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2026 Travel Trends

General Travel Trends

General

- Many 2026 trend reports point to travel as more intentional and purpose-led (“why” first), with travelers prioritizing experience and meaning. (Hilton/Expedia)
- Brand/destination storytelling is increasingly built around distinct emotions and identity (“this trip says something about me”) which means brand positioning and tone matter more than listing attractions. (Booking.com; Hilton)

Insight: Many 2026 trend reports point to the same theme: travelers want trips that feel personal and meaningful—and they choose destinations that match their values and the version of themselves they want to project.

Trip Planning & Decision Drivers

- Set-jetting (travelling to places of their favorite TV shows or movies) is especially pronounced among younger cohorts; Expedia reporting notes large majorities of Gen Z and Millennials plan trips influenced by film/TV. (Expedia)
 - 81% of Gen Z and Millennial travelers plan getaways based on TV shows and movies
- “Hotel hopping” (splitting a trip across multiple properties) is rising, which makes multi-stay bundles (2 nights in the urban core and 2 by the waterfront), clear neighborhood positioning, and easy movement between areas more important. (Expedia Group / Hotels.com)
 - More than half of travelers want to book multiple hotels within a single destination (Expedia)
 - Discussions of “Hotel hopping” increased by 1,100% in 2025 (Expedia)
- Interest in rural/farm travel has increased (Expedia)
 - 84% of travelers interested in staying on or near a farm
- Nearly 2 in 3 travelers search for pet-friendly accommodations. (Hilton)

Continued Expansion of AI Use in Trip Planning

- AI is becoming a normal part of trip planning: 51% of travelers used AI in travel planning and 37% of travelers expect travel sites to offer AI planning tools (Travel & Tourism Research Association Webinar)
- AI is shortening the booking funnel by turning inspiration into an itinerary fast (less time between discovery and booking). [TikTok]



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- AI tools will increasingly narrow choices for travelers—rewarding destinations and brands with strong trust signals, loyalty, and direct booking relationships. (Financial Times; Skyscanner)
- 61% of travelers report AI tools are valuable when planning their trip. (Hilton)

Insight: As AI plays a bigger role in planning, a destination’s digital footprint (content, reviews, accuracy, and clarity) has to work for both people and algorithms.

Hotels & Vacation Rentals

- CoStar and Tourism Economics predict slight increases in demand (however, decreases in overall occupancy due to an increase in supply) and average daily rate
- Hotel groups continue to push loyalty and direct booking to reduce OTA dependence, especially as AI agent booking becomes more mainstream. (Financial Times)
- Event compression in 2026 will create bigger rate swings in peak weeks—especially in host and surrounding markets. (Travel Weekly; Reuters)
- Short-term rentals remain important for group/family travel, with destinations competing on regulation, resident sentiment, and inventory quality. (Airbnb; industry coverage)
- 1 in 5 travelers use streaming entertainment in their hotel and 72% value in-room entertainment when traveling. (Hilton)
- There is a widening gap between luxury and the rest of the accommodation segments with RevPAR of luxury properties outpacing all other segments (Travel Weekly)

Business / Meetings Travel

- Meetings and convention travel is expected to remain a steady base in many markets, supporting midweek occupancy and smoothing seasonal swings. (Destination reporting)

International Travel to the United States

- **Note:** This information was compiled before the January 2026 U.S. operation in Venezuela that resulted in the detention of President Nicolás Maduro; any impacts on international visitation and predictions are still unfolding.
- Official forecasts project U.S. inbound volumes continuing to rise in 2026, with international arrivals returning to (and potentially exceeding) 2019 levels. (ITA / NTTO)
- NTTO forecasts roughly 85 million international arrivals to the U.S. in 2026 (approximately +10% vs. 2025). (ITA / NTTO)
 - Canadian visitation is expected to be up 6.4% from 2026 (for context, Canada was down 22.2% in 2025 from 2024)



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- **Insight:** 2026 is widely described as an event-driven “step-up year,” but realized growth will depend on exchange rates, perceived friction (visa processing/entry difficulties, and pricing). (ITA / NTTO; Brand USA; Tourism Economics)
- Some inbound travel spending projections suggest the U.S. could see softer foreign spend in the near term even as visitation rises. (WTTC / Reuters)
- National park access and fee policies affecting international visitors have received attention heading into 2026, influencing itinerary choices for park-heavy trips. (AP; U.S. Department of the Interior)

Travel Niches

Event Travel / Sports Tourism

- Trip inspiration is increasingly driven by a central event (sports, entertainment, etc.), with travelers building itineraries around this main reason for the trip rather than a generic destination list. (Expedia Group; Airbnb)
- FIFA World Cup 2026 is widely expected to generate major inbound and domestic travel, with demand concentrated around match cities and travel corridors. (Reuters)
 - **Insight:** Host markets may see their typical visitors priced out so other destinations may be able to lure these travelers during the World Cup dates (Travel Weekly)
- Sports and live entertainment continue to be used as primary trip anchors for younger travelers (Gen Z / Millennials). (Expedia Group; Airbnb)
 - 57% travelers state they are likely to attend a local sporting event while travelling (68% among Gen Z/Millennials)

Nature & Outdoors

- Parks, coasts, and outdoor experiences remain core to international perceptions of the U.S., with accessibility, permitting, and fee changes affecting how people plan. (AP; U.S. Department of the Interior)
- Destinations may see increased demand for less crowded outdoor alternatives as travelers seek to avoid peak congestion. (Skyscanner; Booking.com)
- Travelers are showing increased interest in offline/outdoor time, with strong demand for national/state parks (+35%) and nature-based experiences. (Airbnb)

Wellness / Slow Travel

- Trend reports describe continued demand for “whycation” and mental-restoration travel, where the emotional outcome is the product. (Hilton)
- One in three travelers are seeking quieter destinations or only plan on visiting popular destinations in the shoulder season. (Skyscanner)
- Travelers top motivation to travel for leisure in 2026 is “to rest and recharge” (56%) (Hilton)



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- 91% of travelers interested in taking a trip centered around reading, relaxation, and quality time with loved ones – some calling these trips Readaways (Expedia)
- The three most anticipated leisure activities are listening to music or podcasts, relaxing by the pool or beach, and reading (Hilton)

Representative Quote: “In an era of political turmoil, news cycles that blend into the next, social media toxicity, tightening wallets, rising temperatures that make everyone constantly feel on edge, many people are seeking to prioritize calm in their personal life and well-being, with travel as no exception,” says Jay Wardle (Adara).

Culinary & Local Culture

- Food and local culture remain prominent trip drivers, especially for higher-spend travelers who plan meals and neighborhoods as central itinerary components. (Hilton; industry coverage)
- Food and drink experiences (particularly hands-on classes) are some of the most booked experiences. (Airbnb)

Traveler Demographic Trends

Gen Z (and younger Millennials)

- Gen Z is highlighted as a driver of short trips and event-centered travel. (Airbnb)
- Compared with the typical traveler, Gen Z tends to prioritize vibes, novelty, and social proof and will often trade longer trips for more frequent, curated trips. (Airbnb; Expedia Group)
- 52% of Gen Z adults have traveled with their parents (Skyscanner)
 - 44% of Gen Z adults report saving money or sharing travel costs as their core motivation for traveling with family (Skyscanner)
- Social search (particularly TikTok, Instagram, Reddit, and YouTube) are gaining increased authority for travel inspiration and planning (Skyscanner)

Travelers 50+

- Travelers age 50+ remain highly travel-motivated, often emphasizing bucket-list goals, comfort, and planning certainty. (AARP)
- Compared with the typical traveler, 50+ audiences are more sensitive to booking friction and value clear service/support cues. (AARP; PhocusWire)
 - **Takeaway:** simplify decision-making with clear accessibility details, cancellation policies, and human support options.

Black U.S. Travelers

- Research highlights that safety and welcoming signals can be top decision factors for Black travelers when choosing destinations and neighborhoods. (MMGY)



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- Compared with the typical traveler, the pre-trip evaluation often includes explicit screening for welcome, representation, and risk. (MMGY)
 - **Takeaway:** make welcome observable with representation, local guidance, staff readiness, and partnerships with trusted voices.

LGBTQ+ Travelers

- 59% of LGBTQ+ travelers have experienced discrimination while traveling, which influences planning behavior and destination choice. (Booking.com)
- Compared with the typical traveler, LGBTQ+ trip planning more often includes rights-checking, safety screening, and higher cancellation sensitivity when risk signals change. (Booking.com)
- Verified inclusivity signals (e.g., trained/affirming partners) can reduce uncertainty and increase conversion. (Booking.com)
 - **Takeaway:** provide practical, local safety guidance (not generic claims) and highlight visibly inclusive partners and neighborhoods.

Travelers with Disabilities / Access Needs

- Accessible travel demand is substantial; the planning process often hinges on accurate, verifiable accessibility information (not generic claims). (Accessibility advocacy)
- Compared with the typical traveler, access-needs travelers more likely to not consider a destination, attraction, etc. when information is incomplete, especially for transport, lodging, and attractions. (Accessibility advocacy)
 - **Takeaway:** treat accessibility information like pricing; structured, findable, and specific. (Accessibility advocacy)

Macro Trends

Pricing, Value, and Distribution

- Direct booking strategies and loyalty ecosystems remain central as suppliers compete with OTAs and prepare for AI-mediated booking journeys. (Financial Times)
- Value messaging is shifting from “cheapest” to “most worth it,” emphasizing experiences, perks, and flexibility. (Industry trend reports)
- Price transparency and flexibility are likely to matter more in 2026 as event-driven spikes create rate fluctuations. (Industry outlooks)