

Australia Ranks #1 Again For World's Top Country Brand, New Global Study Reveals

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Croatia, China and the United Arab Emirates Named 'Rising Stars' for Tourist Destinations, While 'Voluntourism' and Accountability (Going Green) Top Traveler Itineraries

With the kick-off of London's World Travel Market this week - the premier global travel and tourism convention - the big questions on the minds of tourism and hospitality professionals are: 'What countries have the best reputations and which ones rank in the top 10 list of desired country brands when it comes to travel?' The answers might surprise you.

According to this year's Country Brand Index (CBI), Australia once again earned the coveted spot as the world's top country brand, with the United States ranking second and the United Kingdom ascending to third. Other countries making the top 10 included Japan, Canada, France and Greece. The CBI also identified Croatia, China and the United Arab Emirates (UAE) as the top three 'rising stars' - those likely to become a major tourist destination in the next five years. Also making the list this year are Cuba, Iceland, and the Russian Federation.

CBI, now in its third year, is a comprehensive study of more than 2,600 international travelers conducted by FutureBrand, a leading global brand consultancy, in conjunction with public relations firm Weber Shandwick's Global Travel & Lifestyle Practice. CBI examines how countries are branded and ranked according to key criteria. This year's index includes rankings and trends as well as travel motivations, challenges and opportunities within the worlds of travel, tourism and country branding (visit www.countrybrandindex.com for complete results).

'A strong country brand provides an opportunity for a country to showcase its values across every government sector,' said Rina Plapler, executive director, FutureBrand. 'In this year's Country Brand Index we detail how multifaceted countries are as brands, and how they require specific frameworks, typologies and the use of considered semiotics.'

2007 CBI Top Country Brands

1. Australia	8. Canada
2. United States	7. Spain
3. United Kingdom	8. New Zealand
4. France	9. Greece
5. Italy	10. Japan

This year's CBI touches on a variety of topics relevant to travelers and tourism professionals alike - from the most environmentally oriented country brand (Sweden) to the country brand in which they would most like to do business (United States). The Index also takes an in-depth look at the 'State of Brand U.S.' and how it seesaws between a brand in decline and one that's becoming more powerful and popular on the global stage.

'A country's brand reputation is in itself a powerful currency. Reputation drives financial and business investment, sustainable growth and helps add fuel to the private and retail sectors,' said René A. Mack, president, Weber Shandwick's Travel & Lifestyle Global Practice. 'A visitor is the most powerful marketer for any country brand. They import the destination and its products and experiences directly into their homes, offices and social communities, combined with the most powerful voice of all - word of mouth.'

The following are key highlights from this year's Country Brand Index. The top five countries are listed in rank order for each category:

2007 Country Brand Index Rankings Highlights

Best Country Brand Ideal to do Business In	United States, China, United Kingdom, France, Italy
Best Country Brand Easiest to do Business In	United States, United Kingdom, Canada, Ireland, France
Best Country Brand to Extend a Business Trip In	United States, Australia, Italy, Japan, Thailand
Best Country Brand for Conferences	United States, Switzerland, Germany, Singapore, United Arab Emirates
Best Country Brand for Art and Culture	Italy, France, Egypt, India, United Kingdom
Best Country Brand for Authenticity	New Zealand, China, South Africa, Japan, Thailand
Best Country Brand for Beaches	Maldives, Tahiti, Bahamas, Australia, Dominican Republic
Best Country Brand for Families	Denmark, Canada, Australia, United States, Sweden
Best Country Brand for History	Egypt, Italy, China, Greece, France
Best Country Brand for Resort/Lodging Options	United Arab Emirates, Maldives, Australia, Tahiti, Canada
Best Country Brand for Natural Beauty	New Zealand, Australia, Maldives, Canada, South Africa
Best Country Brand for Nightlife	Spain, United States, Brazil, Thailand, Singapore
Best Country Brand for Fine Dining	France, Italy, Singapore, Japan, United States
Best Country Brand for Outdoor Sports/Physical Activities	Australia, New Zealand, Canada, South Africa, United States
Best Country Brand for Friendly Local People	Australia, Canada, New Zealand, Ireland, Thailand
Best Country Brand for Rest and Relaxation	Maldives, Tahiti, Bahamas, Jamaica, New Zealand
Best Country Brand for Safety	New Zealand, Canada, Sweden, Denmark, Switzerland
Best Country Brand for Shopping	United States, United Arab Emirates, Singapore, Italy, Japan
Best Country Brand for Value for the Money	Thailand, Hungary, Czech Republic, Mexico, Vietnam
Best Country Brand You Would Most Like to Live In Other Than Your Own	Canada, New Zealand, Australia, Sweden, Singapore

NEW TOURISM TRENDS TAKE ON HUMANITARIAN/ECO-FRIENDLY CAUSES

Participants in this year's Country Brand Index also highlighted a number of emerging trends in travel and tourism that include:

Voluntourism in Demand - As a response to disaster aid, growing global village consciousness and a need to contribute to society in ways big and small, more travelers are planning their trips around humanitarian purposes. From building homes and teaching English to working at refugee camps and participating in animal conservation research, the menu of volunteer vacation options is growing.

Accountability Grows in Importance - Travelers are becoming more environmentally responsible and asking airlines and hotels to rally around the cause. The result is that consumers and pioneering travel brands are partnering to minimize their impact on the environment. Silverjet, with a mandatory carbon dioxide offset fee, became the first carbon neutral airline. Car rental companies such as Hertz, Budget and Avis are adding more fuel-efficient cars to their fleets, while leading luxury hospitality providers are offering carbon offset programs. Non-profits and online vendors are inviting travelers to calculate their CO2 footprints and purchase offsets or donate to the websites' tree planting projects.

24/7 Brand Life - Now brands outside the hospitality sector are extending into the destination business and creating offerings that allow people to live that brand 24/7. Fashion labels such as Armani and Versace first infused hotels with their signature aesthetics from Dubai to Australia. Today, luxury car companies are following suit. For example, Ferrari has teamed up with Aldar Properties to launch an entertainment development in Abu Dhabi in 2008. With a racetrack, rides and simulators, the destination invites visitors of all ages to explore Ferrari and the company's history. The complex will also feature hotels, retail, residential and hospitality components that extend the brand in multiple ways and take inspiration from Ferrari car designs.

Methodology

FutureBrand has developed a three-tiered evaluation system for ranking country brands. This Index incorporates global quantitative research, expert opinions, and references relevant statistics that link brand equity to assets, growth and expansion. The result is a unique evaluation system that provides the basis of our rankings. More than 2,600 respondents from seven countries participated in a travel survey. Participants were screened to include only frequent international travelers (travel internationally more than once a year) between the ages of 21 and 65, with a balanced split between men and women. Business and leisure travelers were both included. More than 50 international travel industry experts spanning writers, editors, analysts and hospitality professionals participated. Experts were recruited from multiple regions to ensure a diverse and representative sample of opinions.

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