

# Looking forward: Expedia.com reveals the top travel trends and tips for U.S. travelers in 2021

**Plus, the sixth annual airfare pricing outlook from the Airlines Reporting Corporation (ARC) highlights when to book and how to save on your next flight**

SEATTLE, Nov. 16, 2020 /PRNewswire/ -- What do Lima, Osaka and Lisbon have in common? These were all trending destinations for U.S. travelers in 2019.

Fast-forward to 2020's trending list: Lincoln, New Hampshire. Lake Havasu, Arizona. The Hamptons, New York.

Whether it was by necessity or design, it's clear Americans spent 2020 exploring small towns, scenic drives, nearby lakes and beaches, or in some cases, their own backyards. Today, Expedia.com<sup>®</sup> released its 2021 Travel Trends Report, analyzing traveler data to uncover the biggest takeaways from an unprecedented year, and what travelers can expect in the year ahead.

In addition to tapping into its own massive database of search and demand data, this year Expedia partnered with the Airlines Reporting Corporation (ARC) for a deep dive on the effect of the pandemic on air travel.

"It's no secret that air travel changed this year in ways we have never seen before, but people are still flying, and they will continue to fly. We are keeping a close eye on these changes to help travelers get the most from their journeys," says Chuck Thackston, Managing Director of Data Science and Research for ARC. "Expedia and ARC are teaming up again to get to the bottom of what's changed and equip travelers with new trip-planning insights to use when they do fly again."

Highlights from the report include:

- Air travel trends and hacks
- Traveler priorities in 2021
- The top trending destinations of 2020
- All the islands (and other dreamy destinations) on travelers' 2021 bucket lists

"What we learned by looking at traveler behaviors in a year as unusual as 2020 is that travel will always be an integral part of our lives," says Christie Hudson, Senior PR Manager for Expedia brand. "Travelers responded to the uncertainty and restrictions by finding ways to safely explore closer to home, and the result is a bigger emphasis on flexibility and a list of trending destinations that are inspiring and attainable for the year ahead."

## **Airfare Booking Hacks for 2021**

For six years running, travelers have relied on the annual Expedia ARC report, which analyzes billions of flight segments, to provide insider tips and tricks for getting the most out of air travel. Considering the atypical year, a new cheat sheet is needed now more than ever.

Based on ARC data, average ticket prices (ATPs) for domestic flights hit their lowest in late April 2020 but

have since started to recover. From May to October, prices were between 25-35 percent lower year-on-year but followed the usual seasonality curve. Meanwhile, ATPs for international flights briefly spiked in April before normalizing to 2019 levels in mid-June and finally settling between 30-35 percent lower year-on-year during the fall months.

What this means for travelers is that while average ticket prices are historically low for both domestic and international flights, prices rise during peak travel periods such as spring break, summer and the holidays. To get the best deal, travelers need to know when to book and start their trip.

- **Best day of the week to book<sup>1</sup>: Sunday**
  - For domestic flights, book on Sunday, not Monday to save around 15 percent
  - For international flights, book on Sunday, not Friday to save more than 20 percent
- **Best day of the week to depart<sup>2</sup>: Thursday or Friday**
  - For domestic flights, start your trip on Friday, not Monday to save around 20 percent
  - For international flights, start your trip on Thursday, not Sunday to save nearly 25 percent

## Traveler Priorities in 2021

- **Flexibility isn't a "nice-to-have", it's required:** In 2021, flexibility will continue to be top of mind for travelers, who booked refundable rates 10 percent more often this year compared to last. Luckily, flexibility is more affordable than ever: Expedia lodging data shows average daily rates for refundable bookings were 20 percent cheaper in 2020 compared to 2019.
- **Health and safety advancements:** In the year to come, concerns about staying safe while traveling will continue to impact every aspect of trip planning, from what type of accommodations to choose to where to go to who to travel with. Since May, nearly 300,000 properties have added health and cleanliness information on Expedia.com, including enhanced cleaning, contactless check-in, social distancing and other guest safety measures.
- **Majority of travelers booking less than a month out:** According to ARC data, in 2019, the average U.S. traveler booked flights around 35 days in advance of their departure date, but during the onset of the pandemic, that window lengthened to 46 days. The new normal (since August) is just 29 days out - the average advance purchase dropping below the 30-day mark for the first time in years - and illustrating how travelers have adapted to the rapidly changing environment. However, with airlines eliminating change fees travelers may feel more confident booking further out, knowing they can always change their plans down the road.
- **Growth in alternative accommodations:** While the most popular lodging type in 2020 was hotels, the types of accommodations showing the biggest growth compared to last year were castles, ranches, cabins, chalets and cottages.<sup>3</sup> These types of retreats, typically found outside of big cities, were the perfect getaway spots for travelers in search of wide-open spaces, nature and privacy. This trend is expected to continue as people look to travel safely amid the pandemic. Whether it's a hotel, vacation rental or chalet, Expedia lodging data shows the cheapest days to stay are Sunday through Tuesday, so try scheduling a long weekend trip at the start of the week instead of the end.<sup>4</sup>
- **Maximizing the trip:** During lockdown, many travelers relied on virtual tours and activities to satisfy wanderlust. But once able to roam again, whether it was just within their own cities or on a proper getaway, travelers resumed looking to activities as a way to get the most out their trips. These are a few of the top trending activities booked on Expedia.com: [the nation's largest and longest-running flower show](#), this [boat tour in Miami's Biscayne Bay](#) and this [ATV and ziplining adventure in the Cenotes](#).

## 2020's Trending Destinations

This year's list<sup>5</sup> might look a bit different than last year's, with backyard beaches and outdoorsy escapes taking the place of exotic international destinations. Still, these domestic gems are proof there's plenty to explore even when travelers are staying closer to home.

1. Lake Havasu, Arizona
2. New Bern, North Carolina
3. The Hamptons, New York
4. Ocean City, Maryland
5. Lake of the Ozarks, Missouri
6. Panama City, Florida
7. South Padre Island, Texas
8. Lincoln, New Hampshire
9. Sun Valley / Central Idaho
10. Yellowstone National Park, Wyoming

### **The Next Big Trip: Top-searched destinations for 2021 and beyond**

While nearby escapes and road trips are likely to remain popular as travelers navigate the ongoing realities of life amid a pandemic, search data<sup>6</sup> proves that aspirations persist for grander, far-flung vacations. More specifically, it seems vacation-deprived Americans dreaming of their next trip fall into one of two categories:

***Island escapists.*** Looking at the top 20 destinations, half are islands and another third are popular beach resorts. After a year like 2020, it's not hard to imagine why so many travelers want to escape to an island the next chance they get.

- Cancun (#1)
- Riviera Maya, Playa del Carmen and Tulum (#2)
- Punta Cana (#5)
- Oahu (#6)
- Maui (#7)
- Los Cabos (#9)
- French Polynesia (#10)
- Maldives (#11)
- Montego Bay (#12)
- Aruba (#13)
- Puerto Vallarta (#14)
- Key West (#16)
- Nassau (#18)
- Bali (#20)

***The urban returner.*** Larger cities haven't seen their usual tourist bustle over the past year, but search results make it clear that travelers are eager to return and enjoy all the culture, activities and experiences that you can only find in these iconic U.S. cities.

- Las Vegas (#3)
- Orlando (#4)
- Miami (#8)
- New York (#15)
- Los Angeles (#17)
- New Orleans (#19)

With COVID-19, it's important to stay safe and up to date on the latest travel guidance and restrictions. Find out what to expect, how to find flexible travel and other information on the [Expedia COVID-19 travel guide](#).

### **About Expedia.com**

Expedia.com<sup>®</sup> 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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### **About Airlines Reporting Corporation (ARC)**

An industry leader in air travel intelligence and omnichannel retailing, ARC provides platforms, tools and insights that help the global travel community connect, grow and thrive. ARC enables the diverse retailing strategies of its customers by providing flexible settlement solutions, innovative technology and access to the world's most comprehensive air transaction dataset. In 2019, ARC managed more than \$97.4 billion in transactions between airlines and travel agencies, representing more than 302 million passenger trips. For more information, please visit [www.arccorp.com](http://www.arccorp.com).

<sup>1</sup>*Best day of the week to book recommendation is based on average round-trip ticket prices for January through early October, for both 2019 and 2020, sourced from ARC's global airline sales database.*

<sup>2</sup>*Best day of the week to travel recommendation based on average round-trip ticket prices for January through early October, for both 2019 and 2020, sourced from ARC's global airline sales database. Departure date determined by the first date of travel in an itinerary.*

<sup>3</sup>*Based on lodging demand on Expedia.com from Jan 1, 2020 – Sept 12, 2020 compared to the same timeframe in 2019*

<sup>4</sup>*Based on lodging demand on Expedia.com for travel between Jan, 1, 2020 – Dec. 31, 2020.*

<sup>5</sup>*Trending destinations are some of the markets seeing the best growth year-over-year, based on lodging demand on Expedia.com between Jan. 1, 2020 – Sept. 14, 2020 compared to the same timeframe in 2019.*

<sup>6</sup>*Top searched destinations based on lodging interest on Expedia.com between Jan 1, 2020 – Sept 12, 2020 for travel in 2021.*

SOURCE Expedia.com

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