

A person wearing a blue jacket and an orange cap stands on a large rock in the foreground, looking out over a vibrant turquoise lake. The lake's surface is calm, reflecting the surrounding forest and the majestic, rugged mountains in the background. The mountains are partially covered in snow and have a warm, golden glow on their peaks, suggesting the time is either sunrise or sunset. The sky is a clear, deep blue with wispy white clouds. The overall scene is serene and inspiring, capturing the essence of a mountain getaway.

SUMMIT SEEKERS

Who mountain travelers are
and how they book

Introduction

A growing number of travelers 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 U.S. mountain traveler. Through a survey, interviews, and Inntopia data analytics, this research reveals demographics, booking habits, values, and preferences of mountain travelers. 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 U.S. leisure travelers 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 traveler

Travelers 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 travelers visited in the summer).



Winter sports traveler

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



Other mountain traveler

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



Mid-tier guest

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



Luxury/upscale guest

Mountain travelers 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 TRAVELER?

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 travelers 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 travelers

4.8 trips

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

\$2.8K

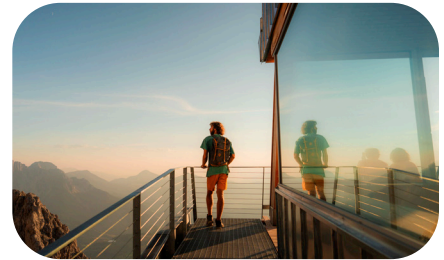
Winter sports travelers spent \$2,888 on their last trip on average.

~\$1.9K

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

6 days

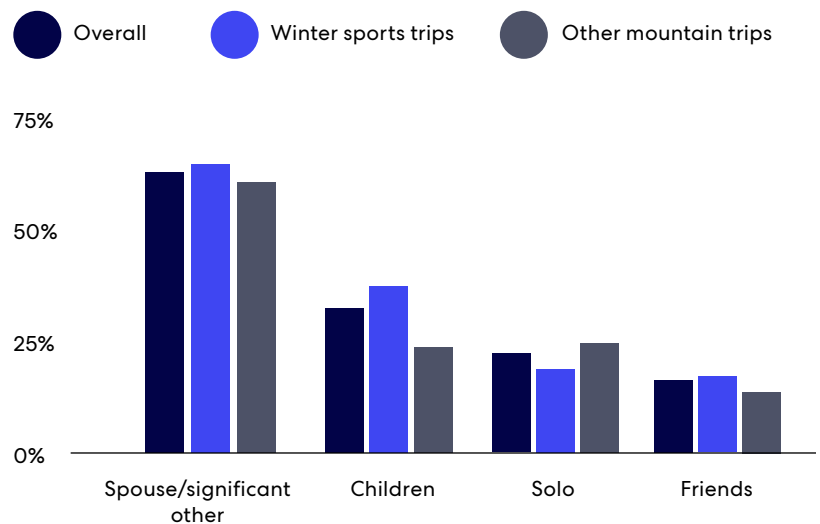
Winter sports travelers had a slightly shorter last trip on average.



Mountain travelers 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 travelers travel more often** and spend more, **other mountain travelers 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.

Travelers make mountain trips a group activity



Take action

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

Three valuable traveler types you need to know



The Luxury Mountain Traveler

These upscale travelers are more likely to venture farther and pay more for their perfect mountain trip.

More likely to travel internationally

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

More likely to use OTAs

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

Less likely to prioritize price

Positive reviews, scenic views, and convenient locations are all more critical lodging elements. They're also more likely to see ski-in/ski-out, on-property food and beverage 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 prioritize 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 travelers

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

Finding the right lodging 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 Traveler

Almost 40% of U.S. mountain travelers went abroad (to non-U.S. 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 travelers and families are more likely to venture abroad

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

Looking for snow, culture, and nature

The top reasons for traveling 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 travelers (39%) and
luxury/upscale guests (31%).

The path to the peak

Trip-planning journeys often start with a simple question: “Where to?” For mountain travelers, 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 do have some destinations in mind to begin with, that list includes more than mountain locations.



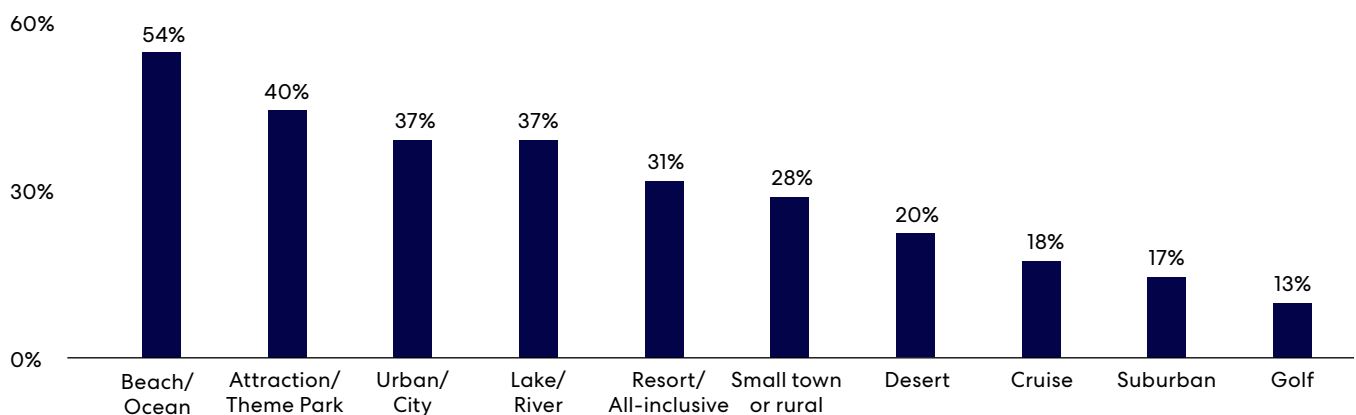
53%

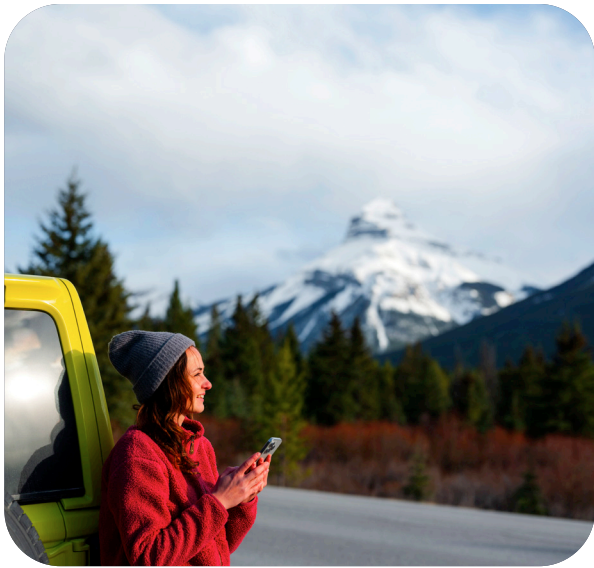
of mountain travelers weren't set on a specific destination when they began trip planning.



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

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





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

▶ 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

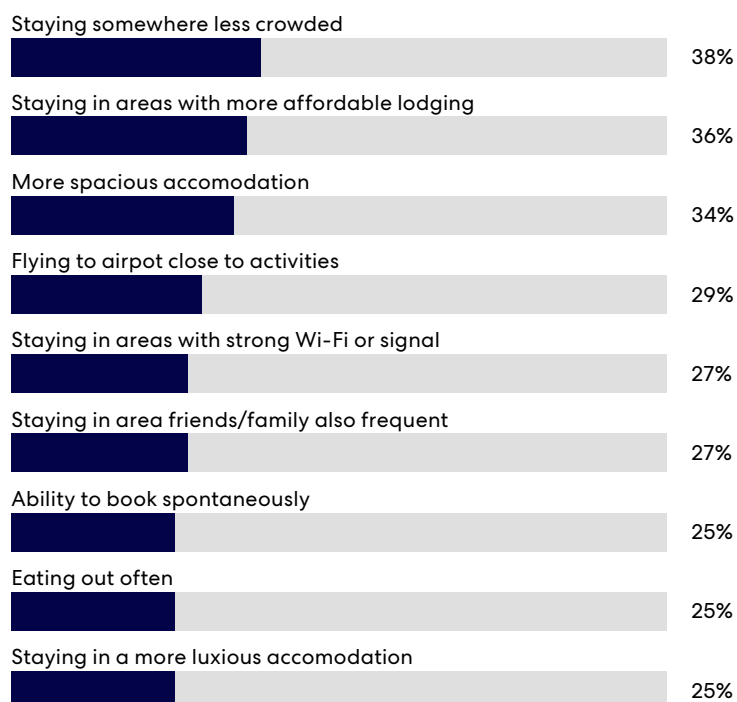
While travelers are swayed by natural beauty, practical priorities like avoiding crowds also come into play during the planning process. We see this ring true in a trend from our [Unpack '25](#) report, “Detour Destinations,” that shows travelers are looking for lesser known, less crowded spots, either 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 travelers the confidence they need to book.



What are the priorities for picking a mountain destination?



Researching and booking the mountain trip

Once the mountain traveler 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?

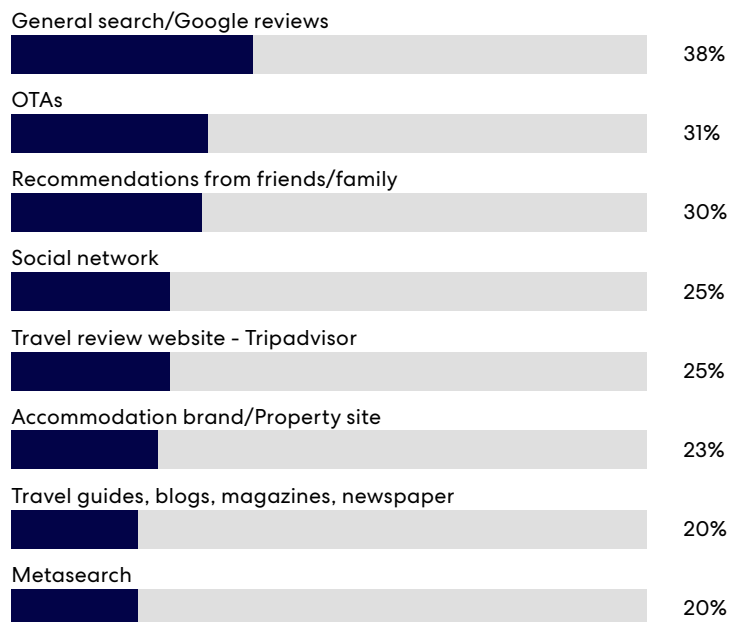
Throughout the research process, mountain travelers lean heaviest on Google and online travel agencies. When it's time to book, OTAs like Expedia top the list of resources, followed by travel provider websites.

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

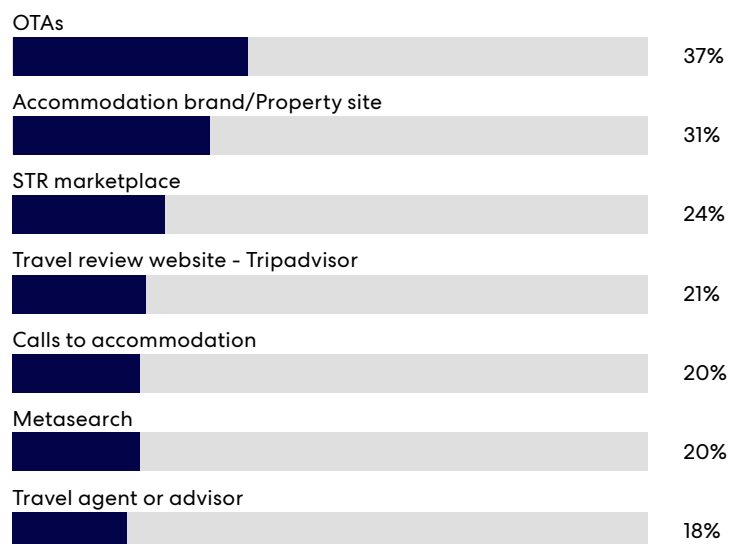
Take action

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

Research resources



Booking resources

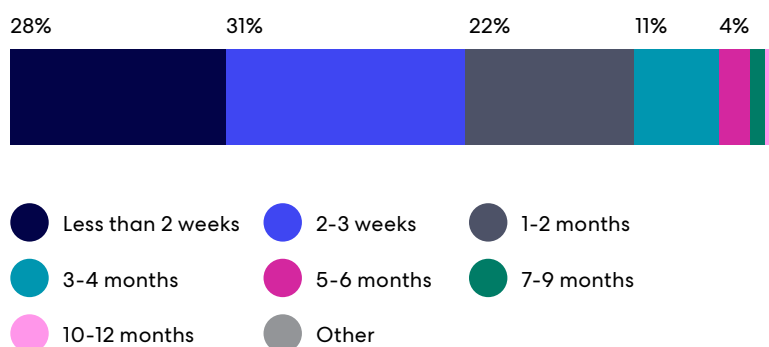


When do travelers book their mountain trips?

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



Most bookings happen within 60 days of the trip



Take action

Many travelers 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](#)

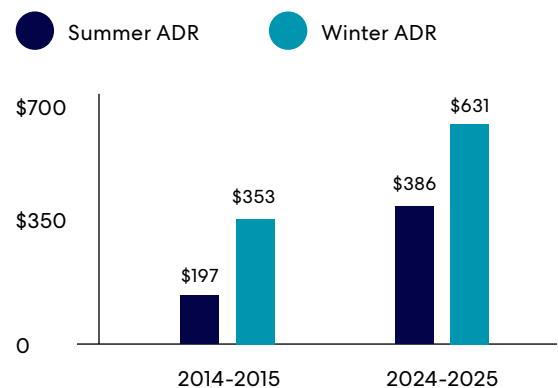


Seasonal shifts: pricing trends in mountain destinations

Mountain tourism pricing dynamics are shifting, revealing both challenges and opportunities. While cost remains the primary barrier for 51% of travelers, 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 travelers. 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 (May 1 - Oct 31) and winter (Nov 1 - Apr 30). 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 window with a red frame. Two women are sitting on the wooden steps in front of the cabin, looking up and smiling. The cabin is surrounded by tall pine trees and greenery. The scene is set in a forest with sunlight filtering through the trees.

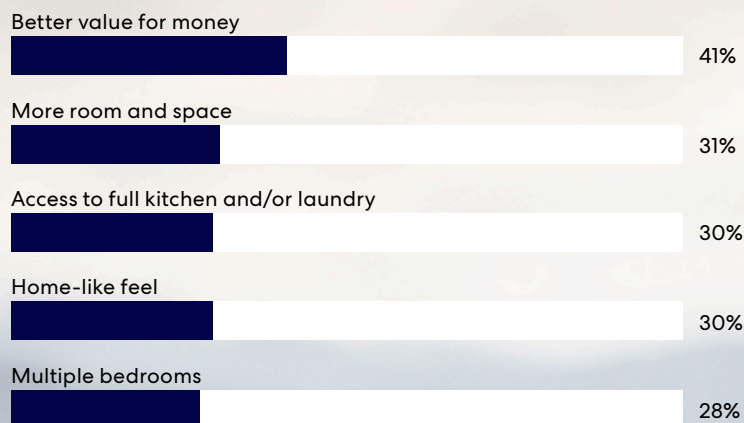
1 in 3

travelers chose to stay in
a vacation rental during
their last mountain trip.

Where mountain travelers STAY AND HOW THEY DECIDE

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

Top reasons for choosing a vacation rental



56%

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

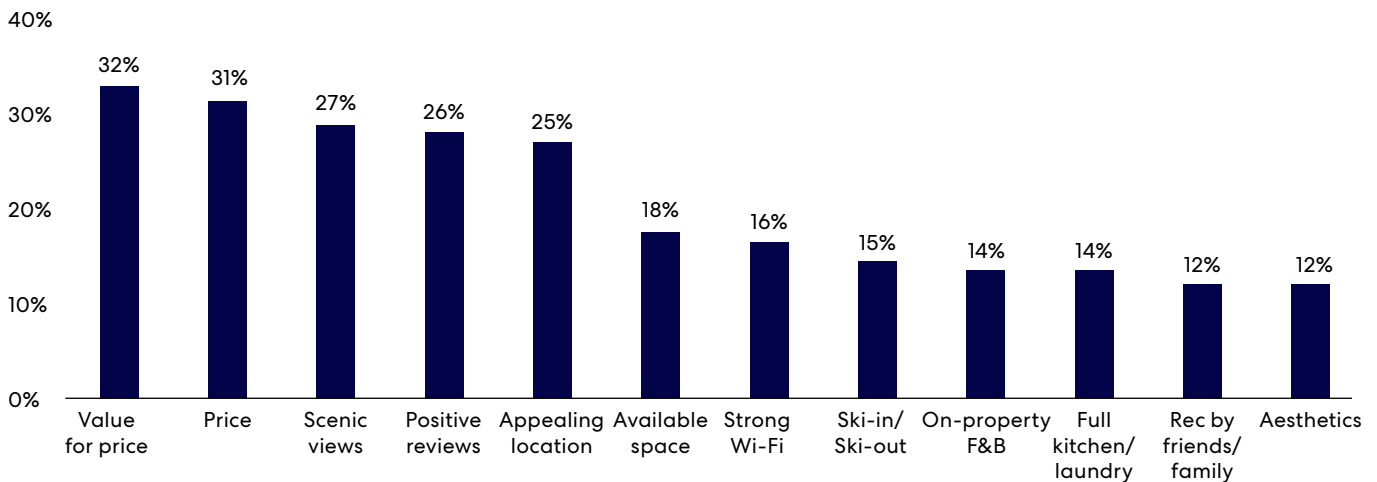
29%

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

Take action

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

Price and views are key for mountain travelers



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 traveler priority. These travelers want value, convenience, and space, but creature comforts like hot tubs and fireplaces ranked high on mountain travelers list of nice-to-have features.

► Take action

Highlight value for price and scenic views in your listings while emphasizing 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 optimize your listing content as a [vacation rental](#) or [as a hotel](#).



Trending U.S. mountain destinations

More than half of travelers 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 traveler supports that — and shows other emerging choices.



Our [Q1 2025 Traveler 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 travelers searched for fall leaf-peeping spots.⁵



Getting to and around mountain destinations

Most travelers got to their destination by flying there, but almost 50% drove, and almost one in three used a rental car. Once in the destination, 62% of those that didn't drive there rented a car. Keep in mind this study focused on U.S. mountain travelers, which can help with your targeting and messaging. Airlines can draw attention to routes to mountain destinations, and rental 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 rental car.



► Take action

Travelers use a mix of air and car travel to reach mountain destinations, so it's important to ensure seamless ground transportation options, like rental car availability and clear driving directions. You can appeal to travelers 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 travelers 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 center where and when it matters most. From refining your amenities based on traveler desires to tailoring your destination or airline advertising strategy to better resonate, we'll help you capitalize on increasing demand as more travelers answer the call of the mountains.



Methodology

- Sponsored Phocuswright-led traveler survey
 - » Online survey of 1,987 qualified responses through a Dynata consumer panel
 - » U.S. leisure travelers who went to a winter/ski/snow destination or a mountain/hiking destination that offers skiing during the winter
 - » Fielded from February 11 and February 26, 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

