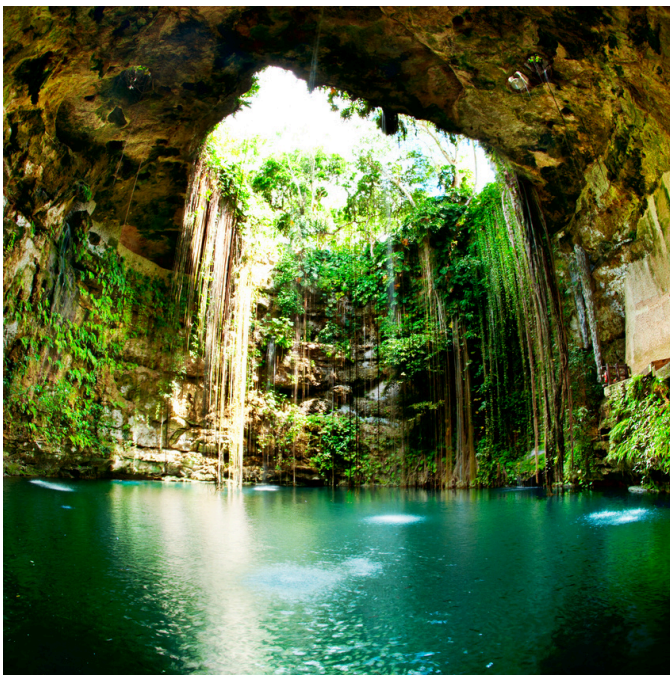


2026 TRAVEL & MOBILITY TRENDS



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Introduction: The Trip Starts Here



Travel in 2026 is shifting toward more individualized, culturally grounded, and sustainable experiences. Travelers aren't just booking trips, they're chasing moods, following influencers and algorithms down rabbit holes, and choosing routes that tell a story.

Viral "hidden gems" are bumping bustling cities, famous beaches, and over-photographed landmarks. Scenic routes are beating fast ones. People are stacking experiences like playlists, planning around daylight, and choosing wilder adventures and stays. Infrastructure is booming, country entry is easing, and suddenly entire regions feel easier — and more fun.

This coming year isn't about ticking boxes. It's about finding the place, the path, and the pace that fits the moment.

About Rome2Rio: What We Do & Why It Matters

Rome2Rio makes every journey discoverable, every destination reachable, and every choice clear, helping travelers move confidently and responsibly. By making global mobility visible, connected, and actionable, we show real patterns of human movement to drive smarter planning, and more confident and responsible travel.

This report is rooted in market shifts and behavioral observations from our global, on-the-ground marketing experts, and data-driven insights from thousands of sources across global transport modes, determining as many as tens of millions of routes per day, and with over 100 billion potential unique searches.

Enjoy the ride!



1. Hidden Gem Holidays Go Mainstream

Forget the capitals, 2026 is the year of plot-twist destinations. Travelers are moving away from busy streets and leaning into deeper exploration within a single area, following viral breadcrumbs to places that feel fresh, surprising, and personal. TikTok, Instagram, and YouTube are sending people to hyper-specific spots, not just cities, but viewpoints, villages, beaches, and one-of-a-kind landmarks.

That shift is showing up in how people plan. Searches for smaller cities are up 35 percent globally, as travelers hunt for places that promise fewer crowds and more character. And they're getting there mostly by surface routes — trains, buses, ferries, funiculars, tuktuks, water buffalo, you name it — signaling a real appetite for unique and personal experiences.



- **Somiedo** and **Teruel** in **Spain** deliver mountain lakes, cycling routes, wildlife spotting, and wide-open landscapes that still feel genuinely undiscovered.



- **Škofja Loka** and **Logarska Dolina** in **Slovenia** offer storybook old towns and alpine calm.



- **Samobor** and **Motovun** in **Croatia** draw visitors inland with festive markets, hilltop views, and walkable historic centers.

- **Zagorochoria** in **Greece** charms as a network of stone villages and hiking trails where travelers experience mountain air, food traditions, and dramatic landscapes.

***Industry Take:** The surge in “hidden gem” travel marks a shift from accidental dispersion to “dispersion by design.” Travelers are already willing to go beyond the obvious — but only when access is clear and confidence is high. Destinations that intentionally guide visitors toward secondary towns, seasonal alternatives, and surface-connected regions can relieve pressure on hotspots while capturing demand that already exists.*



Teruel, Spain

2. The Low-Lift Scenic Flex (aka #TrainTok Takes Over)

Travelers aren't just choosing destinations in 2026, they're curating their journeys. Scenic routes led by trains are a direct response to burnout culture, offering time to unplug, stare out the window, and enjoy the journey. Fewer transfers, no security lines, no turbulence, just downtime that feels calm and intentional.

Scenic travel has officially become a flex, with #TrainTok building an aesthetic: long window views, retro carriages, quiet-car rituals, and sweeping landscapes now carry real cultural currency. Rail routes across the world continue to deliver more: they look better and feel better, with time and intention.

- **Glacier Express** in the **Swiss Alps** connects Zermatt and St. Moritz, delivering panoramic views of snowcapped mountains and alpine villages.
- The **Rocky Mountaineer** in **Canada** delivers stunning views of the Rockies, offering a front-row seat for some of the country's most dramatic landscapes.
- The **Eastern & Oriental Express** delivers luxury accommodations as it leaves **Singapore** and traverses **Malaysia** with stops in **Kuala Lumpur**, **Butterworth**, and **River Kwai** (well known for its movie namesake) in **Kanchanaburi, Thailand**.

***Industry Take:** The global appetite for “journey-as-experience” opens major opportunities for destinations and transport providers. Routes that invest in better views, heritage elements, onboard design, and storytelling will outperform those that focus solely on speed. Destinations should promote panoramic rail, ferry loops, mountain buses, and rural routes as signature experiences. Scenic connectivity is becoming a competitive advantage.*



Canadian Rockies



Swiss Alps



Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia

3. Move Over Slow Travel, We're All About Intention Now

Slow Travel is no longer about checking out of modern life – it's about choosing a deeper connection. In 2026, this trend is turning towards Intentional Travel. Instead of packed immersion itineraries, they're settling into a single village, town, or neighborhood and letting daily life unfold around them.

This version of slow travel is practical, emotional, and restorative. Travelers want fewer hotel changes, fewer transfers, and less decision fatigue. They're exploring local markets, walking trails, cafés, and community events, living experiences that don't require constant movement to feel meaningful. And the sustainability win is baked in: fewer transfers, lower emissions, and money staying in the community without sacrificing experience.

- Travelers to **Slovenia's Bohinj** and **Soča Valley** base themselves for longer stays centered on alpine lakes and river trails that reward presence over pace.
- At **Italy's Masseria Living in Puglia** (Valle d'Itria), multi-day farm stays are rooted in food, land, and tradition with a naturally slow rhythm of travel.
- In **Northern Romania's Breb** and **Botiza**, Maramureș Wooden Villages and Homestead Stays are increasingly attracting travelers seeking authenticity over amenities, with daily life, craft traditions, and landscape shaping the experience.

***Industry Take:** Sustainability lands when it improves the trip. Destinations that support longer stays and surface access will attract travelers who want meaning without messaging fatigue.*



Soca River, Slovenia



Puglia, Italy



Maramureș, Romania

4. Skip-the-Flight Energy Goes Mainstream

Short flights are losing their grip. In 2026, travelers are actively choosing trains, buses, and ferries because they're more reliable, more predictable, and way less stressful, especially during school breaks and holidays. The logic is simple: fewer lines, fewer delays, fewer meltdowns.



- In **Spain**, high-speed rail already beats flights between Madrid, Barcelona, Valencia, and Seville.

- In **Slovenia**, trains to Koper, Bled, and alpine regions outperform cars during peak winter congestion.



- Across **Greece** and **Croatia**, ferries and buses remain the most dependable way to move when airports clog.

Industry Take: The short-haul reset is real. Regions with strong surface networks will capture demand as travelers deprioritize airports for anything under a few hours.

5. Chasing Daylight: The Sun-Saving Traveler

In 2026, travelers are planning around their most valuable asset: daylight. Instead of spending prime hours in transit, they're choosing sleeper trains, night buses, and evening ferries that move them while the world sleeps, so they can maximize their daylight hours and arrive ready to explore.

This shift is driven by a simple mindset: more experience, less logistics. The Sun-Saving traveler wants sunrise hikes, open museums, long beach days, and golden-hour photos. Travel happens after dark, living happens in the light.



- Across **Spain**, evening high-speed rail and late-day buses make it possible to arrive after dark and start exploring first thing in the morning, especially when heading inland or north.

- In the **Balkans**, night buses connecting cities to mountain towns help travelers maximize short winter days while avoiding icy drives and early-morning departures.



- In **LATAM**, night buses are a long-standing norm, letting travelers cover distance while sleeping so daylight can be spent in cenotes, thermal baths, beaches, and historic centers.

- Across **APAC**, sleeper trains and evening ferries are increasingly used to stretch trips without adding hotel nights, making multi-stop itineraries feel fuller without feeling rushed.

Industry Take: Systems that offer clear night-travel options will see increased demand. DMOs should position overnight mobility as part of the destination experience, not merely a transfer.

6. The Rise of the Regional Loop: One Region, Many Stops

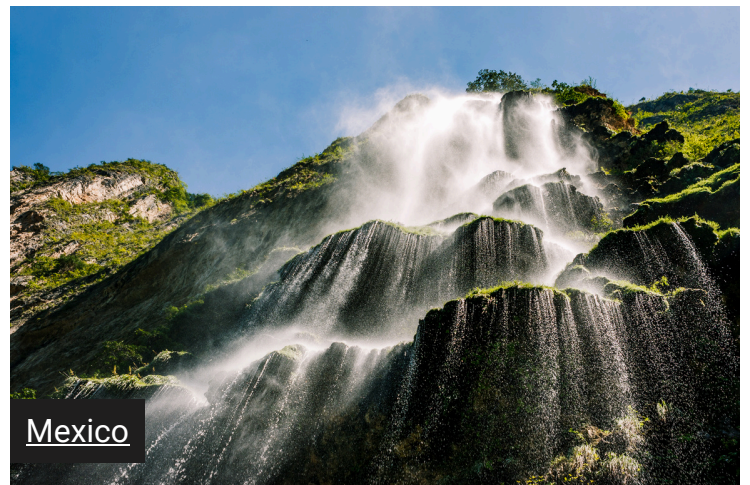
Big, whirlwind itineraries are out. In 2026, travelers are trading fast-paced, multi-country trips for something more immersive: a single corridor explored deeply. Instead of bouncing between capitals, they're following a connected path of towns, beaches, natural sites, and cultural hubs that unfold naturally along the way.

The new itinerary looks less like "Europe in 10 days" and more like a flowing journey. Each stop builds on the last, turning the trip into a story rather than a checklist.



Japan

Kyoto → Nara → Osaka → Kinosaki Onsen



Mexico

Chiapas → Tabasco → Campeche → Yucatán



Italy

Florence → Lucca → Pisa → Cinque Terre



Brazil

Rio de Janeiro → Paraty → Ilha Grande → Ubatuba

Industry Take: Destinations should map and market their strongest corridors, not just their cities. The winners will be regions that make multimodal exploration intuitive and promote the "string of pearls" around their main draws.



Mount Rinjani, Indonesia

7. Adventure Travel: The Inner Compass Era

Adventure Travel in 2026 is no longer about pushing limits for bragging rights. It's about meeting yourself somewhere new. Travelers are seeking moments that challenge them physically or mentally, reconnect them with nature, and leave them with a sense of accomplishment, not just content.

These adventures are intentional and often solo or small-group by design. They require effort, presence, and patience – whether that's a long hike, a cold plunge, a multi-day trail, or navigating a remote village without constant connectivity. The reward is internal: confidence, clarity, and perspective.

- **Patagonian Chile** delivers experiential ecolodges with Class IV and 5 rapids for everyone from novice to river pro.
- In **Indonesia**, the famed Mount Rinjani Trek is a multi-day volcanic physical and mental challenge with strict conservation rules, guide requirements, and community-run eco-lodges.
- In **Germany**, travelers are turning to long-distance hiking routes like the Rheinsteig and Malerweg, while forest bathing in the Black Forest.

Industry Take: *Travelers are prioritizing experiences that deliver personal growth, not just adrenaline, which favors destinations and operators that emphasize effort, guidance, conservation, and community involvement. The biggest winners in 2026 will be those who pair clear access, responsible trail management, and local stewardship with storytelling that roots itself in transformation.*

8. AI Becomes the Co-Pilot; Humans Keep Travelers Safe and On Track

Planning in 2026 isn't human-only or AI-only – it's a power duo. AI handles the chaos at lightning speed, sorting messy schedules, comparing modes, and surfacing routes you'd never find on your own. Humans step in to keep it real, confirming the bus actually runs, the ferry isn't "seasonal-ish," and the connection won't leave you stranded in a town with one café and no signal.

Travelers are leaning on AI to spark ideas, cut through noise, and make planning feel effortless, but they still want confidence when it matters. That's where local expertise shines, filling the gaps between where the API stops and the offline schedule and route details exist.

The magic is in the mix. When machine intelligence meets on-the-ground insight, planning stops feeling like guesswork and starts feeling like a green light. Because the best travel advice works when you're standing at the station.

Industry Take: *AI will accelerate multimodal adoption, but trust will determine who wins. Platforms that combine AI's scale with human-verified transport data will become the gold standard. As AI agents begin to sit between travelers and supply, mobility providers must ensure their data is accurate, structured, and discoverable – because the next wave of bookings will be shaped by systems that prioritize clarity, consistency, and confidence. The industry's task: pair automation with authenticity.*



LATAM 2026 Travel Trends

Latin America in 2026 is being shaped by algorithms, aesthetics, and access. Viral discovery is sending travelers to specific “must-see” spots and small towns at record speed, while new regional infrastructure, surface-first mobility, and experience-driven travel are turning entire corridors into playgrounds for deeper, more adventurous exploration.

- Influencer-driven destination duplication pushes travelers toward specific ‘viral spots,’ fueling weekend surges to unprepared small towns.
- Dispersion being driven by content as travelers seek uniqueness, novelty, and aesthetics.
- Experience-first regional exploration is expanding, with travelers focused on one corridor (e.g., Riviera Maya) using bus, colectivo, shuttle, and new rail.
- Novel accommodations (treehouses, barrel suites, cliff nests, jungle domes) drive entire itineraries.
- Adventure micro-tourism surges: cenotes, thermal waters, forest escapes, cave exploration, and adrenaline activities.
- Surface-first mobility grows in-region due to high domestic flight costs and improved bus networks.
- Maya Train expansion and the Tulum Airport reshape southeastern Mexico’s mobility ecosystem.



Yucatan, Mexico

APAC 2026 Travel Trends

Asia-Pacific travel in 2026 is being unlocked by easier entry, faster movement, and massive new connectivity. Visa liberalization, pilgrimage demand, biometric travel corridors, and landmark transport projects are opening entire regions, from Central Asia to Southeast Asia, while renewed interest in cultural icons and emerging destinations reshapes how travelers move across the region.

- Visa liberalization and reopened borders drive enormous regional flow, especially into China and Southeast Asia.
- Religious and pilgrimage tourism grows across Hajj/Umrah, Hindu temple circuits, and festival-driven travel spikes.
- Central Asia becomes a breakout region: Uzbekistan, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan attract adventure and cultural travelers.
- New mega-infrastructure reshapes mobility: Mumbai Metro & airport, HCMC Metro, Cairo Monorail, Qatar-Bahrain ferry, UAE-Oman rail.
- Biometric seamless corridors (led by Indonesia) eliminate queues, paperwork, and identity friction in airports.
- Strong interest in Egypt, Morocco, Vietnam, Japan, and Palau, driven by new attractions, easier access, and direct flights.

EU 2026 Travel Trends

European travelers are leaning into surface-first journeys, longer stays in villages and nature-rich regions, and experiences rooted in food, culture, and community. With upgraded rail and ferry networks making multimodal travel easier, Europe is seeing a shift toward more intentional, lower-pressure trips.

- Sustainable and responsible travel will surge, with strong interest in agritourism stays, eco-villages, scattered hotels, and experiences rooted in local food and culture.
- Surface-first travel will grow rapidly, with upgrades to European rail and ferry infrastructure.
- Travelers will increasingly pursue “slow travel,” staying longer in small villages, exploring nature parks, and seeking restorative, low-pressure winter experiences.
- Multimodal travel combinations (train + bus + ferry) will become the norm as winter flight schedules shrink and travelers seek more reliable and cost-stable options.
- Niche experience-driven tourism like nostalgia travel, sleep retreats, wellness-focused trips, and walking pilgrimages will see major growth.
- Food-driven and community-based tourism will expand as travelers seek local workshops, wine tastings, farm-to-table stays, and small-town festivals.

NORAM 2026 Travel Trends

North American travel in 2026 is being reshaped by a quiet surface-first comeback and smarter city connectivity. Renewed interest in rail and coach travel, nature-driven itineraries, and mega-event mobility planning is pushing travelers to move beyond cars and short flights, as cities invest in multimodal systems that make getting around feel easier, more flexible, and more intentional.

- Rail curiosity turns into real rail demand with new and revitalized routes like Brightline in Florida and VIA Rail improvements in Canada fueling an appetite for train-first domestic travel.
- Bus and coach networks get a glow-up, as FlixBus and Greyhound consolidation creates a more unified bus ecosystem.
- National parks and nature travel fuels surface-first itineraries, pushing people toward cars, shuttles, buses, and new rail extensions to bypass overcrowded gateways.
- Cities rethink connectivity during mega events, as FIFA World Cup demand in the US, Canada, and Mexico accelerates new transfer systems, park and ride networks, rail connectors, and last mile shuttles.
- Car optional travel grows in surprising cities, as Los Angeles, Atlanta, Houston, and Phoenix see a rise in multimodal behavior as visitors use emerging metro lines, airport connectors, scooter networks, and micromobility.
- Secondary cities become weekend powerhouses: Austin, Raleigh, Milwaukee, Pittsburgh, Calgary, and Halifax see spikes in demand as travelers seek lower costs and more creativity.
- Overnight regional routes make a comeback, with sleeper buses, rail pilot programs, and long haul coaches becoming popular again as travelers seek slower, more affordable, more experiential movement between major hubs.

The Journey Ahead

Travel in 2026 isn't about doing more, it's about doing it better. Travelers are signaling what they value through how they move: calmer routes, deeper stays, meaningful connections and challenges, and places that feel human rather than overproduced.

***Industry Take:** For destinations and the industry, the opportunity isn't to push people faster or farther, but to guide them towards smarter travel, less discovered routes and regions, and rhythms that benefit both visitors and the places they visit. The future of travel won't be built around volume. It will be built around intention.*