GLOBAL HOTEL ALLIANCE REVEALS THE NEW TRAVELLER MINDSET IN 2027: TRAVEL FOR HAPPINESS, AI FOR INSPIRATION, LOYALTY FOR BENEFITS, AND HOTELS THAT MAKE EVERY TRIP SPECIAL

- *Travel stays non-negotiable: 80% say travel is an essential part of who they are*
- *AI becomes the travel researcher: 81% expect to use AI for their trips, but only 4% would let it book for them*
- *Loyalty decides: 92% say a great loyalty programme can sway their choice of hotel*
- *The hotel makes the trip: 84% say their hotel can make or break a trip, and 77% will pay more for one that feels special*
- *Japan tops members' wish lists for the third year running*

Dubai, UAE, 18th November 2026: Global Hotel Alliance (GHA), the world's largest alliance of independent hotel brands, has explored the travel trends set to shape 2027, based on insights from 9,000 members of its award-winning GHA DISCOVERY loyalty programme, which now counts 38 million travellers globally.

The new research reveals that travel remains an essential part of consumers' identity, happiness, and aspirations, with travellers eager to explore the world, discover new experiences and have memorable trips to look forward to. The findings highlight an evolving travel landscape in which AI is increasingly influencing how people research and plan their journeys, while personal choice and human control remain important. At the same time, the hotel experience and loyalty programmes continue to play a pivotal role in shaping travel decisions, with travellers placing growing value on stays that feel special and add something meaningful to their trip. Japan has retained its position at the top of members' travel wish lists for the third consecutive year.

Here's what the travel landscape will look like in 2027:

Travel stays non-negotiable

Travel has become a fixed part of members' lives. 89% say they are happiest when they have a trip to look forward to, 80% call travel an essential part of who they are and 73% rather spend on travel than other things. To further emphasise the importance of travel, 65% say it is non-negotiable: they will make sacrifices elsewhere to protect it. That commitment is strongest among members in the UK, Switzerland and China.

For those who do expect to travel less next year, the reasons are practical rather than a loss of appetite: rising travel costs (38%) and work or family commitments (37%) lead, while just 6% say they have less desire to travel.

International trips exploring new places will lead

Leisure travel will hold steady in 2027, with international trips leading the way. 41% of members plan to travel more internationally for leisure, against 7% who plan to travel less. Domestically, 27% plan more and 9% less. Members in India are the most upbeat, with 69% planning to travel more for leisure, followed by Thailand (58%) and the UAE (52%).

Discovery is the main driver: among those planning more leisure travel, 45% want to explore new places and cultures, 35% say life is short and they want to make the most of it and 34% mention that travel enriches life and broadens the perspective.

AI will become the travel researcher

81% of members expect to use AI tools such as ChatGPT, Gemini or Claude for their trips next year, up from 62% who said a year ago that they had already used AI to plan a trip. Building itineraries (48%) and researching destinations (47%) lead the way. The biggest shift is among Baby Boomers: 63% now expect to use AI, roughly double the 32% who had used it a year earlier.

Trust still has limits. 37% trust AI to recommend the right hotel, and only 4% would let it book travel on their behalf.

Loyalty will decide

91% of members say a great loyalty programme can persuade them to choose one hotel over another, and loyalty benefits can make them book directly rather than through an online travel site. Members value the stay over the points: 70% rate room upgrades above earning points or rewards, and 62% value recognition and special treatment more than rewards.

Belonging to a global programme also gives members the confidence to try something new: 82% say it makes them more comfortable trying a hotel brand they don't know. In Asia, loyalty comes first: 78% of members in China, 79% in Malaysia and 83% in Indonesia choose the loyalty programme before the hotel.

The hotel will make the trip

Asked what makes a trip feel truly luxurious, regardless of price or star rating, members put exceptional quality and attention to detail first (52%), followed by privacy, space and comfort (39%) and exclusive access (27%). Not having to think about the cost comes last (9%).

When it comes to spending more, the hotel is where the money goes. One in three would put extra budget towards a better hotel or resort (17%) or a better room, suite or villa (16%), ahead of business- or first-class flights (13%). This preference for upgrading the hotel experience is shared across younger generations, with Boomers the exception, favouring a better flight experience instead.

86% prioritise hotel quality, 84% of members say the hotel they choose can make or break a trip, and 76% are willing to pay more for a hotel experience that feels special, rising to 86% in the UK. Character counts: 73% prefer hotels with personality over standardised ones, and 65% say a hotel itself can be the reason to choose a destination.

Food and beverage also plays an important role in hotel choice, influencing the decisions of nearly 40% of travellers globally, with its appeal particularly strong in India, Japan and the UAE.

At the table, breakfast is the surprise star. An exceptional breakfast is the top reason members would dine at their hotel (50%), ahead of authentic local cuisine (36%) and a highly regarded signature restaurant (24%).

Asia tops wish lists for 2027

Japan is members' most wanted destination for the third year running, followed by China, the US, Thailand and Italy. A closer look at the results reveals that South Korea ranks among the top travel destinations for UK travellers, while Vietnam is a leading choice for Indian travellers and Indonesia for Japanese travellers. Meanwhile, France and Spain remain among the most popular destinations for US travellers.

When it comes to choosing somewhere new, a recommendation from someone they trust is the top reason members would pick a destination they've never visited (33%), followed by a unique cultural or local experience (28%), while a social-media trend would sway just 3%. Meanwhile, 18% are drawn by the chance to escape the places everyone else is visiting.

"Our research shows that the desire to travel remains stronger than ever, with members increasingly valuing the experiences, connections and memories that travel brings", said Kristi Gole, Executive Vice President of Strategy at Global Hotel Alliance.

“As hotels become an even more important part of the overall travel experience, loyalty programmes have a real opportunity to make those stays more personal, rewarding and memorable. And while AI is changing how travellers discover and plan their journeys, loyalty provides the trust and connection that influence where they stay and why they return. Ultimately, it's about helping travellers discover more, experience more and get greater value from every journey,” she added.

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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, Facebook and WeChat.

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About GHA and GHA DISCOVERY:

Global Hotel Alliance (GHA) is the world’s largest alliance of independent hotel brands with 60 brands and 1,000 hotels across 100 countries. Its award-winning loyalty programme – GHA DISCOVERY – provides 38 million members with recognition, D$ rewards and exclusive experiences across its hotels and partners, both with and without a stay.
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.