

## Attracting Gen Z with Sustainability and Culture

Generation Z, who focus on sustainability, adventure and cultural experiences are causing destinations all across the world to evolve in order to cater to these unique preferences. Several U.S. destinations have seen success by aligning their marketing strategies with these values, providing a model for other destinations to follow.

### **New York City: Leveraging Local Culture and Social Media**

Known for its dynamic cultural scene, NYC has been leveraging social media to appeal to Gen Z. The city's efforts to promote local art, music festivals, and sustainability initiatives resonate well with young travelers who seek authentic and eco-friendly experiences. Emphasizing sustainability initiatives, such as urban gardening projects and eco-friendly urban planning, New York City aligns with the values of young travelers who prioritize authentic and environmentally conscious experiences.

This strategy not only highlights the city's cultural vibrancy but also invites young travelers to explore and participate in its urban landscape, fostering a deeper connection with New York's rich cultural heritage.

### **Nashville, Tennessee: Embracing Experiential Trips and Music Culture**

With its vibrant music scene and emphasis on live events, Nashville attracts Gen Z travelers who value experiential trips. The city actively promotes music festivals spanning from country to indie rock, showcasing both established acts and emerging local talent.

Leveraging platforms like TikTok and Instagram, Nashville engages directly with younger audiences, sharing behind-the-scenes glimpses of concerts, artist collaborations, and vibrant street performances.

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Photo courtesy of GoHawaii.com

## How Generation Z Is Revolutionizing Hawaii's Tourism Landscape

Generation Z, born from 1997-2010, is fast reshaping the Hawaiian tourism landscape. Together with unique values, a deep-rooted social and digital prowess, and a desire for authenticity, this demographic is transforming the traditional vacation playbook in the islands. Here's how: Millennials, the generation that came before (1981-1996), were introduced to technology. Gen Z, however, has never known life before the Internet. They were born into a world of screens and smartphones.

Gen Z uses technology for everything from problem-solving to communicating. Since they are digital natives, they can spot marketing ploys and inauthenticity across multiple formats.

Gen Z makes up 21% of the U.S. population and spends more on travel than any other generation. Their spending power could increase by 48% by the end of the decade. Maybe you know some of them?

### **Role of Hawaii tourism in relation to Generation Z marketing.**

The Hawaii Tourism Authority (HTA) has faced nearly universal disapproval regarding virtually all aspects of its performance. Despite these challenges, the HTA is beginning to align more closely with

emerging travel behaviors and preferences, for example, those of Generation Z. Whether by design or by chance, HTA's recent initiatives seem to resonate well with this younger generation. Their focus on promoting authentic Hawaiian cultural experiences, supporting environmental preservation, and encouraging participation in local agriculture and conservation, seems to mirror the conscientious and immersive approach sought by young Gen Z. This alignment, perhaps serendipitously, offers an interesting perspective on how Hawaii may navigate its tourism future, ensuring that it not only meets the expectations of young travelers but also addresses the broader challenges facing the islands today.

### **1. Craving authentic Hawaiian experiences**

Gen Z in Hawaii seeks to immerse themselves in genuine cultural experiences more than any other generation. This means moving away from typical tourist traps towards more meaningful engagements like small-group luaus with local families, overnight stays in traditional Hawaiian hale (houses), or hands-on preservation efforts with native flora and fauna. Their quest for authenticity is reshaping what it means to experience Hawaii.

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This digital strategy not only amplifies Nashville's allure as the "Music City" but also invites Gen Z travelers to participate in and contribute to its cultural landscape.

### Denver, Colorado: Highlighting Outdoor Adventures and Eco-Friendly Practices

Known for its outdoor adventures and eco-friendly practices, Denver has become a destination for Gen Z travelers seeking both relaxation and sustainable experiences. The city's marketing not only showcases its outdoor activities, wellness, live events, and cultural activities but also emphasizes its commitment to sustainable tourism. Denver's proactive approach to sustainability includes solar power and bike lane initiatives, as well as its Certifiably Green Denver program. This program guides businesses throughout



Photo courtesy of Denver.org

the city to adopt sustainable practices and connects conscious travelers to eco-friendly hotels, locally sourced restaurants, and community-driven conservation projects. This strategy integrates sustainability, adventure, and cultural richness,

attracting Gen Z travelers and setting trends for the future of the travel industry.

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### 2. Social media is their new Hawaii travel guide.

Gen Z spends almost 9.5 hours daily online, including on social media. Platforms like Instagram and TikTok are frequently mentioned in Hawaii travel, and they appear to be at the very heart of Gen Z's travel planning. Their "grammable" moments are more about showcasing hidden gems like the backroads of Maui or a less renowned hiking trail on Kauai.

This generation's reliance on social media has the side effect of turning once obscure Hawaii gems into must-visit destinations, impacting both the environment and communities.

### 3. Pioneers of eco-conscious travel?

Sustainability is more than a buzzword to those in Gen Z—it's a way of traveling. They drive demand for eco-friendly Hawaii accommodations and tours that respect the islands' delicate ecosystem. So, while the ubiquitous broadcasting of their finds may have a harmful impact on Hawaii, at the same time, they're the

ones who are choosing to support local businesses and farmers' markets, joining beach clean-ups, and in some ways, setting new standards for responsible tourism in Hawaii.

### 4. Technology at their fingertips.

Gen Z visitors to the islands expect seamless tech integration into their Hawaii travel experiences. From AR tours of historic sites like Iolani Palace to VR surfing, hiking, and other experiences that they can engage with before hitting the actual locations, technology is making Hawaii accessible in very new and innovative ways. This expectation pushes local businesses to adapt swiftly to remain relevant to Gen Z.

### 5. The rise of flexible, spontaneous travel.

Thanks to an ethos of working and studying entirely remotely with great flexibility, Gen Z is likely to book a last-minute flight to Hawaii or head out for a spontaneous weekend on Maui. This spontaneity is a boom for businesses that, via apps and services offering last-minute deals, are becoming adept at facilitating

this kind of reshaping Hawaii travel.

### 6. Changing social dynamics.

Another prominent feature among Gen Z Hawaii travelers is going solo or with friends instead of family. In the islands, this shift aligns with accommodations like boutiques, hostels, or group-friendly rentals, as well as activities that cater to meeting new people, like hikes and other community-based events and workshops.

### 7. Value and experience in harmony.

While budget-conscious, Gen Z doesn't hesitate to splurge on experiences that promise lasting memories, like helicopter tours over the Na Pali Coast or diving with manta rays. This dual approach has businesses rethinking how they package and market experiences and what value means to a younger traveler.

Through their evolving preferences and behaviors, Generation Z is not just visiting Hawaii; they are transforming it on the fly. They are compelling Hawaii to adapt to their distinct, digital-first, and eco-conscious travel ethos. Ready or not, Hawaii's travel scene is changing.

- Hawai'i Travel News