Travel Trends

SMARInsights

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Fall Travel Meets Literary Tourism

Intentional "slowcations" have dominated 2026 leisure travel, aligning with mindfulness, wellness, and short-haul travel trends. Literary tourism has branched off these trends, carving out its own space in the industry and transforming niche bibliophile interests into a tourist-driven economic engine for bookish small towns, storied shoulder-season destinations, and independent retailers such as bookstores and reading-adjacent shops.

While literary retreats existed long before #BookTok and #Bookstagram, the massive community following this online content has propelled the rise of getaways centered around popular genres, intellectual aesthetics, and literary settings.

Per Skyscanner, hotel platforms have seen a 70% global year-over-year surge in searches using "library" filters. Morning Consult reports that consumer surveys indicate over 53% of U.S. travelers express direct interest in attending a dedicated reading retreat. Furthermore, BookRetreats suggests that over 91% of leisure travelers express interest in trips that feature dedicated quiet time, reading lounges, or low-stimulation environments.

The hashtag phenomenon has served as a significant catalyst for this growing travel trend, and the industry-savvy are capitalizing on it. Independent bookstores are partnering with local businesses to expand the breadth of offerings to literary tourists, generating reciprocal revenue.

Bookstore passport programs represent a collaborative effort by bookshop owners to create a trail of stops that pulls visitors away from metropolitan destinations and towards off-the-beaten-path communities. Similarly, DMOs with ties to literary destinations are creating maps of stops that travelers can visit during leaf-peeping road trips. By weaving together the independent bookstore experience with scenic autumn foliage drives, DMOs transform passive road-trippers into high-intent retail consumers. On top of these efforts, lodging establishments along the way are adapting their offerings to include curated in-room experiences and genre-themed visitor packages.



Programs and Innovative Hospitality

Bookstore passport programs are coordinated efforts by independent sellers throughout a local region that foster increased visitation numbers across the area. A few examples include the following.

Central Ohio Indie Bookstores Passport: This initiative ties together bookshops across the Columbus metro area with surrounding historical areas, encouraging visitors to explore beyond the city limits.

Regional Indie Bookstore Passport: Crossing the state line between Southeast Wisconsin and Northeast Illinois, this program has a three-step approach to ensure direct economic return. First, visitors must obtain their passport from a participating shop. Next, they collect stamps by making purchases of $15 or more at these shops. Finally, they unlock rewards based on the number of stamps they collect.

Rhode Island Independent Bookstore Passport: This program encourages travel along scenic state corridors that see high volumes of shoulder-season trips, connecting shops from Newport to Providence.

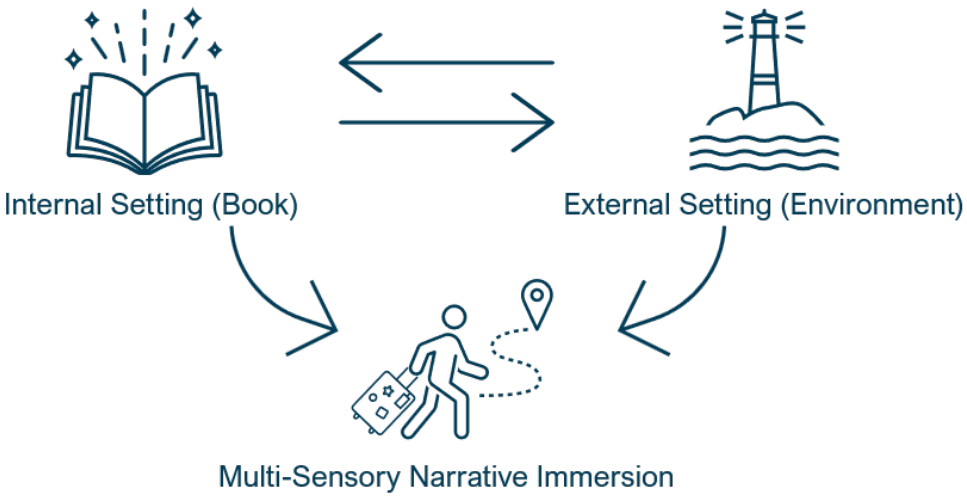
Select luxury and boutique properties are also leaning into unique experiences for literary travelers. Common initiatives that they have built into their amenities include in-house libraries, tailored book stacks in visitors' rooms, partnerships with local bookstores, and room décor that creates a cozy reading environment.

Travel Demand, Aesthetics, and Atmosphere

Books that are viral on social media are increasingly driving travel demand to physical locations with similar aesthetics. Importantly, these locations—whether stores, lodging, or landmarks—are physical anchors for literary tourism, attracting tourists seeking welcoming third-spaces for readers.

This fall, literary travelers are expected to design trips around "multi-sensory

immersion" in destinations associated with specific genres. Otherwise known as "atmospheric matching," this represents a more psychological component of literary travel. Rather than visiting a destination with a checklist of literary landmarks, these visitors are seeking a sensory experience that mirrors the atmospheric mood of the books they love—heightening emotional engagement with the location itself, often leading to extended stays and increased visitor spending. Some destinations are more equipped than others with literary history, independent bookstore density, atmospheric settings, and autumnal appeal. For example, literary travelers are likely to visit New England this fall if they favor classic literature. The Hudson Valley—home to Sleepy Hollow—is a favorite for travelers who read books in the Gothic and Dark Academia genres, which are increasingly popular as Halloween approaches.



Sources:

About Time Bookstore, BookRetreats, Books on the Square, Daily Passport, Expedia, Midwest Independent Booksellers Association, Ohio Department of Development, Tourism Ohio, Skyscanner, Small Business & Entrepreneurship Council, Travel Tomorrow, Twin Cities Business, U.S. Chamber of Commerce

In Summary

- Literary tourism has carved out its own space in the industry and is transforming niche bibliophile interests into a tourist-driven economic engine for communities.
- The massive community following viral online book content has propelled the rise of getaways centered around popular genres, intellectual aesthetics, and literary settings.
- The hashtag phenomenon has served as a significant catalyst for this growing travel trend, and the industry-savvy are capitalizing on it by expanding the breadth of offerings to literary tourists and creating book trails spanning across multiple regions.
- Bookstore passport programs are coordinated efforts by independent sellers throughout a local region that foster increased visitation numbers across the area.
- Physical locations with bookish aesthetics are anchors for literary tourism.
- This fall, literary travelers are expected to design trips around “multi-sensory narrative immersion” in destinations associated with specific genres, heightening emotional engagement with the location itself and leading to extended stays and increased visitor spending.
- In the fall, some destinations are more equipped than others with literary history, independent bookstore density, atmospheric settings, and seasonal appeal. These destinations are most often found in New England.