in Europe, Japan, India and elsewhere, travelers will pay less for everything from lodging to dining to transportation. "This is one of the best times for Americans to travel in years," travel writer Matt Kepnes told the Associated Press. "England is cheaper than it was six months ago, but the euro has slumped more, making most of continental Europe an even better bargain." Many economies are shaky, including those in Europe, Japan and China, and combined with a steadily improving U.S. economy, the 2015 dollar is strong enough that many economists forecast that the Federal Reserve will raise interest rates later this year.



SOURCE: ASSOCIATED PRESS

### The Travel Trends of 2015

According to *Travel + Leisure*, this year's most important travel trends are generally positive for travelers. They include an upscale shift in the properties available for rent via services such as Airbnb, as well as a more connected experience in airports, hotels and everywhere in between. For instance, Bluetooth enabled beacons can provide customized, traveler-specific information throughout an airport, delivering information such as flight changes, travel time to gates, and other useful tips. With mobile payment services such as Apple Pay gaining in popularity, smartphones will replace wallets for many travelers. New long-haul flights will change travelers' trajectories, including the new, longest flight in the world, 16 hours and 8,500 miles from Dallas to Sydney on a Qantas A380.

SOURCE: TRAVEL + LEISURE

### American Express Global Business Travel Survey

American Express has released its 2015 Global Business Travel Survey. According to Pedro Paredes, the company's vice president of global business consulting, what business travelers want is for travel agents to prove their worth. "It's more important than ever for agents to demonstrate their expertise," Paredes told *Travel Market Report*. "With online adoption increasing, they need to add value in helping the business traveler. They can't just issue a ticket." Business travelers call agents when their travel needs are tricky, so agents have to stay abreast of industry trends and changing policies. The survey also determined that 95% of travelers prefer an aisle seat, making for many unhappy passengers on every flight.

SOURCE: TRAVEL MARKET REPORT

### Million Dollar Zipperless Luggage

Crowdfunding website Kickstarter has its first million dollar success story of 2015 thanks to Trunkster luggage. According to the makers of the new zipperless bags, it's the most successful funding of a travel-related item in Kickstarter's history. The hard sided luggage met its initial \$50,000 goal in 24 hours and ultimately raised \$1,395,370 in the 30-day campaign. The bags feature a zipperless rolltop design, a built in scale, a USB port and an integrated GPS tracking system. Available in carry-on and checked sizes, the bags will retail for \$500 and \$600 when they are released in August.

SOURCE: ABC NEWS



Trunkster zipperless luggage raised more than \$1 million in its 30-day Kickstarter crowdfunding campaign.



### The Worst Day to Fly Is...

The worst day to fly in the United States is not the day before Thanksgiving. It's not even close. According to Quartz, a digital news outlet that combed FAA airport data to determine the busiest travel days of 2013, the three worst days to fly are all in the middle of the summer. In 2013 they were July 18, July 25 and July 11. Of the 30 busiest travel days of the year, only three were during the winter months. Of those, the Friday before Christmas was the busiest, ranking fourth overall. Rounding out the top 10 are additional summer dates in June, July and August.

SOURCE: QZ.COM

## U.S. Airlines Plan More Flights to Cuba



As the United States warms relations with the Cuban government, airlines make plans to add more flights to the island nation. Conveniently located just 90 miles off the coast of Florida, Cuba was once a popular destination for American tourists and business travelers alike. And although the U.S. government has yet to lift restrictions on tourist travel to Cuba, airlines and agents are now free to provide services without the need for a special license. American Airlines, Delta and JetBlue already operate charter service to the island, and they can now convert those flights to regularly scheduled routes. Low-cost carriers like Southwest Airlines and Spirit Airlines, as well as many foreign carriers, are keeping an eye on the evolving diplomatic relationship as well. SOURCE: SKIFT

## United Airlines Sues 22-Year-Old Entrepreneur

Together with travel booking website Orbitz, United Airlines has filed a civil lawsuit against 22-year-old entrepreneur Aktarer Zaman, founder of the airline ticketing website Skiplagged.com. Skiplagged helps travelers find the least expensive flights with a technique known as “hidden city” ticketing. When a traveler wants to fly from New York to Chicago, for instance, the least expensive ticket might be a flight from New York to Denver with a layover in Chicago. With hidden city ticketing, the passenger would book the flight to Denver and simply deplane in Chicago. It’s not illegal, but it is a strategy that only works for one-way travel without checked luggage. Frequent fliers and travel agents have exploited the hidden city loophole for years, but Zaman is the first to make the information easily accessible to the masses. The site is a side project for the entrepreneur, who says he does not profit from it. The suit claims hidden city ticketing is prohibited by the airline, and that Skiplagged therefore represents unfair competition. Industry analysts suggest that even if Skiplagged is shut down, other services will likely replace it. SOURCE: CNN

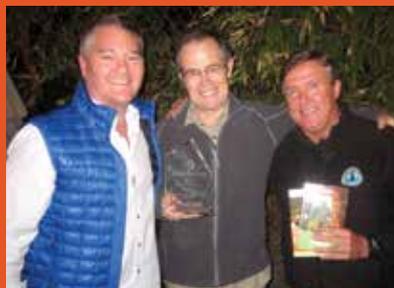
## Randoseru Backpacks Increasing in Popularity



Fashionable foreign tourists are returning from Japan with a new kind of souvenir: Randoseru backpacks — the stiff leather packs ubiquitous among Japanese school children — are gaining popularity with visitors from China and Australia in particular. The well-made, box-shaped bags have even piqued the interest of fashion buyers from Italy, Russia and the United States, and Japanese manufacturers are exporting the bags in growing numbers. Traditionally available in red or black leather, more durable synthetic versions are now made in many colors with a guarantee to last the six years of elementary school. With the 2020 Olympic Games scheduled for Tokyo, the popularity of randoseru packs is expected to continue to rise. The bags were first introduced to Japan in the mid-1800s when soldiers began carrying imported Dutch backpacks called ransels. SOURCE: JAPAN TIMES

## Eagle Creek’s Rep of the Year Award

Eagle Creek, maker of luggage and travel accessories, has named Harold Mullins and the Atlantic Sports Group as its 2014 Rep Agency of the Year. The group has directed sales in New England and upstate New York since 1983, and it’s the second time it has been honored with the award. “Harold brings an enthusiasm and passion to the job that makes him one of the most respected sales agents in the industry,” said Eagle Creek’s Senior National Sales Manager Tim McGuire. “I am thrilled to be recognizing Harold for all his hard work and resulting success in 2014.” Eagle Creek presents the award annually to a rep or agency that delivers outstanding results and superior customer service. This year’s award includes a trip for two to Peru. SOURCE: EAGLE CREEK



Left to right, Roger Spatz, president of Eagle Creek; Harold Mullins, winner; Tim McGuire, senior national sales manager of Eagle Creek.

## HEX x Staple Pigeon Cases for iPhone 6

Tech accessories maker HEX collaborated with fashion designer Jeff Staple to produce a new line of wallets and cases for the iPhone 6. The HEX x Staple Pigeon Collection consists of three products made of genuine leather and printed with a custom Jeff Staple graphic. The Icon wallet incorporates three internal card slots and a cash pocket in a journal-style case. The Solo Wallet features 2 external card slots on the back of the case. And the Focus Case is a classic snap case design. The HEX x Staple Pigeon line is available now at [www.staplepigeon.com](http://www.staplepigeon.com) and [www.shop-hex.com](http://www.shop-hex.com), as well as at select retailers. SOURCE: HEX



The HEX x Staple Pigeon Icon wallet for iPhone 6 is the result of a collaboration between case-maker HEX and fashion designer Jeff Staple.

## Big News for 24-7 International

It's been a busy start to the year for 24-7 International. The travel goods manufacturer has inked a deal with designer Lily Bloom and will launch new collections at The 2015 International Travel Goods Show featuring Lily Bloom's signature vibrant prints and recycled plastic KARMA fabric. "We're proud to welcome this brand to our family," said Scott Kosmin, 24-7 International's president and COO. "The lifestyle collections will encompass a variety of prints and solid colors in both hard- and soft-sided traveler items." The Lily Bloom Collections will be available at specialty luggage stores, department stores and Internet retailers. The manufacturer has also named Zarby International as the exclusive Canadian distributor of Andiamo, Pathfinder and Pathfinder Gear. The Pathfinder Revolution Plus carry-on was recently honored by *Premier Traveler* magazine, which tested the rugged, durable business luggage against strong competition. Praising its size and weight, as well as the functionality of wheels, handles and other features, *Premier Traveler* also cited the legacy brand's Extra Mile Warranty by honoring it with the Best Overall distinction in its "Insider Report" carry-on comparison.

SOURCE: 24-7 INTERNATIONAL



The Pathfinder Revolution Plus 20" Wide Body Expandable Carry-On Spinner from 24-7 International was honored by Premier Traveler magazine with the Best Overall distinction among carry-on luggage.

## Bugatti Bags' Hollywood Debut

Bugatti-Sedona Inc. provided its Nathalie ladies' handbag for inclusion in the coveted Golden Globes Ceremony Gift Bag at the 2015 Golden Globe Awards in January. Only highly sought after brands and premium products are included in the gift bag, which is provided to the stars, producers and directors who participate in the annual film and television awards ceremony. As part of a rigorous process, Bugatti presented several items to an exclusive panel that selected the Italian leather bag to be included alongside Gucci Guilty and Ross & Brown products. "We felt that Bugatti truly represented the core values of the audience that we are rewarding with the 2015 Golden Globes Ceremony Gift Bag," reported the panel, "an amalgam of great craftsmanship, distinguished design and astonishing brand appeal."

SOURCE: BUGATTI-SEDONA INC.

The Bugatti Nathalie ladies' handbag was included in the coveted Golden Globes Ceremony Gift Bag at the January awards show.



## Luggage is TV Star

Ricardo Beverly Hills' Roxbury 2.0 and Mirage Collections appeared on the CBS TV game show, "The Price is Right," hosted by Drew Carey, on January 22, 2015.

Ricardo's Roxbury 2.0 Collection will also appear on the nightly syndicated game show, "Wheel of Fortune," hosted by Pat Sajak and Vanna White, where it will be featured as the Ricardo Beverly Hills Gift Tag prize on the wheel. This episode will air on February 23, 25 and 27, 2015.

SOURCE: RICARDO BEVERLY HILLS



The Roxbury 2.0 from Ricardo Beverly Hills

## BAQBAG's New Website

Luxury leather handbag maker BAQBAG has launched its new website at [www.baqbag.com](http://www.baqbag.com). The company's finely crafted European-made bags are based on a unique, classic design and constructed of eco-friendly leather that can be traced all the way back to its farm of origin, then finished with antique brass components. The Norwegian company will officially debut its bags in the United States at The 2015 International Travel Goods Show in Las Vegas.

SOURCE: BAQBAG



The homepage of BAQBAG's new website

## Travelpro Named Best Luggage in the World



For the second year in a row, readers of *Premier Traveler* magazine have honored Travelpro with the World's Best Luggage Award. More than 14,000 *Premier Traveler* readers voted for the awards in a survey on the magazine's website last summer. No company names or choices were provided in the open-ended survey. "We want to thank *Premier Traveler* readers, our customers, retail partners and the media for all their complimentary comments on our products," said Scott Applebee, vice president of marketing for Travelpro. "By listening to customer feedback via social and traditional media, product reviews and observational research, we were able to identify the implicit needs of the customer that led to the development of a series of groundbreaking luggage innovations. For more than 25 years, Travelpro luggage has been preferred by frequent travelers and flight crews around the world."

SOURCE: TRAVELPRO

## News for LCI Brands

**L**C. Industries, Inc. has changed its name to LCI Brands in order to more accurately represent the company's growing portfolio of travel and outdoor accessory brands. That lineup includes in-house brands Lewis N. Clark, Belle Hop and UrbanGear, as well as distribution for brands such as humangear, Cabeau, Pom-ID, GoGirl, i-stay, No-Jet-Lag, Static Guard, tug and Wrinkle Wiz. A new addition to that list is MosRepel, a Hong Kong-based company that makes natural, DEET-free insect repellent wrist bands. The company's newly revamped website features an improved design and upgraded functionality which includes product manuals, videos, and reviews of all its represented brands and products. Visit it at [www.lcibrands.com](http://www.lcibrands.com).

SOURCE: LCI BRANDS



## Jack Georges' American Dream

**A** video interview with leather goods maker Jack Georges was selected by the website Upworthy for inclusion in its "American Dream" campaign. The short film features Georges discussing his own origins, as well as those of his company. "I was one of the lucky ones," he says. "I made it to America." Georges then proceeds to tell the story of his life after immigrating to the United States, and what led to the start of his own business. He began helping in his father's shoe shop at age 12, where he learned about working with leather. Eventually, like many successful entrepreneurs, Georges turned a negative event into a positive opportunity. For him it was the stock market crash of 1987. "People thought it was a tough time to start a business," Georges says, "but my back was against the wall." After 27 years, Jack Georges still makes the same bags that gave the company its start, and the CEO is proud not only of the quality products he produces, but that all his bags are manufactured in the U.S.A. SOURCE: JACK GEORGES INC.



A nod to the history of travel inside Landmark's new Cleveland store

## Landmark Luggage Opens in Cleveland

Cleveland's affluent Woodmere neighborhood is the newest home to luggage retailer Landmark. Joining national brands such as Brooks Brothers and Lulu Lemon in the Eton Center mall, Landmark's Cleveland store will complement the mall's high-end mix of dining, retail and office tenants. New manager David Dyer was brought over from the company's well-established St. Louis store, and he promises to bring that knowledge and experience with him. The store features a fresh and bold look incorporating new branding, a new logo and a new mission. "We are thrilled as a company to introduce many of the vendors we represent into the Cleveland market," said Landmark CEO Ray Krut, "and add the travel expertise and customer service that will make the difference between a purchase made online and a purchase made in our store."

SOURCE: LANDMARK LUGGAGE

## The Rosy Future of Mobile Payments

**R**esearchers predict that within five years, mobile payment systems will account for \$130 billion of worldwide consumer spending, equal to 254 million users making five mobile payments per month, averaging about \$9 each. Mobile payment service providers will have to overcome a relatively high level of current consumer distrust of mobile payments in order to reach that high mark. Incentivized loyalty and rewards programs are likely a requirement to convince consumers to abandon the credit and debit cards that dominate payment systems. The introduction of new technologies, such as the fingerprint identification feature on the iPhone 6, will help allay security fears surrounding mobile payments.

SOURCE: TECH TIMES

## Responding Positively to Negative Online Comments

**T**he web presents a wealth of opportunities for customers to publicly share their experiences online, good or bad. The only thing more damaging than a negative online comment about a business is when that business' response makes things even worse. The American Express Open Forum provides five tips for responding positively to negative online comments. First is to respond appropriately and professionally, never accusing the commenter of wrongdoing (even if they did wrong). Next is to keep comments brief, and think about the criticism as free market research. Keep in mind that all responses are public, and be sure to act accordingly. And lastly, consider hiring a professional social media manager or public relations professional to handle such complaints. Ignoring customer feedback can hurt any business' image almost as much as responding inappropriately.

SOURCE: AMERICAN EXPRESS OPEN FORUM