


The joy of travel.

**Trends to shape
your next incentive.**



We put brands and winners [uponcloudnine.co.uk](https://www.uponcloudnine.co.uk)



What drives people to travel and what do they want when they get to their destination?

Here at Cloud Nine we've delved into the research, pulling findings from multiple industry reports, to bring you the key outputs that will help you to refine your next initiative.

- **Why are people seeking out more joy?**
- **Do they want off the beaten track adventures or city escapades?**
- **Are their preferences far flung shores or the familiarity of home?**

Grab a coffee and take a read to ensure your next travel incentive delivers for your audience and, as a result, your brand.

The value of incentive travel.

Incentive travel has long been a trusted way to motivate and reward staff. In fact when designing their budgets, 53% of senior leaders consider incentive travel a 'need to have' with 48% calling it an 'essential strategic differentiator'.

The motivational appeal of group travel, which has traditionally been aimed at Gen X and Baby Boomers, continues to be exceptionally strong with 91% of respondents describing it as 'very' or 'extremely' motivating.

This positive trend is also reflected in younger generations with 64% of Gen Z and Millennials citing group travel rewards to be 'extremely motivating'. As the workforce gets younger, event designers must work hard to appeal to these employees, who have values and preferences often very different from previous generations, to ensure they are meeting their different needs and motivators.

With those surveyed, there is a strong drive to travel to new or off the beaten track destinations with 71% of respondents citing this as a priority. The challenge though is to balance this curiosity with incentive-level standards and unique destinations cannot come at the expense of luxury.

Those who have experienced incentive group travel are significantly more likely to prefer it as a reward choice. Incentive programmes incorporating local culture make a long-lasting impact on guests, continuing to motivate them long after they return home and deliver ROI for clients. Authentic experiences also allow winners to share their stories, creating excitement, anticipation and FOMO for future incentives.

Image credit:
Stéphan Valentin



We still want to travel.

Despite the cost of living crisis, people are still keen to get their travel fix.

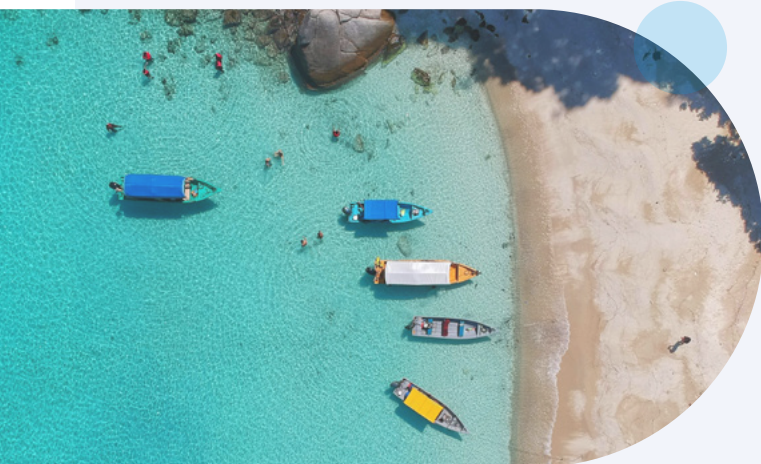
Whilst 35% of Brits are reducing non-essential journeys, less than one in ten are likely to reduce their travel expenditure because of the increase in cost of living. In fact 42% of respondents are cutting back and reducing spending elsewhere rather than compromising on a holiday.

Whilst these numbers are really encouraging, the cost of travel and accommodation is still causing a challenge with 45% and 35% of respondents citing this as their biggest challenges vs 21% and 15% in prior year.

Clearly travel still has a hugely motivational impact for individuals and is why travel-based incentives give such a great return.

91%

of employees think group travel is **very or extremely motivating.**



International vs staycation.

In 2023, international travel experienced the most significant increase with 45% of Brits taking an international break vs 30% the prior year. This trend is set to continue with travellers across all generations (66%) having an international trip planned this year.

Whilst international travel is still a big driver, people are still seeking out experiences closer to home with 74% of Brits having a domestic trip planned in the next 12 months. Staycations still have the highest appeal to Baby Boomers and Gen X.

The number of trips is also increasing with 57% anticipating taking 2 to 4 trips in the next 12 months. People are now also looking to spread their travel throughout the year and therefore searching for destinations that deliver across the seasons.

Despite the unpredictable weather, it's easy to see why the UK still has a big appeal. White-sand beaches, buzzing cities, dramatic landscapes and chocolate box villages. There's also a plethora of new hotel openings that will appeal to any taste.

The first Soho House in the North of England is set to open later this year. Located in the St John's area of the city, [Soho House Manchester](#) will give members a Soho House experience, including bedrooms, across 5 floors of the former Granada Studios.



Soho House, Manchester

Estelle Manor, Oxfordshire



66% of travellers across all generations have an international trip planned this year.

For unashamed glamour, the Jacobean [Estelle Manor](#), created as an outpost for Mayfair members club Maison Estell, has been reimaged as a country retreat on the edge of the Cotswolds. Guests can expect designers from NoMad London, chefs from Hakkasan and Nobu and a Roman-inspired carved marble spa.

And for those who want a wilder landscape, the Isle of Skye is often described as otherworldly. [Kinloch Lodge](#) is a 16th-century farmhouse has had serious makeover to become a destination for absolute comfort and relaxed luxury.

For a low-key stay, you can't beat [The Black Shed](#). An award-winning, self-catering accommodation with wrap-around views of Loch Dunvegan.

Kinloch Lodge, Isle of Skye



What people want from travel.

Despite wanting to seek relaxation and an escape from their routine, Brits want more from their travels these days. 43% cite adventure and exploration as their main focus of travel with 47% agreeing that they like to go off the beaten track when they travel.

Culture is also really important with 41% of Brits seeking out cultural exploration and educational experiences and 79% believing you can only truly get to know a country by experiencing it's culture.

In terms of destinations, city breaks are still a firm favourite (48%) with the combination of relaxing and sightseeing/activity holidays coming a close second (47%). Culture and history feature (32%) as well as lakes/mountains/countryside (27%)

Whilst they are looking to pack more into their trips, shorter durations are on the rise with the preference for trips lasting up to 3 days seeing the biggest growth versus prior year.

People also want to switch off. In an age of full connectivity and always being on, Gen Z are craving old-school analogue adventures. 16% of UK 18-to-24 year-olds bring a Polaroid camera when they travel, whilst 13% take an old-school camcorder. Clearly there is a desire to embrace the joy of just being in the moment.

We also love to experience the new, with 65% of Brits wanting to come back from their travels having learnt something. A developing trend which is playing to this want of discovery is 'forage tourism' which has seen an increased demand in people looking for authentic experiences where they can also take home a skill. Whether it's truffle hunting in Italy, or berry-picking in Canada, there are plenty of ways to unearth unique culinary experiences across the world.

In the UK, [Nomadic Dinners](#) have the foraging concept nailed. An experience designed with mother nature in mind where diners get to explore the natural woodland to find delicacies to add to their supper. Cocktails carved from giant blocks of ice, a hyper-seasonal menu and a food-over-fire concept. What's not to love!

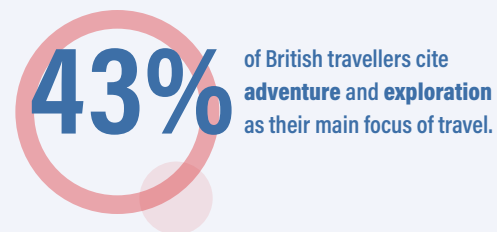


Image credit:
Digital Sennin

Curiosity & Connection.

The COVID years left us isolated and disconnected. Sadly, more than six out of ten people surveyed still agree that "there's no sense of community anymore".

As humans we crave connection and people are actively seeking out experiences as sources of emotion such as joy, happiness and awe.

There is an appetite globally for fun and adventure and 89% of the audience surveyed said awe-inspiring experiences made them feel good. We also love the element of surprise with 75% of people agreeing that they enjoy a sense of mystery in the things they do. This need for joy continues into what people want from a brand, with 45% saying they are likely to buy from brands that surprise and delight.

Air B&B have recently capitalised on this trend, with the release of their Summer Icons. Going way beyond just an overnight stay, they have created extraordinary experiences which take guests inside worlds that only previously existed in their imagination.

Whether it's a stay in the house from Disney/Pixar's Up!, sleeping in the iconic clock tower at the Musée d'Orsay or a gaming night in a Milan penthouse with TikTok star Khaby Lame, each experience has been curated with incredible detail that will evoke the sense of joy and delight that people are looking for. Unsurprisingly, the experiences are selling out almost immediately on release.

45% of people are likely to buy from brands that **surprise** and **delight**.

Consumers are also thirsty for adventure and new experiences with 47% people planning to visit a new city or resort in the next twelve months and 41% planning to visit a country they have never been to previously.

Cultural richness and diversity also plays a pivotal role in destination selection. The trend for uniqueness continues and guests are seeking out destinations that offer experiences which allow them to connect with the culture, live like a local and capture the essence of a place.



Image credit:
Chris Yang

Group travel but make it personal.

Whilst enthusiasm for incentive travel remains high, people no longer want a 'one size fits all' experience where incentive trips have too much structure.

Audiences crave unique, engaging experiences tailored to their specific interests and it's vital incentive programmes are designed to meet these needs. Personal communication, along with surprise and delight moments, also ensure guests have a memorable and rewarding experience.

Whilst guests still appreciate the guidance and security of group travel co-ordinators, one of the biggest trends over the last two years is that people want time to do their own thing. It's important when designing an incentive to get the balance between group activities and downtime so guests can still find time for privacy.

Other priorities from those surveyed included a preference for luxury accommodation, being able to bring a guest, having all out-of-pocket expenses covered and experiencing a unique culture. Interestingly, the least important elements of an incentive trip were receiving gifts and being recognised in front of peers.

The sustainability story.

Consumers are more mindful than ever when making decisions about how and where they travel. 96% of those surveyed believe that sustainable travel is important and this belief runs across all generations.

74% of those surveyed want travel companies to offer more sustainable travel choices (up from 66% in 2022) and the interest in green modes of transport is growing. 31% of respondents said they planned to take fewer flights and over 57% percent said they planned to travel responsibly, even if it inconveniences them.

More people are choosing to travel by train, often more expensive than flying, with 42% of people said they would be willing to pay an additional £100 to reduce their carbon footprint. However, 49% of global travellers still think sustainable options are 'too expensive' and would welcome discounts and economic incentives to help them opt for better choices.

Whilst method of travel and choice of accommodation are the biggest ways people are making more conscious choices, travellers are also seeking out activities that 'do good' in the destinations they visit.

66% of travellers want to limit the impact their stay has on a destination with the same number wanting to leave a place 'better' than when they arrive. Whilst many already adopt small energy-saving practices, turning off lights and re-using towels, (as they would do at home) travellers are becoming more thoughtful about their activity and impact beyond their accommodation. 52% said they wish to support local, community-led and sustainable businesses and 43% of travellers plan to walk, cycle or take public transport whilst they are sightseeing (up by 10% from 2022).

'Travel Transformers' are incredibly passionate about mitigating further damage to the planet and driving positive change through travel. In the future, travellers will hold themselves accountable for their impact and by 2040 it will be unusual to see members of Generation Alpha without a carbon footprint tracker on their smartphones.

74% want more sustainable travel choices.



Image credit:
Timo Stern

Noteworthy strides have already been made in shaping this landscape. Sustainability platform Ariel is recognised for its accuracy in gauging carbon footprints and subsequently offsetting emissions for individuals. With the booming sector of global travel technology, tracking travel metrics in real time will create an era of live traceability and accountability within the travel industry.

The desire to make more conscious choices is continuing to grow but with no consistent yardstick to measure sustainability, it's hard for travellers to make fully informed ethical travel choices. Accreditation schemes, such as Green Tourism and Green Key, award businesses demonstrating significant positive contribution to the environment but there is some way to go before travellers feel confident in their decision-making. With 68% of those surveyed saying they would take a certified sustainable holiday, perhaps accreditation is the key to gaining travellers trust.

From a B2B point of view, anecdotally, our events team are receiving more requests where responsible travel is one of the pillars of focus. Whilst travel efficiency often comes under this heading, there are several other key elements that we take into account when helping our clients. From food waste to over tourism, all these indicators can be measured to ensure you're as responsible as possible.

The impact of technology.

With mobile check-in, smart rooms and virtual concierge now a given when we travel, guests are looking to AI to transform elements of how they plan their trips.

Automated personalised itineraries, predictive pricing to analyse the best time to book and enhanced searches to produce more relevant results are some of the ways AI is adding value. Couple this with intelligent chat bots for 24/7 booking assistance and language translation for location communication and AI becomes highly valued by modern travellers seeking unique and customised journeys.

Globally, 44% of travellers are using AI to plan and research trips, but its use varies wildly depending on the market. For example, 63% of American travellers are already using AI on their phones compared to just 8% in the UK. The UK market is open to AI though with 42% are eagerly integrating or would integrate AI into their travel planning.



Image credit:
Alessia Cocconi

Travellers still want the personal touch though. Those who are open to, or have used AI, still rely heavily on the opinions of others with 51% looking to friends and family for advice and 45% trusting online forums and reviews.

Clearly the human element and personal interaction remains a key component in destination discovery, journey planning and experience creation.

Sources: YouGov UK Travel Trends 2024, ABTA Travel Trends 2023/2024, C&IT State of the Industry Report 2024, Forbes Travel Trends 2024, Incentive Research Foundation Trends Report 2024, Incentive Travel Index 2023, VML The Age of Re-enchantment, VML The Future 100, A Sustainable Future for Travel – Intrepid Travel, Booking.com Sustainability Trends.

Want to run something past us to see if it can be turned into reality? Or simply need a proposal, then get in touch.

Alternatively if you would prefer to talk about a project face to face, we're more than happy to pop in and see you.

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