

# Travel Trends

**SMAR**insights

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## Soft Shoulder-Season Start

With the federal government shutdown impacting confidence in the travel and tourism industry, PriceLabs data suggests a slowdown in U.S. domestic travel this fall. Fewer travelers intend to take trips because of anxiety over TSA staffing shortages and slower bookings into peak leaf-peeping season. The trend could continue into the final months of 2025.

Only a few popular foliage destinations have heightened occupancy over last year, including Asheville, North Carolina; Acadia National Park, Maine; Aspen, Colorado; and Shenandoah National Park, Virginia.

Conversely, other fall markets that are typically busy are

seeing sharp declines, such as Oregon's McKenzie River Scenic Byway and the Berkshires in Massachusetts.

Despite challenges imposed by the government shutdown, tourists are undeterred from visiting US National Parks for shoulder season. Kelsey Vlamis, a senior reporter for Business Insider, recently visited popular parks to report on limited services during the shutdown, as well as the extra planning required of tourists to enjoy their visits to these parks.

She notes that national parks that are "open" can be accessed by the public, but services vary by park, e.g., some parks will keep visitor centers open while others won't. Likewise, some will continue to collect

entry fees, some won't.

Visitors should check for updates from specific destinations' websites and social media for current info.

"...for first-time visitors, it might be better to wait until the shutdown ends and the parks are operating at full force. I recommend doing a lot of research in advance and learning about Leave No Trace principles to protect yourself as well as the parks."

Sources: [Travel Agent Central](#), [Business Insider](#)

## Leave No Trace

"Some parks are open. Some parks are closed. More than 60% of national park staff are on furlough," Kyle Groetzing, a spokesperson for NPCA, tells Business

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Insider. "The shutdown is leaving national parks without the experts needed to protect fragile ecosystems, interpret American history, and serve the public."

As travelers spend time outdoors this shoulder season, they must be conscious of their actions and corresponding impacts on the wilderness. The Leave No Trace Seven Principles can minimize those impacts:

1. Plan ahead and prepare
2. Travel and camp on durable surfaces
3. Dispose of waste properly
4. Leave found items
5. Minimize campfire impacts
6. Respect wildlife

7. Be considerate of other visitors

These principles are defined by the Leave No Trace Center for Outdoor Ethics, built on research by the US Forest Service, National Park Service, and Bureau of Land Management.

Source: [National Park Service](#)

## Luxury Fall Travel

US RevPAR being projected as negative in 2025 and luxury bookings being up more than 25% suggests that we are in a K-shaped travel economy. Investors are working with a split-screen travel market.

The middle-market where most Americans book their vacations is softening. Additionally, further

declines in occupancy and RevPAR are predicted for the rest of 2025. Midscale hotels have limited options for travel incentives beyond offering discounts.

"The next six months are really going to be rocky and probably not feel so great, because we saw the bulk of our growth in the first half of the year, unless you're a luxury hotel" says Amanda Hite, president of STR.

Regardless, luxury fall travel is expected to do well this year. Experts are recommending hidden gems in the Hudson Valley, photographing foliage with expert photography instructors, and traveling by train for lush views of fall-hued landscapes.

Sources: [Travel Agent Central](#), [Forbes](#)

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## Upcoming Holiday Travel

Upcoming holiday travel data looks promising.

Cirium booking data suggests airline reservations made for Thanksgiving and Christmas travel are up compared to last year (2% and 1%, respectively).

"The entire fourth quarter, the fall break, Thanksgiving, Christmas, they're all likely to set records with strong demand," United Airlines CEO Scott Kirby says to CBS News. "At the beginning of July, it was like a light switch got flipped on and demand started to come back."

Airlines' perception of consumer demand lead to approximately half a million more seats being added for the Thanksgiving travel period

compared to last year.

However, as the holidays approach, there could be government-shutdown related issues that passengers face at airports if funding delays persist. Corresponding airport staff shortages across the US could lead to more flight delays than usual.

In light of this information, it is important to consider that the host agency Travel Experts, which represents hundreds of independent advisors in the luxury market, projects flat bookings for the winter holiday season despite robust fall bookings this year. These findings were recorded in a survey of its affiliate network. However, optimism remains

that there may be an uptick from an ongoing late booking trend.

"My winter business is a little slower than usual right now, but I fully expect it to pick up as we get closer to the season," Teresa McCombs of TP McCombs Travel reports. "Clients are booking later than they used to. What I'm seeing is a very strong last-minute trend."

Importantly, Sharon Fake, executive director of Travel Experts, notes "...our advisors concentrate on the luxury market which may not be an indication of the overall travel industry."

Sources: [CBS News](#), [MoneyWatch](#), [TravelAge West](#)