

Expedia's 2018 Year in Review report highlights the rise of secondary cities, alternative accommodations and culinary experiences

Report details the fastest-growing destinations, activities and other travel trends from the year

BELLEVUE, Wash., Dec. 5, 2018 /PRNewswire/ -- Expedia.com® analyzed thousands of data points this year to identify the top trends in travel for 2018, and the results show that American travelers are increasingly interested in unique and novel experiences. Highlights from the report include the rise of secondary destinations like Chiang Mai, the Azores and Cartagena, and non-traditional lodging options such as tentalows and houseboats. In the activities and attractions space, observation decks and architectural landmarks saw the biggest growth, with cooking classes and other culinary experiences close behind.

"In this day and age, it's possible to have the exact type of experience and trip you want, whether it's visiting a breathtaking island off Portugal, or staying on a family farm where you can gather your own fresh eggs in the morning," says John Morrey, SVP Brand Expedia. "Being able to meet the needs of every kind of traveler is our driving force at Expedia, and why we strive to make it easy and affordable to find the perfect accommodation for any trip and bundle it with flights or car for even more savings."

Read on for more highlights from Expedia's 2018 Year in Review, including trends across destinations, air travel, lodging and activities.

2018: The Year of the Secondary City

Expedia crunched flight data from 2018¹ to determine the destinations seeing the most year-over-year growth, and it was clear that U.S. travelers are venturing beyond the primary tourist stops to seek out the culturally-rich offerings of secondary cities. Here are some of the most noteworthy trending destinations for 2018, all of which saw double- or triple-digit growth from last year:

- **Portugal: Azores**

It's no secret that Portugal had a major moment in 2018, seeing big boosts in tourism throughout the year. But it wasn't just Lisbon and Porto attracting crowds – the [Azores](#) also wooed tourists with its dramatic landscapes and world-class diving and hiking.

- **Thailand: Chiang Mai**

[Chiang Mai](#), Bangkok's more laid-back and spiritual sibling, is home to hundreds of Buddhist temples, incredible street food and historic festivals. Visit in November to launch a fire lantern during Loi Krathong, or in April to see the city come alive for Songkran.

- **United Kingdom: Inverness and Belfast**

London remains one of the top global destinations in the world, but flight data proves travelers are venturing farther into the UK to [Northern Ireland](#) and [Scotland](#).

- **Malta: Valletta**

For those craving a beautiful Mediterranean getaway without the high prices of the French Riviera or crowds of the Italian coast, Malta could be just the ticket. Its capital city of [Valletta](#), an UNESCO World Heritage site, is surrounded by water and features carefully restored and preserved monuments dating back to the late Renaissance.

- **Alaska: Kenai and Kodiak**

The Emerald Isle of [Kodiak](#), with its immense National Wildlife Refuge, and [Kenai's](#) legendary salmon fishing are proof that there's more to Alaska than just Anchorage and Juneau. For visitors looking to experience the best of Alaska, many of the highly-rated cruises will stop at three or four port towns.

- **Australia: Brisbane and Perth**

U.S. travelers embarking on the 14+ hour journey to Australia are clearly seeing more than just Sydney's iconic Opera House. Queensland's capital, [Brisbane](#), and Western Australia's [Perth](#) both appear on the trending destination list this year.

- **Ecuador: Cuenca**

Ecuador's capital, Quito, and the Galapagos Islands are both popular tourist destinations, but this year [Cuenca](#) saw increased demand. Perhaps word is getting out that its historic city center, an UNESCO World Heritage Site, and array of street markets are just as worthy of a visit.

- **Croatia: Zagreb**

[Zagreb](#) may be Croatia's capital but from a western tourism perspective it's been playing second fiddle to coastal Dubrovnik for a few years now. But U.S. travelers are starting to take notice of Zagreb's urban appeal, lighter crowds and affordable prices.

- **Colombia: Cartagena**

Quite different in terms of climate and personality than the capital city of Bogotá, [Cartagena](#) is rich in colonial charm.

- **Spain: Seville**

For those looking to experience real Spanish culture, [Seville](#) will not disappoint. Less touristy than popular Barcelona, locals would tell you Seville is where to find authentic flamenco and tapas.

Check out the full list of Expedia's Top Trending Cities on the [Viewfinder blog](#).

Alternative accommodations are on the rise

While traditional resorts and hotels continue to be a favorite for U.S. travelers, Expedia.com data shows a growing interest in alternative lodging options. Here are some of the fastest-growing accommodation types for 2018²:

1. **Tentalows** (cross between a tent and a bungalow) - up 135 percent year-over-year
2. **Chalets** - up 85 percent year-over-year
3. **Villas** - up more than 45 percent year-over-year
4. **Agritourism properties** - up more than 40 percent year-over-year
5. **Houseboats** - up more than 35 percent year-over-year

Top trending activities include observation decks and culinary experiences

Activities and experiences are increasingly popular as travelers look to personalize and customize their vacations. These are the fastest-growing activity categories in 2018 for the U.S.:

1. **Fastest-growing category:** Attractions. Observation decks and architectural landmarks are leading the pack, with the Eiffel Tower, Rome's Colosseum, the 360 Chicago Observation Deck and the High Roller Observation Wheel in Las Vegas among the top trending attractions.
2. **Runner-up:** Tours & Sightseeing. Walking and hop-on-hop-off bus tours remain popular among travelers visiting big cities.
3. **Third place:** Shopping & Culinary Experiences round out the top categories, as travelers look to get the most out of their destinations and sample local flavors.

It's never been easier to browse and book activities on the fly with Expedia's [mobile app](#), which lets travelers sort and filter things to do by proximity, popularity and activity type.

Busiest & least busy days to fly

Flight data confirms that traveling ahead of the holidays is bound to be hectic. However, the least busy travel days of the year also fall around the holidays: the day after Christmas, Christmas Day and New Year's Day drew the fewest airport crowds. These are the busiest air travel days of the year³:

1. Wednesday before Thanksgiving Day
2. Friday before Christmas Day
3. Friday before Labor Day

Want to see more trends? Be sure to head over to [Expedia's Viewfinder blog](#) for the rest of the results from the 2018 Year in Review, including the most popular last-minute getaways and where to find the best views, spa, pools and service.

About Expedia

[Expedia.com](#)[®] is one of the world's largest full service travel sites, helping millions of travelers per month easily plan and book travel. [Expedia.com](#) (<https://www.expedia.com/>, 1-800-EXPEDIA) aims to provide the latest technology and the widest selection of top vacation destinations, affordable airfare, hotel deals, car rentals, destination weddings, cruise deals and in-destination activities, attractions, services and travel apps.

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¹Based on air travel demand on Expedia.com from January 1, 2018 - November 1, 2018 compared to the same timeframe in 2017

²Based on demand on Expedia.com from January 1, 2018 - September 30, 2018 compared to the same timeframe in 2017

³Based on air travel demand on Expedia.com from October 31, 2017 - November 1, 2018

SOURCE Expedia.com

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<https://newsroom.expedia.com/2018-12-05-Expedias-2018-Year-in-Review-report-highlights-the-rise-of-secondary-cities-alternative-accommodations-and-culinary-experiences>