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**VTC**  
**2026 Travel  
Trends**

**February 2026**

# SOCIAL & COMMUNAL WELLNESS

- Travelers are looking for destinations and experiences to dial down the noise of everyday life, especially the online aspect. They want to feel more rooted, not just rested.
- Wellness is shifting from a solitary self-care practice to a shared ritual. People are seeking connection with local people, fellow travelers, and the places they visit.
- Social bathhouses, communal dining, sober/soft clubbing, and private retreats designed for connection, conversation, and a sense of belonging are all part of this trend.
- “Viking Wellness” is also an emerging trend, with a focus on raw, elemental experiences and large dining tables with shared dishes.

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# HUMAN INTELLIGENCE> ARTIFICIAL INTELLIGENCE

- Digital fatigue has led to a strong backlash against automation, A.I. planning, and social media-driven travel. As a result, niche and luxury travel agents are seeing a resurgence in the desire for on-the-ground destination knowledge.
- Travelers crave human interactions with guides, concierges, artisans, and local hosts to get the notable details that chatbots don't know.
- There will be more human-guided discovery in vacations as A.I. fades into the background and trust, intimacy, and expertise move front and center.
- While trust in technology remains an issue, 42% of consumers find that using A.I. for **some** parts of travel planning helps save time.

# Heritage & Ancestry **travel.**

- Travel as emotional reconnection—returning to family roots, revisiting childhood places, learning “Old World” skills, and embracing bi-/multi-generational trips.
- Part of this is social media fatigue; people want to leave algorithms behind and avoid the overhyped destinations in favor of places that they either have firsthand or secondhand knowledge of (family members visited).
- Nostalgia-driven itineraries are big, with travelers revisiting places and experiences that shaped their lives, such as family beaches, amusement parks, and hometown hangouts.
- Ancestry pilgrimages allow travelers to reconnect with their heritage and trace their family trees.
- There is also an element of inherited travel tastes, where travelers head to the destinations, hotels, and tourism sites frequented by their parents.

# Grandma & Grandpa **travel.**

- A subset of the Nostalgia travel trend is “Grandma & Grandpa Travel”—Vacationing with older parents and grandparents to learn generational skills that are at risk of being forgotten, such as canning, sewing, and other artisan crafts. Embrace your inner “old person” while on vacation to develop skills that your parents or grandparents have mastered.
- This is also a continuation of the multi-generational travel trend that we saw in 2025; BUT the big difference is that more than one in four travelers who vacation with children (29%) are shifting to skip-generation travel by sending the kids off with just the grandparents.
- This trend does not have to be a traveler's own grandparent, either; there is an increase in booking “grandparent activities” with locals. For example, these travelers will book an experience to cook with grandmothers in Tuscany or work with weaving artisans in Peru.
- Hotels are embracing this trend by partnering with local artists and craftspeople to showcase regional artisan traditions through available classes, gift shops, and hotel décor.

# SPORTS TOURISM: THE FAN VOYAGE

- 2026 is a huge year for international sports, with the World Cup coming to America and the Winter Olympic Games happening in Milan. But local sports are also seeing a rise in attendance.
- 57% of travelers say they are likely to attend a local sporting event while traveling. This number rises to 68% when combining Gen Z and Millennials.
- People want to travel for sports or other group-focused events to share in the collective energy.
- College game days are turning into weekend or even week-long trips. College towns with top-ranked teams have turned into must-visit destinations, as nearly  $\frac{2}{3}$  of travelers say they would love to visit a college town.





# FOOD & EVERYDAY CULTURE TOURISM



- Travelers are eschewing fine dining experiences and instead viewing food as a chance for cultural immersion.
- The farm-to-table trend has shifted, focusing on deeper connections with regional traditions and ingredients, as well as sustainability efforts around these crops. This allows travelers to look through a wide lens at the culinary ecosystems of a region.
- Exploring grocery stores, booking farm stays, sampling street food, shopping local markets, and taking home edible souvenirs have become commonplace practices among travelers.
- 77% of travelers report that they enjoy exploring local grocery stores to try authentic local food and drink offerings.
- In 2025, just 54% of U.S. adults reported drinking alcohol—the lowest level in 90 years. If drinking, travelers tend to lean more into investigative drinking, centered on hyper-regional spirits and artisan ingredients.

# HOME COMFORTS **ON THE ROAD**



- Travelers bring “home” along with them on vacation: pets, favorite recipes, books, and familiar comforts.
- Part of the reason behind this need to feel “at home” during travel is that hybrid workers now blur the line between work, home, and vacation. This group will travel but bring work along so that they can work in a new location and explore the area during their free time.
- Additionally, pet-friendly travel has exploded. 56% of people around the world own a pet
- According to Hilton, 64% of travelers are searching for pet-friendly accommodations.
- Hotels are responding by offering above-and-beyond pet accommodations, including pet-walking services, dog beds in rooms, and gourmet room-service menus for pets.



# SLOW & GROUNDED TRAVEL

- This trend is defined by a shift away from airplanes for traveling longer distances and towards trains, scenic road trips, non-viral destinations, and off-season travel to avoid tourist crowds.
- Air travel has seen wild fluctuations in cost and reliability in the past few years. This trend is the response by consumers to find more affordable, more flexible, and less stressful ways to travel.
- The lead-up to America's 250<sup>th</sup> anniversary in July 2026 is also a reason for the return of the "All-American Road Trip".
- 71% of Americans plan to drive on their next vacation.
- Travelers are looking for road trips that keep them connected to the landscape, and for many, appreciation for nature is the main focus.
- Rail travel is still increasing in popularity, with travel specialists Explore Worldwide reporting rail bookings for 2026 up 41% YOY. But the industry is moving into a more luxury-focused and extended vacation travel sector.





# SOCIAL MEDIA TRENDS

## **Comfort-First Storytelling**

Content that feels thoughtful, human, and emotionally grounding—posts that linger, spark reflection, and build trust over time.

## **Cinematic Short-Form Video**

Immersive, cinematic-style reels that prioritize mood, pacing, and storytelling over fast cuts and trends.

## **The Return of Analog Romance**

A resurgence of snail mail, handwritten notes, postcards, and tactile travel memories that celebrate slowing down and nostalgia.

## **Mystical & Enchanting Destinations**

Whimsical towns, moody landscapes, distant ruins, and places rooted in folklore and atmosphere that invite curiosity and wonder.

## **Adrenaline-Driven “Darecations”**

High-energy, thrill-seeking travel experiences that emphasize challenge, intensity, and unforgettable moments; especially for Millennials and Gen Z.

# THANK YOU!

