

GLOBAL HOTEL ALLIANCE REVEALS WHAT TRAVEL WILL LOOK LIKE IN 2026

- *Travel will get more personal, with 65% of travellers saying it expresses who they are*
- *Leisure for pleasure will lead, 6 trips planned on average vs. 4 for business*
- *Exploration will rule, as 62% choose new destinations over old favourites*
- *Slow, conscious breaks will pick up as 60% seek small cities and rural escapes*
- *Selective luxury; 79% plan to spend on meaningful upgrades, rather than splurge freely*
- *Tech adoption to continue, with 60% already using AI tools to trip plan*
- *Asia remains world's most desired travel region, led by Japan as top destination*

Dubai, UAE, 27th November 2025: [Global Hotel Alliance](#) (GHA), the world's largest alliance of independent hotel brands, has revealed how the world will travel in 2026, based on insights from members of its award-winning GHA DISCOVERY loyalty programme, which now counts 32 million-plus travellers globally.

Survey results point to a more intentional traveller, one who values connection, comfort and authenticity over excess. From the rise of discerning spending and lifestyle-based loyalty to Asia's continued dominance as a dream destination, travel in 2026 will be smarter, slower, and more personal than ever before.

Here's what the travel landscape will look like:

Travel will be more personal

For 2026 travellers, journeys are becoming more about who they are than where they go; 65% of travellers agree that travel expresses their identity, while nearly 90% agree or remain neutral overall. Among Gen Z, 50% say travel matters more than career milestones, proof that global experiences are now the new achievements. This mindset is strongest in Germany, the US, Thailand, the UAE, and India, reflecting how destinations have become expressions of personal values and individuality.

Travel will be leisure-led

The desire to travel for enjoyment and experience is stronger than ever. In 2026, travellers plan an average of 6 personal trips versus 4 for business. Nearly half (47%) expect their leisure travel to increase, while only 12% plan to travel more for work. Gen Z and Millennials are driving this shift, with 65% of Gen Z saying they'll travel more for fun, while Boomers opt for fewer, longer restorative breaks. More than 40% expect to travel internationally for personal trips, led by China, Thailand and India in overnight stays abroad.

Travel will be more exploratory

Curiosity is redefining how travellers choose their next adventure. 62% prefer discovering new destinations over revisiting old favourites, while the 38% who do return say it's to experience a place more deeply. The appetite for discovery is strongest among Gen Z (72%) and travellers from India, the UAE and China. When choosing where to go, 57% prioritise safety and comfort, followed by cultural curiosity (41%) and wellness (38%) - though for Gen Z, curiosity leads every decision.

Travel will be slower and more conscious

Fast-paced itineraries are being replaced by slower, more meaningful journeys. Around 60% of travellers prefer small cities and rural escapes to large metropolises, with China the only market still favouring iconic urban spots (51%). 42% of travellers want unplanned, restful trips, with an action-packed sightseeing agenda lagging behind at 36%. Members who want a laid-back itinerary

the most are based in Malaysia (55%) and the UK (53%), while those in China and the US (both 43%) are more likely to whizz around key sights and landmarks.

The rise of the selective splurge

Travellers are becoming more discerning, with 79% saying they'll spend on quality upgrades rather than splurge freely, prioritising value and comfort. Germany records the highest share of "splurge freely" respondents (22%), while 63% of Asia-Pacific travellers prefer to spend more thoughtfully. The definition of luxury is shifting: 78% still equate it with five-star or boutique hotels, but more now associate it with personalised service, gourmet dining, and flexibility. Above all, 86% say hotel quality is the one aspect of travel they refuse to compromise on.

Loyalty will become lifestyle

Travel loyalty has evolved from collecting points to building belonging through thoughtful benefits. For 2026, 44% of members say room upgrades, early check-in and late check-out are their most valued perks, while 73% of travellers would consider purchasing a travel subscription offering continuous lifestyle benefits. Members also rank timesaving (56%), exclusive access (50%) and recognition (47%) as key to a rewarding stay.

Travel will be smarter and more seamless

The tech-enabled traveller is here to stay. Six in ten members have already used AI tools such as ChatGPT or Gemini to plan trips, with usage highest among Gen Z (79%) and lowest among Boomers (31%). China, Thailand and Singapore lead in AI adoption. Contactless payments (56%), digital hotel keys and biometric boarding are the most valued innovations, while preferences still vary by age and region. When booking, 42% of travellers favour hotel loyalty apps or brand websites over third-party platforms.

Asia tops global travel wish lists for 2026

Asia is setting the pace for global travel in 2026. Japan leads the region – and the world – as the most desired destination, named by 14% of travellers and topping wish lists for members in Thailand, Malaysia, the UAE, Singapore and Australia. China ranks second (7%) and Thailand third (6%), together accounting for almost one in three dream trips next year.

And when it comes to trip inspiration, travellers are turning to trusted voices and visual platforms. Friends and family remain number one (36%), while Instagram has surged to second place (34%), overtaking traditional media. YouTube leads in Japan and Thailand, and TikTok reigns in China, proof that Asia is not only shaping where we travel, but also how we dream about it.

"Our 2026 study paints a picture of a traveller who's more thoughtful and values-driven than ever," said Kristi Gole, Executive Vice President of Strategy at Global Hotel Alliance.

"They are travelling less for work, more for meaning, and choosing experiences that reflect who they are. What's particularly exciting is how loyalty has evolved; for GHA DISCOVERY members, it's about lifestyle, recognition, and belonging wherever they go."

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For more information visit [Global Hotel Alliance](#) and [GHA DISCOVERY](#).

GHA DISCOVERY is complimentary to join, and travellers can [sign up online](#) or download the GHA DISCOVERY app and register on their mobile phones. Travellers can also connect with GHA DISCOVERY on Instagram and Facebook.

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About GHA and GHA DISCOVERY:

Global Hotel Alliance (GHA) is the world's largest alliance of independent hotel brands with 45 brands and 850 hotels in 100 countries. Its award-winning loyalty programme – GHA DISCOVERY – provides 32 million members recognition, D\$ rewards and exclusive experiences across its hotels and partners, both with and without a stay. GHA DISCOVERY generated US\$2.7billion in member hotel revenue and 11 million room nights in 2024.

Through membership in GHA, brands expand their global reach, drive incremental revenue and reduce dependence on third-party channels, all while maintaining management independence and individual positioning. For more information, visit globalhotelalliance.com or ghadiscovery.com.