



Todd Smith,
founder
and
president

"Our bookings are up for the past year. We've been seeing pretty good growth the last couple years, about 25 percent increase year over year," Todd Smith, founder and president of AdventureSmith Expeditions, a major travel agency, told *Cruise Industry News* in an interview.

However, since the U.S. election, the company has seen a flattening of its bookings, specifically in the number of inquiries coming in, despite still being strong.

"There's maybe some difficulties on the horizon for U.S.-based operators," he added.

Trends

"If we experience a downturn, I expect that people will go back to booking much closer to departure," Smith said.

“**AS DEPARTURE DATES GET CLOSER, THERE'S INCREASING DISCOUNTED OFFERS TO FILL LAST MINUTE SPACE.**”

About 20 percent of the company's bookings were international, and this segment has dried up since January.

"People are looking to book outside of the U.S.. I think Canadians want to book with a Canadian company, Europeans want to book with European companies. But hopefully that's a shorter-term trend right now," Smith said.

Smith added that due to the slowdown, there's discounting happening.

"As departure dates get closer, there's increasing discounted offers to fill last minute space," he added.

However, Smith also noted higher quality leads coming in, which he credited to algorithms and online searches.

"Traffic is down, but the traffic that is coming in is better. So, conversion rates are up," he explained.



A unique experience on Ponant with Le Commandant Charcot finding the North Pole

According to Smith, this could also indicate a maturing of the expedition market, as more people are aware that the niche exists.

There's also a significant increase in solo travelers, as well as women traveling solo, or in couples and groups.

"More than 50 to 60 percent of our reservations are women," Smith said. "But we've seen that increase and tick up. Women want to travel with other women or on trips that have women guides and women expedition leaders. The industry is responding."

Another trend is charters. Smith explained that a lot of groups and families are coming and asking for private expedition cruises.

Guests are now more aware of culinary and are asking about culinary experiences that highlight local recipes, local products and even foraging.

Another trend is smaller ships and micro cruises with 12 to 30 guests aboard, he added.

Demand

The "Big Four" destinations (Alaska, Galapagos and the Poles, Arctic and Antarctica) remain core, Smith said.

"In the Arctic, there's been this increased demand for the micro cruises, these smaller yachts and smaller ships. Other destinations that tend to be hot and growing are Indian Ocean and Africa, South Pacific, Indonesia and even the Caribbean. And that may be a reflection of the U.S. market wanting to stay a little bit closer to home," Smith noted.

He also pointed out that some clients are a little bit worried about their perception abroad.

"What's going on in the U.S. could affect people's desire to go abroad. I know it's on some people's minds here in the U.S.," he explained.

Market

Smith pointed to the boom of new expedition ships over the past few years, as well as new sustainability practices and technology.

"It's great. We've really embraced that. We love it," Smith added.

He said that this could be pricing out customers who otherwise might be interested, but that was an adaptation to demand.

"Right now, it seems like there's a little bit of overcapacity," Smith said. "These ships are all deployed and they're not quite running at capacity or even the numbers that everybody would like."

What does this mean for the industry going forward?

"I think in the short term, there's going to be a challenge. Given the events in the U.S., we're bracing for a slowdown. But in the long term, I think it's going to be a good thing that will pass, and then those ships will begin to fill later in the year or early 2026, and hopefully that trend will continue," Smith added.

"We're seeing increased competition in the expedition cruise market. I think there are a lot of people that are doing it that have jumped in because it's lucrative, but they don't really understand the product or the niche. So it might be a double-edged sword," Smith said. ■