Travel Trends

SMARInsights

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Grocery Store Tourism Added to the Itinerary

Traditional itineraries are adapting to modern times. Travelers are shifting their trip planning to include *less* "iconic" trip activities and *more* culturally immersive experiences. With uncertainties regarding the economic climate and the cost of travel, consumers have shaped a new travel trend: grocery store tourism.

Otherwise known as "shelf discovery," "aisle scouting," and "supermarket safaris," grocery store tourism has leaped in popularity over the last year. This trend is wallet-friendly and satisfies the desire for cultural exploration.

There are several other benefits to grocery store tourism, chief among them being an unfiltered view of a destination's identity. Another important benefit is that it turns a secondary chore (that likely would've been performed anyway) into a key itinerary item.

> *"When travelers step into a local grocery store in a new destination, they aren't just checking off a chore list—they are stepping directly into the unvarnished living room of the community. It is the single most authentic, unfiltered cultural exhibition a traveler can experience."*
> *-Elena Vance, Cultural Tourism Consultant and Destination Analyst*

Value-Seeking as a Trip Motivator

The average trip planner in 2026 is a value-seeker. Instead of organizing a comprehensive destination checklist that includes as many iconic attractions as possible, budget-minded planners seek experiences that are off-the-beaten-path (also observed in the rise of "whycations," microtrips, and road trips that are closer to home.)

Aligned with exploring more niche travel opportunities that are also affordable, it is understandable that grocery store tourism would become a leading travel trend in 2026.

Although this behavior shifts visitor expenditures away from bigger attractions, it also fosters a more sustainable tourism economy in the destination. For example, a well-known attraction sells trinkets that are likely made abroad; meanwhile, a lesser-known, independent attraction sources

merchandise from local artisans. Purchases made at the lesser-known attraction directly support the local tourism industry.

Grocery tourism functions similarly. Visiting local grocers in a destination leads to increased purchases of local goods—such as oils, spice blends, and honeys—and more financial support for regional producers and the economic ecosystem of the destination.

"From a budgeting standpoint, tourists are realizing that grocery aisles offer the highest return on investment for cultural immersion. Instead of paying inflated prices at tourist-trap restaurants, travelers are investing directly in regional food artisans by picking up authentic local pantry goods."
-Marcus Sterling, Sustainable Tourism Economist

Sentimental Value Behind the Trend

Grocery store tourism is accessible—meaning anyone at any age, ability, or stage in the trip can participate. It allows visitors and local residents to interact, sparking spontaneous connections and cross-cultural conversations. Experiences like these are much harder to come by on crowded tours or at overhyped attractions.

Travelers are also likely to discover nostalgic mementos at a local grocery store—items like locally made snacks, as well as food-related merchandise with local art printed on it. This is in line with Booking.com's travel trend predictions for 2026, which noted that 'shelfie' souvenirs, such as edible and design-forward products, would become keepsakes that represent the traveler's journeys. Specifically, Booking.com reported that more than 26% of respondents think edible souvenirs help them relive a destination, and 25% value the local craft, sustainability, and traditional methods showcased by these souvenirs.

These low-cost items tend to have more purpose and reusability than traditional destination mementos. Additionally, they emotionally reward the traveler for exploring the destination in a grassroots, community-level way.

Overall, grocery store tourism can be a trip component that yields indispensable experiences and unforgettable

memories.

Domestic Travelers, International Visitors Back the Trend

Domestic travelers have shaped the grocery store tourism trend in the United States during their regional road trips. Specifically, they have shown heightened interest in exploring specialized co-ops, markets, and farm shops they pass on the road. In this way, domestic travelers are charting their own map of culinary diversity in the United States.

Grocery tourism saw exponential growth from international tourists during the World Cup. These tourists flocked to grocery stores, celebrating them as cultural keystones at the heart of American identity.

Internationally, American food culture is famously regarded as excessive yet affordable. International visitors were drawn to grocery stores because they put this excess on display—and allowed these visitors to sample domestic beverages and snacks in an environment outside of the high-energy World Cup setting.

"During major international events, visiting the local supermarket becomes an anchor for travelers feeling overwhelmed by crowded stadiums and tourist zones. International fans love browsing our domestic aisles to discover regional snacks and everyday products they can't get back home—it's an effortless way to feel integrated into the local culture."
-Sarah Jenkins, International Hospitality Coordinator

Sources: EWN Media, DMG Media, Time Out Group, Curation Edit, NerdWallet, Food & Wine, NomadWomen, The Star (1, 2), Booking.com, Travel and Tour World (1, 2), OIYS Media, Travel + Leisure Asia

In Summary

- Consumers have shaped the grocery store tourism trend among uncertainties regarding the economic climate and the cost of travel. This trend is wallet-friendly and satisfies the desire for cultural exploration.
- Aligned with exploring more niche travel opportunities that are also affordable, it follows that grocery store tourism would become a leading travel trend in 2026.
- Grocery tourism fosters a more sustainable tourism economy in a destination.
- Nostalgic mementos found at local grocery stores while visiting a destination tend to have more purpose and reusability than traditional destination mementos. Additionally, they emotionally reward the traveler for exploring the destination in a grassroots, community-level way.
- Domestic travelers have shaped the grocery store tourism trend in the United States during their regional road trips, charting their own map of culinary diversity in the United States.
- International tourists flocked to grocery stores during the World Cup, celebrating them as cultural keystones at the heart of American identity.