

INTERNATIONAL TRAVEL: WHAT TO EXPECT IN 2023



The pandemic taught us that nothing should be taken for granted. And, with most countries having now lifted all Covid-19-related restrictions, the vast majority of people are keen to once again make travel an important part of their lives, albeit in a year of no-normal, as **Nada Alameddine**, managing partner at Hodema consulting services, explains.

In October 2022, the digital travel platform Booking.com asked more than 24,000 people from 32 countries how they foresaw their travel plans in the months to follow, with war, instability and inflation dominating world news. The report stated that: "2023 will be about creatively reimagining travel amid the chaos. Nothing will be off limits and everything is on the menu as everyone seeks to find the right balance in a world of contradictions." Expedia also announced: "In 2023, travelers are ditching the conventional and veering off course for all-new experiences. Prepare for the year of the no-normal."

So, what does this all mean for the future of international travel? The key word will be "adaptability." Travelers will need to adapt to potential new health restrictions; they will have to navigate rising transportation and hospitality costs, as energy bills will likely increase, unlike salaries. They will be required to adjust to new geopolitical considerations, as previously safe countries become no-go areas; and they will also be encouraged to adopt more climate-friendly traveling habits. The question remains, how do we reconcile our urge to travel with times of great change?

Back to basics

For some, the answer is venturing off grid. A way to forget about the world and escape the everyday is to focus on nature and go off the beaten track. Sleeping in tents or cabins, cooking on campfires and trekking in the woods are great options for people looking for a back-to-basics experience. Nature lovers and green activists will also find holiday plans that match their values. For more radical individuals, learning survival skills is crucial, such as lighting a fire or foraging in the wild. But for those who are not ready for such extreme plans, switching off from our connected lives by traveling to a place with no screens or internet and making our own meals can be a good way to start the "off-grid" experience.

Looking for a culture shock

After almost two years spent in our living rooms, many of us were yearning to travel far away and discover new cultures and places. Indeed, 73 percent of travelers surveyed by Booking.com expressed their wish to escape their zone of comfort. For most, this means visiting remote places, discovering hidden gems and learning about exotic traditions and languages, while for others, the plans might be more peculiar, such as tasting the hottest chili pepper, going on alien spotting tours or simply buying a one-way ticket somewhere.

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The good old days

A common way of dealing with uncertainty is to reminisce about the past, a soothing exercise to forget about how unclear and ambiguous things are. The same applies to travel; we all remember places we love from our childhood or early adulthood. People strive to find comfort and nostalgia in their past trips. Also known as the "madeleine moment" or Proust effect, these places can be a family home or a popular summer or winter destination.

Television also has a big impact on our travel choices. According to the latest Expedia survey, some people are turning to popular TV series and films for inspiration.

Me time

Another way to find comfort and reduce stress is by going on trips that focus on wellness, such as retreats or pilgrimages. These health hiatuses can be religious, sport-related or meditative.

The "bleisure" trend

Business travel is back. However, the forced break caused many employees to reevaluate their employment conditions and seek less

stressful, more relaxing environments in which to work. This also applies to work trips. Companies are looking to build more camaraderie among staff and offer a leisure side to work trips. So themed stays are on trend, with games and team-building activities on the menu. The ability to work from anywhere is also creating new destination options for firms.

Traveling in a virtual reality

Another world is opening to tech-savvy travelers, with virtual reality, biometrics and the metaverse now providing new travel experiences. Consider the metaverse a new kind of travel agent, which makes us try places; we may never even visit. The rapid evolution of the technology will soon enable users to feel 3D touch and sand or heat with their hands. Biometric payments via ApplePay or GooglePay will also become more mainstream. The digital transformation will be applied to border management as well: electronic Visa authorization systems, cloud-based passports and digital identities are all in the works to speed up border crossing, although privacy remains a big concern.

Money is key

Whether you go for a low-cost holiday or a lavish one, identifying your budget is the first step to your next holiday. Travelers are now more conscious about the price of their trips after years of traveling economically around the world. Boarding a plane had become less expensive than taking the train and sometimes even driving a car. But now the price of fuel, and its impact on the environment, is making consumers think twice before booking a ticket. So, budget-conscious tourists will be looking even more closely for deals, loyalty programs and discounts. Some options to save money can be to travel off season, pick longer journeys or book in advance. Wealthier travelers are not giving up on their luxurious trips, though. According to Booking.com, some people are ready to spend more on their next holiday to make up for lost time. Another reason is that many hotels and airlines are struggling with staffing problems and are thus reducing their services to customers. To benefit from a comfortable experience, guests now need to pay the extra dollar.

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