

A person wearing a blue jacket and an orange cap stands on a large rock in the foreground, looking out over a turquoise lake. The lake reflects the surrounding forest and the majestic, rocky mountain range in the background. The sky is a clear blue with wispy clouds. The overall scene is a beautiful mountain landscape.

SUMMIT SEEKERS

Who mountain travellers are
and how they book

Introduction

A growing number of travellers are trading cityscapes for ridgelines and screen time for summit views. They're seeking natural beauty, outdoor recreation and a sense of escape, causing mountain regions to climb in popularity.



Inside the data

We sponsored Phocuswright research to uncover what truly drives the modern US mountain traveller. Through a survey, interviews and Inntopia data analytics, this research reveals demographics, booking habits, values and preferences of mountain travellers. Paired with our actionable insights, you'll discover how to connect with this valuable audience.

(Full methodology on page 22)

The evolving mountain tourism landscape

Last year, the winter sports market was massive: 16.7 million US leisure travellers spent over \$85 billion on overnight trips.¹ But that's just the beginning. The research shows increased demand – and willingness to spend – in mountain towns year-round, which means your opportunities to stand out go beyond ski season.



Key terms



Mountain traveller

Travellers who took a leisure trip, involving air travel or a paid stay 75+ miles from home, in the past 12 months. They visited at least one mountain or snow destination across a range of seasons.



Mountain travel

Mountain travel is limited to a destination that offers winter sports (even if travellers visited in the summer).



Winter sports traveller

Travellers who took a mountain or snow trip that included one of the following sports: skiing, snowboarding, snowmobiling, snowshoeing, snowtubing or dogsledding.



Other mountain traveller

Travellers who took a mountain trip that did not include a winter sports activity.



Mid-tier guest

Mountain travellers whose visits included a stay in a hotel or short-term rental considered to be mid-tier or 3-star.



Luxury/upmarket guest

Mountain travellers whose visits included a stay in a hotel or short-term rental considered to be upscale or luxury, or 4/5-star.

Who is the MOUNTAIN TRAVELLER?

Profiles and preferences at a glance

4+ trips

They travel frequently and have taken more than four mountain trips in the past year.

\$2.5K

They spent an average of almost \$2,500 on their last mountain trip.

58% male

Mountain travellers skew male and tend to be in their 30s-50s.

6.2 days

Their trips in the past year last a little under a week on average.



BEYOND the SLOPES

Reach more mountain travellers

4.8 trips

Winter sports travellers have taken slightly more trips in the past year on average.

\$2.8k

Winter sports travellers spent \$2,888 on their last trip on average.

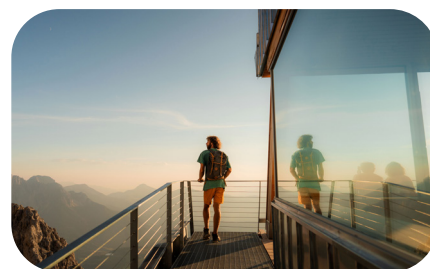
~\$1.9k

Other mountain travellers spent \$1,998 on their last trip on average.

6 days

Winter sports travellers had a slightly shorter last trip on average.

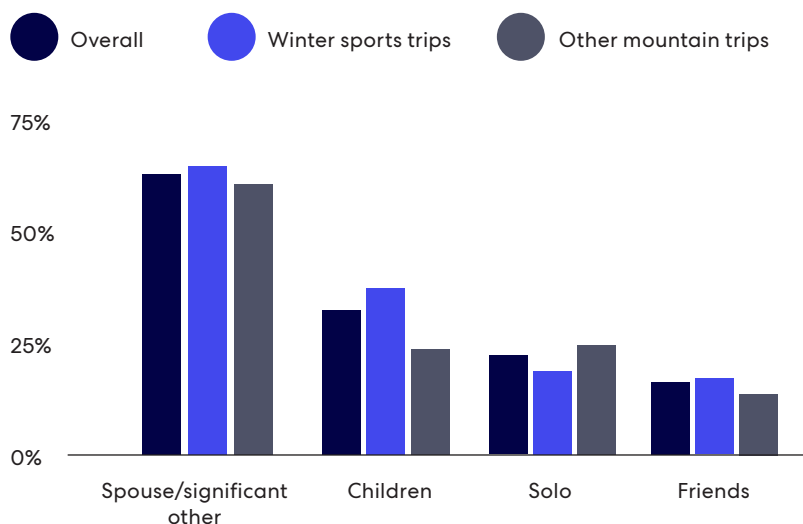




Mountain travellers as a whole are frequent visitors who stay almost a week on average. That said, understanding the different types can help you attract them more effectively. While **winter sports travellers travel more often** and spend more, **other mountain travellers stay longer** – their last trip was 6.4 days on average.

Varying your audience is key for year-round engagement. Knowing their trip lengths, ages and who they travel with (including pets) can make all the difference in your strategy to reach them. With a strong presence of families and couples, tailored experiences and targeted marketing can drive deeper loyalty and revenue.

Travellers make mountain trips a group activity



Take action

[Expedia Group Advertising solutions](#) allow you to effectively reach your ideal travellers. Use [sponsored listings](#) to customise your message and targeting parameters.

Three valuable traveller types you need to know



The luxury mountain traveller

These upmarket travellers are more likely to venture farther and pay more for their perfect mountain trip.

More likely to travel internationally

53% of upmarket/luxury guests went abroad on their most recent trip, compared to 21% of mid-tier guests.

More likely to use OTAs

35% of luxury/upmarket guests used OTAs as a research tool compared to 31% on average and 42% booked through OTAs, compared to 37% overall.

Less likely to prioritise price

Positive reviews, scenic views and convenient locations are all more critical accommodation elements. They're also more likely to see ski-in/ski-out, on-property food and drink options and aesthetics as critical.



The experienced athlete

These advanced/expert athletes are dedicated to their sport. They'll spend more on their trip and prioritise picking the perfect place to stay.

Higher spenders

Advanced/expert winter sports athletes spent an average of \$3,060 on their last trip while intermediate athletes spent \$2,600 on average.

A large chunk of winter sport travellers

60% of winter sports travellers consider themselves advanced or experts in their sport.

Finding the right accommodation is key

50% of advanced/expert athletes said choosing the right accommodation is critical to their enjoyment of the trip, compared to 35% for intermediate athletes.



The international traveller

Almost 40% of US mountain travellers went abroad (to non-US destinations) on their most recent trip.

Canada and Europe are the most popular destinations

Of those that went abroad, the top destinations were Canada (52%), France (25%), Germany (20%), Italy (20%), Spain (13%), Switzerland (13%) and Japan (11%).

Winter sports travellers and families are more likely to venture abroad

44% of winter sports travellers and 48% of families went abroad for their last mountain trip.

Looking for snow, culture and nature

The top reasons for travelling internationally were better snow conditions, experiencing another culture and seeing different natural features.



26%

of mountain trips
included pets.

This is even higher for
international travellers (39%) and
luxury/upmarket guests (31%).

The path to the peak

Trip-planning journeys often start with a simple question: 'Where to?' For mountain travellers, the answer is rarely straightforward. Most are open to inspiration, meaning you have real opportunities to influence their choices. That said, you'll have competition. When they have some destinations in mind to begin with, that list includes more than mountain locations.



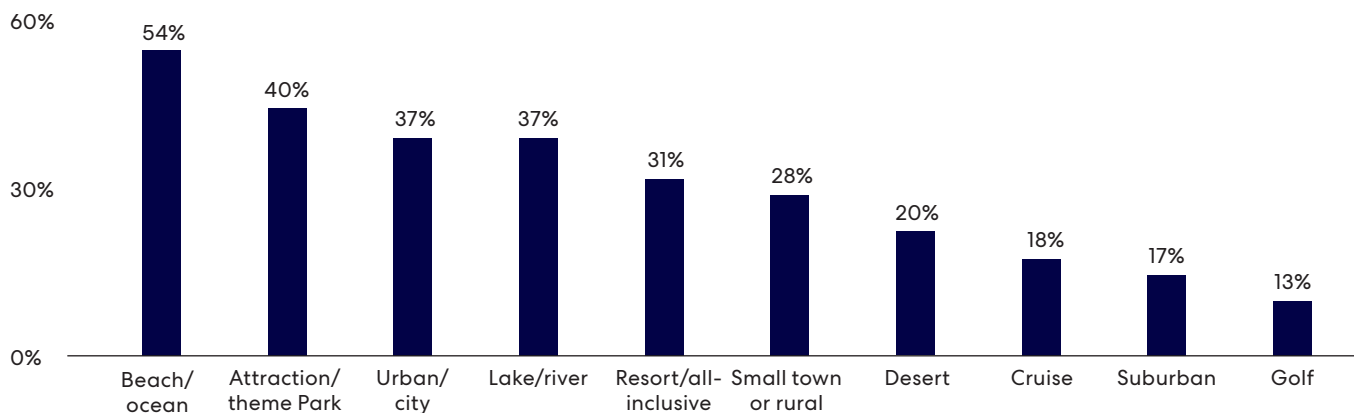
53%

of mountain travellers weren't set on a specific destination when they began trip planning.



Travellers consider beaches, theme parks and more before picking the mountains

*Among travellers that had a shortlist of destinations when planning.





Why travellers choose mountain destinations

- See/experience something beautiful
- Exposure to nature/wildlife
- Feel adventurous
- Improve mood/mental health
- More physically active trip
- Prefer weather/climate

When you know the emotional desires behind their destination decisions, you can reflect them back to future travellers in every photo you choose, every ad you run and every story you tell.

▶ Take action

Lean into the natural beauty of your area and show off opportunities for adventure in your advertising and online presence. Our award-winning [E Studio](#) can help you craft campaigns that resonate.

Your competition for mountain travellers changes dramatically with the seasons. In spring and summer, you're vying with East Coast beaches for the same travellers. Come winter, a family isn't only choosing between two ski resorts, they're often weighing the whole trip against a sunny theme park holiday.

▶ Take action

Understanding your seasonal rivals is key. That way, you can stand out early with compelling, competitive messaging. To extend your marketing spend, you can [join a co-op campaign](#) to join forces with hotels at your destination.



The mountain trip must-haves

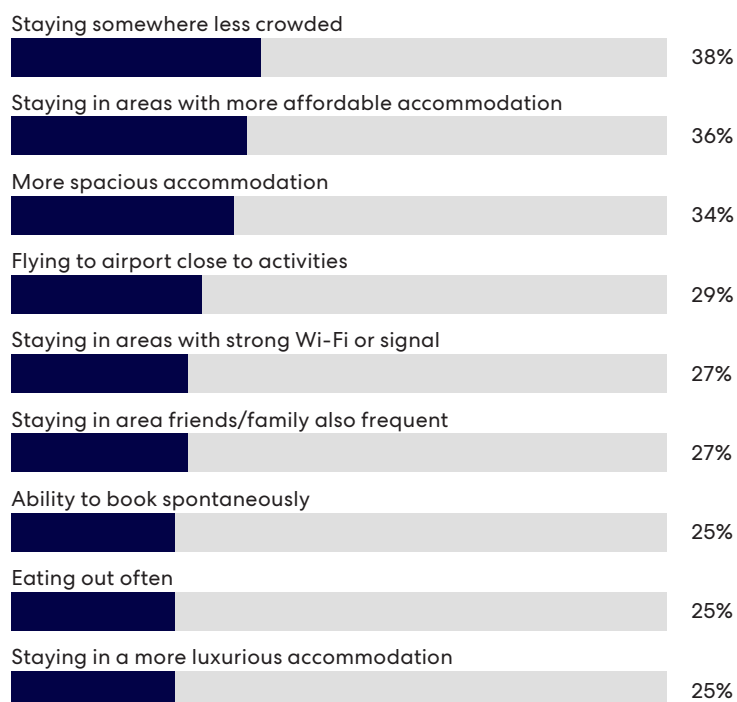
While travellers are swayed by natural beauty, practical priorities like avoiding crowds also come into play during the planning process. We see this ring true in a trend from our [Unpack '25](#) report, 'Detour Destinations,' that shows travellers are looking for lesser known, less crowded spots, either as an add-on or for their main destination.²

Take action

Weave these practical answers directly [into your ads and listings](#) and you'll help give travellers the confidence they need to book.



What are the priorities for picking a mountain destination?



Researching and booking the mountain trip

Once the mountain traveller has picked a destination, they move on to researching and booking. How far in advance do they make decisions and what resources do they use?

Throughout the research process, mountain travellers lean heaviest on Google and online travel agencies. When it's time to book, OTAs like Expedia top the list of resources, followed by travel provider websites.

Our [Path to Purchase](#) research shows that on average, travellers who used OTAs spend an average of 160 minutes on them while researching and booking – the most of any resource.³

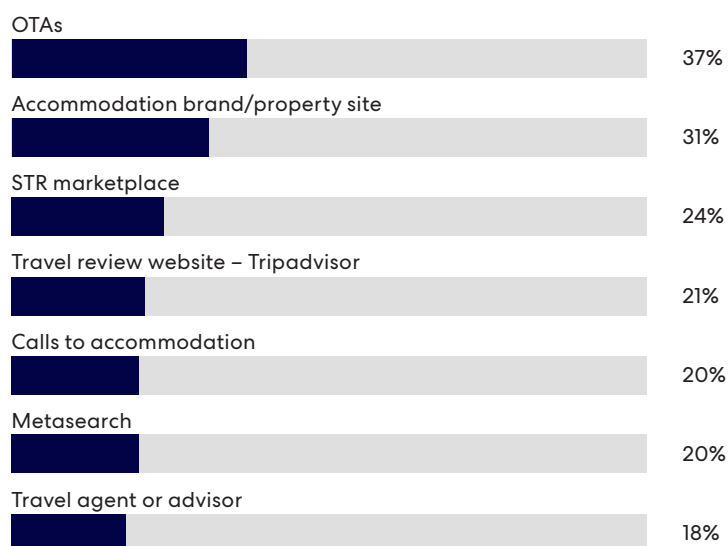
Take action

It's essential to show up everywhere travellers are looking and booking. Hotel partners can get your organic listing higher in search results with an [Accelerator](#).

Research resources



Booking resources

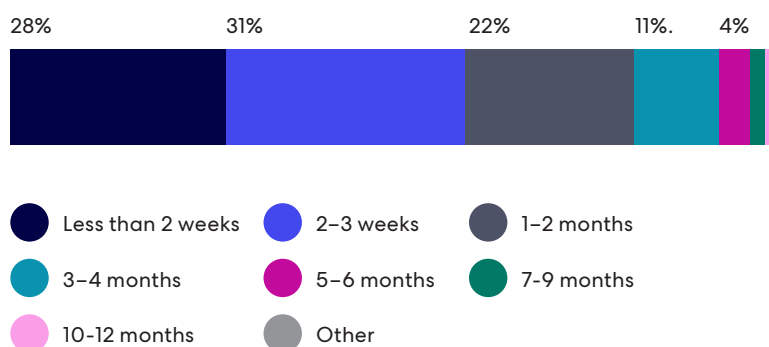


When do travellers book their mountain trips?

Travellers typically book about 2 months out or less, but the research process starts ahead of that. **37% of travellers begin research 3+ months ahead of their trip.** When it comes to what they book first, travellers are split. **38% book transportation to the destination first and 38% book accommodation first.** The remaining travellers book in-destination transportation and activities first (like their ski pass).



Most bookings happen within 60 days of the trip



Take action

Many travellers don't make their booking decisions until 3 weeks out. To entice last-minute bookings, consider offering last-minute deals.

- Learn more about [Vrbo promotions](#)
- Learn more about [hotel promotions](#)

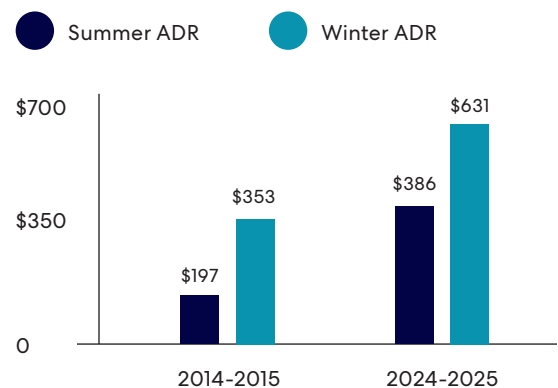


Seasonal shifts: pricing trends in mountain destinations

Mountain tourism pricing dynamics are shifting, revealing both challenges and opportunities. While cost remains the primary barrier for 51% of travellers, a decade-long trend shows Average Daily Rates (ADRs) rising faster for summer than winter seasons.

This suggests an approaching winter price ceiling and the emergence of summer as a viable alternative. Despite faster growth, summer rates remain significantly lower, appealing to cost-conscious travellers. This evolving landscape offers industry players the chance to promote summer experiences as high-value options, develop unique offerings and implement dynamic pricing strategies.

Average Daily Rates (ADRs) rising faster for summer



*Note: summer (1 May – 31 Oct) and winter (1 Nov – 30 Apr). Because shoulder season length varies year-to-year based on opening/closing date, weather, staffing and other variables, Inntopia wraps shoulder seasons into the two defined high seasons for consistent year-over-year analysis.

A dark wooden A-frame cabin with a steep roof and a small dormer window. Two women are sitting on the wooden steps leading to the open front door. The cabin is surrounded by tall pine trees and greenery. The scene is brightly lit, suggesting a sunny day.

1 in 3

travellers chose to stay in
a holiday rental during
their last mountain trip.

Where mountain travellers STAY AND HOW THEY DECIDE

Over half of travellers chose to stay in a hotel during their last mountain trip, but almost one in three stayed in a holiday rental. When travellers pick a holiday rental, their main motivations are value and space.

Top reasons for choosing a holiday rental



56%

of mountain travellers
stayed in a hotel
during their last trip.

29%

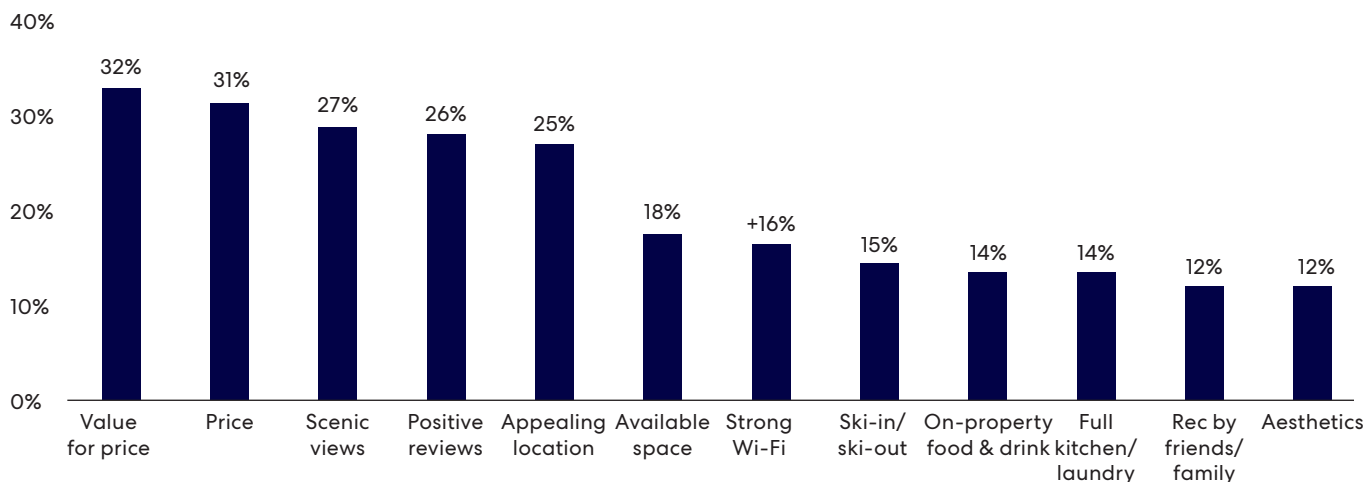
of mountain
travelers stayed
in a holiday rental
during their last trip.

Take action

For holiday rental hosts in mountain towns, it's essential to ensure that you are staying competitive with hotel options. Understand current traveller expectations and perceptions of holiday rentals compared to hotels by checking out our [Short-Term Rental Guest report](#).



Price and views are key for mountain travellers



When looking at features that influence stay decisions, practical ones around pricing come out on top. Scenic views come in third, which is a uniquely mountain traveller priority. These travellers want value, convenience and space, but creature comforts like hot tubs and fireplaces ranked high on mountain travellers list of nice-to-have features.

► Take action

Highlight value for price and scenic views in your listings while emphasising spacious layouts and convenient locations. Show off your extra amenities, like hot tubs and fireplaces, to stand out in a competitive market. Learn more about how to optimise your listing content as a [holiday rental](#) or [as a hotel](#).



Trending US mountain destinations

More than half of travellers left their home state for their last mountain trip, but where are they going? Colorado, California and New York are the most popular domestic states and our first-party traveller data supports that – and shows other emerging choices.



Our [Q1 2025 Traveller Insights](#) showed Big Sky, Montana and Aspen, Colorado, showed strong year-over-year increases.⁴ [In Q3](#), Stowe, Vermont and Acadia National Park in Maine saw strong year-over-year increases as more travellers searched for autumn leaf-peeping spots.⁵



Getting to and around mountain destinations

Most travellers got to their destination by flying there, but almost 50% drove and almost one in three used a hire car. Once in the destination, 62% of those that didn't drive there hired a car. Keep in mind this study focused on US mountain travellers, which can help with your targeting and messaging. Airlines can draw attention to routes to mountain destinations and hire car companies can promote space to bring families and pets or mountain features like all wheel drive.

55%

reached their destination
via air.

48%

reached their destination
via owned/borrowed car.

28%

reached their destination
via hire car.



► Take action

Travellers use a mix of air and car travel to reach mountain destinations, so it's important to ensure seamless ground transportation options, like hire car availability and clear driving directions. You can appeal to travellers looking for a bundled booking experience by participating in a [package promotion](#).

Looking **AHEAD**

The future of mountain tourism is full of opportunities to delight this growing audience. Understanding who these travellers are, what they want and what resources they use to research and book their mountain trips is your competitive advantage.

We're here to turn insights into action and get your offerings front and centre where and when it matters most. From refining your amenities based on traveller desires to tailoring your destination or airline advertising strategy to better resonate, we'll help you capitalise on increasing demand as more travellers answer the call of the mountains.



Methodology

- Sponsored Phocuswright-led traveller survey
 - » Online survey of 1,987 qualified responses through a Dynata consumer panel
 - » US leisure travellers who went to a winter/ski/snow destination or a mountain/hiking destination that offers skiing during the winter
 - » Fielded from 11 February to 26 February 2025
- Research was supported by Inntopia Data Analytics
 - » In-depth analysis of over 2 million folios of mountain destination guests transacted through the Inntopia Commerce booking engine across bookings made between January and December 2024.
 - » Combined the findings from their commerce system with lodging performance data from the DestiMetrics reporting set of mountain town lodging performance.

¹All research unless otherwise noted comes from Phocuswright's Shifting Slopes: Navigating the Future of Mountain Travel 2025

²Expedia Group, Unpack '25, 2024

³Expedia Group, The Path to Purchase, 2023

⁴Expedia Group data, Q4 2024

⁵Expedia Group data, Q2 2025

