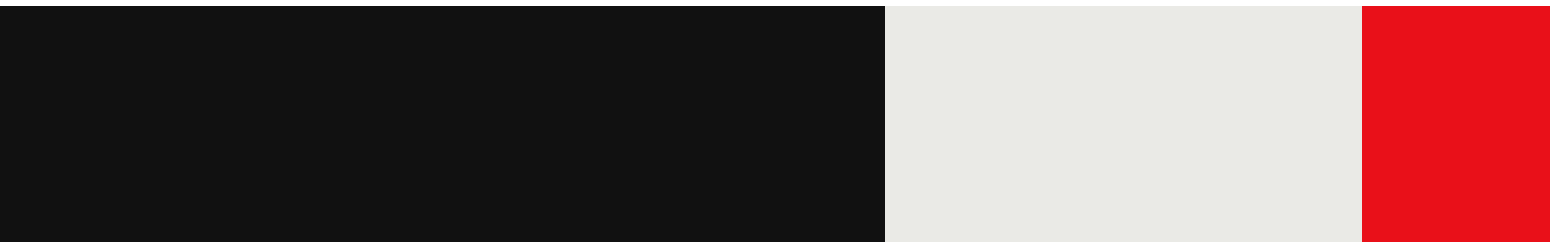



The 2025 travel trends issuers need to know

Article



The data: As with the rest of the economy, the travel sector has whipsawed with uncertainty. In February, [hotel and lodging companies forecast strong growth](#) and ambitious expansion projects for 2025. But just this week, [airlines slashed their forecasts](#) across the board and trimmed capacity as fears of a slowdown took hold.

Barring a recession, consumers still have big travel ambitions this year. Globally, **77% of respondents plan to go on as many or more international trips** as they did in 2024, per American Express Travel's [2025 Global Travel Trends Report](#). Understanding the key trends shaping travel this year can help issuers tailor their offerings to win more travel volume.

Below, we look at the key trends identified in Amex’s report and illustrate how issuers can respond to maximize their travel spend.

“Memorable mementos” over souvenirs: Millennials and Gen Zers are [driving the era of “authentic, off-the-path” travel](#), per Bookings.com.

Not only are they searching for non-touristy destinations, but they also want to take home similarly authentic memorabilia: The overwhelming majority (82%) of these travelers look for goods that are unique, handmade, and authentic—what Amex Travel calls “memorable mementos.”

That can be a big problem for issuers—especially the likes of **Amex** and **Discover** that already have a reputation for more limited international acceptance than **Visa** and **Mastercard**.

- Unique and handmade often means small and even micro-business—which are less likely to accept credit cards at all.
- Credit cards made up **just 25% of all POS transactions** globally in 2024, per [Worldpay](#).

Money talks—so do rewards: Redeeming points has always been a big part of vacation planning, but as consumers tighten their budgets, the deciding factor often comes down to maximizing their perks, particularly for younger consumers.

- 45% of travelers pick their vacation destinations based on where their credit card points offer the best deal, per Amex.
- And Gen Zers and millennials are almost twice as likely as Gen X and boomers to maximize their rewards potential by stacking credit card points with other loyalty programs, at 61% and 36%, respectively, per Amex.

Our take: With these trends in mind, issuers can adjust their strategies to offer the greatest value to consumers as many start to pull back on nonessential spending.

- Issuers can offer fee-free ATM withdrawals abroad so that consumers feel incentivized to fund their purchases with their credit card even where merchants only accept cash.
- Issuers can also offer boosted rewards redemption to off-the-beaten-path destinations that are becoming more attractive to younger consumers, rather than trying to compete on price for the biggest tourist cities.

Travelers Look for Savings by Using Credit Card Rewards

% of credit card holders worldwide* who plan on using select methods to save on travel, Jan 2025

Combine credit card rewards with other loyalty perks to provide "the best value for international trips"

66%

Stack travel benefits from multiple loyalty programs to get upgrades they wouldn't have splurged on otherwise

58%

Use credit card/travel points on trips in 2025

50%

Choose their travel destination based on where they can best utilize credit card points

45%

Book a 2025 vacation once they've earned a specific amount of credit card or loyalty points

43%

Note: ages 13-79 with a \$50K+ income equivalent who travel at least once a year; *India, Australia, Canada, Japan, Mexico, the UK, and the US

Source: American Express Travel, "2025 Global Travel Trends Report," March 13, 2025

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Go deeper: [Check out our Airline and Hotel Co-Brand Credit Cards report](#) for more insights on how issuers and travel brands can maximize their appeal to the next generation of travelers.