

NEW DESTINATIONS: THE FUTURE OF TOURISM

Global tourism is surging, but visitors and locals alike are tired of sightseeing culture. At the same time, climate change, modern work and new technologies are reshaping how and where we travel. Here's a look at the biggest forces redefining tourism in 2026 and beyond.

By Lena Hunter

Director of Special Feature Reports: George Clarke

It's the high season for global tourism, and 2026 is careening toward another record-breaker. Some [307 million people](#) travelled internationally in the first quarter—2 percent more than last year. Incremental, perhaps, but zoom out and the change within a generation is dramatic. “People aren’t traveling the way they used to. It’s more frequent, more international, more blended between work and vacation,” says Greg Jung, chief marketing officer at U.S.-based travel insurance company Seven

Corners. Indeed, [66 percent](#) of people say they have become more interested in travel since the COVID-19 pandemic, and [81 percent](#) of business travelers are now likely to take “bleisure” trips. But the shift runs deeper than Zoom calls by the pool. “Travellers have fundamentally changed,” CEO of Lonely Planet, Paul Yanover, told Newsweek. “People aren’t simply taking holidays anymore; they’re building a collection of experiences that become part of who they are.” Indeed, for many Millennials and

Gen Z, travel experiences have become an asset class, as rising costs of living and uncertain job markets push traditional milestones like home ownership out of reach. [Nearly half](#) of 18-to-34-year-olds prioritise travel over property, according to a poll by Realty Mogul. Meanwhile, Baby Boomers—the richest living generation—average more [leisure trips per year](#) than any other age group.

Yet tourist behavior is not all that has changed. Climate change, overtourism and technology have transformed the holiday landscape. Popular cities like Tokyo and Lisbon have started pushing back against the hordes with visitor caps and taxes. Others, like Bangkok and Southern France, are facing increasingly deadly heatwaves. In the wake of the budget airline and travel marketplace boom, well-known landmarks have gone out of fashion and niche destinations and activities have come in.

What does the future of travel hold? From “new luxury” and emerging hotspots to the rise of AI concierges and hyper-connected flight cabins, we asked 50 leading tourism executives to peer into the crystal ball.

“New Luxe” is all about experience

Luxury travel is one of the fastest-growing tourism segments. The top 10 percent of U.S. households (over \$240,000 income) and top one percent (over \$600,000) take an [average of 4.3 and 6 leisure trips per year](#), according to research by Resonance Consultancy—more than double the 2.8-trip average. They are also spending more than ever before: up to \$12,400 per trip in 2026 (up from \$8,400 in 2022). “Affluent travelers aren’t a niche segment anymore – they’re the structural foundation of the leisure travel economy,” said Chris Fair, president and CEO of Resonance Consultancy.

However, as leisure travel has become more accessible, luxury travel standards have evolved. “Once everyone has taken the same photograph in front of the same landmark, the experience can start to feel hollow,” points out Darryl Wade, co-founder of adventure travel company Intrepid Travel. Five-star accommodation and ticking off hotspots are no longer enough, agrees Melanie Meador, CEO of tour marketplace Travel Curious. “It’s about experiences that feel curated, meaningful, and uniquely your own. Experiences have become the emotional centerpiece of the journey.”

A sunrise hot air balloon ride above the Teotihuacán pyramids of Mexico City; whisky tastings from casks never released to market in Scotland; private viewings inside Tokyo sumo training stables; after-hours entry into the Great Pyramid of Giza. Luxury tourism promises seamless exclusive access. “[Travellers] value the freedom and



▲ Saranda in Albania. The Mediterranean country is one of Europe’s fastest growing tourism destinations of the past five years. PIXABAY

reassurance of having everything taken care of,” says Jérémie Hoss, a regional managing director of the resort company Club Med, which invented the all-inclusive concept 75 years ago. Its offering has grown beyond dining and play areas to outings for tea with Berber families in Marrakech and glacier hikes in the Alps. Tellingly, the top end of its portfolio is seeing the highest growth. “Our Exclusive Collection resort in Cefalù, Sicily is up 40 percent compared with last summer,” Hoss told *Newsweek*. “The market has evolved,” agrees Roberto Lucci, COO of Tuscany Now & More, which started as a luxury villa rental business, but has now expanded to trips. “Bespoke experiences have become

absolutely essential.”

The trend echoes all over the world. In the U.S., the \$4.3 billion, 88-acre mega-retreat Resorts World Las Vegas has launched the Strip’s first “luxury inclusive experience”—a package bundling valet, dining, private-club-lounge access and pool privileges with “built-in nightlife.” “Knowing where to start [in Las Vegas] can be overwhelming. We saw an opportunity to curate a stay for travelers who value indulgence without compromise,” explains company president Carlos Castro.

New luxury, in other words, is about achieving a string of bragworthy encounters, without fretting over admin and risk. “Luxury today is much more about convenience, confidence and authenticity than expensive extras,” says Tomáš Turek, CEO of Prague-based Daytrip, which provides private drivers for tailored sightseeing trips in 130 countries. “Travellers want to know exactly who is collecting them, what vehicle they’ll be travelling in and what to expect throughout their journey.” With this updated playbook in hand, luxury agencies have swooped, offering hyper-personal itineraries for top-end tourists. George Morgan Grenville, founder and CEO of Red Savannah, recalls planning a surprise for a client at the church where her parents had married: “The vicar introduced us to the church historian, who found the original marriage register signed by her parents. When our client arrived at the church, the register was waiting for her. She burst into tears. It became one of the defining moments of the entire trip.”



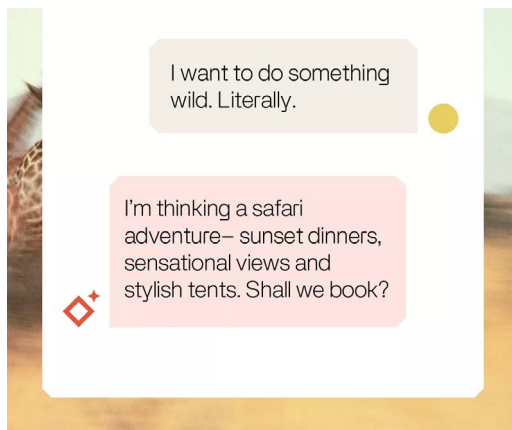
We serve all waters

Passport, keys, wallet... AI-concierge?

Fifty-four percent of U.S. travelers say they use artificial intelligence to plan and book travel, according to research by [Skyscanner](#). Amongst Gen Z, it's 72 percent. So far, generative AI has primarily been used as a search tool, but new systems are quickly upending that.

Take the app Mindtrip AI, for example. It enables users to verbally describe their dream holidays, then fulfills the necessary bookings. Since launching in May 2024, it already reports 1.5 million monthly users. Texas-based Sabre Corporation provides the underlying technology—Agentic APIs and MCP capabilities—that Mindtrip developers use to build the app. Demand among developers for Sabre's AI tools has more than doubled so far, says CEO Kurt Ekert—and it's accelerating. He expects natural-language booking will hit the mainstream "in the next few years."

"Travel will become almost entirely conversational. Rather than searching websites or filling in booking forms, travellers will simply explain what they need. You might say you need to fly home, stay near the airport, arrange a car on arrival and make a restaurant reservation. Your AI assistant will understand



▲ Many in the travel business see agentic AI conversations as one of the most disruptive and valuable shifts in travel technology. [SABRE CORPORATION](#)

"Today's luxury is about time, authenticity and personalisation. The ability to experience more while travelling less has become one of the greatest luxuries."

Sascha Gill, CEO, United Waterways

your preferences and organise everything automatically... like a personal concierge available wherever you travel."

Several online travel marketplaces have jumped on the trend already. Skyscanner's

"Explore with AI" tool can converse with you to suggest destinations, dates and travel styles. Expedia has a similar tool, "Smart Trip AI." At eDreams ODIGEO, CEO Dana Dunne called natural-language concierges "a new interface and acquisition channel." And it's not just travel platforms: Wise, the international payments company, is betting on it too. "We have a strong payments experience, but the broader ambition is to create something closer to a travel concierge, where customers don't need multiple different apps and providers simply to manage the basic elements of an international journey," Head of Product for North America Vinay Nilakantan told *Newsweek*.

There's a breathless, frozen-in-time quality about the present, as tourism writhes through a technological metamorphosis. "Years from now, I think we'll look back at how much work it once took to plan a trip and find it extraordinary," Skyscanner CEO Bryan Batista commented.

Emerging destinations: Brazil, Uzbekistan, Albania

This year's blockades of the Strait of Hormuz, which squeezed Middle East oil supply and pushed up airfares, did not dampen international travel. Europe, pulling in 130 million arrivals in the first three months of 2026, continued to lead as the world's biggest destination. U.S. tourists are especially big fans. Last year, Greece saw four times as many U.S. visitors as it did a decade ago and Portugal, almost five times. In Italy, "a considerable gap" has opened between the U.S. and other regions, observes Tuscany Now & More's Lucci.

But with technology demolishing logistical barriers to travel, interest in non-mainstream destinations is growing. "Destinations that previously attracted only a handful of visitors can suddenly become global travel trends almost overnight through AI recommendations and social media," says Daytrip's Turek. Americans are now flocking to smaller Central & Eastern

◆ Nyerere National Park is the largest national park in Tanzania and one of the world's largest wildlife sanctuaries and national parks. [TANZANIA TOURISM](#)



► Khiva, Uzbekistan. Tourism is booming across the Central Asian country, a historic trade hub along the Silk Road. PIXABAY

European destinations like Estonia, Czechia, Hungary, Poland, Romania, Latvia and Slovakia, where improved transport links have made it easier to get around. These countries reported year-to-date growth in U.S. visitors ranging from 6.9 to 35.9 percent compared with 2025, according to the [European Travel Commission](#).

Globally, the fastest-growing destinations in 2026 are Rio de Janeiro in Brazil (up 21 percent year-on-year), Seville in Spain (up 14 percent) and Funchal in Portugal (up 12 percent), according to eDreams' 2026 booking data. Newer entrants are moving even faster: Podgorica in Montenegro is up 99 percent, Punta Cana in the Dominican Republic, 45 percent and Warsaw in Poland, 20 percent. On a longer timescale, Uzbekistan and Colombia have seen some of the largest growth of the decade. Meanwhile, visits to the U.S. have slumped since President Donald Trump's return to the White House for reasons including tariffs, an immigration crackdown and relentless jabs at allied nations.

Yet tourism flows are fickle. Every few years, a destination becomes a "hit." "We have seen it happen with Iceland, Vietnam, Morocco and, more recently, Albania," says Intrepid Travel's Wade. So, which destinations are likely to be next? "Brazil feels like a country with enormous untapped potential. Incredible diversity, culture, nature and experiences, yet international tourism remains relatively underdeveloped," says



"Social media has transformed how people discover destinations. Travellers are no longer inspired only by film, tv and celebrities, but by real people sharing authentic experiences."

Melanie Meador, CEO, Travel Curious

Wade. Lonely Planet's Yanover hopes more people discover sub-Saharan Africa: "Places like Tanzania and Namibia have extraordinary stories to tell and unforgettable experiences to offer." CEO of Radisson Hotel Group Federico J. González points to the Middle East, "one of the world's fastest growing hospitality markets." "In Saudi Arabia, tourism

investment is accelerating at an extraordinary pace," he told *Newsweek*.

Air travel is becoming "hyperconnected"

Atlanta International Airport handled some 106 million passengers last year—more than the population of Vietnam—and cemented its title as the world's busiest airport for 27 out of the last 28 years. But second place tells a more striking story: Dubai International Airport has roared up the rankings from 25 million in 2005 to 95.2 million in 2025 at more than triple the growth rate of Atlanta. Its explosive rise reflects the Middle East's rapid emergence as a flight hub. And there's fuel in the tank yet: Dubai's Al Maktoum International Airport, under development until 2032, is preparing to hit 260 million. "The real challenge isn't size," says Paul Griffiths, CEO of Dubai Airports, "it's operating at that scale while still making the experience feel intuitive and personal for every traveller. If we achieve that, DWC won't just be one of the world's largest airports, it will be one of the easiest to move through."

All over the world, terminal upgrades are enabling vast numbers of people to move through airports almost touchlessly. Singapore Changi is on track to automate 95 percent of arrivals using biometrics, and Istanbul and Abu Dhabi already operate near-fully biometric journeys. In the U.S., TSA's Touchless ID is being rolled out in business hubs like Atlanta, Los Angeles and New York. In the U.K., Gatwick and Heathrow are trialing facial recognition for non-EEA arrivals.



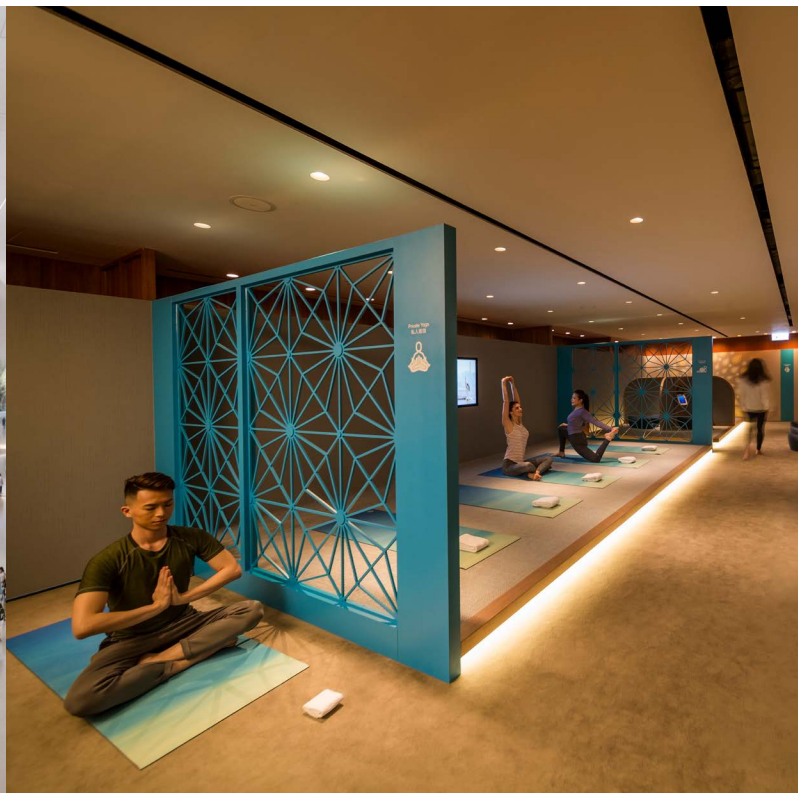
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▲ Artist's impression of the \$34.8 billion USD expansion of Dubai World Central - Al Maktoum International. DUBAI AIRPORTS



▲ "The Sanctuary" yoga room inside The Pier Business Class lounge at Hong Kong International Airport. CATHAY PACIFIC AIRWAYS LIMITED

Terminals are not only optimizing for speed—they are getting a facelift too. Long gone are the sterile liminal zones that defined airports of yesteryear. New designs focus on regional architecture and culture, with shops full of locally produced items. Munich Airport, for example, now has Bavarian beer gardens and live music. "Traditional retail and food courts are giving way to more experiential concepts, premium hospitality services and lounges," says Rémi Maumon de Longevialle, CEO of VINCI Airports, which manages more than 70 airports in 14 countries. "We want passengers to immediately feel connected to the destination they are visiting rather than experiencing a terminal that could be anywhere in the world."

Entertainment and luxury are becoming more pronounced, too. Incheon International Airport in South Korea has installed VR lounges for virtual tours and gaming. Travelers through Zurich Airport can rent bicycles to visit nearby lakes during layovers. Doha Hamad International Airport

boasts a swimming pool, and Hong Kong International Airport, a yoga room. Where airports allow it, premium lounges are becoming significantly larger. "Airlines, banks and airport partners are investing millions," Suzy Kitcher, CEO of hospitality company Sodexo Live! told *Newsweek*, adding that passengers have proved willing to pay for "more than somewhere to sit before boarding." Those millions are worth it: data from Airports Council International (ACI) finds that increasing passenger satisfaction by 1 percent leads to an average 1.5 percent growth in non-aeronautic revenues.

Airport shavasanas aside, the biggest transformation is happening in-flight. For years, fewer than 10 percent of seatback screens have had internet access—but that's about to change. Now, satellites like Starlink and OneWeb are bringing the cloud into the cabin. "The aircraft is becoming a hyperconnected environment," says Don Buchman, president of aviation at Viasat, which provides digital infrastructure to airlines. "You would not get on a flight today

without expecting water, lighting or a functioning seat. Increasingly, passengers feel the same about Wi-Fi." The change is coming fast: "Airlines are investing heavily," CEO of aviation tech company Panasonic Avionics Ken Sain told *Newsweek*. "The cabin is the single greatest digital engagement opportunity an airline has."

Air Canada already offers free Wi-Fi for loyalty members across North America, and "full expansion across international destinations" is in the works, says Executive Vice President Mark Galardo. Others are at similar stages, including JetBlue, Delta Air Lines, Qatar Airways, Singapore Airlines and United Airlines. Private jet cabins point to where commercial flights are heading. "Customers expect the same level of streaming capability in the air as they have in their office or home," says John Owen, CEO of private jet operator Airshare. In what will no doubt be nails on a chalkboard to the ears of some and music to others, the next step, he says, is "replicating the performance and output of a typical workday while traveling."



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From extra bandwidth to extra miles: Qantas, which already operates a 17-hour direct Perth to London route, is about to launch the world's longest scheduled passenger service. "Project Sunrise"—nonstop Sydney to London and Sydney to New York—will have a flight time of 21 to 24 hours when it launches in October 2027. "A flight of more than twenty hours is a new proposition, so we needed to determine whether passengers would be willing to remain onboard for that length of time and whether they would pay a premium for the convenience of travelling nonstop," says CEO of the company's international and freight division Cam Wallace. The undertaking has required years of planning. "One of the earliest challenges was working with Airbus to create a bespoke version of the A350 with the additional fuel capacity required for these routes," he told *Newsweek*. The interior has also been redesigned to hold only 238 seats. "Other airlines may operate the same size of aircraft with around 350 seats, making our configuration one of the least dense A350 layouts in the world."

Rail holidays are in a golden era

2026 has been another banner year for rail journeys. In the U.K., bookings have soared 186 percent compared with last year, according to data from Railbookers. France and Germany also hit triple digits. Even longtime favorite Italy saw 98 percent more reservations. As the emergence of the Swedish term *tågskryt*—literally, "train brag" (a spinoff from the *flygskam*, or "flight shame," movement)—suggests, train holidays have



▲ Arsenale's "La Dolce Vita Orient Express" luxury rail tour in Italy – not to be confused with the historic Paris to Istanbul route – weaves through 14 regions from north to south. ARSENALE GROUP

"We no longer regard premiumisation as a temporary trend, but a structural change in the market. Travellers are increasingly choosing to prioritise discretionary spending on more frequent and longer holidays, experiences, and a higher level of comfort."

Cam Wallace, CEO of International and Freight Division, Qantas

become synonymous with good taste and ethics. "Luxury rail naturally combines several of today's most important travel trends: cultural immersion, slow travel, exceptional hospitality and sustainability," explains Paolo Barletta, CEO of luxury operator Arsenale Group. Passengers are not only travelling in greater numbers, but for longer: the average journey now lasts 11 days—up from 10 in 2025. "The journey itself becomes the destination. Guests are not simply visiting

places; they are discovering entire regions through their landscapes, gastronomy, craftsmanship, traditions and local communities," says Barletta.

Many in the rail sector are speaking unguardedly of a "golden era"—as the existence of Railbookers' showstopping "Around the World By Luxury Train" tour attests. Now in its third year, it snakes through nine countries in 60 days for a mere \$130,000 per person. The even-more-exclusive Seven Stars in Kyushu, Japan, which accommodates just 28 passengers and is booked years in advance via a lottery, introduced new routes in 2026 due to overwhelming demand—a first since its launch in 2013. Sleeper tours in regions "that have rarely appeared on global itineraries" are also on an upswing, observes Barletta, citing Arsenale's lines in Saudi Arabia, Egypt and Uzbekistan.

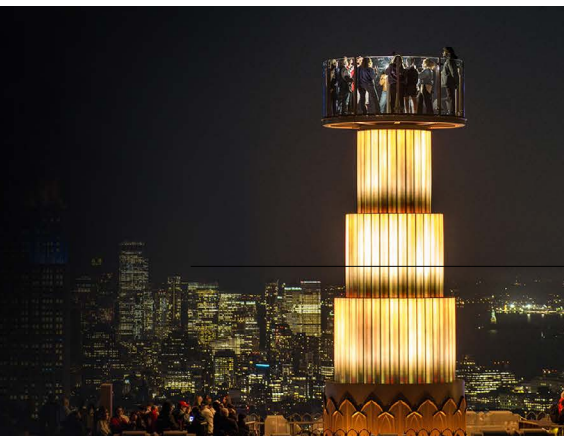
A few projects should be on every rail enthusiast's radar this year. The long-awaited Budapest–Belgrade line, part of the corridor linking Central Europe to the port of Piraeus in Greece, is expected to launch in autumn 2026. This will open the gate to one of Europe's best-kept secrets, the stunning onward route to Bar in Montenegro. Elsewhere, European Sleeper has launched a new 1,100-kilometer overnighter linking Amsterdam, Brussels, a string of Swiss-Alp stops and Milan—the first line connecting these corners of the continent in many years. European Sleeper will also launch a Malmö to Brussels service in 2028, with stops in Copenhagen, Amsterdam, Rotterdam, The Hague and Antwerp.



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For the real bucket-list chasers, Geographic Expeditions has opened a 22-day luxury journey from China to Uzbekistan, following the ancient Silk Road trade route. In North America, Armstrong Collective—the operator behind the spectacular Rocky Mountaineer routes—has extended its Canyon Spirit tour from Denver to Salt Lake City, passing through Glenwood Springs and Moab. Finally, looking one year ahead, the legendary Orient Express between Paris and Istanbul—yes, the one famously murdered upon in Agatha Christie's whodunnit—is set to relaunch in 2027, complete with bombastic Art Deco interiors.

Expedition cruising in a melting world

Like overlanding, cruising continues to grow in popularity—particularly in the Antarctic. The icy continent drew some 120,000 visits in 2025 and 2026 and could see [450,000 every summer](#) within a decade, according to a [forecast](#) by researchers at the University of Tasmania. “We are seeing stronger forward sales for Arctic and Antarctic small ship expeditions than at any point in our history, with bookings significantly further ahead than we would normally expect at this stage,” says Sam Seward, president of cruise company Quark Expeditions, which has launched its 2028 and 2029 Antarctic seasons earlier than ever before.

Polar cruising is on the front line of overtourism and sustainability debates. On the one hand, commercial operators offer berths to climate and environmental researchers, enabling them to monitor seabird or whale populations and record ecosystem changes. For tourists, bearing witness to climate change in Earth's most remote locations can crystallize a lasting ethic of environmentalism. Many cruises host expert-led seminars and give guests opportunities to participate in wildlife monitoring. “Antarctica or the Arctic aren't simply bucket list destinations,” says Gerhard Raina, CEO of HX

Expeditions, which operates vessels in Antarctica, Greenland, Spitsbergen, Arctic Canada, Iceland and Norway, “they're opportunities to understand climate change, wildlife, indigenous cultures and the fragile ecosystems.”

On the other, cruising in these ecosystems causes physical disturbances, noise pollution and carbon emissions that contribute to their decline. Each cruise traveller to Antarctica [typically produces](#) between 3.2 and 4.1 tonnes of carbon—roughly the emissions an [average person produces in a year](#). Though polar operators follow strict regulations around proximity to wildlife, landing sites and seasonal activities—and vessel emissions are only a tiny fraction of the global picture—ecotourism guides have begun to [suggest](#) we may be “loving the Antarctic to death.”

Is there such a thing as ethical polar cruising? Wrestling with this question has led to a string of positive outcomes. Ships are becoming greener, and travelers, better informed. Quark Expeditions' Seward says he sees the expedition industry “moving further towards citizen science.” The International Association of Antarctica Tour Operators (IAATO) has pledged to [halve emissions by 2050](#) and some operators have already launched hybrid-powered vessels. HX Expeditions' MS Roald Amundsen, for example—one of the world's greenest expedition cruise ships—uses electrical propulsion to cut emissions by 20 percent. Seward observes that, increasingly, “guests want companies to be transparent about emissions and environmental policies, particularly when travelling to extremely sensitive environments such as Antarctica, Greenland and the Norwegian Arctic.” However, the broader cruise sector still has a long way to go. “I would love to see Quark and the wider industry transition towards biofuels and other cleaner fuel solutions as that infrastructure develops,” he told *Newsweek*. “I would also like to see further expansion of overland programmes before and after expeditions. There is an opportunity to encourage people to take longer journeys while flying less, helping reduce the overall emissions.”

“When you combine extraordinary destinations with science, education, sustainability and warm, personalised hospitality, you create experiences that genuinely change how people see the world.”

Gerhard Raina, CEO, HX Expeditions



► Orne Harbor is a popular site for tourist expeditions to the Antarctic Peninsula.

KAY FOCHTMANN / HX EXPEDITIONS

From One Tour to a Global Travel Company

By Amigo Tours

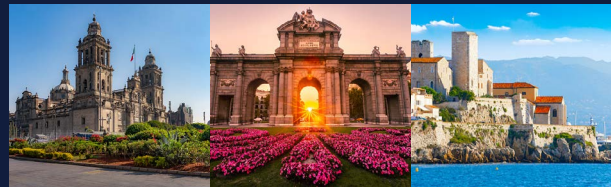
Twenty-one years ago, Amigo Tours began with a single tour to the pyramids in Mexico City. There was no global network or catalogue—only a belief that visiting an iconic place could become more meaningful when transformed into a memorable experience.

That vision belonged to Jose Arozarena, Amigo's founder, whose entrepreneurial instinct turned a local operation into one of the world's largest operators of tours and experiences.

From Mexico, Amigo entered tourism's most competitive markets. It expanded first into the United

Kingdom, followed by Spain and France, then the United States and the rest of Europe. Success required more than reproducing a tour: it demanded local knowledge, operational discipline and the ability to distinguish the company in destinations where expectations—and competition—were high.

Japan became the culmination of that journey. Its customs and exacting service standards required Amigo to adapt its model to one of the world's most nuanced travel markets. By succeeding there, the Mexican company completed an expansion across three continents.



Today, Amigo welcomes more than 3.8 million passengers. Behind that scale is a team whose experience, consistency and commitment have shaped the company over more than two decades. From product design to daily operations across destinations, its people turn global reach into trusted local experiences.

Amigo's growth has mirrored a transformation in travel. Visitors still want to see the Eiffel Tower, the Sagrada Família or Mexico City's landmarks, but access alone is no longer enough. They seek the first entry of the morning, the story behind a

masterpiece and the human connection that makes a famous place personal.

Arozarena recognised this shift early. Technology expanded Amigo's reach, but storytelling, execution and an unwavering focus on travellers sustained its rise. Amigo's story is ultimately one of ambition and persistence: one tour became a global footprint, and one entrepreneur's vision—brought to life by a dedicated team—helped reshape how millions experience the world.



Museums are learning from theme parks

The post-pandemic years have not been kind to museums. Squeezed by funding cuts, many have shuttered. Others, however, have risen magnificently to the challenge, ditching the glass and launching multisensory experiences that reimagine what museums can be.

The poster child of immersive exhibits is undoubtedly Las Vegas' AREA15. The 35-acre experiential entertainment complex features mind-bending participatory art, VR, axe-throwing, dining, retail and a Boeing aircraft jutting out of the wall. "The 747 emerging from the building wasn't part of the original concept, but it perfectly reflects our DNA. We constantly ask ourselves, 'What's the coolest thing we can do next?'" CEO Winston Fisher told *Newsweek*. Here, you'll find art collective Meow Wolf's famous Omega Mart installation—a down-the-rabbit-hole supermarket brimming with secret passageways, puzzles and satirical products like "moth milk" and "Y2K contingency sauce." Nearby is toy brand Superplastic's "Dopeameme Institute for Pleasure Research"—an installation designed to trigger a dopamine rush via physical and mental challenges and adapt to players' excitement levels in real time using radio wave monitors.

Visitors no longer expect these experiences only from blockbuster venues. Travelers want more than "a museum where you just look



▲ Omega Mart at AREA15 is an immersive exhibition and alternate-reality game where visitors unearth a corporate mystery. ATLAS MEDIA



▲ The "Top of the Rock" observation deck at 30 Rockefeller Plaza offers thrill experiences like "The Beam" (recreating the famous 1930s New York skyscraper photo) and "SKYLIFT", an ascending platform with even loftier views. THG CREATIVE

at things on a wall," says Jonathan Ullman, president and CEO of The Mob Museum—a venue 20 times smaller and a 30-minute drive from AREA15. Officially the National Museum of Organized Crime and Law Enforcement, it features a Prohibition exhibit with an underground speakeasy entrance and a "Crime Lab" where visitors can try forensic analysis techniques. It also hosts talks by Chicago mafia turncoat Frank Calabrese Jr. about his former Mob life and relationship with his father, notorious hitman Frank Calabrese Sr. "People don't just want to show up; they want to be part of the story—to have the secret password, find the side door and encounter mystery and excitement along the way," says Ullman.

It's a fine line to tread: "One of the pitfalls we sometimes encounter is a desire to integrate technology for technology's sake," Erik Neergaard, CEO of themed experience company THG Creative, told *Newsweek*. "Time and again, we find that the wow factor of cool new technology doesn't go far with guests; they want to be surprised and amazed by an experience or transported and transformed by a story, regardless of the kind of technology that made it happen."

A few upcoming openings promise to nail the balance of

spectacle and substance. The Lucas Museum of Narrative Art will open in Los Angeles in September, featuring art from legendary comic book artists and writers, alongside canonical painters. The five-story, 300,000-square-foot venue takes the shape of an infinity symbol with an amphitheater, hanging gardens and waterfall. Then, in November, Europe's newest art institution Kanal-Pompidou in Brussels, Belgium, will cut the ribbon. Occupying a former car factory, it will launch with 350 pieces by artists including Matisse, Mondrian and Picasso—on loan from Centre Pompidou in Paris. Also in November, London Museum completes its expansion from 180,000 to 290,000 square feet in what its architectural firm, Stanton Williams, calls "one of the biggest projects of cultural reimagining in Europe at the moment." Its day-to-night program features partnerships with Fabric nightclub, Morley's chicken shop and other guests, with an inaugural exhibition on London food culture. Then in December, the long-awaited Guggenheim Abu Dhabi will open—a jaw-dropping, Jacques-Tati-esque architectural feat of interconnected blocks and glass bridges designed by the late Frank Gehry—with works from the 1960s to present.

Sport is the ultimate lodestone

Of all tourism segments, sport is the fastest-expanding, according to [research](#) published by the World Economic Forum. Sport tourism's total value in 2026 is estimated at over \$678 billion – 10 percent of the world's total tourism expenditure. In recent years, UN Tourism has started referring to events like the Olympics, FIFA World Cup and Super Bowl, which draw hundreds of thousands—even millions—of attendees, as “mega events.”

Mega events are formidable affairs. At Harry Reid International Airport in Las Vegas, coordination for the Formula 1 Grand Prix and Super Bowl LVIII began nearly a year in advance. Transport hubs bear significant responsibility, points out Director of Aviation for Clark County, James C. Chrisley, “from managing cargo and equipment arriving well ahead of an event, to accommodating significant increases in private jet activity.” The local economic impact of a single sporting event can be sizeable: In 2025, the Tokyo Marathon [boosted](#) consumer spending by some \$100 million in a ten-kilometer radius of the race, while the London Marathon [generated](#) £226 million across the U.K. CEO of TBR Global Chauffeuring Greg Chambers says global events are one of the biggest opportunities in the travel business. “We’re seeing increasing demand from organisations looking to deliver exceptional delegate experiences, whether that’s international summits, sporting events, exhibitions or corporate conferences,” he told *Newsweek*.

Hotels are also pivoting towards

“If communities stop benefiting from tourism, then the entire model becomes unsustainable.”

Federico J. González, CEO, Radisson Hotel Group

sport. In the U.K., Radisson Group has partnered with Manchester City Football Club on a hotel inside Etihad Stadium that offers bedside views of the pitch—part of its strategy to promote destinations through sport. In the U.S., Hilton Grand Vacations has a relationship with the New York Yankees and Kia Center in Orlando, where members can attend baseball and basketball games. “Our objective is not simply to send someone to the venue. We look for ways to add access. That could include going down to the floor before the game while the team is practising, followed by dinner and hospitality before the event begins,” says Senior Executive Vice President and Chief Operating Officer Gordon Gurnik. Some destination organizations have even started creating their own “tentpole events.” In Anaheim, California, the tourism board co-hosts Savannah Bananas games. “We’ve hosted them twice now, selling out Angel Stadium with approximately 45,000 people each evening. Hotels filled, restaurants were busy and the city benefited from thousands of overnight visitors,” says CEO of Visit Anaheim Mike Waterman.

An uncertain future

Major sporting events face an

uncertain future. During this year’s Tour de France, for example, wildfires blazed in the Pyrénées-Orientales region during the third stage. As average temperatures tipped 30 degrees Celsius, some riders were drinking 28 bottles of water per day. Similar heat at the Shanghai Masters tennis tournament last year prompted Denmark’s Holger Rune to ask an official “Do you want a player to die on court?” Ski destinations are also vulnerable to global warming: In the U.S., ski seasons are projected to be [14 to 33](#) days shorter than in 1960–1979 under low-emission scenarios, and 27 to 62 days shorter under high-emission scenarios. “Climate change is undoubtedly one of the biggest challenges facing the sector,” said Intrepid Travel’s Wade. “The challenge is not simply reacting to those changes when they occur. It is about planning ahead and building a more resilient and responsible tourism industry for the future.”

Looking ahead, a recent [UNESCO report](#) outlines how tourism destinations across all sectors can contribute to climate mitigation and adaptation. Well-preserved forests and coastal habitats can help store carbon and protect against storms and floods; major tourism sites can act as “learning laboratories” for the study and mitigation of climate impacts; destinations can test resilient management strategies—just as many are already doing. “Success,” write the authors, “will require us to expand our networks and partnerships with local communities and businesses and to encourage the tourism industry to join us in this vital task.” ●

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