

20 places to travel in 2026 where your visit truly matters

- A Monitor Desk Report

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Dhaka: From remote Polynesian islands to reborn cultural capitals, 2026 is shaping up to be a year of more meaningful travel. This list highlights destinations that pair unforgettable experiences with sustainability, community benefit, and cultural preservation. These places are welcoming visitors while ensuring tourism leaves a positive legacy.

Abu Dhabi, UAE

Why go: Major museums and theme-park expansions



Visitors can now explore vast digital art space TeamLab Phenomena in Abu Dhabi

Abu Dhabi enters a defining cultural moment with new openings in its Saadiyat Cultural District. Alongside the Louvre Abu Dhabi, visitors can now explore the vast digital art space TeamLab Phenomena, the Zayed National Museum and the Natural History Museum Abu Dhabi. Meanwhile, Yas Island continues to grow as a global entertainment hub, with new attractions at Warner Bros World and long-term plans for Disneyland.

Algeria

Why go: Ancient ruins without the crowds



Algeria's desert oasis town Djanet inhabited for over 500 years

Often overlooked, Algeria is opening up to travelers with easier visa policies and new tours. Visitors can explore Roman sites like Timgad and Djémila, historic cities such as Algiers and Constantine, and the vast Sahara desert — all while supporting cultural preservation and local artisans.

Colchagua Valley, Chile

Why go: Wine, food, and rural traditions



Chile's Ruta del Vino spans five valleys in country's center

South of Santiago, this wine-rich valley blends vineyard stays, acclaimed wineries and traditional Chilean cowboy culture. Beyond tastings, travelers can enjoy stargazing, historic villages and farm-to-table cuisine in one of South America's most inviting wine regions.

Cook Islands

Why go: A low-key Polynesian paradise



Visitors can enjoy turquoise lagoons, untouched outer islands, and one of the world's largest marine parks in Cook Islands

With new direct flights from Australia and the US, the Cook Islands are easier to reach than ever. Visitors can enjoy turquoise lagoons, untouched outer islands and strong environmental protections, including one of the world's largest marine parks.

Costa Rica (Osa Peninsula)

Why go: Wildlife and wellness



Costa Rica strengthening conservation on both land and sea with focus on jaguar habitats and shark protections

Home to extraordinary biodiversity, the Osa Peninsula offers rainforest hikes, surfing, yoga retreats and wildlife encounters. New conservation projects and eco-lodges make this a model destination for regenerative tourism.

Hebrides, Scotland

Why go: Whisky, history and wild beaches



Isle of Lewis, largest island in Outer Hebrides archipelago

Scotland's Atlantic islands combine ancient stone circles, white-sand beaches and a booming whisky scene. New distilleries, visitor centers, and community-led festivals make 2026 a standout year to visit.

Ishikawa, Japan

Why go: Supporting recovery through travel



Ishikawa is 2.5-hour bullet train ride from Tokyo

After a devastating earthquake, communities in Ishikawa are encouraging visitors to return. From Kanazawa's traditional crafts to Noto's family-run inns and renowned sake breweries, tourism plays a vital role in preserving local culture.

Komodo Islands, Indonesia

Why go: Dragons, reefs and conservation



Komodo Islands home to Komodo dragon, largest lizard on earth

Famous for Komodo dragons and rich marine life, the national park is strengthening visitor limits and conservation efforts in 2026. New flight routes improve access while ensuring tourism supports habitat protection.

Loreto, Mexico

Why go: Marine wildlife and community-led travel



Loreto developing two new national parks

Set on the Sea of Cortez, Loreto blends desert landscapes with whale watching, kayaking and conservation projects. Local guides, many former fishermen, now lead sustainable wildlife experiences.

Montenegro

Why go: Dramatic landscapes beyond the coast



Bay of Kotor is UNESCO World Heritage site and often referred to as Europe's southernmost fjord

While the Bay of Kotor draws attention, Montenegro's interior offers mountains, lakes and long-distance hiking routes like the Peaks of the Balkans trail, designed to support remote communities.

Oregon Coast, USA

Why go: Accessible, wild and community-focused



Oregon Coast embracing accessibility with sand-friendly wheelchairs and program that highlights inclusive lodging

This entire public coastline offers epic road trips, cycling routes and whale watching. New transport options, EV infrastructure and accessibility initiatives make it easier to explore responsibly.

Oulu, Finland

Why go: Arctic creativity



Winter cycling, a draw for Finland's new Capital of Culture

As a 2026 European Capital of Culture, Oulu hosts year-long art, food and climate-focused events. Visitors can combine cutting-edge culture with saunas, islands and northern landscapes.

Philadelphia, USA

Why go: America's 250th anniversary



Upcoming sporting events in Philadelphia include 2026 FIFA World Cup, MLB All-Star Game, PGA Championship, and more

The birthplace of the US will host major celebrations, exhibitions, sports events and public art projects throughout 2026, making it a lively year to explore the city's history and neighborhoods.

Phnom Penh, Cambodia

Why go: A capital reinventing itself



Phnom Penh emerging as a creative, sustainable city with heritage architecture, modern design

With a new international airport and revitalized riverfront, Phnom Penh is emerging as a creative, sustainable city. Heritage architecture, modern design, and a new generation of Cambodian entrepreneurs define its transformation.

Guimarães, Portugal

Why go: History meets sustainability



Guimarães's unique mix of history and energy thanks its young population and ancient sites

Portugal's first capital blends medieval streets with youthful energy. Named Europe's Green Capital for 2026, the city showcases long-term investment in green spaces and adaptive reuse.

Samburu, Kenya

Why go: Wildlife, stars, and community conservation



Visitors come to spot "Samburu Special Five", rare animals endemic to northern Kenya

Northern Kenya's Samburu region offers rare wildlife, Indigenous-led conservation and new astro-tourism experiences, including Africa's first Indigenous-guided planetarium.

Santo Domingo, Dominican Republic

Why go: Festivals and restoration



Boca Chica beach is one of Dominican Republic's beloved beaches

Hosting the 2026 Central American and Caribbean Games, the city has restored its historic center and is celebrating music, culture and inclusive urban renewal.

Slocan Valley, Canada

Why go: History and reflection|



Outdoor enthusiasts long been drawn to the wilderness of Canada's Slocan Valley

A new heritage trail honors Japanese Canadians interned here during WWII. Visitors can explore lakes, forests and cultural sites while engaging with an important chapter of history.

Uluru, Australia

Why go: Indigenous-led experiences



New hike is reshaping how visitors experience world-famous red rock

A new multi-day walking trail allows visitors to experience sacred landscapes guided by Anangu Traditional Owners, marking a shift toward respectful, immersive travel.

Uruguay

Why go: Sustainability and slow travel



Uruguay offers relaxed cities, pristine beaches, wildlife lagoons, and world-class food

Powered largely by renewable energy, Uruguay offers relaxed cities, pristine beaches, wildlife lagoons and world-class food — all with a strong focus on inclusivity and environmental care.

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