

A woman with vibrant red, curly hair is the central figure, wearing a light-colored trench coat with a dark belt. She is standing in a lush green field under a clear blue sky. The background is slightly blurred, showing more greenery and a distant treeline. The overall mood is serene and sophisticated.

The *New* Luxury Traveller

WHAT AFFLUENT CONSUMERS REALLY WANT FROM TRAVEL

August 2026

HAYES & JARVIS

The art of luxury tailor-made travel

OVERVIEW

Why Do Affluent Consumers Travel?

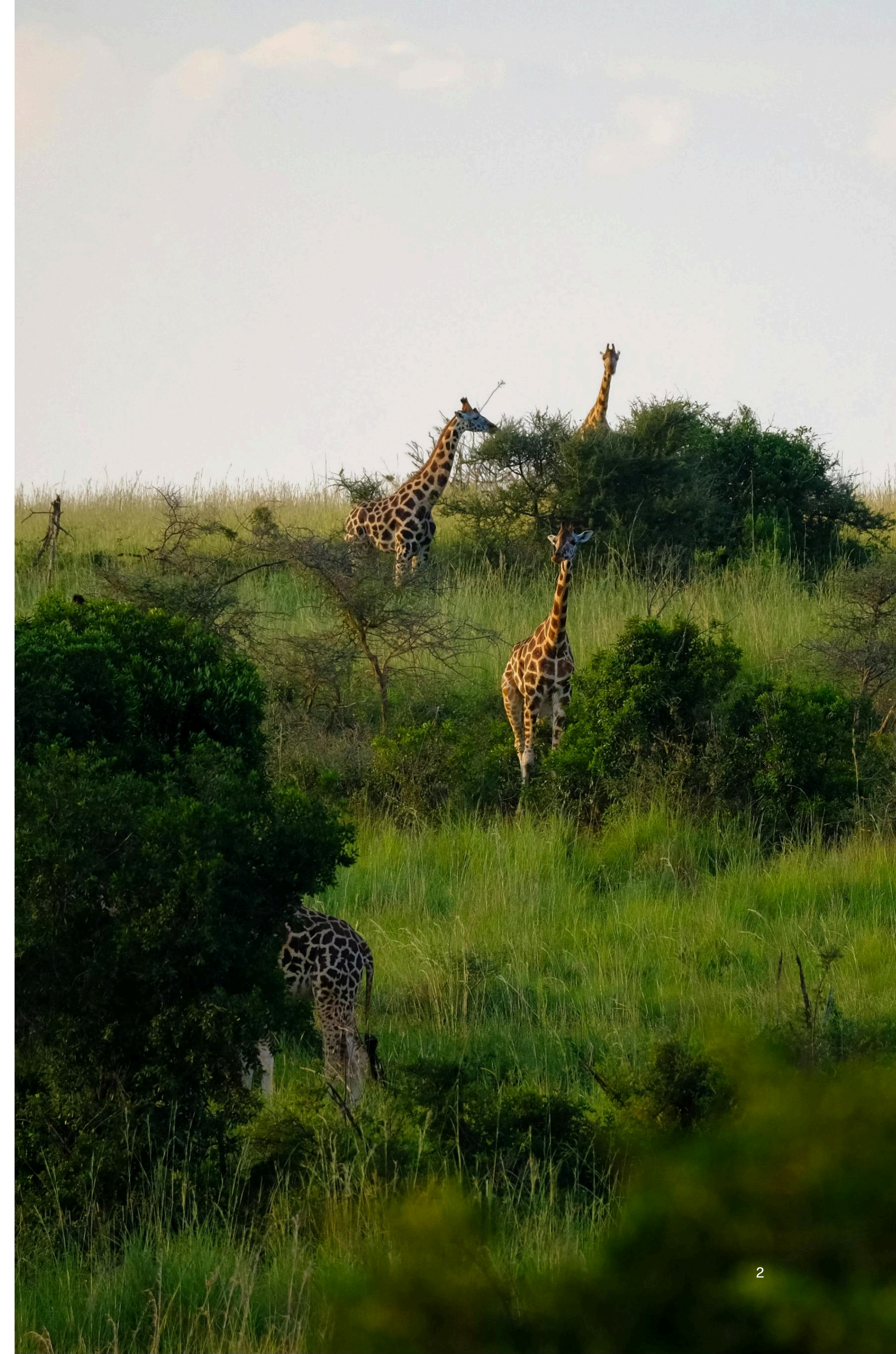
The end of luxury as a status symbol

The luxury travel market is entering a new phase—one defined less by traditional notions of exclusivity and more by the pursuit of meaningful, immersive experiences. The proprietary research summarised in this report indicates that affluent travellers are increasingly re-evaluating what luxury represents, shifting away from passive indulgence towards experiences that feel personal, transformative, and culturally connected.

This evolution is reshaping long-held assumptions across the industry. Attributes that once served as primary signals of luxury are becoming less influential, while factors such as **authenticity, access, personalisation, and emotional resonance** are gaining importance. Travellers are also demonstrating a stronger desire for depth: longer journeys, more intentional itineraries, and experiences that deliver lasting personal value rather than momentary escape.

Taken together, these findings point to a broader redefinition of luxury itself. For today's affluent traveller, luxury is no longer simply about comfort or seclusion—it is increasingly about engagement, perspective, and the ability to experience a destination in ways that feel rare, enriching, and deeply human.

Hayes & Jarvis has been delivering tailor-made travel experiences for more than 75 years and has focused on luxury travel to destinations around the world since 1998. We have grown our global operation with experts positioned in twenty different countries. After caring for over 100,000 guests and earning a 5.0/5.0 rating on Trustpilot, we have perfected the art of experiential travel for our guests in more than 60 destinations across seven continents. The following report highlights what travellers seek when they holiday and what influences them all.





INSIGHT 01

Experiences Have Become the Primary Driver of Luxury Travel

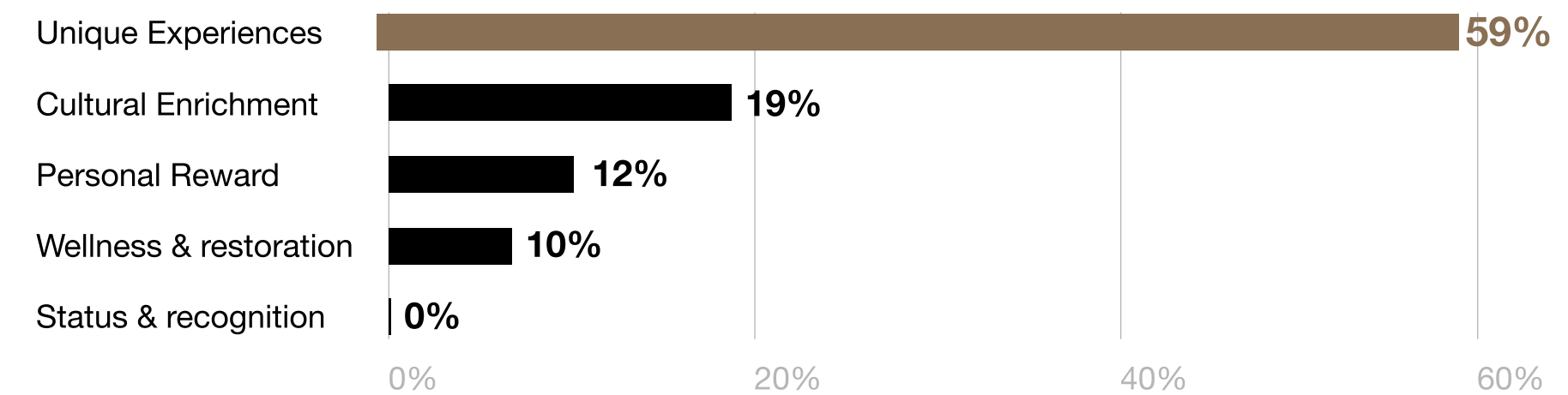
The shift from “status” to “scarcity”

Increasingly, travellers are seeking experiences that feel tailored, immersive, and unavailable through conventional tourism channels. More than half of respondents (59%) identified **unique experiences** as their primary reason for taking a trip, making it by far the strongest motivator among those surveyed.

By comparison, cultural enrichment ranked second at 19%, while personal reward (12%) and wellness or restoration (10%) followed behind. Notably, status and recognition accounted for 0 responses, suggesting that traditional status signalling plays virtually no role in modern luxury travel decisions for affluent consumers.

The findings indicate that affluent travellers are increasingly prioritising experiences that feel distinctive, personal, and difficult to replicate. Rather than viewing luxury primarily through the lens of prestige and idle pampering, travellers appear to place greater value on access, authenticity, and experiences that create lasting memories or stories.

Primary Motivation *for* Luxury Travel



INSIGHT 02

Discerning Travellers Define “Unique” in Different Ways

Exclusivity is not a universal expectation

While the desire for unique experiences emerged as a key motivator among affluent travellers, the research reveals that “uniqueness” does not have to mean “impossible to reach.” Instead, the market is defined by a strong demand for distinctiveness, balanced by a desire for seamless delivery.

Affluent travellers are not uniformly seeking ultra-rare, inaccessible expeditions. For the vast majority, the winning formula is “**Differentiated Access.**” The most compelling luxury offerings are those that unlock distinctive, privileged moments while maintaining a consistently flawless, comfortable standard of delivery.

However, the real story lies in the nuances of how these travellers prioritise exclusivity:



The “Extreme Rarity” Segment (7%)

Representing the top tier of the market (scoring 5), these travellers place the highest value on pure originality, absolute rarity, and experiences that feel entirely out of reach for the average person.



The “Attainable Uniqueness” Majority (56%)

The true sweet spot of the market sits between scores 3 and 4 on a 5-point scale. These travellers want their experiences to feel personal, thoughtful, and highly differentiated from the mainstream, but they evaluate them through a lens of accessibility. They do not need the experience to be hidden from the world; rather, they want privileged access—the opportunity to experience something special and curated without facing extreme logistical hurdles.



The “Core Luxury” Segment (37%)

For more than a third of travellers (scoring 1 and 2), the unrepeatable nature of a trip is a low priority. Their focus remains squarely on traditional luxury indicators —impeccable service, beautiful properties, and relaxing environments. Notably, the lowest tier alone (scoring 1) accounts for 23% of the market, making it more than three times larger than the “Extreme Rarity” top tier.



INSIGHT 03

Luxury Guests Want More Than Recommendations

They are seeking trusted expertise over peer opinions

Our qualitative data reveals a fierce independence among affluent travellers, completely upending the myth of the peer-driven luxury consumer. In fact, around two-thirds of respondents state that peer recommendations do not directly influence their choices, choosing instead to rely on their own rigorous research and distinct personal preferences. When peer inputs do register, they act merely as initial sparks—igniting ideas or inspiring travel stories—rather than final decision-makers.

Because these travellers are sceptical of subjective peer reviews and weary of doing all the heavy lifting themselves, they increasingly look outside their social circles. They view a professional Travel Advisor, like Hayes & Jarvis, not as a standard booking agent, but as an objective, expert source of truth.

The Advisor acts as a vital quality shield, taking the guesswork out of the equation to ensure that structural standards—comfort, safety, and local authenticity—are flawlessly executed. Ultimately, the high demand for disconnecting from responsibility is what drives these independent travellers to partner with professionals. By offloading the "Managerial Brain", the traveller secures the peace of mind they cannot get from peer recommendations alone, giving them the psychological permission to fully disappear into the experience.

INSIGHT 04

The Vitality Shift — Moving the Emotional Goal towards Active Engagement

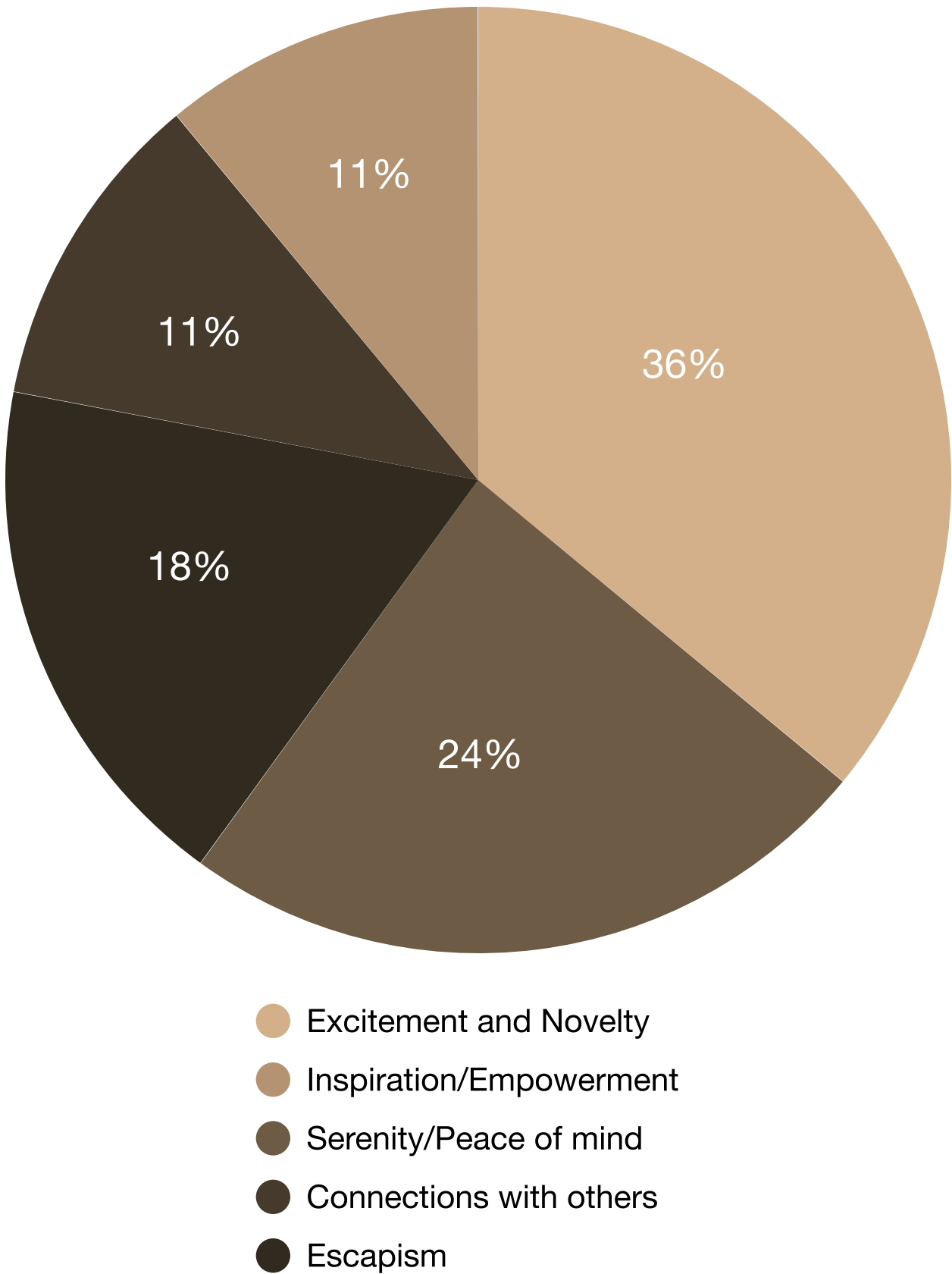
Moving the emotional goal from relaxation to personal enrichment

For decades, luxury travel has largely been positioned as an opportunity to disconnect, slow down, and recover from the pressures of daily life. While that motivation still exists, our research suggests it is shifting among affluent consumers towards active engagement and stimulation.

The highest share of respondents (36%) identified excitement and novelty as the emotional outcome they value most from travel, closely followed by serenity and peace of mind at 24%. Escapism captures 18%, while connection with others (11%) and inspiration/empowerment (11%) represent focused areas of interest.

These findings point to a broader shift in how luxury travellers define restoration. Rather than viewing travel as passive rest or a coping mechanism for a demanding lifestyle, affluent consumers see it as a deeply individualised source of proactive renewal through active engagement. For this high-net-worth audience, fulfilment comes not from disengaging into a quiet void, but from leaning into something that feels fresh, perspective-changing, or emotionally rewarding.

Desired Emotional State



Comfort and Heritage Form the Core of Luxury Planning

Shifting from luxury as isolation and towards luxury as access

The research points to a meaningful shift in how affluent travellers evaluate luxury experiences. Historically, exclusivity and privacy have been viewed as the defining hallmarks of high-end travel. Today, however, **travellers place a far greater premium on the physical quality of the experience itself — and on genuine engagement with a destination's heritage and culture.**

When asked to rank six key travel aspects from most to least important, respondents overwhelmingly prioritised comfort and authentic connection. Comfort & amenities emerged as the dominant frontrunner, with 42% of travellers naming it their number-one priority. Close behind was heritage and authenticity, capturing 29% of top-tier votes. Combined, **71% of all respondents identified either comfort or heritage as their primary driver**, signalling that the quality of the physical experience and a sense of genuine place have become the strongest indicators of luxury value in this market.

Meanwhile, personalisation — while valued — occupies a more secondary position. **Exactly half (50%) of respondents placed personalisation within their top three choices**, yet only 11% ranked it first, suggesting it is appreciated as an enhancer rather than a defining expectation. **Local cultural immersion followed a similar pattern**, with 54% placing it within their top three, reflecting a consistent but not dominant appetite for authentic local engagement.

Perhaps most telling is the near-total collapse of privacy as a luxury aspiration. A striking 64% of respondents ranked privacy dead last on their list, and 77% placed it in their bottom two choices. Exclusivity fared little better, with 40% ranking it in the bottom two. While these elements may still serve as contextual amenities, the data makes clear they are no longer meaningful differentiators in the eyes of UK luxury travellers.

Taken together, these findings signal a clear hierarchy: Affluent travellers want luxury to *feel* exceptional first — through superior comfort, immaculate service, and physical quality — and then to *mean* something, through a genuine connection to the destination's heritage and character. Luxury is defined not by what it keeps out, but by the quality of what it delivers.



“The most discerning travellers in the world do not want to be impressed. They want to be understood. This sounds simple, but it changes everything – how an itinerary is designed, how staff are trained, and how success is defined. The feeling of being impressed fades by the luggage claim at the latest. The feeling of being understood stays for years.”

— Alexander Metzler, COO, Hayes & Jarvis





HAYES & JARVIS

The art of luxury tailor-made travel

INSIGHT 06

Travel as a Form of Disconnection

Seamlessness becomes a form of emotional value

While affluent travellers are increasingly seeking immersion and engagement, the research also highlights an equally important counterbalance: a strong desire to disconnect from the pressures and responsibilities of everyday life.

Nearly half of respondents (45%) rated the ability to disconnect from professional obligations and their daily responsibilities at the highest level of importance (6 or 7 on a 7-point scale), while 71% placed it at a high importance level (5, 6, or 7), reinforcing that mental relief and cognitive offloading remain foundational components of the luxury travel experience.

Importantly, this desire for disconnection does not appear to conflict with the broader demand for cultural immersion and engagement identified elsewhere in the research. They want to feel connected to the destination, its people, and its experiences—while simultaneously feeling removed from the demands, expectations, and decision-making responsibilities that define their daily lives.

For many affluent consumers, particularly high-achieving professionals, luxury travel increasingly functions as an opportunity to temporarily step outside of constant responsibility. The value lies not simply in physical escape, but in mental relief: fewer decisions, fewer obligations, and a reduced sense of performance tied to work or status.

Affluent Travellers are Prioritizing Longer, more Immersive Journeys

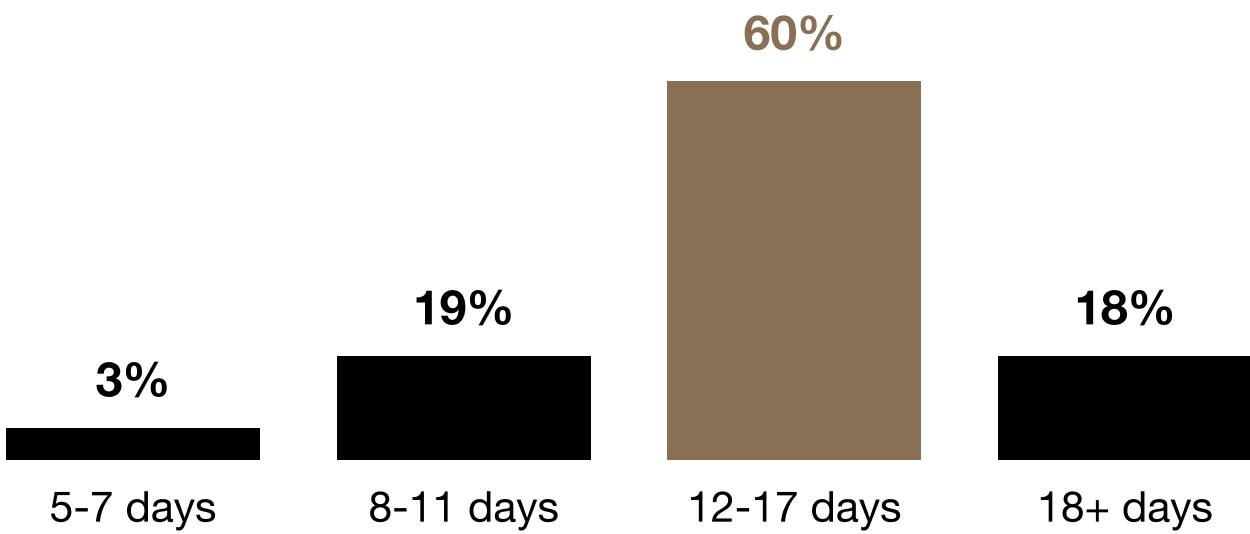
Going beyond isolated experiences

The research suggests that affluent travellers are increasingly drawn to longer-haul, experience-led travel that allows for a deeper sense of immersion in a destination. While the travel industry often promotes shorter luxury escapes, only 3% of respondents identified a five-to-seven-day trip as their ideal length. In contrast, **the vast majority (78%) stated that their preferred trips last 12 days or longer**—with 60% choosing 12 to 17 days, and 18% actively prioritising trips extending past 18 days.

The findings point to a growing preference for travel that feels expansive rather than abbreviated—particularly when visiting culturally rich or geographically distant destinations. For many travellers, long-haul journeys are no longer viewed simply as holidays, but as opportunities to step more fully into a different environment, pace of life, and cultural context.

This shift reflects broader changes in what affluent consumers expect from luxury travel. Rather than optimising for efficiency or checklist-style tourism, travellers increasingly appear willing to dedicate more time to exploring a region in depth, moving across multiple cities or landscapes, and engaging with experiences that unfold gradually over the course of a journey.

Ideal Trip Length



INSIGHT 08

The Residual ROI

Discerning travellers measure value by what stays with them after the trip

When asked what makes a luxury travel experience feel truly “worth it,” respondents rarely focused on logistics, properties, or amenities alone. Instead, their answers centred on the lasting emotional impact of the experience—the residual ROI that stays with them long after they have returned home.

Across responses, three themes emerged consistently:



Deep Contentment and Mental Restoration

The most dominant theme was a sense of profound relaxation, mental fulfilment, and peace. Affluent travellers frequently described a successful trip as one that left them feeling completely decompressed, mentally refreshed, and genuinely happy.

For this audience, luxury is evaluated by how effectively it clears the mind and relieves the pressures of daily life—returning home with an “inner glow of satisfaction” and a relaxed mind serves as the ultimate marker of a worthwhile investment.



Lasting Memories and Lifelong Value

Many respondents described the most meaningful trips as those that remained vivid long after the journey ended. The strongest experiences were often characterised as unforgettable, deeply resonant, or continuing to bring a smile to their face when looking back at photos months or years later.

They also increasingly evaluate luxury travel by the depth and longevity of the memories it creates. A successful trip is not simply enjoyable in the moment; it provides a permanent “memory bank” that continues to hold immense personal value long after returning home.



A Desire to Revisit and Repeat the Feeling

Beyond deep relaxation and memorable moments, many respondents noted that a trip was truly worth it if it sparked an immediate yearning to recreate the experience. Rather than treating a destination as a one-time box to tick, value is derived from a strong impulse to return or immediately seek out the next adventure.

For these luxury travellers, the ultimate validation of a luxury experience is that it leaves them feeling inspired, energised, and deeply motivated to do it all over again.



CONCLUSION

The Architecture of Meaning

The affluent traveller is no longer looking for a standard "getaway." They are looking for a way in—to genuine heritage, a deliberate break from their daily responsibilities, and highly individualised journeys that offer mental clarity. In an age of relentless digital connectivity and professional burnout, the ultimate luxury is no longer the gold-plated tap or exclusive isolating privilege. It is the unique, deeply immersive experience that completely transforms how they feel upon their return.

Throughout our research, a consistent portrait emerges. The modern affluent traveller is:

Experience-first, not status-first. They are investing in unique experiences and authentic cultural connection, not traditional status symbols. The logo on the door matters far less than what happens inside.

Engagement-seeking, not just relaxation-seeking. They want to return home mentally enriched and fulfilled. Rather than looking for passive rest, they chase proactive renewal through active excitement and novelty, seeking to return with shifted perspectives and an expanded outlook.

Comfort and heritage-driven. The confidence that a trip will flawlessly deliver superior physical comfort and immaculate service, combined with an insistence on exploring a destination's authentic heritage and character, is the signal of true luxury value.

Hungry for disconnection. Not privacy in a transactional sense—which has nearly collapsed as a luxury aspiration—but genuine cognitive offloading. They seek the psychological freedom of stepping away from everyday obligations, letting a trusted advisor manage the "managerial brain."

Memory-oriented in their ROI. They measure the worth of a trip in months and years, not days. The true residual ROI is found in an enduring "memory bank," a deep sense of mental restoration, and a lingering inspiration that leaves them yearning to book the next adventure.

Affluent travellers no longer think travel is about prestige and exclusion. It is about depth, transformation, and the rare and lasting quality of a life fully lived. At Hayes & Jarvis, we seamlessly execute journeys based on each guest's passions and preferences to ensure that transformation is delivered.

As the luxury tailor-made travel landscape continues to evolve, Hayes & Jarvis remains committed to monitoring these shifts through our internal metrics and guest feedback. We look forward to seeing how these emerging preferences shape the future of travel in 2026 and beyond.

For further insights or media inquiries regarding this report visit hayesandjarvis.co.uk.

Data Note: The insights presented in this report are based on proprietary internal data and guest analytics collected by Hayes & Jarvis. All findings are the intellectual property of Hayes & Jarvis. This information is provided for informational purposes and reflects internal trends rather than broader market-wide statistics.

HAYES & JARVIS
The art of luxury tailor-made travel