

Lemongrass



Annual Travel Trend Report 2027

Introduction

Every year, travel trend reports attempt to separate the world into neat categories – wellness, AI, luxury, sustainability, culture – but reality is rarely that tidy.

The most important shifts shaping travel today aren't happening in isolation. They're unfolding simultaneously, influencing one another in ways that are often difficult to predict. Like the waves on the surface of the ocean, the trends we notice are simply the visible expressions of deeper currents beneath. Some rise, others fade, but they're all shaped by the same underlying forces.

We found exactly the same while compiling this report. Every trend we identified seemed to lead us to another: AI influences trust. Trust increases the value of human expertise. Human expertise creates richer travel experiences. Richer experiences encourage slower travel. Slower travel supports wellbeing. Each trend reinforces the next.

That made this year's report unusually difficult to write – not because there weren't enough trends, but because almost every one touched several conversations at once.

Systems thinker Donella Meadows observed that, in complex systems, changing one element inevitably changes many others, often in unexpected ways. We see the same dynamic in travel. Beneath the surface, the trends are interconnected, much like the unseen mycelium network beneath a forest floor. What appears to be separate is, in fact, part of a much larger living system.

Underpinning the fifteen trends we've identified sit five broader forces shaping the future of travel and hospitality: Human sustainability. Depth and meaning. Joy and connection. Trust in an AI world. Intentional consumption (which we are aware is an oxymoron in itself). Across all of them runs a common thread: In a world characterised by uncertainty, acceleration, and information overload, people are searching for something profoundly human. They're seeking clarity, connection, meaning, hope, and a greater sense of balance.

Travel has always reflected society. Increasingly, it is also becoming one of the ways we respond to it.



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Force 1: Human Sustainability

"All flourishing is mutual." – Robin Wall Kimmerer, The Serviceberry

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Trend 1

The Anti-Optimised Holiday



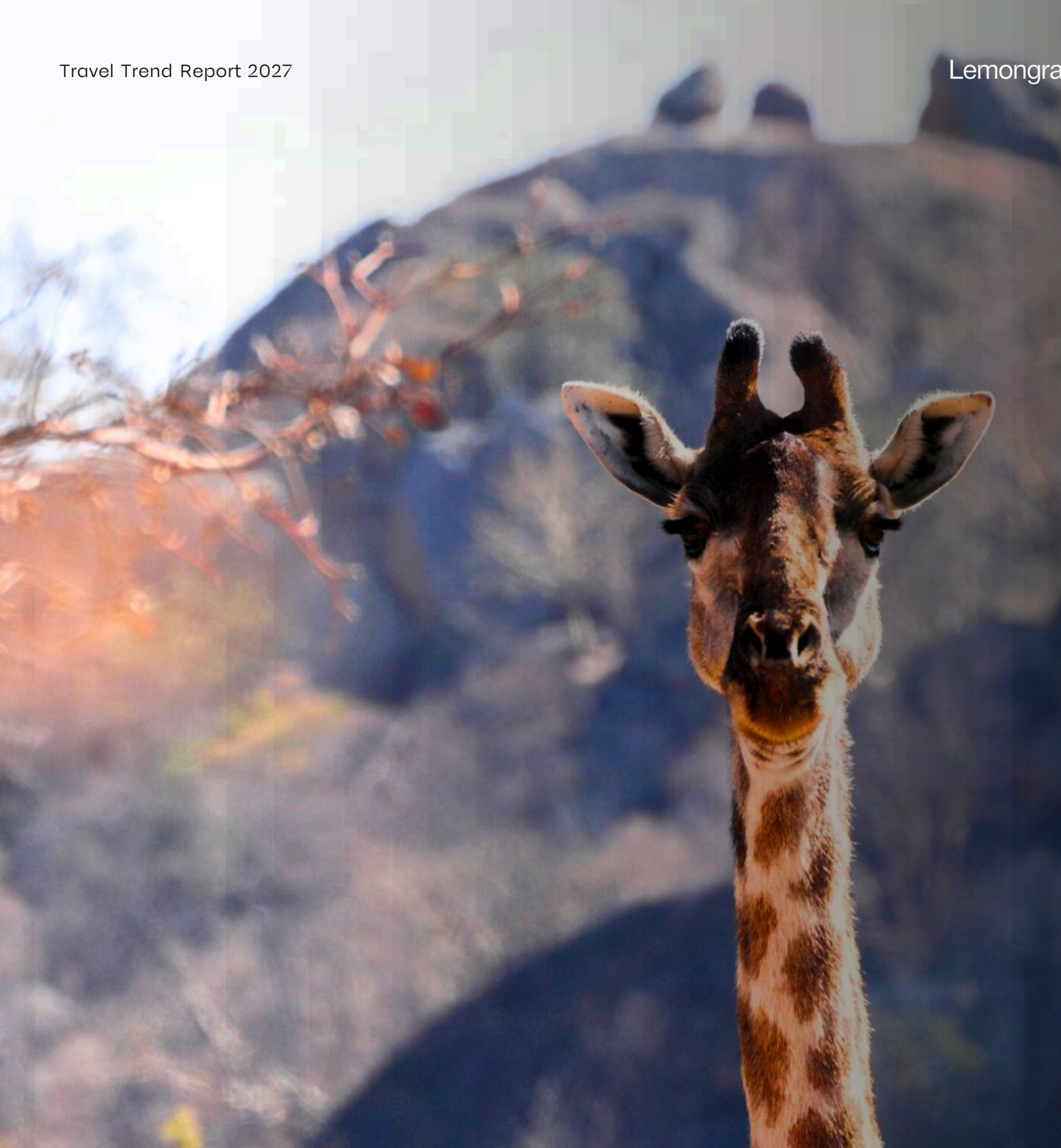
Optimisation has defined travel for years with hyper-curated itineraries, rewards programmes, and pressure-filled bucket-list travel.

But people have had it with hustle culture and performative living – and they're increasingly uninterested in maximising every minute of their hard-earned holidays too.

Consumers were sold on fitness trackers, productivity apps, and biohacking techniques to maximise and document every experience on the journey to personal growth. Travel fit easily into that narrative, and holidays became jam-packed with experiences, recommendations, upgrades, and expectations, creating pressure to make every trip productive or life-changing. Today, though, travellers don't aspire to return home transformed but rather truly rested.

Take note, travel brands: The temptation to keep adding more may backfire. Instead, focus on what matters to guests now: simpler itineraries, longer stays in fewer places, and more unstructured time. In other words, permission to stop performing and simply enjoy the moment instead.





“The anti-optimised holiday is here, although the industry keeps trying to schedule it out of existence. In Zimbabwe I see guests arrive with a camera, packing list and an itinerary copied from the same circuit sold since 2005. Victoria Falls. Hwange. Mana Pools. Home. Then they stand twenty metres from a rhino in Matobo and put the camera down. By day three they are wearing the same khaki shirt, sitting longer at dinner and asking questions that were not in the briefing.

That matters because travel has begun to confuse movement with experience. A country is not understood through six lodges in ten days. In 2027, the better operators will leave hours unclaimed, sell fewer stops and keep guests in one place long enough for the place to interrupt them. The successful trip will not be the one that completed the itinerary. It will be the one that broke it.”



JOSH ELLIOTT
Managing Director,
Matobo Hills Lodge

Trend 2

Nervous System Design



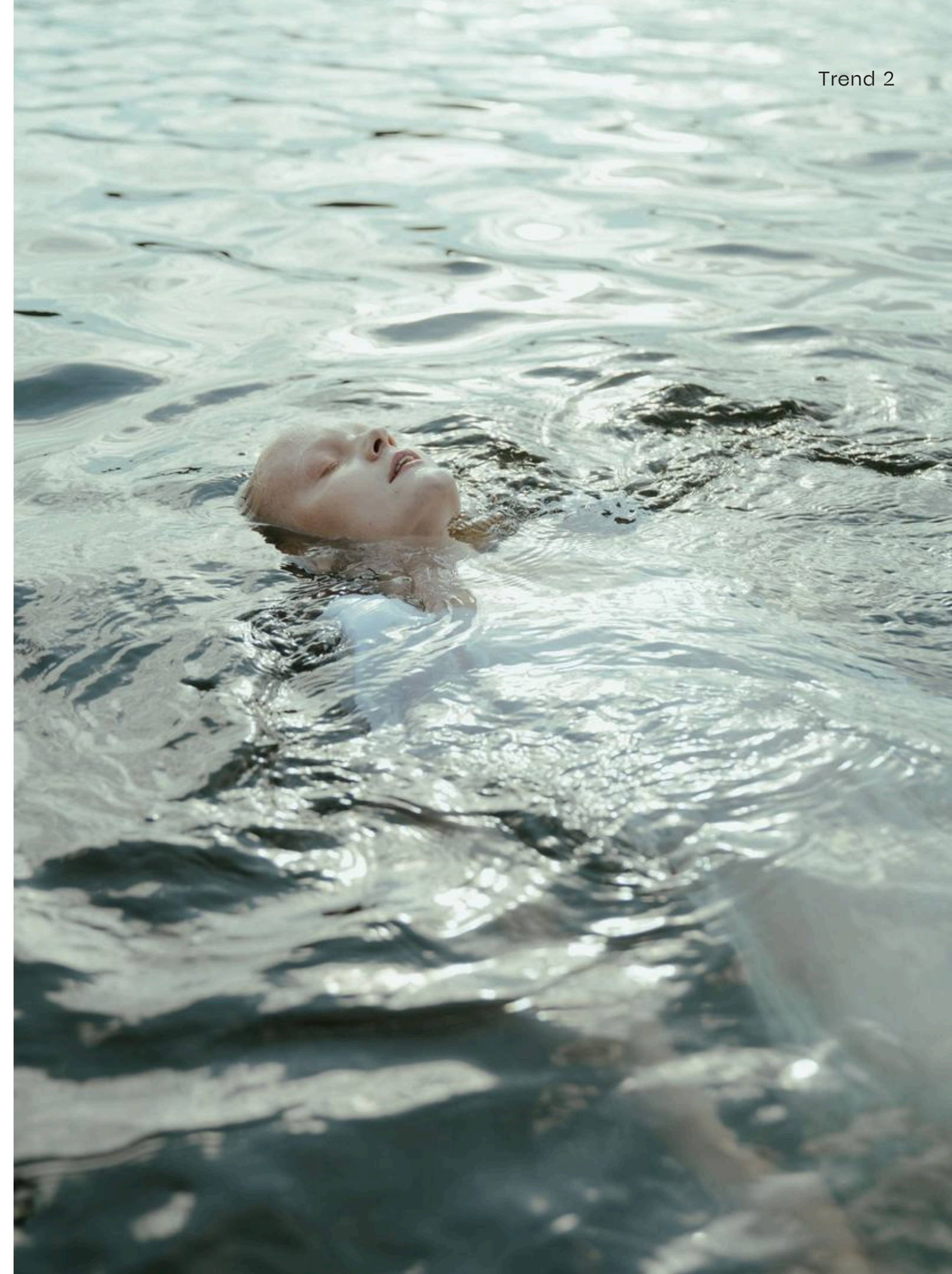
Image © Eha

Luxury hotels once sold wellness as indulgence, complete with lavish spas, extensive treatment menus, and healthy dining options.

Then the focus shifted toward optimisation, with longevity clinics, biometric testing, recovery technologies, and personalised health programmes promising guests help for sleeping deeper, performing better, and living longer. Even with its good intentions, though, pursuing wellness is now another source of cognitive stress, and this trend is peaking.

Now, wellness is evolving once again. Hotels are rethinking wellbeing through the lens of nervous system health. Rather than focusing solely on what happens inside the body, a growing number of hospitality brands recognise the environment itself can actively reduce stress, support recovery, and promote a sense of calm.

Wellness is moving beyond biohacking and interventions to become part of the architecture, atmosphere, and experience of a place. At Eha Retreat, for example, wellness touches every aspect of a guest stay, with the Hiiumaa retreat's programming following the island's five seasons. Additionally, travel-centric biophilic design that connects people to nature is increasingly popular: 35% more guests choose to spend time in hotel spaces with elements like natural lighting, plants, and water structures.





According to a 2016 Booking.com survey of business travellers, 93% of people experience stress during their travels, but hospitality brands can be an antidote for that stress. As 24/7 connectivity and global instability intersect with a growing awareness of nervous system regulation and emotional resilience, people are turning to travel as an emotional respite that leaves them feeling calmer, safer, and more balanced.

Tomorrow's successful luxury hotels won't be the ones adding more treatment options, diagnostics, or feel-good interventions. Instead, they'll remove sources of stress, focus on restorative lighting and acoustics, reduce sensory overload, and integrate nature and biophilic elements throughout the guest experience. Turning away from complexity, they'll focus on the basics: good nutrition, movement, and human connection. They will still be beautiful, but they won't simply impress guests; they will also help them regulate and restore their whole selves.

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"My perspective is that we are moving from wellness as something you do to wellness as something you inhabit and sense. For many years, hospitality wellness was largely centred around the spa or a treatment. Now we understand that our nervous system is constantly reading our surroundings – light, sound, scent, temperature, texture, air quality, nature and spatial design all send signals to the body before our conscious mind has even decided whether we like a place. HRV (heart rate variability) and resting heart rate are particularly interesting here because they can give us useful insights into stress, recovery and resilience. But there is another dimension that I believe is equally important: spiritual wellbeing.

A sense of meaning, awe, belonging, ritual, connection to nature and connection to something greater than ourselves can be profoundly regulating. By 2027 and beyond, I believe we will see hospitality environments designed much more consciously around nervous-system regulation, with HRV and other recovery markers helping us understand what genuinely works. At the same time, the technology will become increasingly invisible. Guests don't want another dashboard telling them to relax. The most sophisticated wellness environment may ultimately be one where you walk through the door, your shoulders drop, your heart rate settles, your breathing changes, and you feel somehow more like yourself – without quite knowing why. That, to me, is the real potential of Nervous System Design."

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ANNA BJURSTAM
Founder, Wahayla & Co-founder, RoseBar
Longevity & Marenia Medical Wellness

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“A few years ago, after a particularly hard stretch in my life, I stayed in a tiny village on the south coast of Crete. Every morning I walked in nature and swam in the sea. In the afternoons I climbed the hill above the village to the ruins of an old temple to Asclepius, the Greek god of healing, and sat in the shade looking out over the blue water, listening to the goats and the wind, breathing in citrus and eucalyptus. I wasn’t trying to meditate. I was just there. When I came home, my doctor took one look at me and asked what on earth I’d done, because I was so much better. I’m a physician and rheumatologist, and spent 26 years at the National Institutes of Health researching the mind-body connection, so I recognised what had happened. Without trying, I’d given my body many of the things it needs to recover: sleep, movement, good food, connection, nature and a sense of something larger than yourself. That experience crystallised a question I’ve spent much of my career exploring: how can a place itself help us heal? In research using wearable devices, we repeatedly saw that our surroundings affect stress, sleep and movement. Good air quality matters, but so do light, quiet, nature and simply creating a place people want to be in. That’s what I’d love travel to hold onto. It doesn’t need to be a specialist retreat or a temple in Crete. It might be a cottage with a garden and birdsong outside. Give a space the chance to do what nature already knows how to do, and people will feel it.”

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DR. ESTHER STERNBERG
Professor of Medicine,
Researcher, Author



“Having worked at the intersection of sustainable design and wellbeing for the past decade, it’s exciting to see these principles entering the mainstream. Biophilic design and neuroaesthetics are moving us towards travel experiences and environments that genuinely influence how we feel and function. Wellness technology and data have an important role, but the opportunity now is to translate insight into experience and environment, considering everything from air and water quality, low-toxin materials, natural light, sound and scent to functional movement, replenishing treatments, whole foods, nature immersion and human connection. This is the approach we’re taking at Eha: creating an environment where these elements work together to support nervous system regulation. For me, this is where wellness becomes regenerative by design.”



AMBER GAUCI-WARD
General Manager & Wellness Director
Eha Retreat

Trend 3

Male Reset



Traditionally, society defined masculinity as strong and indestructible. It celebrated men's endurance, stoicism, and brute strength, yet 50% of men have struggled with mental health difficulties.

Luckily, times are changing: Today's conversations around masculinity are more robust, weaving in intersecting issues around loneliness, burnout, work-life balance, and pressures related to family responsibilities and financial uncertainty.

From a tourism perspective, the result has been a growing interest by men to use travel as a vehicle for physical, mental, and emotional wellbeing. They are seeking fitness-focused retreats, mindfulness getaways, and outdoor challenges as a socially acceptable and aspirational way to embrace full-body wellness and bond with friends in a meaningful way.

This shift toward a holistic definition of masculinity on a societal level also underpins an emerging yet mostly underdeveloped tourism market – though some companies have already gotten onboard. Both Sides Retreats, for example, offers getaways where men can “rediscover and redefine masculinity” through breathwork, bushcraft, connection through nature, and community-centric emotional support.

Similarly, Broughton Sanctuary’s ZERO Reset Men’s Retreat pushes wellness beyond fitness or performance with programming focused on nervous system regulation, recovery, and emotional resilience.

Travel brands like these that approach masculinity through a lens of self-awareness, emotional intelligence, and connection will be opening their doors to a familiar guest sporting a new identity.





“I have spent much of my adult life walking alongside other men – soldiers, guides, local people, old friends, and complete strangers – through some of the most remote and demanding places on earth. What I have learned is that men often speak most honestly when conversation is not the main purpose. They talk while walking, making camp, sharing food or dealing with a challenge together. The ‘Male Reset’ trend identified here reflects a wider change in what men are looking for from travel. Increasingly, the aim is not simply to escape, prove toughness or conquer something, but to step away from routine, rebuild confidence, form meaningful friendships and gain perspective. I have seen how quickly barriers fall when men share a practical purpose in the outdoors, particularly across different ages and backgrounds. I hope this leads to more thoughtful, accessible journeys built around nature, genuine challenge and human connection.”

LEVISON WOOD
Writer, Photographer, Explorer



Image © Martin Hartley

Trend 4

From “Coolcations” to Adapted Destinations

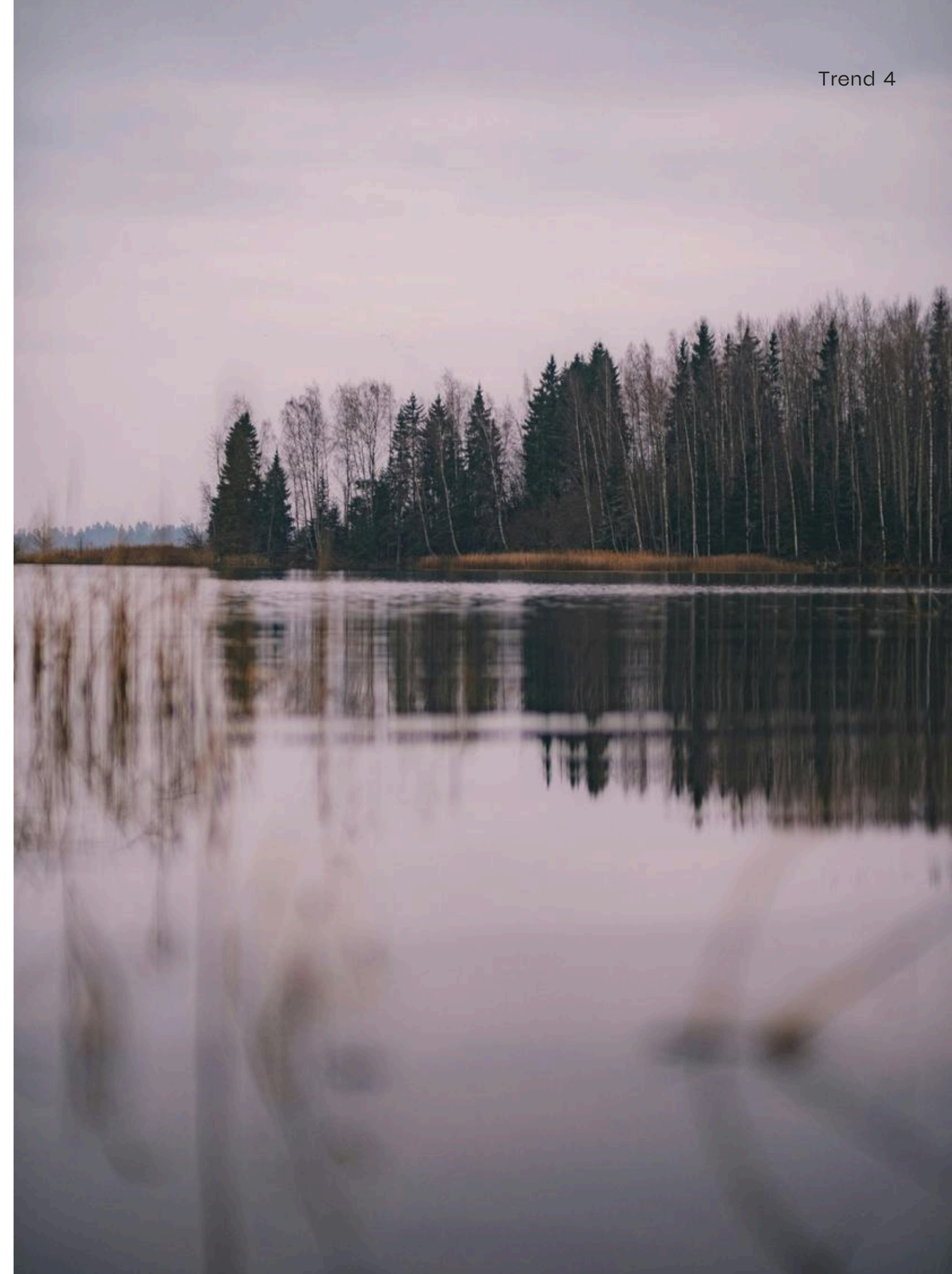


Last year we noted the rise of “coolcations” as travellers looked northward or toward the mountains to escape increasingly hot summers. This year – and its extreme heat, unpredictable weather, and environmental stress – has exposed the flaw in that narrow focus.

In recent months, for example, there have been wildfires and drought in Scotland, thawing permafrost and unstable mountainsides in the Alps, low water levels throughout Eastern Europe, and devastating glacier-triggered floods in Nepal.

In other words, a cooler destination isn't necessarily an unaffected one. So, beyond escaping the heat, travellers now also consider how prepared destinations are for tumultuous conditions.

Enter the adapted destination: Rather than “climate-proofing” tourism – an impossible promise – the best-prepared destinations understand localised vulnerabilities and adapt accordingly. For destinations and tourist boards, this requires taking on a greater role in stewardship and guiding all tourism stakeholders in a coordinated response – from addressing resource regulation to rethinking the traditional tourism calendar.





Hotels need to think beyond air conditioning with water-smart landscaping, shaded shared spaces, multiple energy sources, and activities planned for cooler conditions. Local knowledge and flexibility are becoming key characteristics for successful tour operators: This may mean changing hiking routes, suggesting alternative visitation options, and working with local partners who have accurate, on-the-ground insight. And while some travellers may have flexibility with timing, school holidays dictate July and August as prime family travel months, making adaptation within destinations all the more important.

The future isn't about finding the perfect climate. Rather, the opportunity now is to make adaptation part of what good tourism looks like, complete with adequately designed places, businesses prepared to respond when conditions change, and an industry collectively protecting the landscapes and communities supporting tourism. This is about creating destinations better prepared for an unwritten future.



Force 2: Depth and Meaning

"Where is the Life we have lost in living? Where is the wisdom we have lost in knowledge? Where is the knowledge we have lost in information?" – T.S. Eliot, Choruses from "The Rock"

- Trend 5: From Bucket List to Depth List
- Trend 6: Citizen Science
- Trend 7: Earned Travel

Trend 5

From Bucket List to Depth List



For more than a decade, travel has been shaped by the pursuit of the bucket list. Social media turned destinations into checklists, encouraging travellers to collect experiences, uncover “hidden gems,” and capture ever more shareable moments.

AI accelerated the process by generating personalised itineraries, destination guides, and cultural summaries in seconds.

The result? Every “hidden” corner is mapped. Every “local” café is reviewed. Every “must-see” experience is instantly accessible. In a world where information is limitless and everyone seems to follow the same recommendations, travellers are craving something that can’t be generated by an algorithm: genuine understanding. The shift is from collecting culture to engaging with it.

On a societal level, this is reflected in the rise of long-form podcasts, cultural newsletters, the resurgence of book clubs, and growing interest in philosophy, history, and architecture. Even fashion house Coach launched a campaign around books and reading. Within tourism, this creates opportunities for museums, expert-led experiences, lectures, workshops, and cultural trails, as well as destinations such as Vienna, Oxford, and Cascais, which have positioned themselves around ideas, creativity, and intellectual capital. Some travellers are even embracing their inner octogenarian tendencies with “grandma” tourism.

AI can tell us everything about a place before we arrive. What it can’t do is replace the intentionality of being there – the conversation with a local expert, the atmosphere of a gallery, or the feeling of losing yourself in a book inspired by a destination. Instead of celebrating how many places we’ve visited, the next status symbol will likely be how deeply we’ve experienced them.



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“We are increasingly seeing guests who want to understand and feel the place they are in, rather than simply ticking off famous sights.

One of the clearest signals for us is the growing demand for private and highly personalised experiences: we have already seen an increase of more than 140% in private experience bookings compared with the whole of last year. I also believe this desire for depth is partly a response to how much of the world we already experience through screens. This philosophy has shaped Sensoria Art. During our Art Residencies, artists live and work at Sensoria for several days, and guests can observe their process, join a workshop or simply sit down for a conversation. Art becomes less about observing a finished object and more about experiencing the process, the person and the place behind it. We also believe in living in the rhythm of the season. Our Art of Seeing Retreat, created with artist Caroline Comploi, will run in two contrasting seasons in 2027, Winter Stillness and Summer Radiance. Ultimately, I think this is a shift from itinerary density to curated depth, from access to information to access to people. Perhaps the new luxury is no longer being able to say, ‘I have been there,’ but being able to say, ‘I came to understand something about this place.’

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LEA OBERHOFER
Hotelière,
Sensoria Dolomites



“Adventure travel has never been about cotton-sheet thread counts or fancy hotel chains, nor is it confined to adrenaline rushes. It has always been about connecting, learning and experiencing – getting out into nature, discovering a new landscape or culture, and understanding the communities that call a place home. What’s changing is that this desire for more purposeful travel is moving firmly into the mainstream. Today, adventure travel is active, immersive and experiential, with travellers looking for experiences that offer a “deeper insight into a destination” through local culture, expert guiding, storytelling or learning something new.

Across the ATN community, we’re seeing travellers move beyond simply seeing a destination to becoming part of the experience. They want to get under the skin of a place – exploring its landscapes, meeting the people who live there, learning about its culture and traditions, discovering local food and hearing stories along the way. Learning holidays are also increasingly popular, from pottery and painting to cooking, SUP and kayaking. Travellers want to return home having learned something new, while gaining a better understanding of the place they’ve visited. Our recent ATN research into Indigenous tourism also highlighted a move away from staged experiences towards genuine cultural exchange, with local knowledge and communities at the heart of the experience. I expect this trend to accelerate in 2027 and beyond, as travel shifts from volume to value. Smaller groups, longer stays, expert-led experiences and stronger local connections can create greater value – not just for travellers, but for the communities and destinations they visit.”

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PRU GOUDIE

Director,
Adventure Travel Networking



Trend 6

Citizen Science



Today's travellers aren't just hiking, kayaking, or birdwatching, then moving on to the next itinerary item. They're also logging wildlife sightings, collecting water samples, and recording bird calls as active participants in their experiences through citizen science.

Though tourism was largely built around observation, travellers increasingly seek purpose alongside leisure. As awareness about biodiversity loss, the climate crisis, and environmental degradation grows, citizen science has become a natural way for people to meaningfully engage in place-based tourism. Recognising this opportunity, tour companies have started to incorporate citizen science activities into their itineraries, but this must be done with care, as noted by the Citizen Science Guidance and Implementation Toolkit (developed in partnership by Travel by B Corp and the NOVA School of Business and Economics).

The accessible handbook helps tour operators, hotels, and other travel brands responsibly embed citizen science into guest experiences by building meaningful scientific partnerships and designing activities without greenwashing.

While the data travellers collect legitimately moves the needle on field research, the value goes beyond science: These experiences strengthen connections between people and the places they visit, support conservation efforts, encourage longer stays, and offer a more robust appreciation for nature-based experiences.

After all, taking a hike through a lovely landscape is nice, but there's something next-level about tracking and logging the pawprints of a rarely seen animal walking the same path.



“Citizen science is emerging as a powerful trend in purposeful and nature-based travel. Travellers increasingly want to make a positive contribution to the places they visit, while destinations and researchers need more data to address biodiversity loss and other environmental challenges. By aligning traveller interests with scientific and conservation priorities, citizen science offers a credible, evidence-based approach to sustainability that delivers measurable outcomes. Rather than being passive visitors, travellers can actively contribute to conservation, research and local knowledge. When integrated seamlessly into nature-positive strategies and travel experiences and when aligned to credible NGOs or universities, citizen science can deepen engagement, strengthen destination stewardship and generate valuable data at a scale that would otherwise be difficult or costly to achieve. With billions of international and domestic travellers annually, even small participation rates could generate enormous scientific value. As more travel businesses adopt nature-positive strategies, citizen science provides a practical way to connect travellers with meaningful conservation outcomes. It enables guests to leave not only with memorable experiences, but also with the knowledge that they have made a genuine contribution to the places they visited. More information can be found in the [Travel by B Corp Citizen Science Toolkit](#).”



ROCHELLE TURNER
Co-chair,
Travel by B Corp



Trend 7

Earned Travel



Technology has made life remarkably easy: We order a package; it arrives on our doorstep. We open an app; someone delivers dinner. We seek new music; a curated list is suggested.

For years, consumers have been encouraged to pursue efficiency and conveniences. Today, algorithms instantaneously tell us where to eat, what to see, what to buy, and, increasingly, where to travel. But with this convenience comes a loss of serendipity, discovery, and personal agency that makes travel memorable.

Across all aspects of life, people are opting out of optimisation, and this is true in tourism as well. Take Black Tomato's Get Lost experiences, which are designed around uncertainty and self-reliance as travellers navigate remote landscapes using only a compass and a series of clues. Or Sawday's, which nudges travellers toward slower, independent travel through local recommendations, memorable accommodations, and self-directed discovery – even in popular destinations like Florence and Paris. From Chile to Sweden, travellers are booking darecations, looking for the unknown, and seeking activities designed around participation and serendipity rather than ease.

This isn't a rejection of technology outright but a new appreciation for experiences that require effort and engagement. Travellers yearn for uncurated moments and unengineered encounters; it's the discovery – and not only the destination – they're increasingly seeking. Those travel brands leaving room for unmapped exploration, human interaction, local knowledge, and unscripted opportunities served with a side of friction are well suited to take advantage of this trend.



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“The most memorable travel experiences rarely come from checking off famous sights – they come from unexpected conversations, learning a local skill, stumbling upon a neighbourhood festival, or discovering a place that wasn’t on the itinerary. Today’s travellers increasingly value stories they can tell over landmarks they can photograph. The role of destinations shouldn’t be to script these experiences, but to create the conditions for them to happen. That means investing in vibrant neighbourhoods, public spaces, local businesses and good mobility, rather than manufacturing ‘Instagram moments’. The best destinations act as facilitators, not directors. Experiences that require a little curiosity or effort – whether taking a local ferry, cycling to a village, joining a community event or hiking to a viewpoint – also naturally disperse visitors. They reward travellers with more authentic experiences while directing spending towards local communities, instead of concentrating it in already overcrowded tourism zones.

There are already some strong examples of this approach. Bhutan has shown that attracting fewer, higher-value visitors can create better outcomes than maximising arrivals. The Faroe Islands have demonstrated how involving visitors in conservation creates deeper engagement. Even cities like Copenhagen are increasingly rewarding visitors who explore sustainably rather than simply consuming attractions. Looking ahead to 2027 and beyond, I think we’ll see a shift from managing marketing budgets to managing value. Success will be measured less by visitor numbers and more by the benefits tourism creates for residents, businesses and visitors alike. The destinations that thrive will be those that optimise for memorable experiences and community wellbeing – not simply more arrivals.”

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DOUG LANSKY
Travel Industry Keynote Speaker,
Author and Tourism Expert





Force 3: Joy and Connection

"We are here to add what we can to life, not to get what we can from life." – William Osler

- Trend 8: The Joy Economy
- Trend 9: Storied Landscapes & Mystic Travel
- Trend 10: Female Narratives
- Trend 11: The Giving Journey

Trend 8

The Joy Economy



People have always travelled for fun and enjoyment, but today's travellers are taking this a step further by choosing experiences that simply feel delightful.

Not luxury or hedonism. Not Instagrammable happiness. But pure, true joy and human connection.

This makes sense: The world feels immensely heavy set against a backdrop of economic uncertainty, geopolitical instability, climate anxiety, and digital overwhelm. So, yes, people are intentionally searching for sources of positivity and opportunities for joy in all aspects of life, as evidenced by the increase in romantic storytelling, television shows centering happiness (like *Race Across the World* and *Clarkson's Farm*), and offline gatherings where people play board games and make art.

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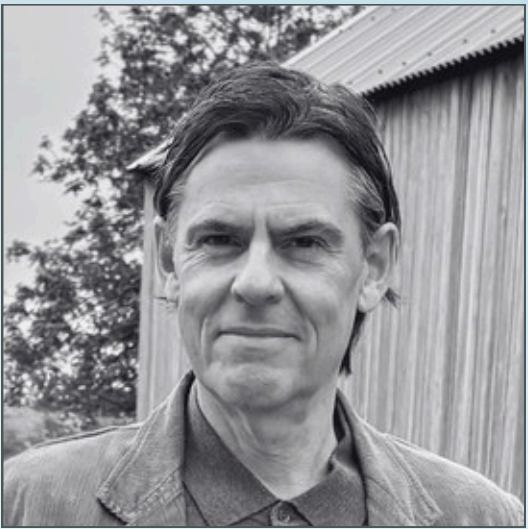
At a deeper level, travellers crave play, hope, and restoration. They seek genuine human interactions, joy over luxury, and encounters that delight and surprise – not complex transformation or achievement. The goal is not to disconnect from reality, but to reconnect with the parts of life that feel meaningful, uplifting, and emotionally nourishing. Travel has always promised escape, but the next wave is less about escaping life and more about feeling alive within it. Travel is becoming a form of emotional restoration.

For those working in tourism, this moment is an invitation to design less stressful experiences that leave travellers feeling restored rather than exhausted. We don't stumble upon optimism every day, but if we can help travellers feel like they've spent an hour with Ted Lasso, they just might believe the world is a happier place than it sometimes appears.

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“Travel can bring joy because it interrupts the familiar and opens us to the possibility of becoming someone slightly different. Joy is not simply pleasure. It is a deeper affirmation of life: the ability to say ‘yes’ to experience in all its unpredictability, difficulty and beauty. Nietzsche’s ‘joyful wisdom’, for example, invites us to embrace life rather than demand that it conform to our expectations. Travel offers a natural exercise in this kind of joy. We leave behind routines, roles and assumptions. We encounter unfamiliar streets, languages, landscapes and ways of living. Things do not always go according to plan. That can be liberating as much as it is disruptive. The missed train, the unexpected meal, the conversation with a stranger can become part of the adventure. Travel also gives us the opportunity to see ourselves from a different perspective. Away from home, we discover that many things we thought were essential are merely habitual. We become less fixed, more curious, more open to possibility. Perhaps the deepest joy of travel is not escape but affirmation: the feeling of being vividly alive, receptive to what is happening, and willing to say yes to the world as it is.”

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ROBERT ROWLAND SMITH
Co-founder,
Hotel Philosophy



Trend 9

Storied Landscapes & Mystic
Travel

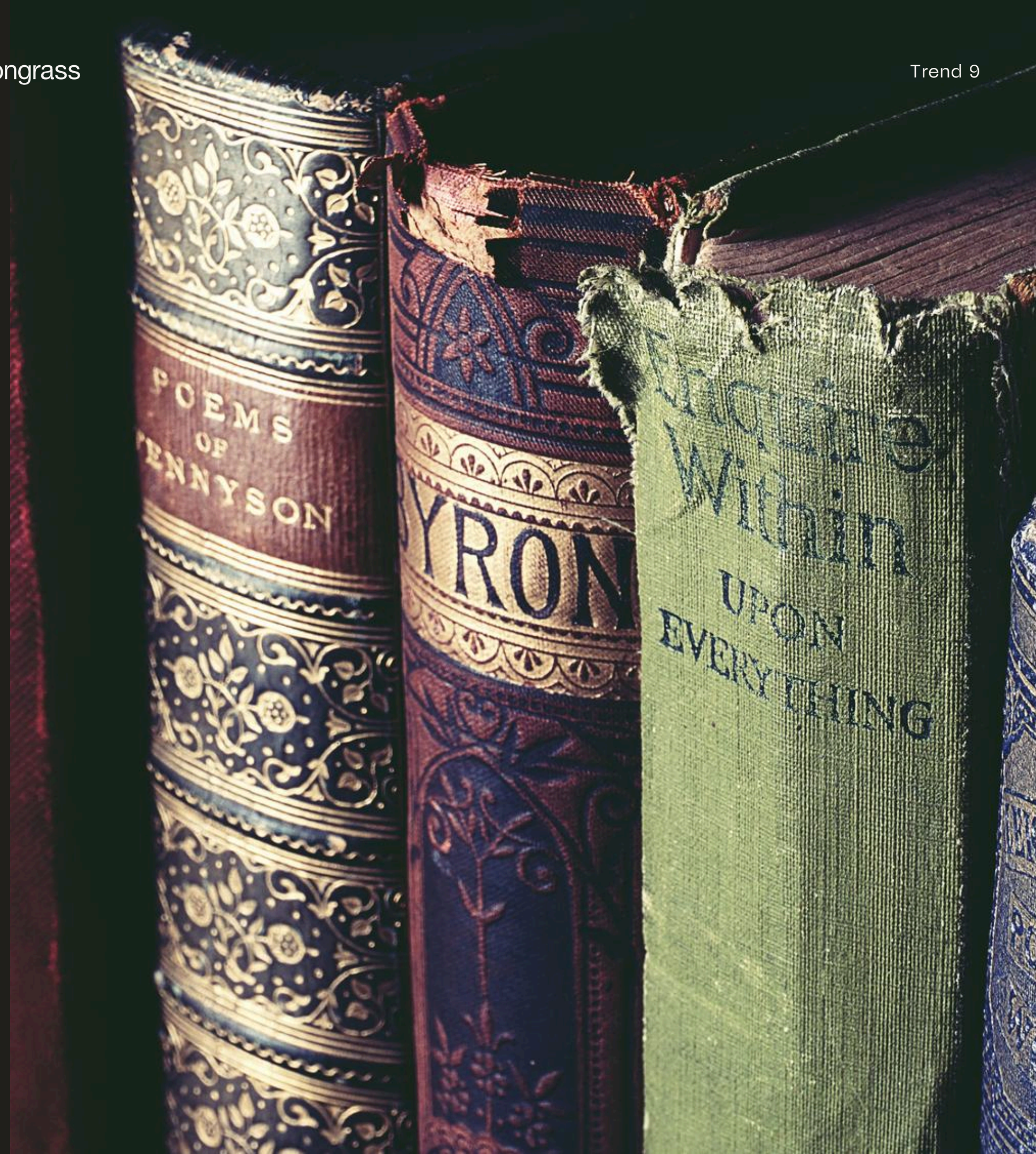


Mist-covered mountains and ancient forests have always been eye-catching, but they've made a more mainstream appearance lately.

Fantasy and folklore are enjoying a cultural resurgence, so it's little surprise people are stepping away from their screens and seeking out spaces and places laced with atmosphere, mystery, and magical worlds that help us make sense of real-life challenges. From dark skies and folklore-rich regions, the natural beauty is obviously a draw, but the appeal is really about emotional immersion in an alternative world.

Literary pilgrimages are as old as storytelling – from J.R.R. Tolkien and C.S. Lewis in Oxford to Che Guevara’s motorcycle journey across South America – but today’s travellers seek more than the destination. They’re more interested in the emotional role these ethereal landscapes play and the feelings of wonder and escapism they offer.

If ever there was doubt, this trend proves storytelling matters. VisitScotland’s Outlander campaign draws visitors into an emotional world supported through literature and screen storytelling. Namibia’s Kwessi Dunes Lodge takes advantage of its location in Africa’s first International Dark Sky Reserve with its open-air ‘stargazer rooms’. And, Budapest’s Kimpton BEM Hotel brings folklore to life with design elements inspired by Hungarian mythology.





Yes, historical accuracy and cultural heritage matter, but the real opportunity here is to bring places to life by instilling wonder through narrative: Think dark sky tourism, folklore-based experiences, immersive nature activities, and fantasy-related destinations with strong, immersive narratives ending in a happily ever after.

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“Bookshops are becoming a very different experience from what they were traditionally used for. We're seeing a rise in independent bookshops for the first time in decades because they're no longer just about buying a book, especially when online retailers can offer convenience and prices that independent bookshops could never compete with. In such an online world, people are craving connection and real-life experiences again. With 'Romantasy' taking the world by storm, readers don't just want to escape into these magical worlds; they want to experience a little bit of them in real life too. This growing appetite for the genre is already nudging readers toward more nature-focused holidays – whimsical forests, the Scottish Highlands, and old castle tours, all of which feel part of the magical worlds in our books. Zermatt in Switzerland, for example, is already regarded throughout the BookTok community as the real-life 'Velaris', the secret city from the Night Court in Sarah J. Maas's global book series. I think this will shape travel in 2027 and beyond, from bookish retreats and destination trips to cottagecore and faerie fashion inspired by the worlds readers love.”

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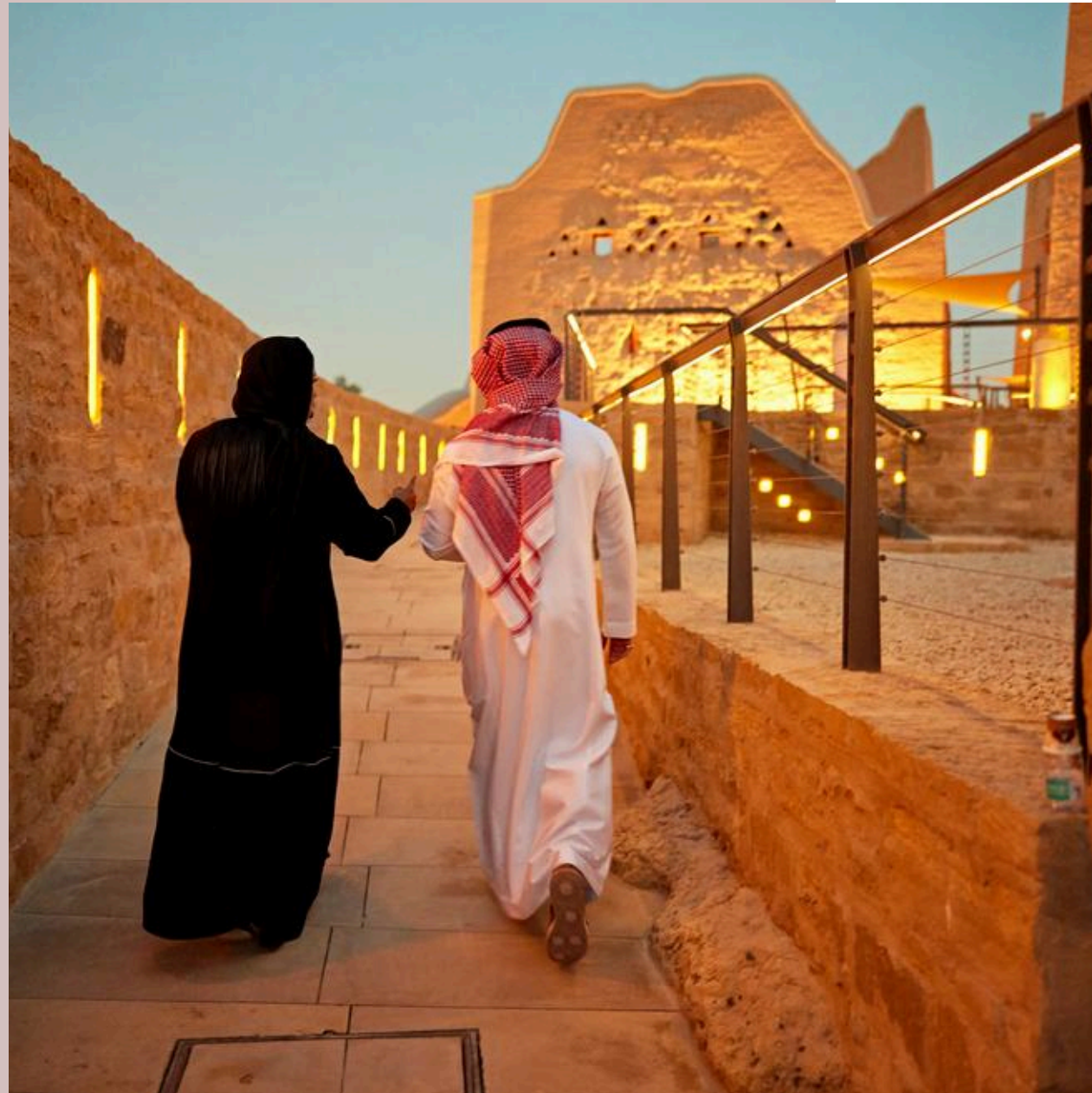


STARLIN MAROT
Owner,
Bad Girl Books



Trend 10

Female Narratives



For centuries, we travelled through spaces where stories were largely selected, recorded, and retold by men. Now, the narrator is changing.

As travellers seek a deeper understanding of the places they visit, attention is shifting from where we go to who helps us understand it. Increasingly, female voices are bringing different histories, experiences, and perspectives to the forefront.

Women who used to appear at the edges of the tourism narrative – guides, historians, conservationists, chefs, artists, makers, farmers, entrepreneurs, and community leaders – are now the protagonists. Their lived experiences reveal aspects of a destination that conventional guidebooks and itineraries have overlooked, while female-led organisations such as Women in Travel CIC and The Conscious Travel Foundation help create greater visibility and opportunity across the industry.





This isn't simply about the rise of travel for women. It's about experiencing the world through women's perspectives. As conversations around representation widen, travellers have grown curious about whose version of a place they are encountering: Who gets to tell its history? Who is shaping its culture today? And whose stories haven't yet been heard?

For tour operators, this creates an opportunity to reconsider the very authorship of an itinerary. Rather than simply adding female-led experiences to existing trips, seeking out female guides, experts, makers, and community figures offers a different narrative path into and throughout a destination. Geography becomes the setting while human experience is the reason to travel.

“Traditional travel storytelling has often reduced a destination to a list of what to see. So, naturally, travellers have focused on a checklist: historic landmarks, famous beaches, breathtaking views, and attention-grabbing spectacles, and paid far less attention to the lives of the people who actually shape those places. When I look back at the women I have interviewed this year – wildlife rangers, guides, divers, conservationists, entrepreneurs, hoteliers, community leaders and decision-makers – what strikes me is how their perspectives can uncover stories and dimensions of a place that have remained unseen in the past. I see a shift from consumption to connection. Travellers are eager to meet the people who give a destination meaning, learn skills directly from local artisans, and hear the stories that explain why a destination is what it is. Travellers may admire a building or a landscape, but they connect with people. And once that connection forms, they often care about the place long after they leave.”



EMESE MACZKO
Freelance Travel Writer,
Forbes



Trend 11

The Giving Journey



Beyond checking out key attractions, travellers say they want to “give back” when visiting places, but this is highly context-specific and difficult to navigate in an unfamiliar destination.

To bridge this gap, travel brands and hospitality businesses are working with a wide web of local partners to identify ways for guests to make a positive contribution during their stay.

Generally speaking, volunteering and civic participation are becoming increasingly mainstream – in fact, the United Nations designated 2026 the International Year of Volunteers for Sustainable Development – so the desire to offer a helping hand while travelling makes sense. However, it's important to note that, in the tourism context, this trend isn't about traditional voluntourism nor should every person volunteer while travelling. Rather, it highlights how hospitality businesses are thoughtfully creating space for guests to engage with existing local initiatives and conservation efforts, should they wish to do so.

Iberostar offers a blueprint for what this looks like through Wave of Change, which uses its award-winning marine biodiversity programme to educate guests about and engage with coral reef restoration and ocean conservation. Travel and hospitality brands play a key role in creating and guiding guests toward thoughtful, locally led opportunities like these that make doing good easy, credible, and genuinely beneficial.

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—— “ ——

“Tourism moves enormous amounts of money and connects people and places in a way few other industries can. With that comes a responsibility to ensure more of that value directly benefits the places, cultures, ecosystems and communities that make travel possible. At The Conscious Travel Foundation, we believe meaningful travel philanthropy begins with listening. The communities closest to the challenges are usually closest to the solutions, so support should respond to locally identified priorities rather than what a visitor or travel company assumes is needed. Done well, philanthropy can move beyond a transactional donation or feel-good addition to an itinerary and become part of a longer-term relationship between tourism businesses, travellers and the places in which they operate. Encouragingly, we are seeing more businesses consider philanthropy as part of how they operate, directing resources towards grassroots organisations, building long-term partnerships and trusting local leadership. If more of tourism’s value can be intentionally and responsibly directed towards locally led conservation and community priorities, travel can move beyond simply reducing harm and become a genuine contributor to stronger, more resilient destinations.”

—— ” ——



OLIVIA CRYER & MAUDIE TOMLINSON
Co-founders,
The Conscious Travel Foundation

“Over the past few years there’s been a definite shift from the ‘leave no trace’ ethos to positive-impact tourism – where travellers are encouraged to actively engage with and contribute to the destinations they visit on a deeper level. The voluntourism model has had its issues in the past, but what we’re seeing today is different. It’s a recognition both among mainstream travel brands and more travellers that holidays can be extractive endeavours, but efforts can be made to make your visit far more of an exchange – for both people and the planet. I don’t really see this as just a ‘giving’ trend, but more of an equitable relationship that’s developing between destinations and the people who visit them, and it’s been a long time coming. In the past year, National Geographic Traveller (UK) magazine has covered all sorts of initiatives that fall into this category, from beach clean-ups in Dubrovnik to coral planting in Raja Ampat and litter-picking kayak tours in Copenhagen. Through giving back, we gain a richer understanding of the places we visit and the people who inhabit them year-round. And in 2027, my prediction is that we’ll see more initiatives like this launching in all travel sectors.”



LORNA PARKES
Executive Editor,
National Geographic Traveller
(UK)





Force 4: Trust in an AI World

*"We know more than we can tell." – Michael Polanyi,
The Tacit Dimension*

- Trend 12: Epistemic Vigilance and the AI Trust Gap

Trend 12

Epistemic Vigilance and the
AI Trust Gap



With AI, it's possible to research a destination, compare hotels, and build a highly personalised itinerary in seconds.

What once required hours of searching, reading, and cross-referencing now appears neatly packaged after just a few keystrokes. But as answers become easier to generate, a harder question surfaces: Who – and what – can we trust?

This is epistemic vigilance: Our instinct to assess whether the information we're given is credible, reliable, and worth acting upon. In an age of AI-generated recommendations, synthetic imagery, sponsored content, and seemingly limitless information, travellers are more conscious of the gap between something that sounds authoritative and something grounded in real experiences.

That creates an interesting paradox for travel. AI can advise on where to stay, where to eat, and which neighbourhood to explore, but it has never slept in the room, walked the route, met the guide, or participated in the activity. As machine-generated knowledge becomes ubiquitous, first-hand human knowledge takes on greater importance.





This means that, for travel brands, trust is now a point of differentiation. Destinations can ensure authentic local voices and lesser-known experiences are represented in the information travellers encounter. Hotels can elevate the people who intimately know their neighbourhoods. And for tour operators, value shifts from simply providing information or assembling an itinerary to offering something harder to automate: judgement.

In today's travel environment, the most powerful reassurance is remarkably simple: We've been there. We know these people. We've had these experiences.

“

“AI is not replacing the need for travel expertise; it is increasing the need to know who and what we can trust. As information becomes abundant and increasingly synthesised by machines, travellers will need greater epistemic vigilance: the ability to distinguish credible knowledge from confident-sounding information. That makes human judgement, first-hand expertise and good journalism more valuable, not less. Destinations, hotels and tour operators have a role in ensuring that accurate local knowledge and nuanced stories exist for AI to draw upon. Journalists and storytellers will matter even more because they ask questions, verify claims, add context and surface perspectives that may otherwise disappear. In an age of almost limitless information, trust may become travel’s real currency. The brands that matter will be those whose knowledge, judgement and stories are worth believing.”

”



MIRJAM PETERNEK MCCARTNEY
Founder & CEO,
Lemongrass Marketing



“Some in this industry still confuse information with knowledge. AI has made information abundant and cheap, but judgement remains scarce. I watched this play out over 4,000 kilometres this summer, cycling self-supported from Rovereto in Italy to Nordkapp in Norway. I had the full digital arsenal: GPS routing, weather models, live tracking, real-time occupancy and rates for my upcoming bookings. All of this is useful surely, but none of it was what made the ride work. The decisions that mattered came from people – the guesthouse owner who cooked an extra meal because she knew the road ahead was hard, the rider coming the other way who warned me about roadworks, the gas station attendant in Lapland (where it was cold and rainy) who knew the only hot coffee for the next eighty kilometres was in a teepee beside the track. So, yes, the algorithm had the road, but the people had the conditions. Those models are trained on the past while people live in the present. That gap is where trust is made. Which is why human experience is not a marketing angle laid over an AI stack. It is the operating model of genuine hospitality. Everything else is the add-on.”



PROF. DR. WILLY LEGRAND

Department of Tourism, Hospitality and
Event Management | IU International
University of Applied Sciences





BETTER

Force 5: Intentional Consumption

Dieter Rams' tenth principle: "Less, but better." -

Dieter Rams, 1995

- Trend 13: Luxury's Great Trade-Off
- Trend 14: Journeys Without Sacrifice or Sermon
- Trend 15: Near is the New Far

Trend 13

Luxury’s Great Trade-Off



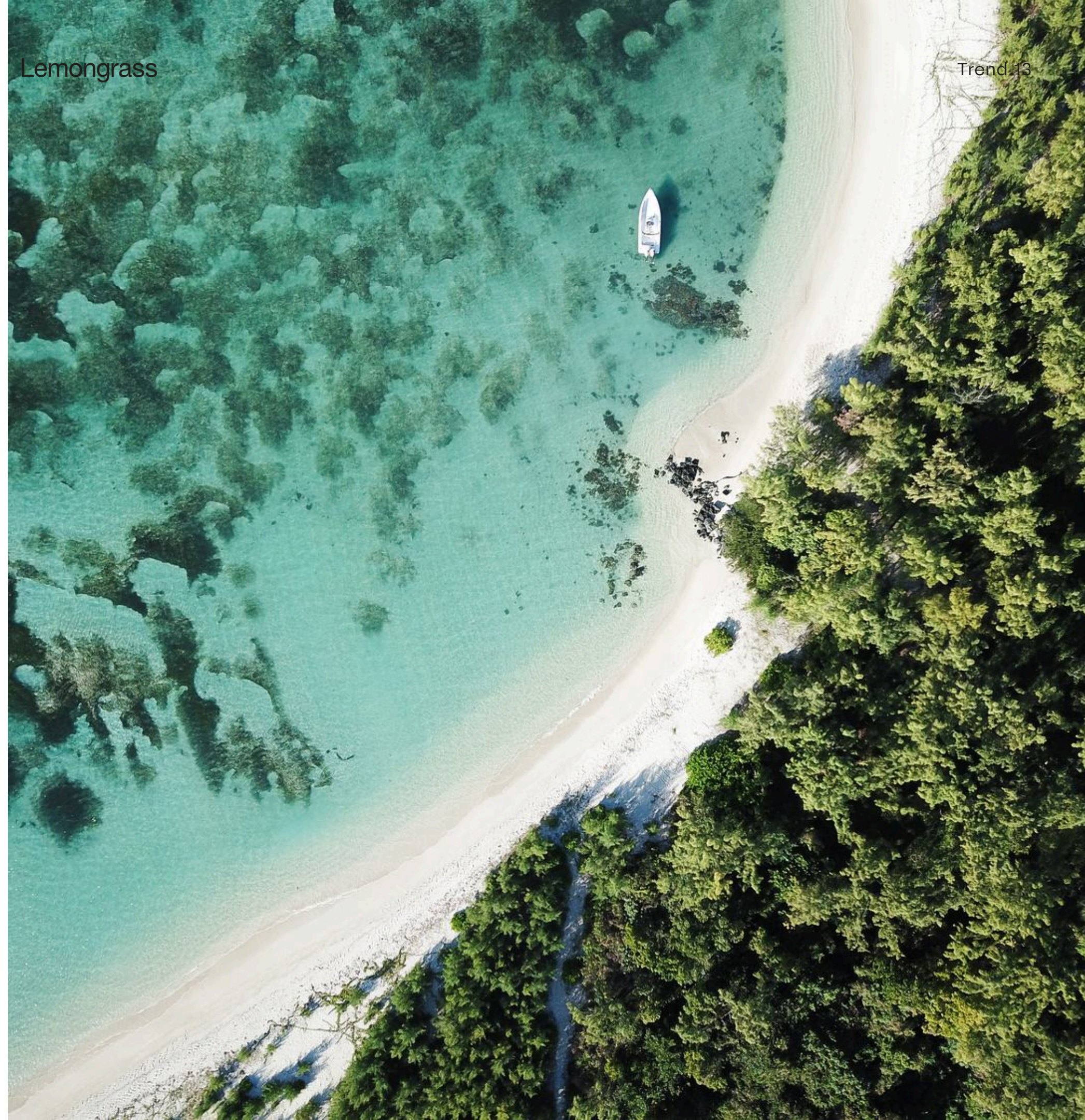
Years of inflation, rising travel costs, and economic uncertainty have finally caught up with the luxury niche of tourism.

While “luxury” has always meant different things to different people, the idea of upgrading and maximising everything is shifting toward becoming more selective. At the top of the market, ultra-high net-worth travellers remain insulated from economic pressures. But for everyone else, luxury increasingly requires strategic decision making that combines pricey purchases with inexpensive alternatives: flying economy while staying in a top-tier hotel, booking a boutique apartment but splurging on a Michelin-starred meal, or taking one exceptional holiday over several average ones, for example.

To be clear, luxury isn't disappearing, and people still want quality travel experiences, but it is becoming more intentional, and travellers are more deliberate about how they allocate their spending. This means luxury has also taken on a level of personalisation and reallocation as defined by where people want to splurge. Consider the fact airlines are now competing by designing exceptional experiences for big spenders. Additionally, with the proliferation of bucket list experiences, embedded emotional value has taken on a deeper meaning. Understanding where travellers are willing to trade down and where they refuse to compromise – and being able to meet them where they're at – will become an important competitive advantage in the coming year.

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Trend 13



“We’re seeing luxury become much more intentional. Travellers aren’t necessarily spending less, but they are thinking more carefully about where they choose to invest and prioritising the parts of a trip that create the greatest emotional return. There is a growing premium on access, whether that is to people, expertise, private experiences or places that feel genuinely special. That might mean compromising on one element of a trip to invest more heavily in another. For brands, the key is understanding what each individual traveller truly values and what they refuse to compromise on. Ultimately, luxury is becoming less about having the most of everything and more about having exactly what matters to you.”



CHRISTY KUPLIC
Managing Director,
Private Luxury Events



Trend 14

Journeys Without Sacrifice
or Sermon



For years, responsible travel was often framed around compromise.

Travellers were encouraged to choose the greener option, even if it meant sacrificing time, spending more, or giving something up along the way. That narrative is beginning to change.

Take rail travel: Once viewed primarily as the sustainable alternative to flying, it's increasingly being chosen because the journey itself is better. Between airport congestion, security queues, and stressful connections, air travel has lost much of its appeal. Trains, meanwhile, offer comfort, flexibility, scenery, and a stronger connection to the places in between. Look no further than Belmond's Britannic Explorer or Orient Express La Dolce Vita, both of which position the appealing rail journey as part of the experience rather than simply a means of getting from A to B.

This reflects a broader shift in how sustainability is perceived. The most sustainable option increasingly wins, not because it is morally superior, but because it delivers the better overall experience. Consumers rarely choose inconvenience, but they will happily choose something calmer, richer, and more enjoyable.

For rail operators and slow travel providers, this marks an important turning point: You're no longer the alternative; you're increasingly becoming the first choice. Regional destinations also stand to benefit as travellers embrace slower, multi-stop journeys and discover places they might otherwise have passed through.



—— ” ——

“We feel this trend on every crossing. SailLink is the first sailing ferry between Dover and Boulogne-sur-Mer, wind and tide across the Channel, and our passengers tell us exactly what the shift sounds like. Some book us for the low-carbon choice first. But most come for the crossing itself. Not two hours of check-in and a grey terminal, but the open water the moment you step aboard: salt in the air, the wind doing most of the work, the coast slipping away behind us.

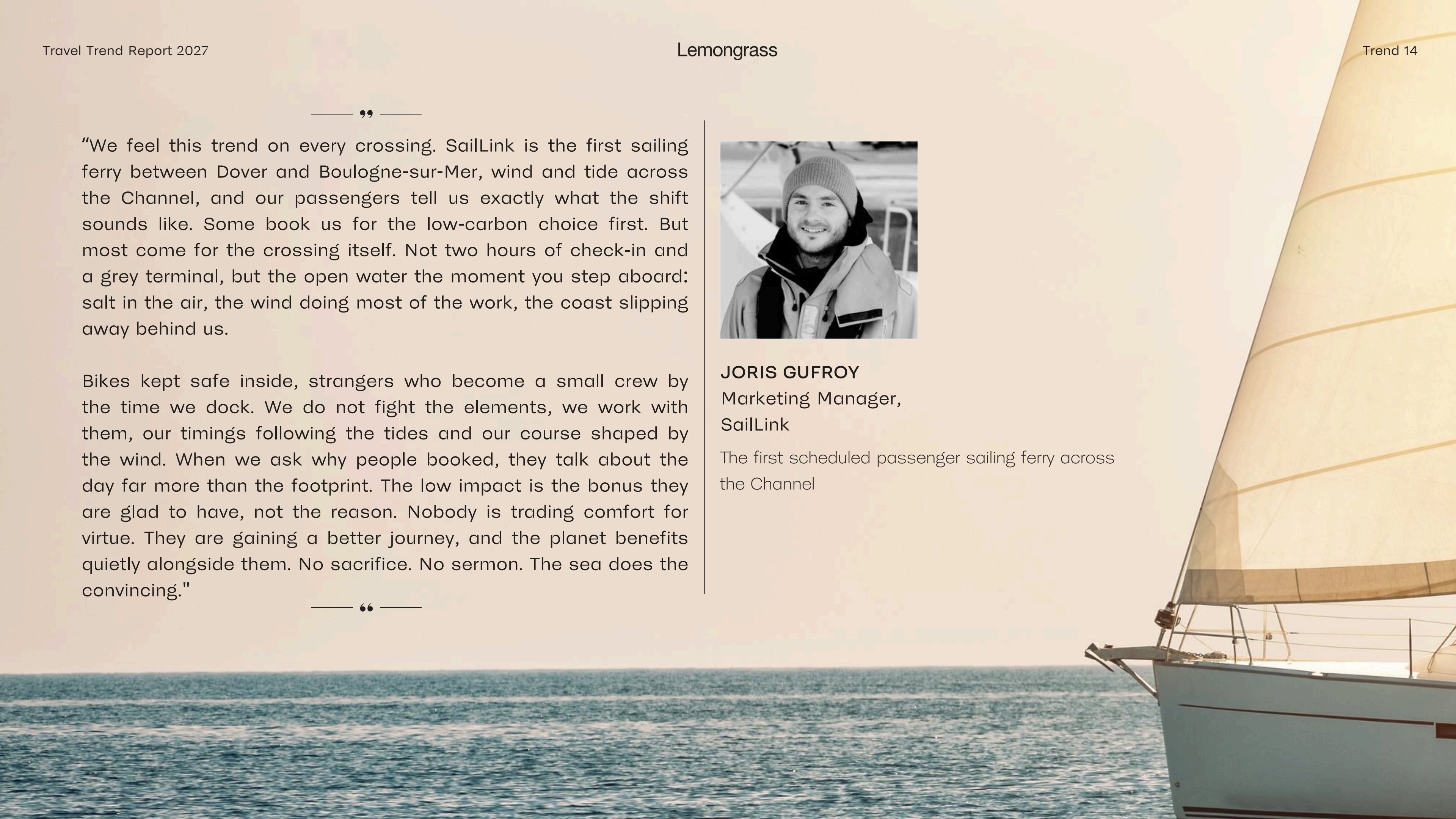
Bikes kept safe inside, strangers who become a small crew by the time we dock. We do not fight the elements, we work with them, our timings following the tides and our course shaped by the wind. When we ask why people booked, they talk about the day far more than the footprint. The low impact is the bonus they are glad to have, not the reason. Nobody is trading comfort for virtue. They are gaining a better journey, and the planet benefits quietly alongside them. No sacrifice. No sermon. The sea does the convincing.”

—— “ ——



JORIS GUFROY
Marketing Manager,
SailLink

The first scheduled passenger sailing ferry across the Channel



”

“At Equator, we’ve long advocated that the way sustainability ultimately wins isn’t in subtraction or making the traveller feel like they need to sacrifice any aspect of their trip to do good – it’s in the story. A story that weaves impact seamlessly into the aspirations of your ideal customer. Do they love art and culture? Tell them about the local artisans or the endangered languages they’re helping to preserve by visiting a particular region. Most responsible and slow travel operators are sitting on more of that story than they’re currently using, one grounded in real numbers about the jobs, livelihoods and communities their trips support. Someone willing to spend three days on a train instead of three hours on a plane cares about depth and immersion. So give them something meaningful that makes them feel like a hero for being your customer. That story only lands if it’s true, and proving it true starts with data. That’s how you can win over someone else’s customer (the one currently on the plane or the cruise): by giving them a better and more compelling reason to choose you instead.”

“

MAYA HUNEIDI
Co-founder,
Equator



Trend 15

Near is the New Far



The travel industry has long celebrated distance as a marker of aspiration. The further away a destination was, the more desirable it often seemed.

Increasingly, travellers are questioning that equation. As time becomes more precious and uncertainty becomes more common, convenience, accessibility, and flexibility are becoming part of the value proposition. Travellers are discovering that meaningful experiences don't always require crossing continents, which makes short-haul destinations, domestic breaks, and regional journeys more appealing than ever. In fact, 43% of UK adults are choosing domestic holidays instead of travelling abroad this year.

The travel-related winners? Staycations, rail-based trips, and nearby international destinations offering shorter lead times, lower risk, and greater flexibility. This is the moment domestic tourism, shoulder-season destinations, flexible booking platforms, and rail travel operators have been waiting for.

After a boom in international travel after the COVID-19 pandemic, people are scaling back. This isn't necessarily a retreat from travel, but more a recalibration of value, appeal, and intentionality. Convenience and regional discovery are suddenly sexy, signalling a potential long-term behavioural shift favouring inter-regional travel. Perhaps the greatest luxury is knowing you can leave Friday morning and be immersed in a completely different environment by lunchtime.



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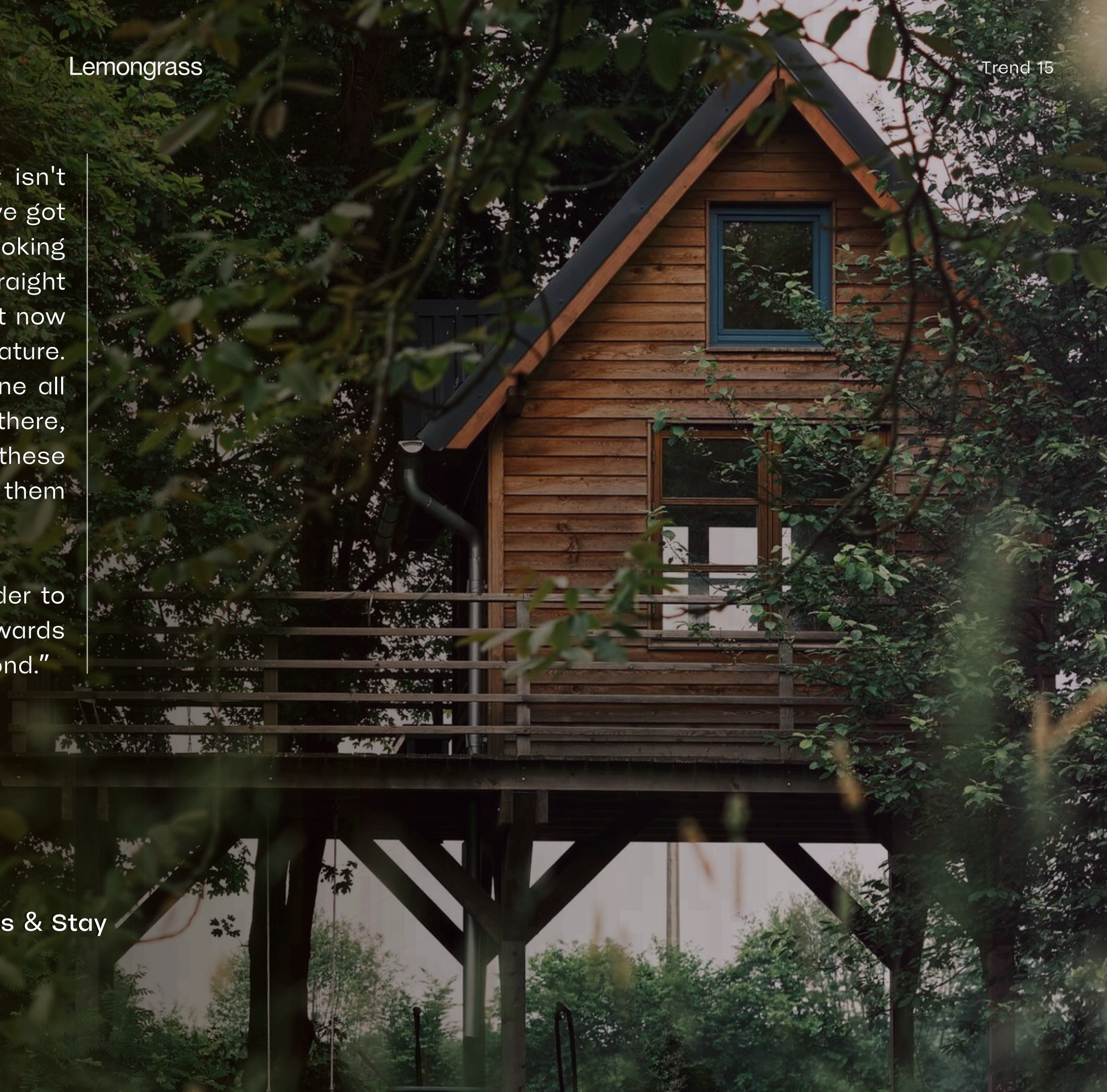
“The shift towards close-to-home escapes is real, and it isn't slowing down. People no longer need distance to feel they've got away. Over the past few years, the market has been booking much later and stays have become shorter, which plays straight into the hands of places closer to home. What people want now is time outdoors, a reset and a proper reconnection with nature. A cabin, a shepherd's hut or a treehouse can give someone all of this just a short distance from home, and once they're there, they relax into it immediately. We're seeing guests choose these breaks for the feeling as much as the place, and take them more often.

As flying gets pricier, its environmental cost becoming harder to ignore and time growing tighter, I'd expect that pull towards nature nearby to shape British travel through 2027 and beyond.”

—— ” ——



MIKE BEVENS
Group Managing Director,
Sawday's, Canopy & Stars, Paws & Stay



Conclusion



Looking back across these fifteen trends, one thing becomes clear: none of them stands alone.

The traveller seeking nervous system restoration is often the same traveller choosing slower journeys. The person craving intellectual depth is also looking for trustworthy expertise. The rise of AI increases the value of human judgement. Joy, connection, and meaning become increasingly important precisely because uncertainty has become such a defining feature of modern life. These are not isolated consumer preferences. They are interconnected responses to the same cultural conditions.

That is perhaps the most important insight in this report: Trends are rarely independent. They behave more like living systems. Strengthen one force and others begin to shift alongside it. Ignore one and the effects ripple much further than expected. That is why we believe the future of travel won't be defined by technology alone, nor by sustainability, luxury, or wellness in isolation. It will be shaped by the way these forces interact and by the brands tuned into those connections.

Ultimately, this is an optimistic report. Despite global uncertainty, travellers aren't retreating. They're recalibrating. They're choosing depth over volume, restoration over optimisation, trust over noise, and connection over consumption. Perhaps that's the most hopeful trend of all.



Thanks for reading. We're always curious to hear how these trends are shaping travel for you – get in touch and tell us.

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Lemongrass Marketing helps travel brands get found, be trusted and get booked.

Lemongrass Marketing is an award-winning communications agency for travel, hospitality and wellness brands. The way people choose where to travel has changed. They might ask AI, read a magazine article, search on Google, watch a video or follow a recommendation on social media. Often, they will do several of these things before they book.

Lemongrass Marketing brings PR, digital PR, SEO, AI visibility, content and creator marketing together in one strategy, helping travel brands show up in the right places with a clear and trusted story – so more people can find them, trust them and ultimately book with them.

A certified B Corp[™] and two-time Sunday Times Best Places to Work winner, Lemongrass Marketing has spent 20 years helping travel brands grow in ways that are good for business, people and place.



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