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Travel Insights

TRAVEL ON YOUR TERMS

Travel on Your Terms

Americans are doing things their own way, with over half (54%) saying they care less about doing things the “right way” and more about getting results that work for them. (Kantar U.S. Monitor) This self-directed mindset is reshaping travel as Americans prioritize what feels rewarding over following a prescribed path. Travelers are seeking rare local finds, trusting instinct over algorithms, creating their own stories through hands-on experiences, and venturing off the beaten path. Travel brands have the opportunity to copilot these ambitions as visitors pursue each trip as an authentic expression of curiosity and independence.



Travel on Your Terms

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Securing Rare Souvenirs

Travelers are treating locally distinctive food, home goods, and vintage pieces as treasures to uncover. These finds satisfy a desire for items unavailable at home and embody their unique experiences. Travel brands can connect travelers with limited, locally made, and story-rich products that associate the pride of discovery with their experience at the destination.



+60%

Vintage discovery shopping tours have seen an increase in bookings YOY (+60%).

- Tripadvisor

68%

of travelers say they'd happily bring home stylish kitchenware or pantry treats from a trip.

- Booking.com

60%

of global respondents surveyed either often or always purchase local snacks or food items specific to the destination they are visiting.

- American Express



"The high-stakes pursuit of smuggling butter home from Paris."

- The Wall Street Journal

66% & 45%

Respondents seek out local foods on their travels to try items not available at home (66%) and to support local businesses (45%).

- American Express



Following Intuition Over Algorithms

Travelers regularly use digital tools but increasingly want to leverage their own human judgment to shape their experience. Uncovering a destination outside expected algorithms, relying on their own instincts, and leaning into personal and analog trip types leave travelers empowered. Travel brands can use technology as a flexible support tool while encouraging travelers to shape their own personal journey.



66%

of Americans say “I feel like I’m on my own when it comes to figuring out what’s real or true.”

- Kantar U.S. Monitor

63% of Gen Z travelers say being one of the first people they know to visit somewhere feels like a status symbol.

- Airbnb

77%

Among people who use AI to plan a trip, 77% still want a human to make the final call.

- ALG Travel

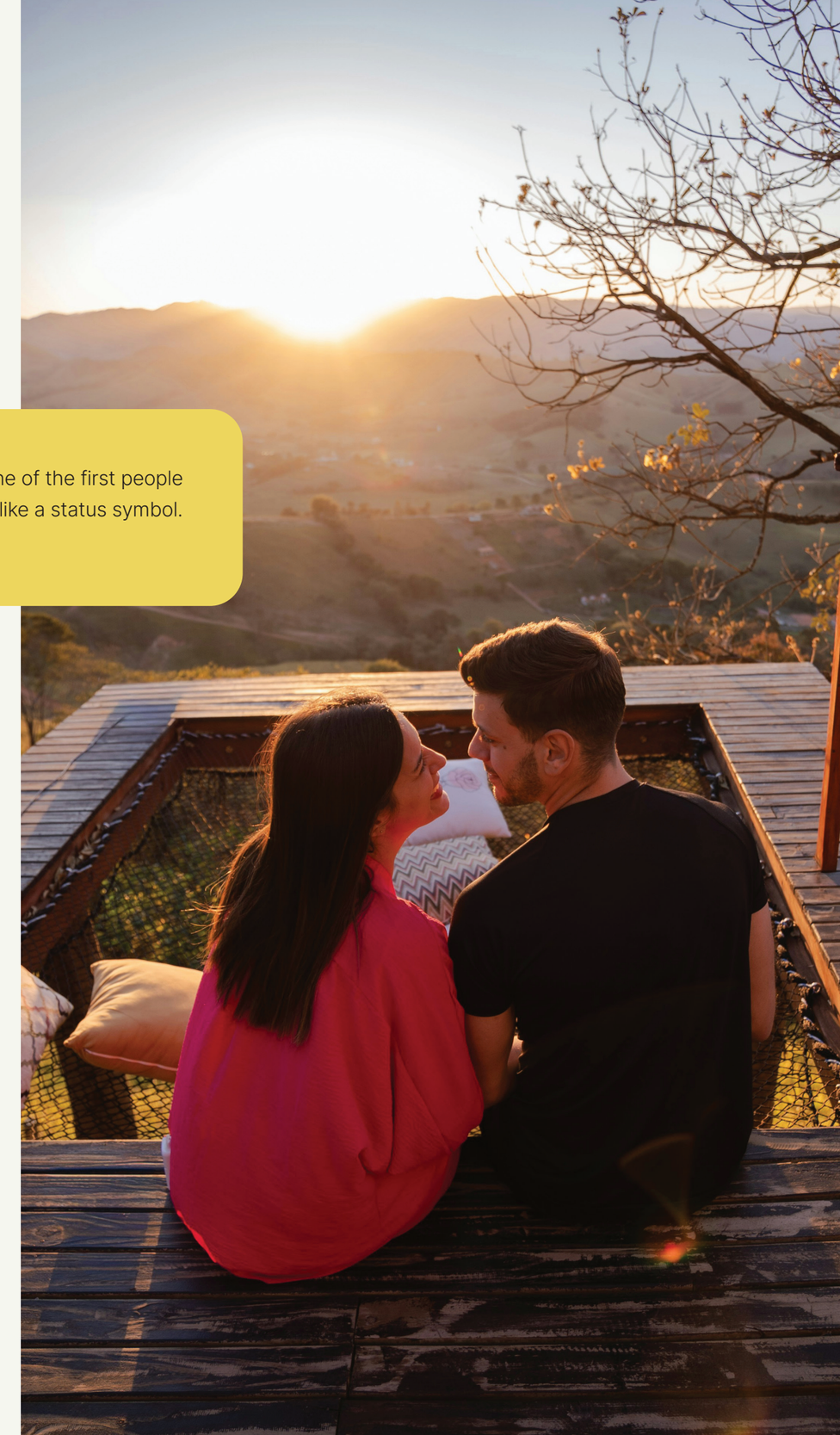
“Trust time, place, and instinct rather than a perfectly optimized schedule.”

- Vogue

“Travelers aren’t necessarily anti-digital. They’re just opposed to being optimized into numbness. They want experiences that feel real and human, not endlessly mediated through a screen.”

- USA Today







Lore Instead of Landmarks

Travelers are prioritizing curiosity and personal narrative over checklist sightseeing. Lesser-known places and activities often unlock one-of-a-kind stories that can be more valuable than a photo with crowds at a marquee landmark. Travel brands can offer itineraries around local lore, surprising detours, and adaptable experiences that help guests return with a story that feels uniquely theirs.

87%

of global respondents like to leave room in their itinerary for unexpected local discoveries.

- American Express

95%

of travel respondents choose a lesser-known place over a major hub at least sometimes, driven by authenticity and the thrill of discovery.

- Trove

82%

of Millennials and Gen Z surveyed say that they're likely to do something completely out of the ordinary simply if it makes a good story.

- American Express

Affordability, authentic local culture, and offbeat, only-here attractions are cited by half of Gen Z respondents as the biggest draws.

- Airbnb



"When travel becomes about curiosity instead of validation, overtourism loses its pull."

- Vogue



Taking Travel Into Your Own Hands

Hands-on creation is becoming central to memorable travel as it offers a sense of ownership and control. This aligns with travelers' strong preference for authenticity and genuine experiences they can have for themselves. Destinations that spotlight expert-led making and learning experiences help travelers bring home new skills and tangible memories of their trip.



82%

of respondents say learning a new skill while traveling creates a more memorable experience.

- American Express

69%

of travel respondents believe that creating something with their hands is one of the most rewarding parts of travel.

- American Express

+52% & +75%

There has been a surge of interest in hands-on local workshops (+52%) and craft classes (+75%) in 2026.

- Tripadvisor



94%

will pay a premium for a genuinely local experience.

- Trove



Select Hyatt properties offer private pottery or ceramics classes, allowing guests to mold their own souvenirs.

- Hyatt



Off-Road Experiences

Travelers are looking beyond familiar routes to remote, rural, and curiosity-led experiences. Emerging agritourism and storm-watching offerings show how unconventional settings can become destinations in their own right. Travel brands can expand the map with safe, accessible ways to explore lesser-known places, supported by local hosts, distinctive natural phenomena, and tools that encourage active navigation.

86%

of U.S. travelers say they're interested in visiting remote or rural destinations.

- Airbnb

A piece in The New Yorker shares how navigating without turn-by-turn directions forces us to notice landmarks, orient ourselves in space and build what researchers call a "cognitive map."

- The New Yorker quote via Axios

25%

of Americans specifically identify exploring "places off the beaten path" as a way they want to satisfy their curiosity through travel.

- National Geographic Lindblad Expeditions

Airbnb and American Farmland Trust are announcing the 'Farm to Stay' Grant Program, which will offer farmers and ranchers up to $10,000 per grant to start or expand an agritourism stay or experience.

- Oklahoma Farm Report



With a historic El Niño forecast to intensify through winter 2026–27, storm-watching is becoming its own travel pilgrimage.

- Sunset

If you'd like to learn more or explore partnership opportunities, we'd welcome a conversation.
Please feel free to reach out to **victoria.simmons@bvk.com**

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96274/002 10/26