



Travel in 2026 is increasingly destination-led, with discerning travellers seeking deeper cultural immersion rather than transactional itineraries

Image courtesy: The Leela Palaces, Hotels and Resorts.

Travel 2026: Mindful Journeys

It’s a brand new year, and we look at some trends that are likely to shape travel in the year, as seen by experts

By Bindu Gopal Rao

There is a whole new world that is waiting to be explored, yet it will be all things mindful, bespoke, and regenerative, among a host of other things. Experts weigh in.

Redefining Modern Bleisure Trips

In 2026, Bleisure will no longer be an add-on to business travel; it will be its natural extension. The modern traveller is blending work and life with intent, seeking destinations and hotels that respect productivity while elevating personal well-being. The shift is from staying longer to staying meaningfully.

“Business trips are being redesigned around flexibility: fluid check-in and check-out, work-ready rooms that transition seamlessly into living spaces, and public areas that encourage both focused work and informal connection. Meetings are shorter, sharper, and purpose-led, freeing time for discovery, wellness, and curated local experiences. The traveller is no longer impressed by scale alone, but by relevance,” says Tarun Seth, General Manager, Grand Hyatt Gurgaon. What makes this trend impactful in 2026 is the mindset change. Professionals are prioritising balance without compromising ambition.

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Regenerative Travel

In 2026, regenerative travel will move from a niche philosophy to a defining force shaping global hospitality. Today’s traveller is no longer satisfied with experiences that simply minimise damage; there is a growing desire to actively improve the destinations they visit. This marks a fundamental evolution from sustainability to regeneration.

Hemant Mediratta, Founder and CEO of One Rep Global, says, “Across the world, luxury hospitality is embracing models that integrate environmental restoration with high-end travel. From large-scale conservation-led developments to carbon-neutral wellness retreats powered by renewable energy, hotels are embedding reforestation, habitat protection, and biodiversity recovery into their core operations. The focus is no longer on reducing impact but on delivering tangible, positive outcomes for ecosystems and local communities.”

What makes this trend particularly influential in 2026 is guest participation. Hotels are designing immersive experiences that allow travellers to engage in wildlife monitoring, agricultural regeneration, and cultural



Tarun Seth, General Manager, Grand Hyatt Gurgaon



Hemant Mediratta, Founder and CEO of One Rep Global



Lakshmi Sridhar, General Manager, Novotel Visakhapatnam Varun Beach and The Bheemili Resort Managed by Accor



Arjun Baljee, Founder, ICONIQA, and President, Royal Orchid Hotels Ltd

preservation, transforming stays into purpose-driven journeys.

Family-friendly Destinations

In 2026, travel is changing from simply visiting destinations to focusing on experiences that value culture, connections, and quality time. Family travel is shifting towards slower, more immersive vacations that meet the needs of multiple generations – kids, parents, and seniors – while ensuring comfort and authenticity.

Lakshmi Sridhar, General Manager, Novotel Visakhapatnam Varun Beach and The Bheemili Resort Managed by Accor, says, “Destinations with strong cultural stories, a sense of local identity and easy access to leisure activities are becoming more popular. These locations give travellers the opportunity to engage more meaningfully with their surroundings.

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For instance, coastal cities are becoming preferred family travel choices because they offer a good mix of relaxation, walkability, and exploration. This trend reflects a growing preference for trips that focus on value and experience rather than fast-paced schedules.”

‘Speisure’ (Spiritual-Leisure) Blend

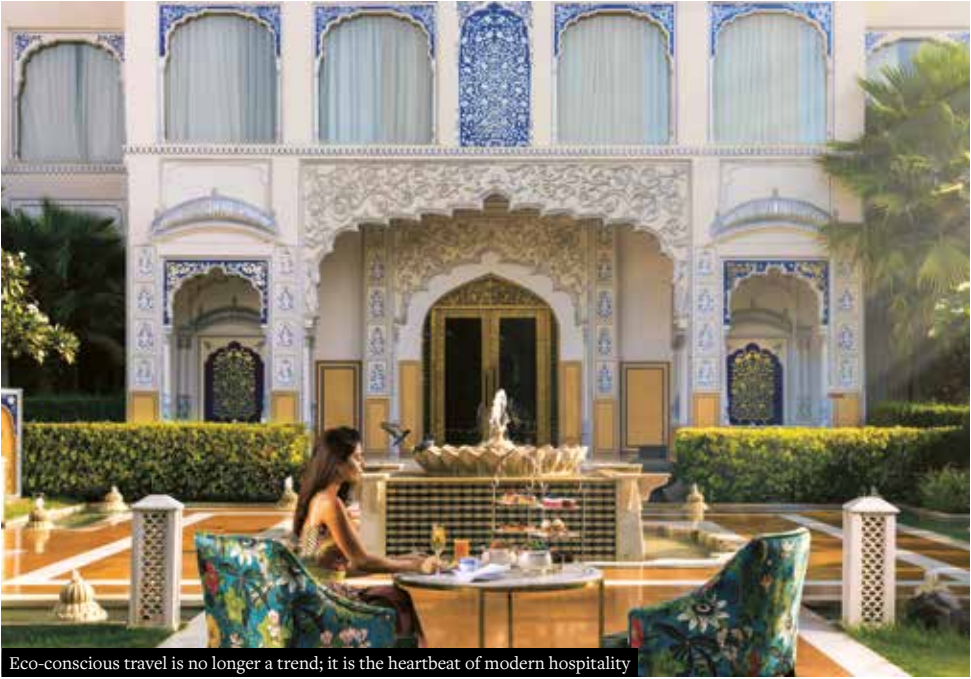
In 2026, there is a fundamental remapping of the Indian hospitality landscape, where the ‘Next-Gen Traveller’ is prioritising spiritual resonance and regional authenticity over traditional metro-centric luxury.

“At Royal Orchid & Regenta Hotels, we view the surge in tier-2 and pilgrimage destinations not as a seasonal spike, but as a structural shift fuelled by the ‘Speisure’ (spiritual-leisure) blend. The impact in 2026 is transformative: travellers are no longer just visiting for a quick darshan, as they are now extending stays for holistic wellness and



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Guests today choose destinations for their heritage, living traditions and the opportunity to engage meaningfully with local culture, craftsmanship and cuisine.

local cultural immersion. We have just reinforced this strategy with the launch of the 120-key Regenta Anantam at Khatu Shyam Ji and our recent expansion into Rishikesh. These aren't just hotels; they are hubs for 'organised hospitality' in regions that were previously underserved," says Arjun Baljee, Founder, ICONIQA, and President, Royal Orchid Hotels Ltd.

The year 2026 serves as the 'tipping point'; improved highway connectivity and the UDAN scheme have made these sacred circuits accessible year-round.

Whycation

In 2026, luxury travel is not defined by opulence alone; it is defined by purpose. The rise of purpose-driven travel, or

'why-cation', signals a profound shift in guest expectations. Today's travellers aren't asking, "Where should I go?"; they are asking, "Why am I going?" And that question is reshaping today's landscape of hospitality. A whycation is anchored in intention, whether emotional, physical, spiritual, or relational. Guests seek more than a destination; they seek transformation. From digital detox retreats to mindfulness programmes, hotels are evolving into sanctuaries of meaning rather than mere spaces of indulgence.

"At JW Marriott Goa, we've embraced this shift by designing journeys, not just itineraries. Our packages like 'Stay Longer in Luxury' allow our guests to not just enjoy hotel experiences but also dining at our award-winning venue, Heliconia. Our guests are spending more time in our hotel with the purpose of spending their vacation in a mindful way, with healing, contemplative quiet moments and nature-forward activations creating environments where rest becomes renewal," says Himanshu Taneja, General Manager, JW Marriott Goa.

Wellness Travel

Travel in 2026 is becoming more intentional. Guests are travelling with clearer expectations of how they want to feel when they return, not just where they have been.

"At Gateway Bekal, we are witnessing wellness evolve from a supporting feature to a primary reason for travel, with guests choosing destinations that allow them to slow down and engage meaningfully with the environment around them. Our collaboration with Arya Vaidya Sala, Kottakkal — a 122-year-old institution central to the practice and preservation of Ayurveda in India—reflects this shift. Rather than offering wellness as an add on, we integrate authentic, physician led Ayurvedic therapies into the guest experience, practised as they have been for generations and enriched by Bekal's naturally restorative setting," says J Gopalakrishnan, General Manager, Gateway Bekal.

As wellness travel evolves, depth and authenticity will



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Hotels are designing immersive experiences that allow travellers to engage



Himanshu Taneja, General Manager, JW Marriott Goa



J Gopalakrishnan, General Manager, Gateway Bekal



Milan Gupta, Corporate Chef & Executive Vice President, Operations, Rosetta Hospitality



Anjali Mehra, Executive Vice President - Brand and Communications, The Leela Palaces, Hotels and Resorts

matter more than ever. Hotels will be valued for how responsibly they enable access to regional healing traditions.

Eco-conscious Travel

In 2026, there will be a profound transformation: eco-conscious travel is no longer a trend; it is the heartbeat of modern hospitality.

"At its core, this shift represents a new definition of luxury, where elegance is measured by our footprint and guest loyalty is earned through unwavering environmental stewardship. From commitment to action, today's travellers are calling for a revolution in how we inhabit the world. They demand that sustainability be woven into the very fabric of a resort, moving far beyond symbolic gestures toward radical transparency and tangible impact. At Rosetta Sakleshpur, we don't just talk about change; we live it. Our sanctuary is a testament to what is possible when conservation drives development. A Living Ecosystem: Our 15,000 trees do more than provide shade; they breathe for the planet, sequestering approximately 375 tonnes of CO2 annually," says Milan Gupta, Corporate Chef & Executive Vice President, Operations, Rosetta Hospitality.

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Destination-led Travel & Cultural Immersion

Travel in 2026 is increasingly destination-led, with discerning travellers seeking deeper cultural immersion rather than transactional itineraries. Today's guests choose destinations based on their heritage, living traditions, and the opportunity to engage meaningfully with local culture, craftsmanship, and cuisine.

"This shift is particularly pronounced in inbound luxury travel to India, where travellers are drawn to journeys that allow them to experience the country's diversity through a layered, experiential lens. At The Leela, destination-led travel is brought to life through brand pillars that translate place into experience. Each property interprets its location through curated culinary narratives rooted in regional flavours, bespoke wellness journeys inspired by indigenous traditions, and The Leela Ceremonial Rituals' distinctive arrival and departure moments that reflect the spirit

and heritage of each destination. These rituals, unique to every property, create an immediate emotional connection between the guest and place," says Anjali Mehra, Executive Vice President - Brand and Communications, The Leela Palaces, Hotels and Resorts.