



The Experience of Travel

How Trips Leave a Lasting Impression

FEBRUARY 2024



Overview and Methodology

“We travel not to escape life, but for life not to escape us.”

These words portray travel as more than just a break from routine but something far more impactful—even life changing. In recent years, there has been a clear shift in people’s priorities toward a more full and meaningful life. With that, travel, and the experiences that go along with it, have taken center stage.

To better understand travelers’ intentions and motivations to travel, Tripadvisor embarked on a multi-pronged research effort in 2023. Tripadvisor partnered with Qualtrics in August to survey 5,618 travelers in six countries: Australia, France, India, Japan, Spain, United States and the United Kingdom. The research findings are combined with internal Tripadvisor booking data, interviews conducted through the Tripadvisor

Community Board (TCB), and Brandwatch social listening data to provide a portrait of traveler behavior, sentiments, and impressions.

The research reveals a tangible shift to prioritizing experiences: why travel continues to be a top (often nonnegotiable) experience, what makes it fulfilling and impactful, and the propensity to repeat transformative experiences. Myriad connections are made during trips as interactions with brands, places, and activities lead to emotional bonds. **This gives destinations, suppliers, and other travel marketers a unique opportunity to make an indelible impression. By providing a meaningful and memorable experience along the journey, customer relationships can be formed that last for decades.**



Key Findings

Experiences have outstripped possessions as people search for more meaning in their lives.

- **67%** of travelers surveyed place more value on experiences over things than they did in the past.
- **34%** now prioritize spending on experiences over things more than they did in the past whereas only **22%** prioritize things over experiences more.

Travel is an experience worthy of prioritization.

The emphasis on experiences over possessions has led many travelers to reprioritize their spending, and even make sacrifices where necessary to satisfy their wanderlust.

- **73%** said travel is always and often a priority.
- **95%** are prepared to cut out other spend items to make their trips happen.



“I cannot think of any item worth the same amount of money that would give me the same kind of pleasure [as a travel experience].”

 Zaur M

Travel has the power to transform, leaving lasting impressions. A majority of respondents found personal growth on their most recent fulfilling trip, especially younger travelers.

- **69%** overall say a recent trip helped them grow as a person, compared to **77%** of Millennials and **74%** of Gen Z.
- **91%** say a recent fulfilling trip provided lasting memories.

In-destination activities especially make trips remarkable, shareable, and repeatable.

When asked to choose which trip component was the single most important to trip memorability, activities rose to the top. More travelers are finding that the things they do during a trip not only enhance it— for many, they are the reason for the trip.

- **87%** had some of their most memorable trip moments doing an activity.
- **53%** said activities were part of the reason they chose their destination.
- **56%** said that activities are very/extremely important in creating a fulfilling and memorable trip going forward.

A fulfilling trip is a sum of all its parts. Despite activities' outsized role in trip fulfillment, each component of a trip plays an important role in building lasting memories.

- **95%** chose at least one activity during their most recent fulfilling trip.
- **79%** said accommodations are extremely/very important in making a trip memorable.
- **73%** had some of their most memorable moments in restaurants and bars.



Travelers now have easier access to the wide breadth of things to do. The acceleration of online platforms have transformed the activities marketplace, allowing travelers to access hundreds of thousands of activities and book in real-time throughout the travel journey. Demand for online activities continues to soar in the seven countries surveyed, according to Viator data, rising 38% for the first nine months of 2023 vs. the same period in 2022.

- 84% of travelers have booked their on-trip activities online.
- 73% of travelers surveyed booked activities in advance of their trip, rising to 79% among Gen Z travelers.

Positive travel experiences drive repeatability. A fulfilling trip provides memories that are long lasting, fueling the desire to recreate the positive emotions connected with brands, activities, and destinations.

- 97% would return to the same destination, and many already have.
- 90% would repeat the same activities.
- 59% said their recent trip changed their approach to future travel.

Travel is a top priority next year. Travel demand has been robust these last few years, even record breaking. There are few signs it will taper off, even if the economy softens. A renewed focus on experiences is long lasting, and travelers will do whatever it takes to make sure they get their share.

- 73% plan to travel for leisure in 2024.
- 52% plan to take more trips over the next 12 months than the previous year.



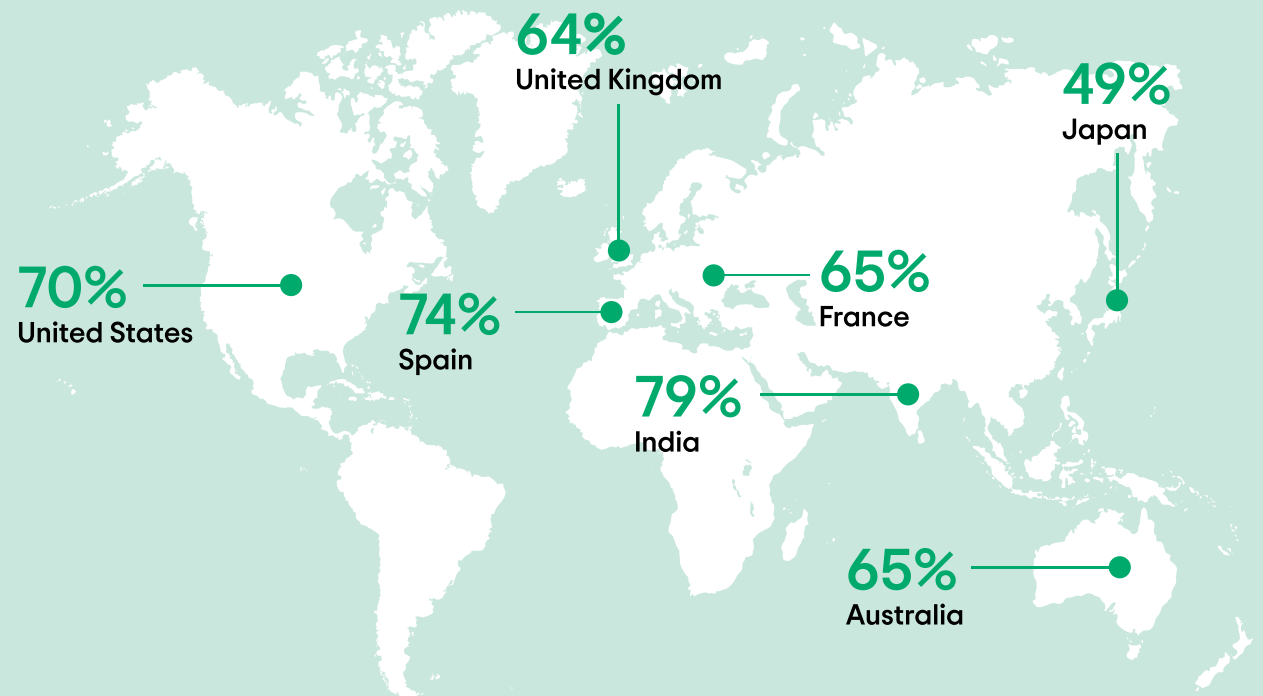
The Travel Imperative

There has been big social change leading to unprecedented travel demand. Whether it's seeking a better work/life balance, more time with friends and family, or learning something new, priorities have been reset.

There was a time when household expenses such as home improvements or electronics might have taken precedence in terms of discretionary spending, especially in certain markets like the U.S. For many, travel was a luxury item after other bills were paid, not a necessity. This is no longer true. Higher value is now placed on people and places over things than before, and experiences over possessions.

- **67%** place more value on experiences over things than in the past
- **73%** said travel is always and often a priority.
- **54%** of discretionary income is spent on experiences vs. **46%** on things.

Percentage of people that value experiences over things more than before

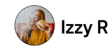


Travel continues to play a bigger role in life and thus budgets: nearly six in 10 (59%) travelers said their recent trip changed the way they are approaching travel over the next 12 months, including 37% who cited being more open to new experiences and destinations than they used to be. Still, the traditional benefit to a vacation—relaxation—continues to be the main reason why most people leave home in the first place. When asked how travel for leisure benefits them, the top two choices focused on renewal:

47% said travel is an important way to disconnect from daily life.

46% said it is a main way to unwind and recharge.

“A unique back to nature experience with my family enjoying being in the wild and technology free”



“The nature and scenery really helped disconnect from everyday stresses.”



“Amazing experience and so memorable. Those days are my most important and relaxed moments.”



A Lasting Impression

Beyond the renewal, satisfying trips also have deep-rooted impact. **Following rejuvenation (61%), the second most cited definition of a fulfilling trip is one that expands understanding of diverse cultures (35%).**

Further, nine in 10 travelers agree that their most recent fulfilling trip provided lasting memories and 86% recall feeling intense emotions such as excitement, awe and joy. Eight in 10 encountered novel and surprising experiences, while nearly seven in 10 said it helped them grow as a person.

Fulfilling Trips Have Deep-rooted Impact

- **91%** say their trips provided lasting memories
- **86%** felt that travel elicited intense emotions such as excitement, awe and joy
- **86%** of travelers say their trips offered novel and surprising experiences
- **69%** say their travel helped with personal growth

A fulfilling trip is one that... (Top 5)



35%

Expands my understanding and appreciation of cultures different from my own



61%

Provides a rejuvenating break from routine and enhances my well-being



33%

Deepens my connection with nature and the environment



25%

Facilitates personal growth and self-discovery



23%

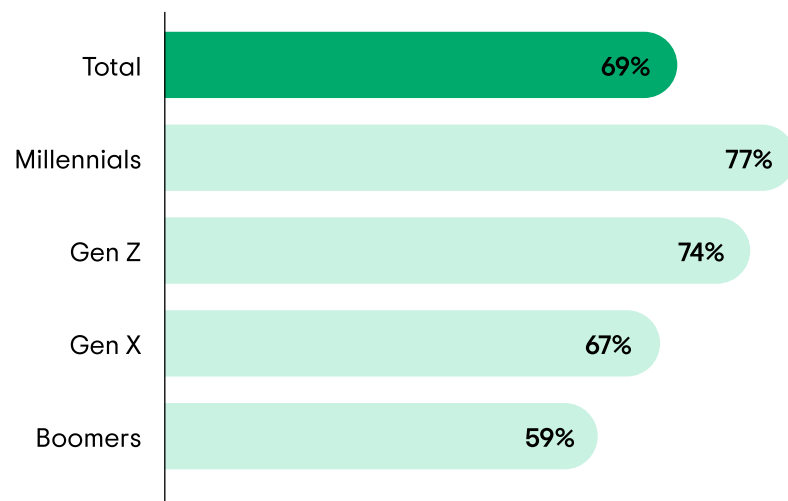
Provides transformative experiences that alter my outlook on life



While all age groups surveyed cite experiencing personal growth during travel, this “aha moment” is especially true for younger travelers: 74% of Gen Z and 77% of millennials said their last fulfilling trip helped them grow as a person. Similar generational differences emerge among those travelers who said their last trip was fulfilling.

Travelers repeatedly come back from their memorable trips transformed, with a fresh perspective and a better understanding of the people and places around them. More than one third said a fulfilling trip provides “defining moments that stay with me.”

Last trip helped them grow as a person



“Allows me to be someone different.”



Patrick D

“Leaves you with something positive to take away whether that’s physical, mental, or spiritual.”



Ciara H

“Travel is a degree program that you’re never going to finish.”



Joshua B

“Strengthened my bond with family.”



Matilda S



All Trips Count

Trips don't have to last long, test our limits, fill a bucket list, or take us far from home to be meaningful. Travel at its core is so impactful even a short getaway can be considered an extremely memorable experience.

Six in 10 respondents traveled less than seven hours to their destination. And nearly three quarters (74%) of all fulfilling trips were one week or less. For the trips that were lengthier, Boomers were the most likely to have taken longer trips than one week (32%).

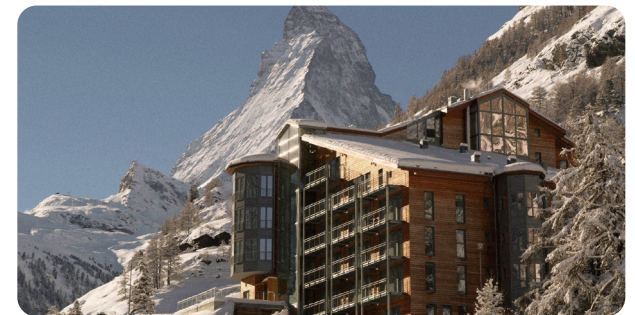


53%

traveled only domestically
(highest in Japan at **84%** and the
U.S. at **71%**).

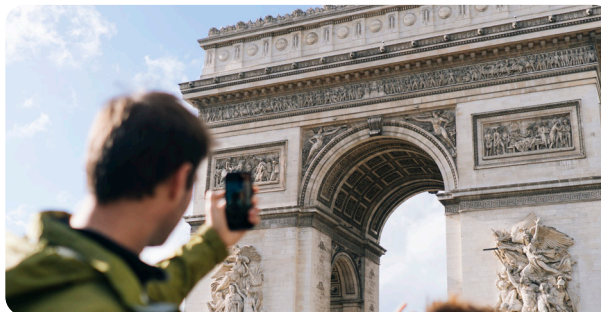
39%

of travelers in India took both an
international trip and a domestic trip,
far ahead of any other country.



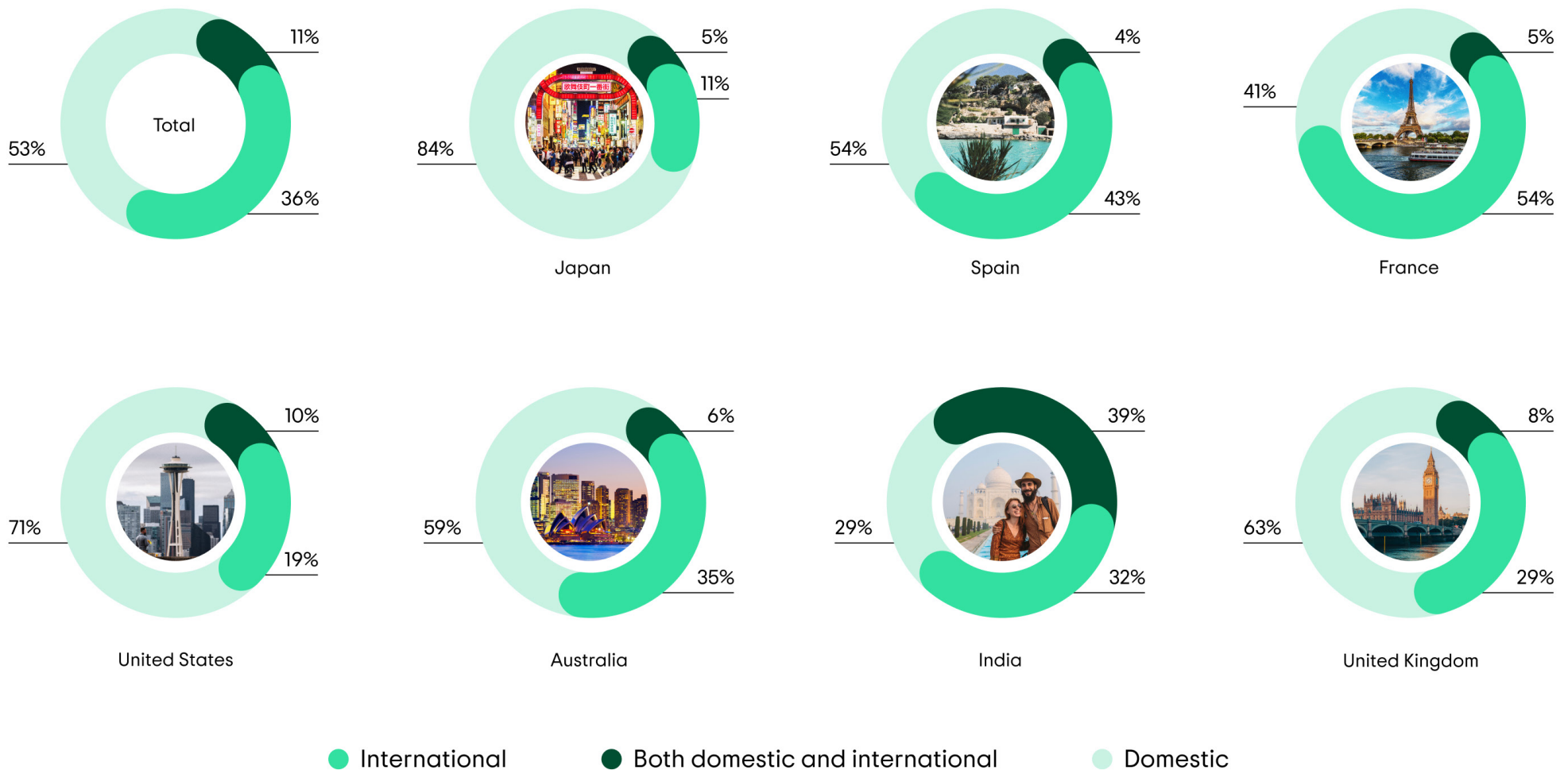
19%

of U.S. travelers took an international
trip vs. **63%** of U.K. travelers and **54%**
of French travelers.



International vs Domestic, Last Fulfilling Trip

53% of recent fulfilling trips were domestic only; Domestic-only fulfilling travel was highest in Japan, and international-only travel was highest in France at 54%.



Activities Become the Main Attraction

For a trip to truly hit the mark, participating in an in-destination activity was the key piece. Across the travel journey—from trip planning, to socializing and exploring, to building memories—activities have become an integral component of a fulfilling trip. Travelers find that activities not only enhance their trip—for many they are the reason for the trip.

In fact, in-destination activities have a direct and integral effect on choosing a destination, second only to cost. And the social aspect of activities can't be ignored:

Nearly nine in 10 (87%) travelers said activities connected them to local cultures and community and 60% said they also enabled them to meet new people.

95%

chose at least one activity during their most recent fulfilling trip.

87%

had some of their memorable trip moments while doing an activity.

53%

said that activities were part of the reason they chose their destination in the first place.

53%

ranked activities among the top three in-destination spend items.



When reminiscing about a recent fulfilling trip, almost half (46%) ranked activities as the single most important reason for making it memorable, higher than other trip components.

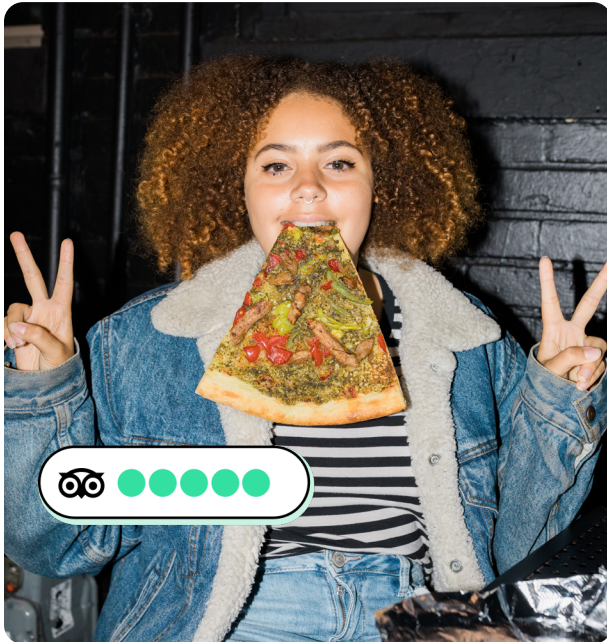
46%

Events/attractions/activities



34%

The accommodation



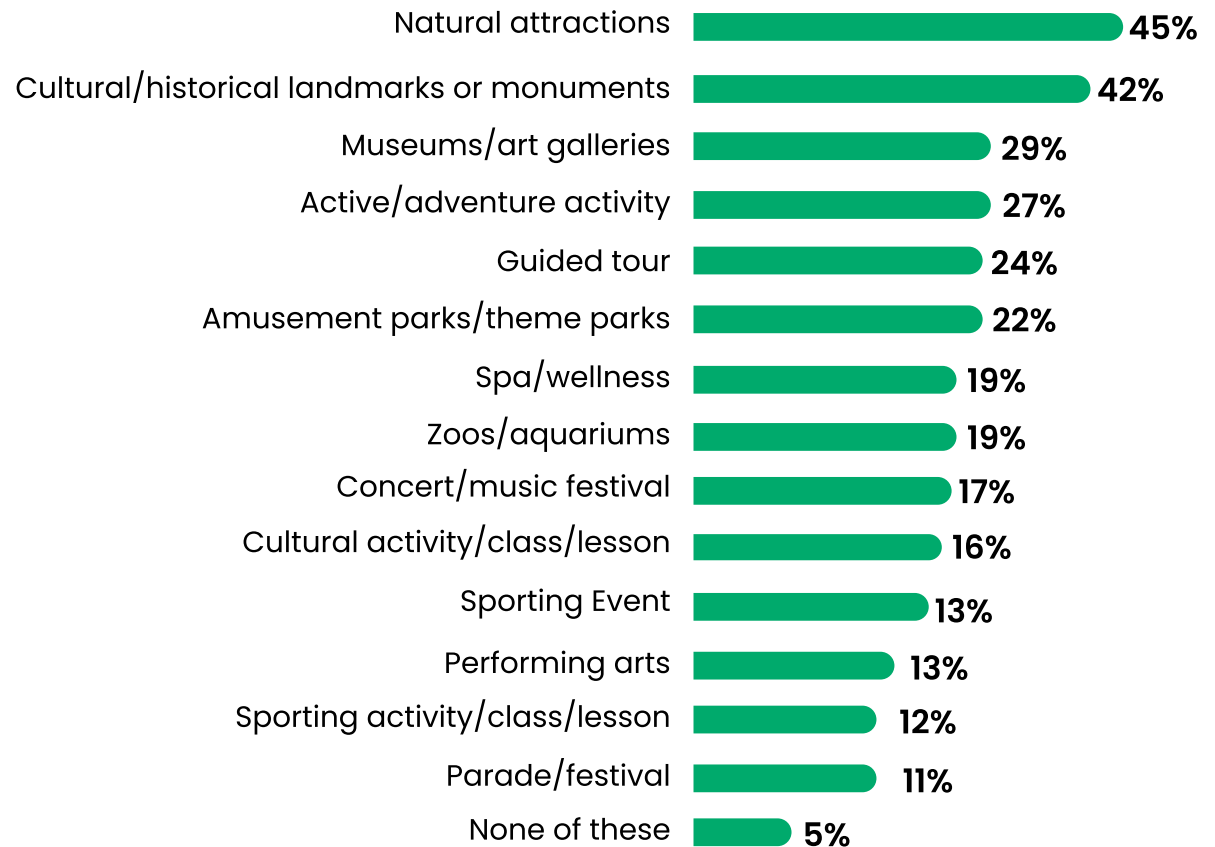
20%

The food

Younger travelers in particular are much more likely to prioritize activities: When asked about future travel, **70% of Gen Z and 66% of millennials said that events/attractions/activities will be very/extremely important vs. 48% of boomers.**

Travelers don't always need to be adventure-seekers or history buffs to put activities on their agenda. Even when prioritizing relaxation as the main motivation for traveling, there is always room for at least one "thing to do." Types of activities vary widely, including amusement parks, sporting events, and performing arts, but natural attractions such as parks and gardens and cultural landmarks and monuments are frequented the most.

Favorite Activities



Source: Tripadvisor's The Experience of Travel, N=5,618; Australia, France, India, Japan, Spain, United Kingdom, United States; November 2023; Viator bookings
Q: Which of the following activities, if any, did you do while on this trip? Select all that apply.

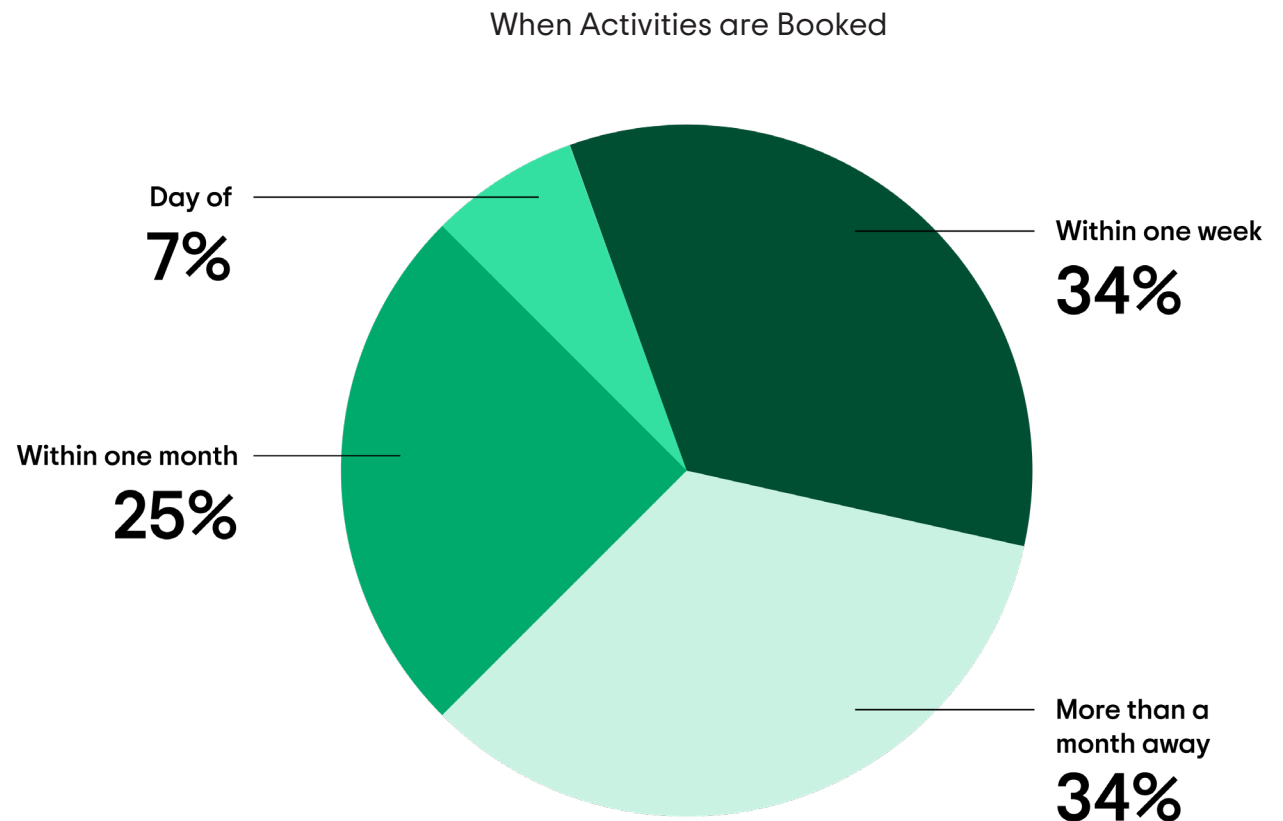


Increased Access to the Piece that Matters Most

Technological innovations over the past decade have made travel researching and planning more seamless and accessible. This is particularly important for on-trip activities, as accelerated digitization in more recent years has made it easier for travelers to secure these critical trip components ahead of time.

Demand for online activities continues to soar. **Survey data found that more than eight in 10 travelers have booked their on-trip activities online.** Furthermore, Viator, one of the largest online activities marketplaces, has experienced a 38% rise in bookings for the first nine months of 2023 vs. the same period in 2022 in the seven countries surveyed. **Cultural tours, the top booking category, climbed 72% YoY. Day trips and historical/heritage tours round out the top three in popularity.**

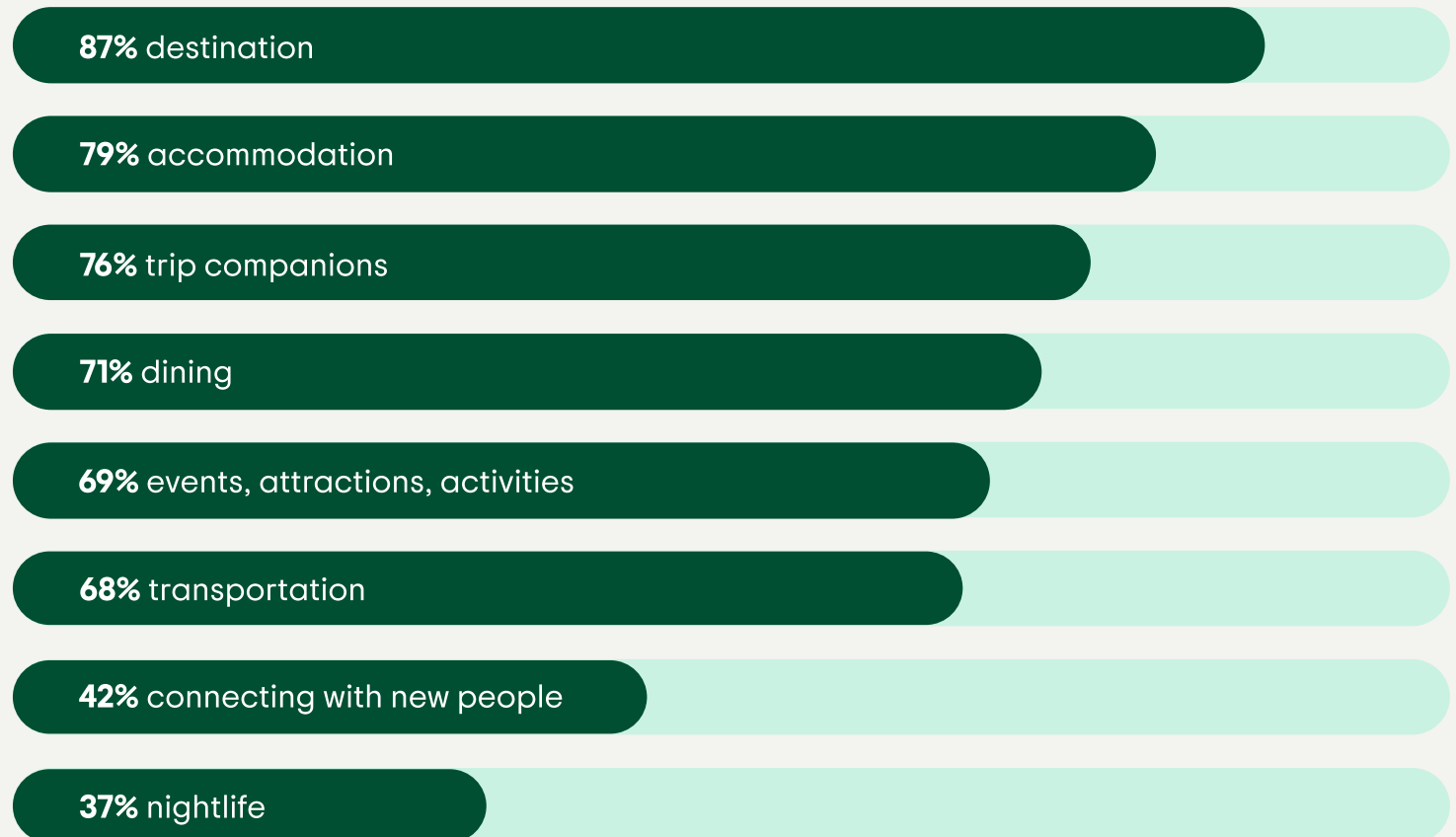
Travelers' desire for advance activity booking is clear. More than nine out of 10 (93%) Viator bookings are completed prior to the day of the activity; more than one third (34%) are booked months ahead.



A Fulfilling Trip is the Sum of its Parts

While in-destination activities play a particularly unique role in trip fulfillment, each trip component must do its part in ensuring a memorable, seamless journey. If one part goes awry, it can impact the entire experience. When asked to grade key trip components by their impact, travelers assigned high importance to most, including lodging, dining, activities, and transportation.

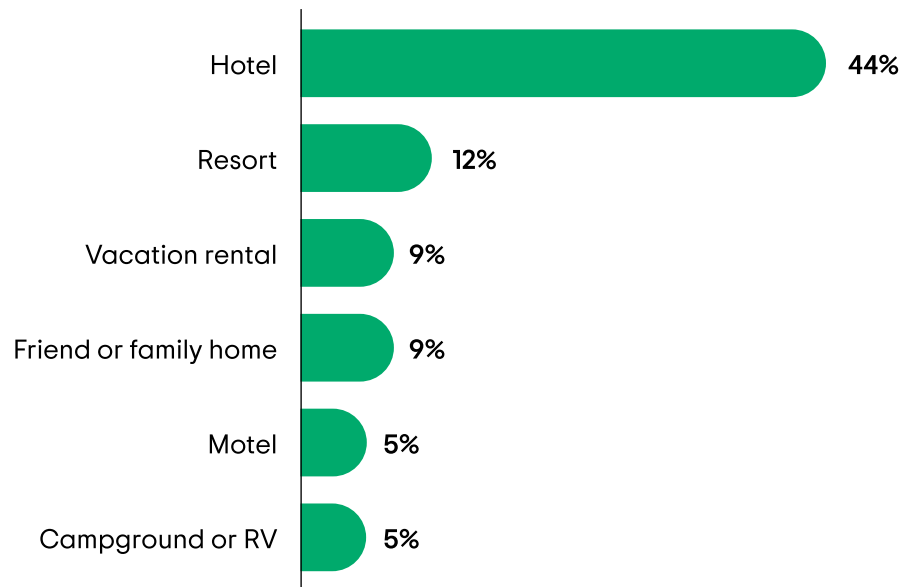
What made the trip memorable and fulfilling? (very/extremely important)



Where We Stay

While the destination received the highest marks, accommodation was not far behind. For nearly eight in 10 travelers, accommodation was a very/extremely important contributing factor in making a trip memorable and fulfilling. **Hotels remain preferred across generations despite the ongoing rise in home and apartment rental popularity.** A fulfilling trip was four times more likely to include a hotel than a vacation rental, and that holds true for all age groups.

Top Accommodation Types – Last Fulfilling Trip



While budget is a top concern in general for most travelers when planning a trip, there is less willingness to compromise when it comes to lodging. Overall, cost (52%) was the most commonly cited evaluating factor for travelers' recent trip. **However, when considering lodging choice criteria, location (48%) rose to #1, ahead of value for money (41%) and cost (37%).**

Q: What factored most into your accommodation choice?

#1 Location

#2 Value for money

#3 Cost



What We Eat

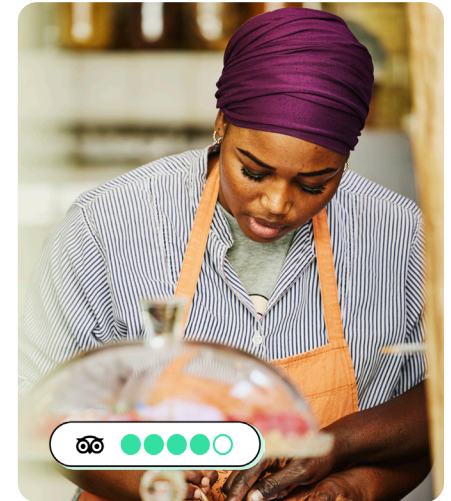
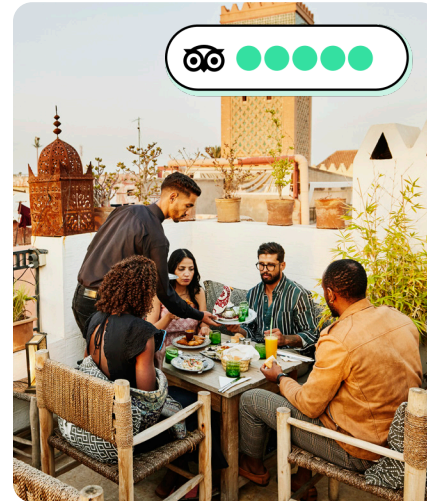
Dining is another trip component travelers consider key to making a trip memorable. Travelers invest a significant portion of their travel budget on cuisine: **Nearly two thirds (65%) ranked dining among their top three in-destination spend items**, ahead of in-destination activities (53%), shopping (49%), and transportation (48%). Beyond serving necessity, dining can be another experience in itself where travelers find defining moments.

66% of travelers dined out for all or most of their meals.

73% had some of their most memorable moments in restaurants and bars.

76% agree that their favorite dining experience exceeded their expectations.

61% said dining is important in creating a fulfilling and memorable trip.



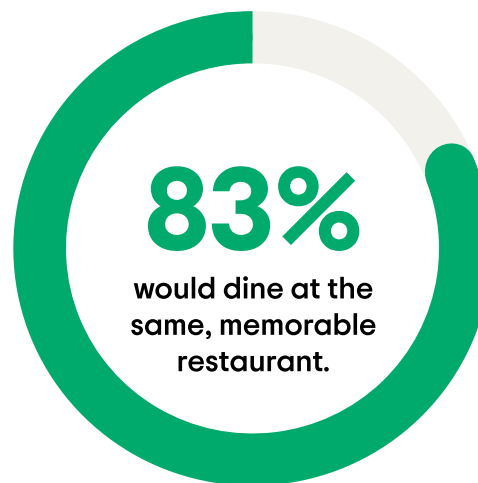
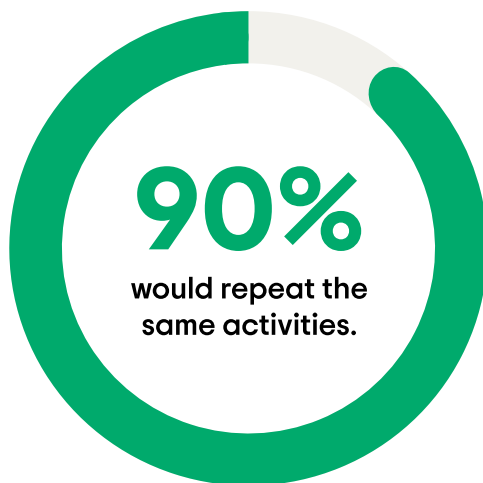
When You Know It's Good

Travelers will return to the places that delighted them, and there is a high propensity across markets to repeat favorite, impactful travel experiences. Nearly all respondents (97%) would return to the same destination where they last had a rewarding trip experience —just over four in 10 travelers surveyed already have and 56% would like to in the future. **The number one reason why travelers plan to return (or already have) is simply because they “fell in love” with the destination.**

Further, travelers are willing to replicate the same trip components from their prior fulfilling travel experience.

While no trip is perfect, 85% said that positives outweigh the negatives all or most of the time.

When travelers are satisfied with their trips



Staying Power

The peak in travel demand that happened in 2022-23 was not a blip. Travel appetite is unabated and all indicators show travelers remain focused on prioritizing experiences, travel especially, into 2024. **73% of respondents said they plan to travel for leisure in 2024 and 74% view specific activities as extremely/very important in upcoming travel.**

But if economic conditions do worsen, travelers will still find ways to satisfy that wanderlust. **When resources are an issue, most travelers (95%) are prepared to cut out other spend items to make their trips happen.** Younger respondents are even more willing to prioritize savings for travel over other purchases.

Making sacrifices to travel is even more important for those with good memories of past excursions: travelers who have had a recent fulfilling trip view future travel as a higher priority than those who have not (78% vs. 58%, respectively).

Top Five Things to Trim from Budget to Make Travel Happen

DINING

44%

FOOD DELIVERIES

41%

CLOTHING/ACCESSORY PURCHASE

36%

RIDESHARE/TAXIS

33%

ENTERTAINMENT EVENTS

33%



Conclusion

Travelers' tastes vary widely, but their motives are similar. They want to relax and unwind, but also engage in activities that add interest and excitement to the trip. **And while travelers have their favorites, each trip leaves its own lasting imprint, so long as there are memorable moments associated with them.**

Leisure travelers are planning their upcoming trips in big numbers—and are even prepared to make sacrifices to stretch their budgets. More than half (52%) plan to take more trips over the next 12 months than the previous year. This level of enthusiasm is good news for travel marketers that are looking to repeat—or exceed—some of their strongest years.



“I intend to make it a travel tradition for me/my family.”



Douglas F



Key Takeaways

- 01 Trips don't always need to push the limits to carry weight with travelers. **Travel marketers have an equal opportunity to leave a lasting impression, regardless of trip type, length, distance, or activity.**
- 02 Fulfilling trips are filled with experiences that are shared and often repeated. **As travel marketers, delivering on expectations can create a cycle of new and repeat business. Providing memorable tours, activities, and attractions is a way to bond with travelers for years after their trip.**
- 03 Activities are often the driver of destination choice though many are booked much later in the process. **Activity providers should aim to reach travelers early in the trip planning process to foster ideas, and then throughout the journey for booking.**
- 04 Travel intention is high, and most consumers are willing to make financial sacrifices to take their trips in 2024. **Travelers are looking for unique experiences that fit into their budgets, so make sure to attract them with the diversity of your offerings.**
- 05 A fulfilling trip is the sum of its parts: activities, accommodation, restaurants, and transportation all play a collective role. **By ensuring every customer experience has the best possible outcome, all travel providers have the opportunity to build lasting relationships to drive repeat or referral business.**



With so many decisions to make before and during a trip, more travelers turn to recommendations and reports from other travelers for guidance, especially for standout trips. By evaluating the prior experiences of others, travelers can make more educated decisions that ultimately ensure a positive trip experience. For their most recent fulfilling trip:

36% of travelers surveyed relied on travel review sites for guidance, second only to general search engines.

37% chose their tour, activity, or attraction because it was well rated by other travelers and **26%** first discovered the activity they did on a travel review site.

23% said positive reviews and ratings were the main reason why they chose their accommodation—only the basics of location and cost factors ranked higher.



Travelers are also eager to share the best parts of their trips with others, recommending activities, restaurants, and lodging. **More than half (53%) of online conversations around fulfilling trips are happening through reviews** (more so than on X, Facebook, blogs, etc.) And 65% of those key reviews are on Tripadvisor, highlighting its role in driving decisions that ensure memorable experiences.

As the world's largest travel guidance platform, Tripadvisor helps companies be a part of the conversations around those travel experiences with staying power.

[Reach out to book a meeting](#) and see how our team can help determine the right solution for your brand.



