

American Express Travel Survey Finds Pursuing Personal Interests Drives Travel Despite Current Economic Conditions

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From Food to Music to Sporting Events, 87% of Respondents Indicate that Travel Involving Personal Interests Will Remain the Same or Increase Over the Next Two Years

From jetting overseas for a culinary experience to a desire to learn life-enriching skills while on vacation, travelers are intent on continuing to pursue travel experiences that allow them to indulge in their personal interests despite the softening economy, according to a recent survey of 501 U.S. adults by American Express Travel. Indeed, 87% of respondents indicated that the number of vacations involving one or more personal "passions" would either remain the same or increase over the next two years, of those, 28% indicated that they expect the number to increase.

These findings may come as somewhat of a surprise in light of the fact that 90% of respondents indicated that they feel the US economy is currently in or edging toward a recession. But at least 60% of respondents say that it's because travel is so important to their mental health and lifestyle that they have not let economic concerns impact their plans. Although these travelers are not immune to the softening economy, they are still moving ahead with their vacation plans but acting more resourceful in their planning. Taking savvy approaches to travel, 66% of respondents are tapping into rewards points or miles earned to offset costs, 58% are visiting more affordable destinations, and 24% are taking shorter vacations.

"Given the uncertain economy, we wanted to see how people's passions drive behavior when it comes to travel," says Audrey Hendley, vice president of marketing, American Express Travel. "The survey results overwhelmingly show that people whose vacations are tied to personal interests intend to continue to travel by taking advantage of money-saving resources, such as rewards programs."

The Purpose-Driven Vacation

From cooking and fitness to theatre and the arts to fashion and spectator sports, the survey found that personal interests are key drivers in vacation decisions. A few interesting facts:

- 87% of travelers indicate that personal interests drive the majority of their vacation plans
- 60%* of travelers say the stronger they feel about a passion, the further they've traveled for it
- 57%* of respondents are willing to travel any distance to explore their personal interests
- 36% of those surveyed said they wouldn't consider a vacation destination that doesn't help them fulfill at least one personal passion
- 71%* of respondents have discovered a "new passion" while on vacation
- 34% of vacationers have discovered a passion on vacation and incorporated it into their home life

*% - agree strongly/somewhat on a 4-point scale.

Vacations that incorporate personal passions also tend to be longer by almost double the number of days compared to those trips that do not include personal interests (16 days versus 9), more frequent (6 trips versus 3), and more expensive (\$3,900 versus \$2,400).

America's Favorite Passions

While the survey showed that Americans have a broad array of passions and interests, here are just a few popular ones:

Culinary Interests: A growing number of travelers are inspired by the desire to expand their culinary horizons. In fact, 42% of respondents said that culinary factors, including the ability to try new cuisine and indulge in truly exotic/native dishes, were extremely/very important to their travel choices. This was particularly true among the younger respondents (18-34 year-olds), of which more than half (55%) said the ability to enjoy distinctive culinary experiences while on vacation was either extremely or very important.

Sporting Events: 28% of respondents have traveled to attend a sporting event in the past.

Adventure: 25% of respondents have taken a vacation in pursuit of adventure and thrill from hiking to whitewater rafting.

Music: 21% of respondents have taken a vacation that included attending concerts and/or music festivals.

Educational travel: More than 15% of respondents reported traveling to delve deeper into the history and/or culture of a particular destination.

At American Express Travel

Many travel counselors at American Express Travel report seeing an increasing number of travelers book vacations with specific interests in mind. For example, one travel counselor arranges travel for a horse racing aficionado client that travels faithfully throughout the year following the circuit, from the Kentucky Derby to Preakness and Belmont. Another travel counselor reports working with a group of travelers that visits London every year to enjoy the latest theater productions. Other travel counselors routinely get requests from clients interested in visiting the best destinations around the world for surfing or skiing. And many travel counselors attribute the growing draw to Africa to the increasing number of photography and nature aficionados in pursuit of their passions.

"The great benefit of American Express Travel is that we have hundreds of travel counselors that have expertise in categories of travel- adventure, safari, ski -- as well as expertise in an endless list of destinations listed on americanexpress.com/travel," says Hendley. "In addition, American Express Travel offers vacation experiences customized not only for any traveler or personal interest, but also for every budget."

About the American Express Travel Survey

Data for this travel survey was collected via an online poll conducted by Harrison Group on behalf of American Express Travel of 501 consumers across the U.S. The poll was fielded in early June 2008. All statistics reflect the percentages of consumers polled.

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