

INSIGHTS

Is Travel Becoming
the New Status
Symbol for Gen-Z?





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We often talk about “experiences over things” as if it’s a generational slogan. But for Gen Z, and increasingly for the cohorts just behind them, experiences are the portfolio. Overnight, travel, meals, and cultural immersion are no longer optional indulgences: they are

Travel Isn’t Recovering — It’s Being Reinvented

In Australia, outbound travel has already rebounded to pre-COVID levels. But what’s happened since is more interesting than the bounce-back: the shape of travel is evolving. More travellers are selecting premium cabins, extended stays, boutique lodging, and curated, immersive experiences over mass tourism. **Globally, air travel is growing at an enviable clip, after 6.5% growth in 2024**, airlines are expected to match that in 2025, even amidst supply constraints. Industry watchers note that premium and business-class demand is outpacing economy growth, signalling a structural shift in how people want to fly. Delta, for instance, expects revenue from premium cabins to soon eclipse their main cabin revenue. As President Glen Hauenstein put it, “we expect premium products to be the majority of our revenue in the next several years.”

existential expressions.

Today, Gen Z is not just leading this shift—they are defining the premium travel frontier. And behind them, the next generation (Alpha, Zillennials, etc.) is watching, learning, and raising the bar.

Who’s Pulling the Strings?

Gen Z as Travel Architects

Research continues to affirm Gen Z’s dominance in shaping travel trends. They are taking roughly three leisure trips per year on average. **Nearly 65% say they plan to spend more on travel in 2025 than in prior years.** Their digital fluency turns every booking into a content moment; every meal, a story to share. In academic explorations, Gen Z isn’t pointing at destinations they’re crafting narratives of self. The trip is not “going somewhere,” but “becoming someone.” Their commitment to sustainability, local culture, and “authenticity” filters out commoditised offers.

Premium Isn’t Luxury - It’s Expression

Premium travel is no longer just for “the rich.” It’s a signal: “I value time, comfort, and meaning.” Airlines are increasingly treating premium cabins not as loss leaders, but as



profit centers. **Premium bookings grew ~11.8% last year, eclipsing economy's growth in many markets.** Air France, for example, launched a revamped first-class experience targeting leisure demand, not only corporate traffic. This move speaks volumes: the premium journey is now built around emotional value, exclusivity, and narrative - not just seats and service

OTAs, AI & the Digital Backbone

Where does AI cut in? As agents, advisors, storytellers. OTAs that integrate AI-driven personalization, real-time dynamic offers, and multimodal experiences are carving out distance from legacy competition. **Booking platforms that source fragmented global supply, package with local experiences, and layer in seamless logistics will remain competitive.** OTAs inhabit the advantage zone: downstream, close to consumers, and precariously dependent on agility and curation - domains where large generic AIs struggle to replicate deep, context-specific relationships.

PARTING THOUGHT WITH AN INVESTMENT LENS

If "experiences over things" defines a generation, then premium travel is their economic manifesto. It's not about more travel; it's about better travel.

In this shift lie winners: airlines rethinking cabin configuration, boutique experiential lodgings, digital-first OTAs with AI muscle, immersive local operators, and experience-first loyalty platforms.

The question becomes: which companies are crafting stories people want to live, and which are clinging to seats and fares? That's the lens we'll need to apply in our investment filter going forward because the new narrative of travel isn't booked in economy.