



Living for today:

How UK holidaymakers are planning their travel in 2026





Executive summary:

Travel plans show UK residents are living life for today

Travel remains a major priority for how people spend their money in 2026. New research shows that many UK residents are choosing to spend their money on trips and experiences instead of holding back for later life or inheritance. Across all age groups surveyed (18+), holidays are increasingly shaped by personal interests and passions, with many people actively planning trips around what they enjoy most, their family circumstances, and how they want to spend their time.

The findings come from a **nationally representative survey of over 2,000 UK adults**, carried out by YouGov and commissioned by Immediate, home to some of the UK's best loved brands including *Radio Times*, *Good Food* and *HistoryExtra*. The research explores **travel plans and preferences for 2026**, including spending intentions, preferred types of holidays, and attitudes towards enjoyment, passion, and inheritance.

One theme runs clearly through the data: comfort with spending increases as life stage changes. Among respondents with children aged 18 and over, **68% say they feel more comfortable spending money on themselves** now that their **children are older or independent**. This increased sense of financial freedom helps explain why travel holds such a strong place in household budgets.

In fact, respondents aged over 55 are planning to take more holidays in 2026 than younger age groups. This group also demonstrates sustained spending power, and a strong willingness and capacity to invest in longer, higher-value travel. This trend is reflected more broadly in national spending data. Analysis from Barclays shows that consumer spending among those **aged 65 and over grew by 8.7% in 2024**, the highest growth of any age group, underlining the increasing economic influence of older consumers.



We found that among over-55s:



30% plan to spend more than £2,000 per person on trips lasting six days or more (compared to 20% of 18-34 year olds and 18% of 35-54 year olds)



Of those with children over the age of 18, **70% say they feel more comfortable spending money on themselves**



Only 13% report feeling guilty about luxury travel

National views on inheritance help add context to this behaviour. **More than half of all respondents (55%)** say they would rather **spend money on shared family experiences** than leave more as inheritance.

Taken together, the findings point to travel being an outlet for people **using their money to enjoy the present**. This whitepaper looks at those attitudes in more detail, considering the national picture but also focusing on those in the 55+ demographic.





This really is a golden generation for travel. The over-55s in particular have something no group before them has had at the same scale: **time, money, and the confidence** to use both.

Many are healthier for longer, their children are grown, and they feel able to enjoy life without apology. Travel becomes a **natural outlet for that freedom**. It is thoughtful, planned, and rooted in a sense that now is the moment to go.



Ed Grenby, Radio Times Travel Editor



The national picture:

How we think about money, time and travel

For many people, decisions about travel are closely **tied to how they think about time**. Holidays are not widely framed as indulgent or unnecessary. They are seen as part of a life well lived.

This is reflected in attitudes towards guilt when **taking luxury holidays and experiences** instead of spending time with family:



Only **25%** of respondents say they feel guilty in these situations



39% say they **do not feel guilty** in these situations

Travel, for most, is not positioned against family life. It sits alongside it. Holidays are often viewed as time that adds something, whether that means **reconnecting with family members or pursuing personal interests** that might otherwise be set aside.

Life stage plays a clear role. As **children grow older or become independent**, **spending priorities often change** and travel becomes one of the most visible ways these changing priorities are reflected.

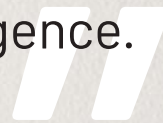
Planning behaviour reflects this. **70% of respondents say they plan holidays around their personal interests and passions** to some extent, with **43% saying this shapes their choice of destination** from the very start of the planning process, rather than being driven only by price or convenience.



What stands out to me is how **relaxed people feel about travel** now.

Holidays are no longer framed as something you justify or feel sheepish about. This generation watched their parents save relentlessly and put themselves last. They are choosing a different approach. They **do not see travel as competing with family life**. In many cases it strengthens it.

Whether that means taking adult children away, travelling together, or simply pursuing long-held interests, there is a **sense that time matters**, and using it well feels like common sense rather than indulgence.



Ed Grenby, Radio Times Travel Editor



Inheritance today:

Experiences, enjoyment and shared time

The research also explores how people **think about inheritance alongside their current spending decisions**. For many, inheritance is part of the picture, but not the only consideration, with **55% of all adults saying they would prioritise shared family experiences** over leaving more inheritance.

There are differences by age group, but the theme holds:



61% of those aged 35–54 say they would **prioritise shared family experiences** over leaving more inheritance



48% of those aged 55+ say the same

This doesn't mean people are indifferent to what they leave behind. It suggests that many are **balancing future considerations** with a wish to **enjoy life and spend time with family** now. For travel brands, this suggests that even among older demographics who traditionally prioritised legacy-building, experience-led spending is actively competing with inheritance planning.

This appetite for shared experiences also extends to structured travel, with **24% of all respondents** saying that **expert-led tours** would appeal to them if planning **passion-based holidays**.

“ People have not stopped caring about what they leave behind, but what ‘leaving something behind’ looks like has changed.

For many families, inherited china or silverware means very little. What **does matter are shared memories and stories that last**. Travel fits that perfectly.

Experiences feel exclusive now in a way objects do not. That might mean a multi-generational trip, a specialist tour, or access to places most people never see. These kinds of trips **bring families together** without excluding anyone.

It is about choosing to **give something meaningful** while everyone is still able to enjoy it together.”






Ed Grenby, Radio Times Travel Editor

The 55+ ABC1 mindset

Within the national picture, the **55+ ABC1 audience** offers particularly clear insight into how **life stages shape travel behaviour**. The ABC1 classification, which represents the higher social grades (professional, managerial, and administrative), significantly reinforces the financial advantages associated with this life stage. Many members of this demographic are past the most financially demanding years of raising children and managing household costs, which gives them **greater flexibility in how they spend their money**. Industry data reflects this pattern. The latest ABTA Holiday Habits report shows that the number of travellers aged over 65 who took a holiday rose by three percentage points year-on-year, reaching 80%, highlighting the **strong and growing participation of older consumers in the travel market**.

Views on inheritance sit alongside this confidence for this group:

-  **Nearly half (48%)** of respondents in the 55+ age group say they would **rather spend money on shared family experiences** than leave more as inheritance. This **increases to 58%** in the ABC1 demographic
-  **Only 13%** of over 55's and **25%** of the ABC1 demographic say they feel guilty when treating themselves to luxury holidays and experiences
-  Of those with children over 18, **72%** within the ABC1 demographic and **70%** of over 55's say they **feel more comfortable spending money on themselves** now that their children are older or independent

This comfort is reflected in intention as well as attitude. **Over-55s are planning to take more holidays in 2026** than any other age group.

For the travel media sector, this **audience is particularly significant**. Those aged **55 and over are engaged, curious, and motivated** by depth of experience, with their approach to travel **closely aligned with interests such as history, food, culture, and learning**.



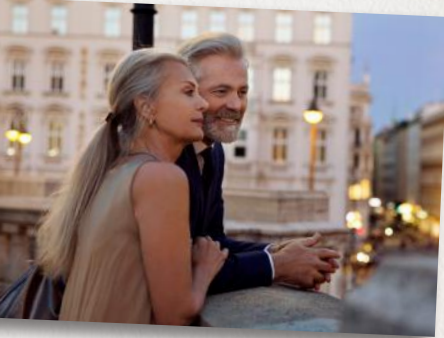
“ This audience sits at a distinctive point in the life cycle. Many are at their **peak earning years**, with fewer financial obligations and **greater autonomy** over how they spend both time and money.

Travel has also **become significantly more accessible** for this generation compared with previous ones, through affordable flights and constant exposure to global destinations via television and digital media. As a result, travel is no longer perceived as an indulgence but as a **natural and expected part of life**.

There is also a strong desire to **share meaningful experiences** with family while those opportunities exist, which helps explain why travel features so prominently in their spending priorities.”



Gosia Wilda, Head of Insight, Immediate



Passion-led travel:

What people are spending their money on

Personal interests play a central role in how people choose their holidays. For many, planning starts with the experience rather than the destination itself:



70% of respondents say they **plan holidays around their personal interests and passions**



43%, also say they choose destinations specifically because they **align with those interests** from the very start of planning

Passion-driven planning in 2026 reflects both what people aspire to and the trips they are actively planning. Among those who say they always, often or sometimes plan holidays around their interests, certain themes stand out in terms of appeal. **History and heritage** appeal to 69% of respondents, followed by **food and drink** (53%) and **nature-focused** trips (53%).

This interest translates into action, with people planning the following types of trips:



History and heritage trips (54%)



Food and drink experiences (31%)



Nature-focused trips (27%)



Expert-led tours (24%)

“ What really drives these trips is **genuine enthusiasm**. People build holidays around the **things they already love**. Someone who spends their weekends cooking are inspired to explore where their favourite cuisines originate from and history fans do the same.

For many people, the planning for the next trip begins almost as soon as the last one ends. It's less about ticking destinations off a list and more about **getting closer to the interests that already shape their lives.**”

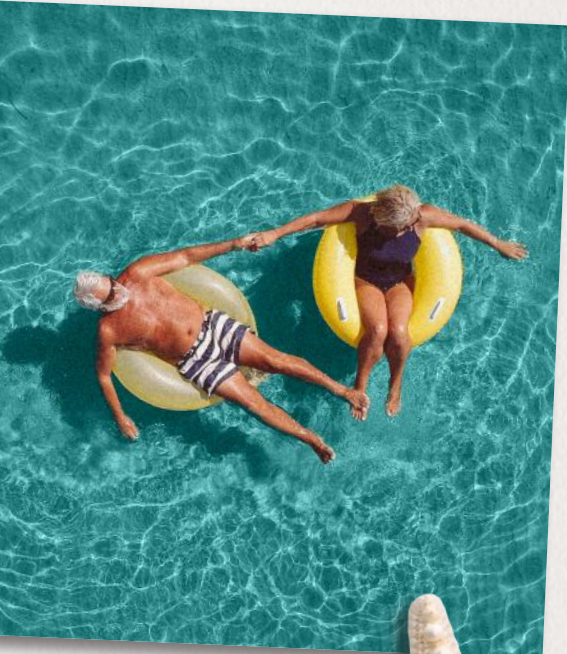


Rob Hunt, Director of Experiential,
IX Experiential by Immediate

This dynamic is increasingly reflected in how **travel brands collaborate with Immediate brands**, whose audiences already share these interests.




For example, **Princess Cruises partnered with Immediate** to launch the inaugural **Good Food Show at Sea**, bringing the culinary expertise and trusted audience of the *Good Food* brand onboard a cruise experience. The initiative combined food-focused editorial, live experiences and travel, demonstrating how shared interests can translate into new formats for travel engagement.

A similar approach can be seen in Immediate’s partnership with **Warner Hotels**, which focused on reaching audiences whose interests align with cultural travel and heritage experiences. By activating across trusted environments, such as *Radio Times* and *HistoryExtra*, the campaign connected with readers already engaged with the types of interests that often inspire trips. The partnership delivered strong results, including over 1 million campaign impressions and engagement rates well above typical display benchmarks, demonstrating how interest-led environments can drive both attention and consideration for travel brands.





Travel formats and inspiration: **Where we go and why**

The most appealing types of holidays for travellers range from:

-  City breaks for 57%
-  Beach holidays for 42%
-  All-inclusive holidays for 37%

Cities fit naturally with the passion-led approach already explored in the research. They offer culture, history, and food in close proximity, often within relatively short travel times, making it a combination that is hard to beat for many travellers.

When choosing where to travel, people rely on a mix of personal recommendation and trusted editorial content:

-  Personal recommendations from friends and family are the strongest influence, cited by 86% of respondents
-  Traditional media continues to play a significant role, with newspapers, magazines and brand advertising each influencing 40% of people when deciding where to go

These findings underline the role of authoritative, editorial content in shaping travel decisions.



// The **mix of destinations** makes complete sense. Cities offer culture, food, history, and inspiration in a compact space. Beach and all-inclusive trips often play a different role, especially for families.

What is striking is **where people get their ideas**. **Friends and family** still dominate, which shows how social travel decisions really are. **Television and documentaries** remain hugely influential, and **traditional newspapers and magazines** still reach around four in ten people.

That tells us **trusted editorial voices continue to shape** where and how people travel. //



Ed Grenby, Radio Times Travel Editor






Spending patterns:




Stable, intentional and future-focused

Looking ahead to spending throughout 2026, most respondents expect their travel spending to remain broadly in line with 2025. Set against a backdrop of rising living costs, this points to holidays being actively protected within household budgets, with **a notable minority planning to spend more**.

For those planning to take **short trips of up to five days** in 2026:

-  **59% of all respondents** plan to spend between **£251 and £1,000 per person**
-  **66%** expect their spending to be **in line with 2025** levels
-  **18%** anticipate **spending more** than they did in 2025

For those planning on taking **longer trips of six days or more**, spending levels are higher:

-  **51% of respondents** plan to spend **more than £1,000 per person**
-  **56%** expect this to be **similar to their 2025 spend**
-  **26%** say this spend will be an **increase** compared to 2025

The picture that emerges is one of control rather than restraint. Travel budgets are being managed carefully, but **holidays remain a protected area of spending**. ABTA's Holiday Habits report shows that not only are people willing to make spending sacrifices to protect their holiday, in the year ahead more of them **expect to spend more on travel than last year** – a rise of three percentage points year-on-year.

Importantly, this stability is also reflected among the 55+ cohort, who show **strong spending intent**, particularly when it comes to longer trips. When compared with younger groups, this reinforces the commercial significance of this audience.

“ Even as household costs rise, holidays remain ring-fenced. People are willing to economise elsewhere, but they are **reluctant to compromise on time away**.
Travel is treated as non-negotiable.

Maintaining the same spend year on year effectively becomes an increase in real terms, given the rising cost of living. That speaks to **how emotionally important holidays are**. They are seen as **essential, restorative, and worth planning for**. ”



Ed Grenby, Radio Times Travel Editor

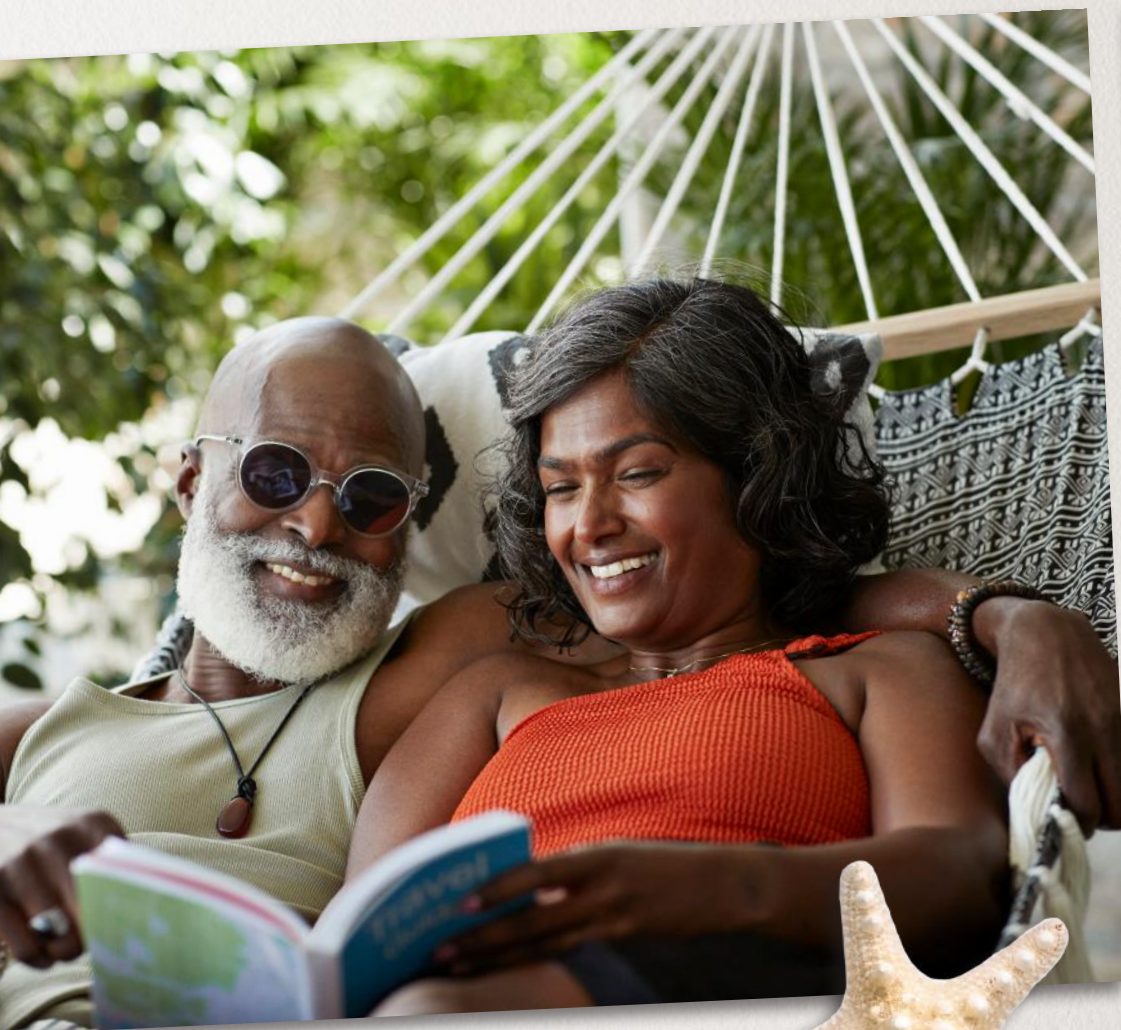
Conclusion:

What this means for travel, media and brands

As people look ahead to 2026, **travel remains central** to how they plan their time and money. Experiences, personal interests, and shared moments **sit at the heart of decision-making**, with holidays viewed as something to enjoy rather than postpone.

For travel providers, the research points to an **engaged market**, particularly among the **55+ ABC1 demographic, who are planning more trips** and feel **comfortable spending on quality experiences** rather than saving for inheritance. For media brands, it **reinforces the value of trusted content** that informs and inspires.

Immediate sits naturally within this space. Its **brands reflect the interests shaping travel choices**, offering relevance and authority for audiences who plan with intention.



Ultimately, this is a story about **parents choosing to be social**, not selfish. Many people are travelling with their children and grandchildren, **creating shared memories** rather than opting out of family life.

The older generation in particular experienced real constraints earlier in life but now **clearly feel able to enjoy both their independence and financial security** in ways their own parents could have only dreamed of.

For the travel sector and for media brands, these factors **present a real opportunity** to engage a larger, more **confident and highly motivated audience** that wants quality, depth, and **experiences that mean something.**



Ed Grenby, Radio Times Travel Editor



Methodology

This whitepaper is based on research that was carried out by YouGov and commissioned by Immediate, publisher of brands including Radio Times, Good Food, HistoryExtra, and BBC Gardeners' World Magazine.

The survey explored travel plans and preferences for 2026, including intended spending levels, preferred types of holidays, sources of inspiration, and attitudes towards experiences, personal interests, and inheritance. Percentages are rounded to the nearest whole number.

All figures, unless otherwise stated, are from YouGov Plc. The total sample size was 2,087 adults. Fieldwork was undertaken between 9th - 12th December 2025. The survey was carried out online with data from YouGov panelists. The figures have been weighted and are representative of all UK adults (aged 18+) based on gender, age and geography.

A full breakdown of the survey results, including tables is available [here](#).