



Top Topics 2026

GENERAL & TRAVEL INSIGHTS



General Insights

1. Algorithmic Reliance & Defiance
2. Kids at All Ages
3. Shifts in Wealth & Redefined Luxury
4. Reworked Wellness
5. The Art of Surprise

Travel Insights

1. Childlike Trips
2. Storybook Vacations
3. Connecting Flights
4. Grounding Getaways
5. Beauty Pursuits



General Insights

During an era defined by algorithms and economic updates, people are pushing back to regain a sense of control where they can. Adults are using play to counter the seriousness of life, while younger generations are defying online immersion with tangible activities. Approaches to health and wealth are being redefined as larger systems seem broken, and people are delighting in spurts of surprise. This era is an opportunity for brands to partner in positive pushback and allow humans to feel in control, even if just for a meaningful moment away from a screen.





Algorithmic Reliance & Defiance

Consumers are acknowledging that there's no stopping tech and AI's infiltration in their daily lives, so they are finding ways to disconnect as an act of rebellion, reclaiming control over their own attention. Brands that seamlessly blend unavoidable technology with refreshing physical experiences will win over conflicted consumers.



5 in 10

Despite **53%** of consumers using AI in their daily lives, **50%** are trying to minimize screen time.

- Dentsu report in Marketing Dive



Pinterest searches for snail mail gifts **(+110%)** and handwritten letters **(+45%)** are up YOY.

- Pinterest

84%

of kids say they want to escape their phones to live more in the real world.

- The Harris Poll

69%

of US gamers/social media users believe algorithmic recommendations on social media are less interesting than those from friends.

- Mintel

↑ 330%

Roughly 1,600 TikTok posts were tagged #AnalogLife during the first nine months of 2025 — up over **330%** from the same period the previous year.

- Axios

“Three-hour lines for pastries. Disposable cameras are selling out. Print catalogs are being framed as art. These aren't nostalgic throwbacks—they're life rafts in a sea of synthetic content.”

- The Next Big Think





Kids at All Ages

As life feels increasingly serious, culture is declaring an all-age need for play. The popularization of adult plushies and kid-like activities at grown-up establishments signals a collective desire for lighthearted escape and offers an invitation for brands to join in on the fun.



+225%

Pinterest shows a YOY increase in searches for nostalgia toys (+225%) and 2000s kids toys (+140%) as adults aim to relive their youth.

- Pinterest

81%

of adults admit they need "more time to be playful" in the real world.

- The Harris Poll

Over three-quarters of Americans (79%) want brands to help them have fun again.

- The Harris Poll

28%

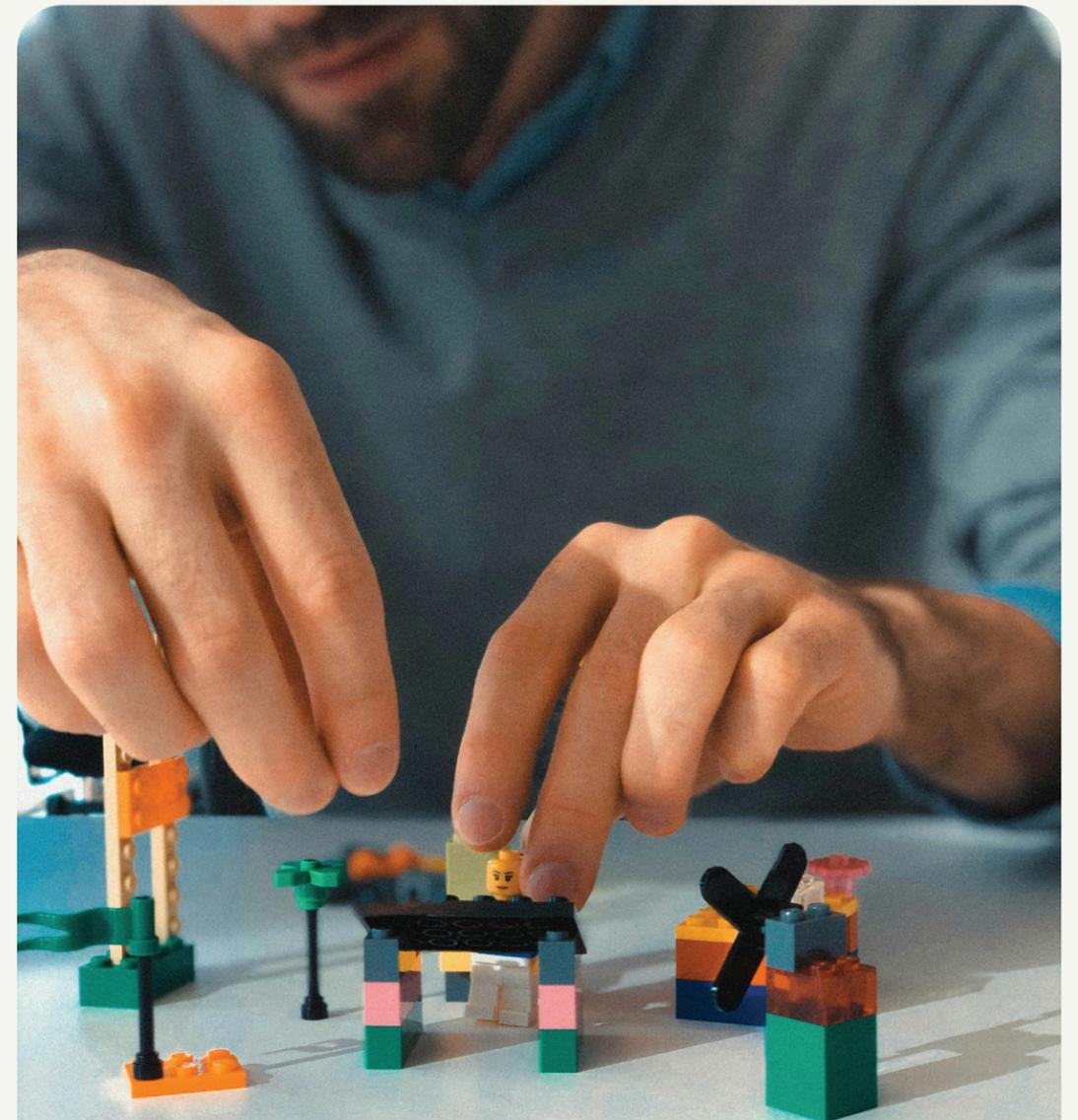
Kidults account for 28% of global toy sales, an increase of 2.5% since 2022.

- Circana data in Morning Brew

80%

of adults engaged in playful activities agree that it is an important outlet for them to try new things and help them relax.

- LEGO



Restaurants like Funny Bar in New York City and Lagana in London offer fine dining with paper tablecloths and crayons, while Play Playground in Las Vegas offers larger-than-life physical and puzzle games paired with alcoholic "party pouches."

- Morning Brew



The meme stock craze of 2020 caused a “generational shift in how people think about building wealth.”

- Kevin Gordon, macro strategist at Charles Schwab in Axios



Shifts in Wealth & Redefined Luxury

The definition of “Wealthy” is being rewritten as this category has acquired new audiences through generational transfer, new mindsets for gaining wealth through gamification over traditional methods, and new definitions of luxury where freedom outweighs possessions. Brands that understand these shifts will be best prepared to support consumers’ aspirations.

70%

of American travelers agree, “For me, the real luxury in travel is time, freedom, or authentic experiences – not expensive amenities.”

- Future Partners

64%

Nearly two-thirds (**64%**) of Gen Z and Millennials say the only realistic way to build significant wealth today is through “alternative methods” (e.g., crypto, gambling, etc.).

- The Harris Poll

79%

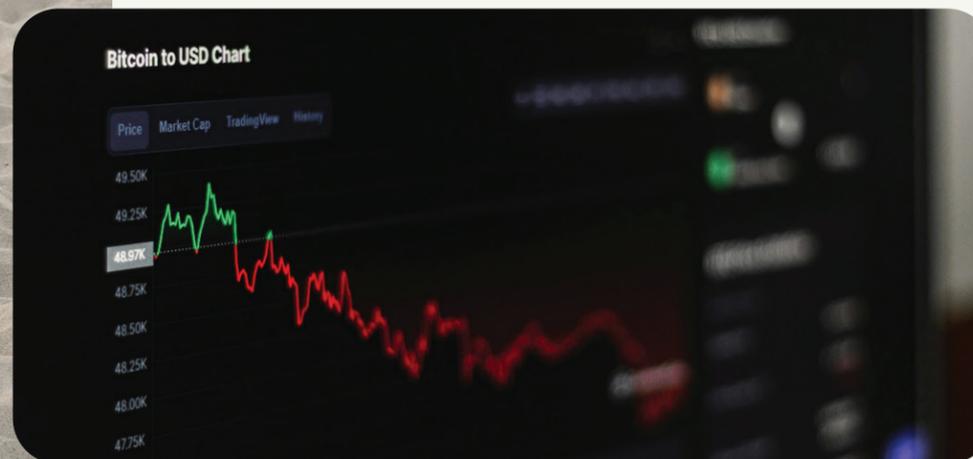
of respondents report luxury experiences feel “beige” lately and sacrificed soul for standardization.

- The Harris Poll

8 in 10

respondents say “these days, people always have to be thinking of ways to beat the system in order to make things work out the way they want them to.”

- Kantar U.S Monitor



The largest wealth transfer in U.S. history is underway with a \$124 trillion transition across generations set to occur over the span of 25 years.

- The Harris Poll



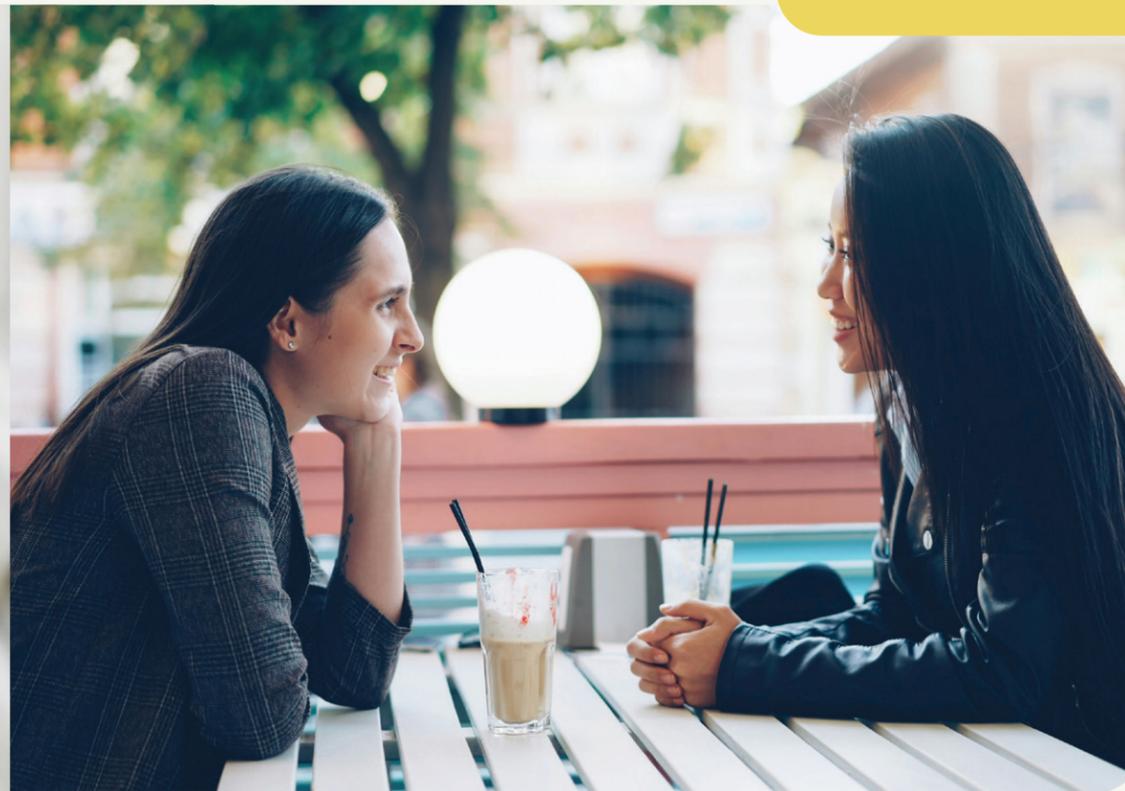
Reworked Wellness

In response to questions about the nation's health and food industries, Americans are returning to simpler rhythms of life. Traditional values, from-scratch foods, and alternative medicines are in while people detox from complex ingredients and alcohol-soaked social lives. Organizations will need to find ways to support at least one meaningful facet of their audience's well-being.

The Department of Health and Human Services announced plans to phase out eight artificial dyes and colorings by the end of 2026.
- ABC

64%

of consumers are feeling more drawn to traditional values and ways of living.
- Dentsu data in Marketing Dive



37%

of American adults now supplement or substitute mainstream medical care with treatments long considered alternative.
- New York Times

71%

of Gen Z who are of legal drinking age say they wish there were more social events and activities that weren't centered around alcohol.
- Kantar U.S. Monitor

89%

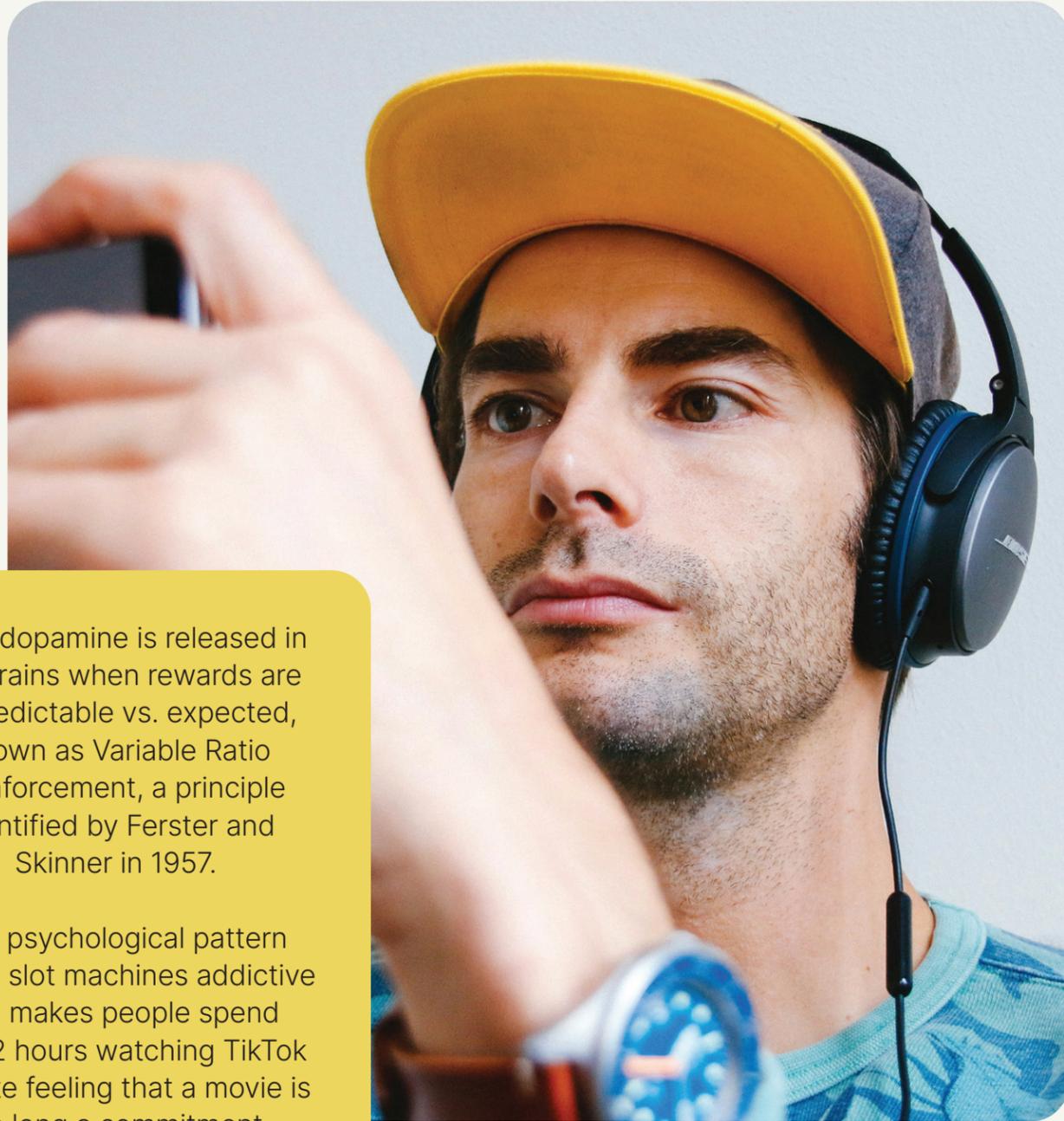
of respondents believe food can function as medicine.
- The Harris Poll

"Health and wellness is no longer just a category or sector. It is a benefit that consumers want from every product and service."

- J Walker Smith, Knowledge Lead at Kantar

↑ 478%

Coffee clubbing events are up **478%** compared to the previous year.
- Eventbrite data in Axios



More dopamine is released in our brains when rewards are unpredictable vs. expected, known as Variable Ratio Reinforcement, a principle identified by Ferster and Skinner in 1957.

This psychological pattern makes slot machines addictive and makes people spend over 2 hours watching TikTok despite feeling that a movie is too long a commitment.

- Weirdo

70%

of consumers say they love being surprised by brands through last-minute deals.

- The Harris Poll

44%

of teens lean more towards unapologetically weird brands.

- The Harris Poll

The Art of Surprise

As feeds start to blend and eyes glaze over, our brains have a psychological craving to be shaken out of the trance of digital monotony. Brands that break through with surprising and strange content provide the desired antidote to online fatigue.

“From Wendy’s tweets roasting people to Nutter Butter’s brain-rot posting, the more out there, the better. This ‘weird’ personality of brands isn’t just a novelty; they’re hacking cultural relevancy.”

- The Harris Poll

83%

of Gen Z / Millennials want brands to bring people together in spontaneous ways.

- The Harris Poll

64%

of teens are more likely to engage with brands that post completely unhinged content that makes them laugh.

- The Harris Poll





Travel Insights

As travelers balance practical responsibilities with a longing for escape, they are seeking trips designed to restore. Kid-inspired planning is rising while adults are seeking book-immersed getaways. People are using travel as a matchmaker for meaningful connections, and as a gateway to looking and feeling like their best selves — whether through beauty travel or grounded pastoral getaways. Travel brands that rise to the moment by speaking to these travel desires will help visitors return refreshed and dreaming of their next trip.





Childlike Trips

As the craving for play rises across all ages, people are acknowledging travel as the perfect playground. Kids' influence on travel decisions is growing, and adults' openness to child-like activities is following suit.

84%

of travelers plan to seek out opportunities for the entire family to play together in 2026.

- Hilton

84%

of parents try to take inspiration from their kids' imagination when setting up a vacation.

- Talker Research with Visit Anaheim in The New York Post



73%

In 2026, nearly three-quarters (73%) of those who travel with children or grandchildren expect to actively encourage them to play a role in vacation planning.

- Hilton

90%

of respondents say their children currently participate in planning family vacations, from at least choosing one activity to providing major input on the destination and activities.

- NYU and Family Travel Association



Peoria, IL is hosting 'Future Play in Peoria' in 2026 - a citywide festival with an esports competition, retro arcade lounge, creator studio and live music.

- Sports Travel Magazine

The most important kid-centered trip features are unique once-in-a-lifetime experiences (77%) and opportunities for physical activities and adventure (73%).

- NYU and Family Travel Association



Storybook Vacations

Like a novel that refuses to be set down, travelers can't get enough of book-centric vacations. Whether taking a retreat specifically to read or selecting a destination inspired by a favorite piece of literature, travelers are looking for travel brands that can help give them their storybook experience.

Literary tourism is predicted to grow to \$3.3 billion by 2034.
- Future Market Insights



53%

of U.S. travelers expressed interest in a reading retreat, up to **67%** among Millennials.

- Morning Consult data via Hilton

↑ 285%

Mentions of reading-related terms in Vrbo guest reviews has surged **285%** year-over-year, and searches for "book retreats" and "book club retreat ideas" are up **100%** and **275%**, respectively, on Pinterest.

- Vrbo

33% + 21% + 14%

The top literary travel experiences people would consider in the future are visiting a destination mentioned in a book (**33%**), staying in a book-themed accommodation (**21%**), and going on a writing or reading retreat (**14%**).

- Skyscanner

Groups and book clubs such as Book a Break host reading retreats and camps for 10-90 people in destinations like New York, New Mexico, Florida, Vermont, Maine, and Wisconsin.
- Vogue



Reading was included among the top three most anticipated leisure activities for American travelers.

- Morning Consult data via Hilton



Connecting Flights

Gone are the days of “catching flights, not feelings”; today’s travelers are catching flights for feelings. Travel brands have the opportunity to be the newest matchmakers, friendship-formers, and bond-builders, as people use trips to foster connections.

48%

Nearly half (**48%**) of Gen Z travelers are interested in trips taken specifically to meet face-to-face for the first time with a friend or romantic partner.

- Future Partners

53%

of travelers have gone or considered going overseas specifically to meet new people for friendship or dating, up to seven in ten among Gen Z and Millennials.

- Skyscanner

Conversation views about dating in travel subreddits have increased **492%** YoY.

- Reddit data via Skyscanner

3 in 10

Over **3 in 10** global travelers are actively seeking local groups or communities to join when they travel.

- Hilton



42% of people are more open to meeting others when they're traveling.

- Skyscanner



63%

of respondents say they've made new friends while traveling to events related to their interests, and a third plan to take group trips specifically to enjoy a shared passion, from music to fitness.

- Hilton





Grounding Getaways

Travelers are becoming down-to-earth as interest in agritourism continues to grow. Travel brands that offer immersive, hands-on, rustic experiences provide nourishment to visitors enchanted by the pastoral charm of a slower life.

6 in 10

Over **6 in 10** Millennials are interested in extended, slower-paced trips and immersive, hands-on experiences that connect travelers with a destination's culture, history, or environment.

- Future Partners

84%

of travelers are interested in staying on or near a farm as the slow travel movement gains momentum.

- Vrbo

↑ 12%

The modern agritourism market is in full bloom, growing 12% yearly and poised to reach \$14.5 billion by 2029.

- Vogue

On Airbnb, there were over 1 million searches for farm stays in the first quarter of 2025, a 20% increase from the same period the previous year.

- CNN

“Elevated farm stays now offer luxurious amenities, spa services and curated wellness programs, reflecting a new standard for restorative travel rooted in land stewardship and mindful living.”

- Vogue

73% + 62% + 42%

The most desired farm stay features include nature walks or hiking (**73%**), the chance to interact with farm animals (**62%**), and harvesting produce or picking fresh fruit (**42%**).

- Vrbo



Beauty Pursuits

Beauty is in the eyes of the beholder, and in the hands of the boarding pass holder. Whether pursuing greater longevity, skincare treatments, or even just beauty sleep, the travel industry has become a gateway for travelers to look and feel like their best selves.

“Longevity travel is one of the biggest trends of the year, as people worldwide become ever more fascinated with living a longer, fuller life.”

- National Geographic



Beauty brands are joining forces with travel brands, with Estée Lauder partnering with Hacienda AltaGracia in Costa Rica to open the Estée Lauder Skin Longevity Institute.
- Esquire



32%

of Gen Z are planning to seek out beauty treatments and skincare stores while traveling in 2026, compared to just **8%** of Baby Boomers.

- Skyscanner

38%

Travelers are seeking beauty sleep, with more than a third (**38%**) finding trips focused on getting sleep and rest appealing, up to **48%** of urban respondents.

- Future Partners

\$31.5B

The global Cosmetic Medical Tourism Market is projected to grow from USD 7.23 billion in 2025 to USD **31.53 billion** by 2032.

- Fortune Business Insights

Reddit conversation views are up YOY for r/koreanbeauty (96%) and r/EuroSkincare (64%).

- Reddit data via Skyscanner

If you found these insights valuable, or would like to discuss them further, we'd welcome the opportunity to speak with you. Feel free to reach out to victoria.simmons@bvk.com.



8909 N PORT WASHINGTON RD | MILWAUKEE, WI 53217 | 414.228.1990 | BVK.COM