

Seven megatrends reshaping global travel industry in 2026

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Dhaka: The global travel industry is undergoing a fundamental transformation. It is gradually moving away from price-driven transactions to experiences, personalization, and meaningful connections. Industry analyses and data have identified seven megatrends that are defining tourism in 2026.

1. Advanced personalization

Advanced personalization tops the list. Travelers increasingly seek experiences tailored to specific goals. This includes reconnecting with loved ones, relaxation, exploration, or family time. Agentic AI and conversational search tools are enabling real-time suggestions, predicting traveler needs and building personalized itineraries that extend well beyond the booking stage.

2. Narrative tourism

Narrative tourism, or "set-jetting," has emerged as another major trend. Travelers are visiting locations featured in films, TV series, or books, turning destinations into extensions of a story. AI-powered tools such as virtual previews and augmented reality tours further blur the line between screen and reality, directly influencing destination choices.

3. Event tourism

Major events are proving to be powerful tourism drivers in 2026. Sports games, trade fairs, and cultural festivals are fueling visitor growth, particularly across Europe. Destinations that invest in predictive analytics and strategic event promotion stand to benefit the most from lasting social and economic returns.

4. Wellness tourism

Wellness tourism is also gaining significant momentum. Travelers are increasingly seeking trips centered on physical recovery, emotional balance, mental rest, and nature immersion. Data from research firm Mabrian indicates nature-based activities account for nearly 17.9% of European tourism activities, reflecting a growing appetite for health-focused travel. Destinations are responding by investing in retreats and outdoor adventure offerings.

5. Heritage tourism

Roots or heritage tourism represents another structurally valuable segment. Travelers are using trips to rediscover ancestry, identity, and memory through family research and visits to ancestral homes. The segment, which appeals primarily to couples and families, recorded steady growth in Italy between 2022 and 2025, underlining its sustained market relevance.

6. Experience-based destination management

Experience-based destination management is reshaping how locations market themselves. Leading destinations such as Italy, Spain, and France are promoting culture, food, and nature experiences across digital platforms to attract long-haul travelers. This approach also helps distribute visitor traffic beyond iconic landmarks to ease overcrowding and spread economic benefits across wider regions.

7. Technology-powered sustainable destinations

Finally, the rise of smart and sustainable destinations is transforming the industry's operational backbone. Destinations are increasingly deploying AI and data analytics to predict demand, manage visitor flows, identify optimized routes, and minimize environmental impact. Autonomous AI supports proactive strategies that improve sustainability and help sites better respond to crowd surges and climate-related disruptions, critical capabilities for long-term industry resilience.

Together, these seven megatrends reflect a broader shift in how travelers engage with the world and how destinations must respond with smarter tools, richer experiences, and a stronger commitment to sustainability.

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