

SAS

Travel Trends 2026

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Preface

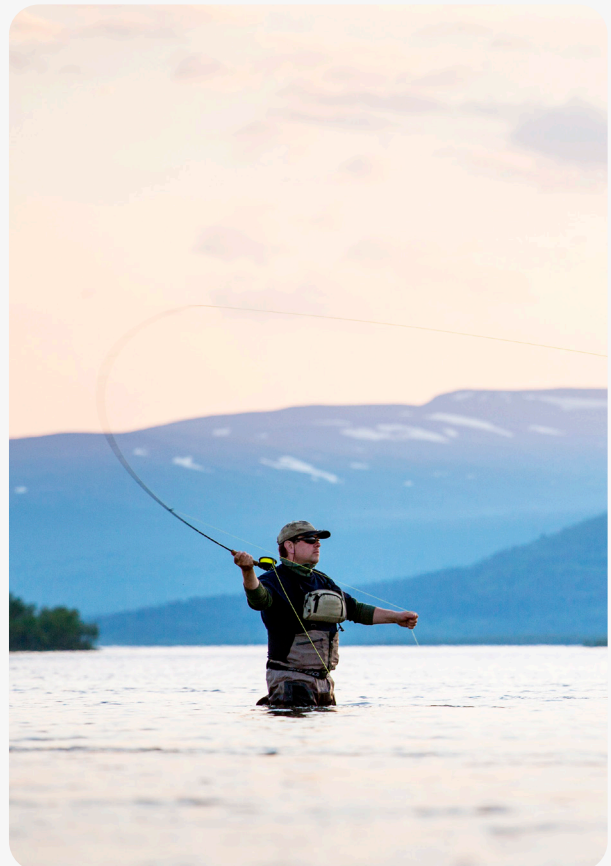
The global travel landscape is evolving at an unprecedented pace, shaped by shifting consumer preferences, technological advancements, and dynamic economic conditions. As an airline committed to connecting people and places, we recognize the importance of understanding these changes to better serve our passengers and partners.

This report provides an analysis of current and emerging travel trends, drawing data from our network operations, customer insights, and industry benchmarks. Our goal is to offer a clear perspective on how travelers' behaviors, expectations, and priorities are transforming – and what these developments mean for the future of air travel.

By sharing these findings, we support informed decision-making across the travel ecosystem and inspire innovative solutions that enhance the passenger experience. We invite you to explore the insights presented here and join us in shaping the next chapter of global mobility.

The following trends for 2026 have been identified:

- Self-care
- Heading North
- Flexcation
- Destination dupes
- Baecation



What are travel trends?

Travel trends can be defined as:

Patterns and shifts in traveler behavior, preferences, and choices over time, influenced by social, economic, technological, and environmental factors

From an airline's perspective, this includes measurable changes in:

- Where people travel (destination popularity)
- Why they travel (business, leisure etc.)
- What they value (price, comfort, sustainability, digital convenience)

A travel trend may begin as a niche of travel behavior with limited adoption. However, growing interest among travelers can transform it into a significant and influential segment of the overall travel market.

These trends are identified through data analysis (booking systems, loyalty programs), market research, and external factors like global events or cultural movements.



Photo credit: Joel Sparks

Trend 1: Self-care

Self-care travel refers to trips designed to prioritize personal well-being, relaxation, and mental health. Unlike traditional vacations focused on sightseeing or adventure, self-care travel emphasizes restorative experiences that help travelers disconnect from stress and recharge physically and emotionally.

Self-care travel can take many forms. One common approach is traditional wellness tourism, where the destination itself is a commercial venue such as a spa, resort, or retreat designed to promote relaxation and well-being. It can also involve travel experiences designed to fulfill specific personal interests or desires, such as culinary tours, cultural immersion, or adventure activities.

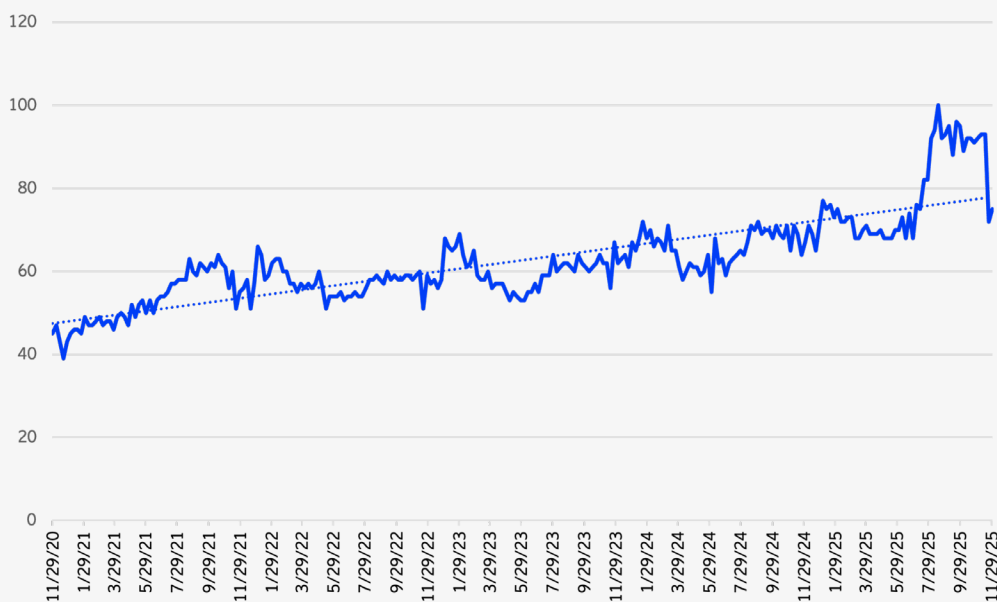
This trend is closely linked to trend 2 in this report called “Heading North”. The travelers’ motivation for going to Northern destinations can be to seek calmness, also called “quietcations”, “silent travel” or “sleep tourism”.

Indicators

SAS has experienced significant increases in demand for travel to countries that have a strong wellness brand like Hungary and Italy. Also, the hospitality sector reports an increase in these types of travel.

There has been a huge increase in Google searches for the word “Wellness” the last five years that indicates a growing interest:

Figure 1. Google searches for “Wellness” globally



Source: Google Trends

Why is this a trend?

Self-care travel has gained momentum due to a combination of social and cultural shifts that prioritize health, well-being, and balance. Several factors contribute to this rise:

1. Increased Focus on Mental Health

Growing awareness of stress, burnout, and mental health challenges has led travelers to seek restorative experiences rather than purely recreational trips.

2. Post-Pandemic Lifestyle Changes

The COVID-19 pandemic reshaped priorities, with many people valuing personal wellness and meaningful experiences over traditional sightseeing or high-paced itineraries.

3. Demand for Authentic and Purposeful Travel

Travelers increasingly want trips that offer emotional and physical benefits, such as relaxation, mindfulness, and reconnection with nature.

4. Integration of Wellness into Everyday Life

As wellness becomes a mainstream lifestyle choice, travelers expect destinations and airlines to support this through healthier options, flexible schedules, and stress-free journeys.

5. Social Media Influence

Platforms amplify the appeal of wellness retreats, spa destinations, and mindfulness escapes, making self-care travel aspirational and widely visible.

Scandinavian offerings

Scandinavia offers a variety of destinations ideal for self-care, ranging from serene natural landscapes to vibrant city escapes, tailored to suit every traveler's preference.



Trend 2: Heading North

Travelers are increasingly drawn to northern destinations – regions known for their natural beauty, unique cultural experiences, and seasonal contrasts.

Indicator

SAS has experienced a more than 10% increase in passengers to Northern destinations in the last year.

Why is this a trend?

Northern destinations gain popularity for several reasons:

1. Climate Appeal

Cooler climates are becoming more attractive as travelers look for alternatives to crowded, hot-weather destinations.

2. Nature

Northern regions often offer pristine landscapes, outdoor activities, and eco-friendly tourism options.

3. Unique Experiences

Activities such as Northern Lights viewing, Arctic cruises, and wildlife encounters provide distinctive experiences that cannot be replicated elsewhere.

4. Cultural Curiosity

Interest in Nordic traditions, local cuisine, and heritage tourism is fueling demand for destinations in Scandinavia, Iceland, and the Arctic.

Scandinavian offerings

By definition, Scandinavia offers numerous options for those seeking northern destinations. These include Svalbard, located north of the Arctic Circle, and even Greenland—though technically not part of Scandinavia. Both Norway and Sweden feature many fascinating northern locations worth exploring.

Trend 3: Flexcation

A flexcation is a travel trend where people combine work (business) and leisure (vacation) into a single trip. The term comes from “flexible” and “vacation,” reflecting the rise of remote work and flexible schedules.

Instead of taking a traditional vacation where travelers completely disconnect from work, a flexcation allows travelers to:

- Work remotely from a destination (often somewhere relaxing or scenic).
- Extend one's stay beyond the typical business trip or short vacation.
- Blend productivity and leisure, so the traveler can enjoy local experiences during off-hours.

Indicator

SAS has seen an increase in business travelers departing or arriving on Saturdays and Sundays – a clear sign that many are extending their trips for leisure. Additionally, our travel partners report a growing trend of combining business and leisure travel.

Why is this a trend?

Flexcations have become a trend for several reasons:

1. Rise of Remote Work

The pandemic normalized working from anywhere. Many companies now allow hybrid or fully remote setups, making it easier for employees to work while traveling.

2. Desire for Work-Life Balance

People want to escape routine and enjoy new environments without sacrificing productivity. A flexcation offers a way to recharge without taking extended time off.

3. Longer Stays & Cost Efficiency

Travelers often extend trips beyond a typical vacation because they can work during weekdays and explore during evenings or weekends. This spreads travel costs over more days, making it feel more worthwhile.

4. Mental Health & Well-being

Changing scenery can reduce burnout and boost creativity. Being in a relaxing location while working can improve overall happiness and job satisfaction.

5. Technology Makes It Possible

Reliable Wi-Fi, collaboration tools, and cloud services mean work can happen almost anywhere.

6. Travel Industry Support

Hotels, resorts, and Airbnb now market “work-friendly” stays with office setups, strong internet, and discounts for longer bookings.

Scandinavian offerings

In Scandinavia, nature acts as a productivity booster rather than a backdrop. Access to nature is not an occasional escape but part of everyday life. Cities are designed with close proximity to green spaces, coastlines, forests, and open landscapes, allowing travelers to move seamlessly from work mode into restorative environments.

This easy access to calm, clean, and uncrowded surroundings helps reduce stress and mental fatigue after working hours. Time spent outdoors – whether it is a walk along the waterfront, a swim, or a hike – supports mental well-being, sharpens focus, and stimulates creativity. For flexcation travelers, this balance between productivity and recovery enables more sustainable and enduring ways of working while traveling.

Trend 4: Destination dupes

Destination dupes are alternative travel destinations that offer a similar vibe, scenery, or cultural experience to a popular hotspot – but with lower costs, fewer crowds, and often a more authentic feel.

SAS reported last year that this travel behavior was on the rise, and the trend is expected to continue in 2026 with growing interest in lesser-known destinations.

Indicator

SAS now serves more destinations with fewer than 5,000 annual passengers, signaling a growing interest in off-the-beaten-path locations.

Why is this a trend?

There are a number of reasons why this trend is gaining popularity:

1. Cost Savings

Travelers save significantly on lodging, food, attractions, and tourist fees—often hundreds to thousands of euros per trip.

2. Avoiding Overtourism

Iconic hotspots like Venice or Santorini—struggling under massive crowds—are losing their appeal for many.

Dupes help distribute tourist footfall more sustainably and relieve strain on infrastructure.

3. Desire for Authenticity

Dupes often offer a richer local experience and more genuine cultural interaction than heavily touristed cities.

4. Influence of Social Media

Platforms like TikTok and Instagram have accelerated awareness—view counts for “dupe” travel content have surged 5× in some regions.

Younger generations (Gen Z, Millennials) are increasingly seeking budget-friendly, off-the-beaten-path destinations.

Scandinavian offerings

Scandinavia is home to many lesser known yet remarkable destinations worth exploring, such as Aarhus and Aalborg in Denmark, Trondheim and Bergen in Norway, and Malmö and Gothenburg in Sweden.

Trend 5: Baecation

A baecation is a slang term for a vacation taken with your romantic partner (“bae” = “before anyone else”). It’s all about spending quality time together, often in a romantic or relaxing setting – think beach resorts, city getaways, or adventure trips designed for couples.

Traveling with a spouse has always been popular, but over the past 10–15 years, other trends – such as solo travel and multi-generational trips – have gained traction. Now, with the rise of baecations, romantic couple getaways appear to be making a comeback.

Indicator

This year, SAS has seen a higher proportion of leisure travelers booking for two people compared to last year.

Why is this a trend?

1. Rise of Experience-Driven Travel

Couples increasingly value shared experiences over material gifts. Traveling together creates memorable moments and strengthens relationships.

2. Social Media Influence

Platforms like Instagram and TikTok amplify the idea of “relationship goals,” making romantic getaways aspirational and highly shareable.

3. Post-Pandemic Priorities

After years of restrictions, people want to reconnect and celebrate intimacy—baecations offer a way to do that in a special setting.

4. Industry Support

Hotels, resorts, and travel brands now market packages specifically for couples, often with perks like spa treatments, private dining, and romantic excursions

Scandinavian offerings

Scandinavia offers a wide range of destinations for couples, whether they prefer nature or city experiences. For those drawn to the outdoors, Norway’s fjords and Sweden’s lakes provide peaceful settings for hiking, boating, or simply enjoying the scenery together. If urban life is more appealing, cities like Copenhagen, Stockholm, and Oslo offer cultural attractions, cozy cafés, and vibrant neighborhoods to explore. Smaller cities such as Aarhus, Gothenburg, and Bergen combine charm with accessibility, making them ideal for a relaxed getaway. This diversity means couples can easily tailor their trip to match their interests, from quiet retreats to lively city breaks.