

Travel Trends

SMARInsights

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2025: A Look Back

2025 has seen significant changes in travel rules and tourism trends.

Sustainable tourism: In many areas of the world, various communities have a dependence on tourism dollars and endure the impacts of overtourism, though it often causes conflict with local ecosystems and strains natural resources. Sustainable tourism is an economically viable approach to travel that attracts higher-spending visitors seeking authentic experiences—who then generate more revenue with fewer environmental impacts. Natural preservation is a top priority for sustainable tourism efforts, as are the needs and wellbeing of the local community. 2025 saw several destinations adopt sustainable tourism strategies, from implementing visitor caps to utilizing data analytics to optimize tourism flows.

AI travel tools:

Consumers are quickly adopting AI planning tools, largely because these tools can craft tailored itineraries and save time and energy when planning travel. Notably, many who are aware of these tools do not trust them. It is important for these tools to be transparent and reliable.

Aviation changes: Three major changes to the American airport experience occurred earlier this summer. First, the Transportation Security Administration (TSA) enforced Real ID requirements to board domestic flights. Second, Americans who visited European countries applied for European Travel Information and Authorization System (ETIAS) approval before boarding their international flights. Third, airlines now must issue transferable credits

valid for at least five years to travelers prohibited from flying due to government restrictions or medical advice.

Sources: [Kantar](#), [Grist](#), [Journée Mondiale](#), [Connected Aviation Today](#)

Emerging Winter Trends

It's the most wonderful time of the year—and typically the most expensive to get away. US travelers have weighed in on their ability to travel this holiday season.

According to a recent WalletHub survey, economic uncertainties have made the shape of travel uncertain. Some travelers are spending freely, while others are paying off last year's trip. Additionally, some are sifting through rewards programs and budgeting apps to figure out how to make their

winter vacations happen. With that in mind, winter travel planning in the second half of 2025 needs to be clever when considering cost, priorities, and budget. WalletHub reports 54% of Americans believe inflation will affect their winter travel plans, and 51% are concerned about the weaker dollar. Nearly one in four are still paying off last year's trip. More than half (55%) plan to redeem credit card rewards to help cover holiday spending, and 23% say they'll apply for a new card to save on travel. Nearly one in three plan to use budgeting apps for their next getaway. Opinions are split on value, with 49% indicating winter travel offers better value than summer.

Airbnb's latest report on emerging trends in winter travel this season has two key takeaways. First, US travelers are

shifting away from well-known hotspots this winter and seeking more under-the-radar destinations. Second, families are leading the way in domestic and local winter travel this year in the US, with 80% choosing suburban and rural locations for their getaways.

According to Airbnb's survey data, cold weather enthusiasts will hit up hidden slopes and smaller ski towns without the crowds, like Brighton, Utah and McCall, Idaho.

Meanwhile, those wanting warm weather will head to artsy and cultural beach towns. Nearly half of winter travelers will be vacationing with family, and for most, visiting family and friends remains the top reason for winter travel.

As the year draws to a close, US travelers will need to be creative about upcoming trip

planning if they want smarter, more affordable options, not just seasonal escapes.

Sources: [Airbnb](#), [Miles with McConkey](#), [WalletHub](#)

2026: A Look Ahead

Travel trend forecasts for 2026 blend old and new.

Skyscanner's 2026 "Travel Trends" report highlights seven trends that will shape 2026 travel. Travelers will continue to plan trips that are fine-tuned to their personal wellbeing—trips with purpose and special worth. The seven trends below will help consumers do just that.

"Glowmads." Skincare and beauty routines will impact real-world travel behaviors in 2026. According to Skyscanner, 33% of global travelers want to experience local beauty culture and 20% say that they're influenced by

TikTok and social media.

“Shelf-discovery.”

Culinary tourism is going local, with many planning to visit local food markets over restaurants.

Skyscanner notes that this is part travel hack, part budget hack—the traveler gets an experience of local cuisine that’s easier on their wallet. 35% of global travelers plan to check out or shop at local grocery stores on their next leisure trip.

“Altitude Shift.” Travelers are seeking higher ground—both for skiing and for serenity.

Skyscanner data reports 76% of global travelers are considering or planning a mountain escape for summer or autumn 2026.

“Bookbound.” According to Skyscanner, over half (57%) of travelers have booked or would consider a trip inspired by literature. This trend is further reflected in

Skyscanner’s “library” filter being up 70% globally YoY.

“Catching Flights and Feelings.” 55% of travelers have gone or considered going overseas specifically to meet new people, e.g., for friendship or dating. Skyscanner hotel bookings using the “solo” filter have jumped 83% globally YoY.

“Family Miles.”

Multigenerational trips are on the rise. There is a duality to this trend: trip costs can be shared across family members, and memories can be made across generations. Skyscanner reports 31% of travelers across the world plan to travel with their family, including multi-generational journeys.

“Destination Check-In.”

In this type of trip, the hotel is the destination. 29% will stay in an accommodation that’s part of the travel

experience or destination itself.

Similar forecasts have been released by Priceline, Audley Travel, Globetrender, and Hilton. Most notably, all three of these sources emphasize a rise in family-oriented itineraries.

Mark Hanson, managing director of Audley Travel, notes, “Family travel, while broader in scope and more multi-generational than ever before, is splintering into ‘Multi-Spoke Itineraries’ that see less time spent together but a greater sense of connection.”

Priceline’s 2026 “Where to Next? Travel Trends Report” notes more Kidfluence burgeoning. According to their recent survey, 87% say their Gen Alpha kids have considerable sway in trip planning.

According to a review of Hilton’s 2026 Trends Report by

Travel + Leisure,
“...almost half (48%) of its global team members have observed more families traveling with three or more generations, signaling an appetite for epic family vacations...2026 will be a big year for shared family adventures.”

The tourism industry is ever-changing, but one thing seems certain for 2026 travel: consumers will take more intentional trips that resonate with their personal values and seem “worth it” amid ongoing economic fluctuations.

Sources: [Skyscanner](#), [Priceline](#), [Spear's](#), [Travel + Leisure](#)

In Summary:

- 2025 has seen significant changes in travel rules and tourism trends, including a rise in sustainable tourism, the use of AI trip planning tools, and several aviation policy changes.
- Economic uncertainties have made the shape of travel uncertain this holiday season, with some consumers spending freely on travel costs and others being more conservative. Additionally, more travelers are seeking under-the-radar destinations that are more affordable and/or closer to home.
- Multigenerational trips will have a large impact on 2026 travel. Additionally, travelers will continue the trend of planning trips that are fine-tuned to their personal wellbeing—trips with purpose and special worth.