Travel Money

INSIGHTS REPORT

Global Consumer Trends

2026

Contents

Philip Bowcock
Chief Executive Officer

Introduction

Across the world, the way people travel is changing. Growing trends like ecotourism and off-grid holidays have shone a spotlight on previously overlooked destinations, while new distribution channels have altered how we access and spend travel money.

I am proud to be introducing the inaugural **Travelex Travel Money Insights Report** – a collection of market-specific and global insights designed to help the travel money sector better understand today's customer trends and evolving market.

For this report, we have combined global Travelex's revenue figures with market survey data from both travellers and Travelex customers from around the world, comprehensively looking at the why, where, when and how of their travel money journey. Our results reveal a fascinating set of emerging global trends, as well as more varied regional nuances. This report comes as Travelex celebrates its 50th anniversary – since 1976 customers have chosen Travelex to solve their travel money problems. Over the past half a century, the business has witnessed huge changes and developments in travel money and sought to adapt to these changes.

Now, through this report, we have combined our experience and insights to help the travel money industry better get to know its customers and tailor itself to their evolving needs.

Philip Bowcock
Chief Executive Officer

Executive Summary

Our analysis shows that travellers' behaviour is changing fast. Each region reveals different priorities in how, why, and where people are going. The inaugural Travelex Travel Money Insights Report highlights how travellers' decisions are evolving to value-seeking and experience-led trips which are popular among UK and European travellers. Visa-free entry and regional trips are the preference for those travelling from the Middle East, Türkiye and Asia, respectively. While, Australians and New Zealanders are influenced by social media dupe destinations. Despite cost-of-living pressures globally, the popularity of non-traditional, emerging, and alternative destinations across all regions is growing.

Cash remains essential for travel. Even though domestic cash usage is shrinking in nearly all markets, travel money remains a priority with on average 69% of travellers surveyed still choosing cash, with more than a quarter buying currency a month in advance. Cash and card payments coexist, with spending patterns adapting to destination environments. Travellers around the world are shifting to pre-trip planning and they are organising their travel money in advance of their departure.

The insights that follow show how these shifts are playing out across regions, highlighting the local dynamics, destination trends and travel money behaviours that are shaping today’s global travel landscape. Together, they show how travellers are adapting, and where the most meaningful opportunities for the travel money industry can be found.

6%

of British travellers acquire travel money on the day of their trip – the power of pre-trip, online and click and collect is more important than ever.

91%

of Dutch travellers use cash when abroad and 66% of Chinese travellers use more cash when outside of the country than they do at home – cash remains king, although the combination with a card gives travellers peace of mind and safety.

49%

of Emirati travellers and 50% of Australian travellers said a travel money provider's reputation is extremely important – trust is just as important as currency.

Asokan Sathurayar
Retail Director
ANZ

SPOTLIGHT

Australia and New Zealand

Are Aussies and Kiwis bored of the beaten track? Travelex data suggests so – with new dupe destination trends emerging as social media influencers drives visitors towards non-traditional locations.

Young travellers, in particular, are increasingly embracing alternative destinations including Morocco, Kenya and non-traditional areas across Southeast Asia. In New Zealand, sales of Moroccan dirham surged by 128% year-on-year. Sales of Sri Lankan rupee and Vietnamese dong also saw a double digit increase in both Australia and New Zealand, thanks to new visa-free access. Scandinavia saw a particularly strong surge in popularity over the last year, especially from New Zealand travellers: the year-on-year sales of Norwegian, Swedish, Icelandic and Danish krona were up 515%, 175%, 98% and 80% respectively. How travellers acquire and spend travel money is also shifting. Cash usage may be decreasing domestically across both Australia and New Zealand, however cash remains the most popular form of travel money – 84% of Australians surveyed take cash with them when they travel, less than half take a credit card and less than a third take a debit card. Nearly half of the Aussies surveyed said they use cash more when travelling than they do at home – one in ten chose to spend with cash only when abroad.

Pre-paid travel money cards on the rise

Our survey highlights the growing shift from in-trip to pre-trip acquisition of travel money: just 3% of those surveyed said they acquire travel money on the day of their trip, with nearly half acquiring it a month or more before they travel. Pre-paid travel money cards also saw an increase in popularity – reloads of the Travelex Money Card (TMC) were up 33% in New Zealand and 15% in Australia year-on-year.

Whilst using a combination of cash and card makes forecasting and budgeting easier, 92% of Australians surveyed return home with leftover foreign currency after their trip. More than half of respondents said they kept leftover currency for a future trip. Collectively, Australian travellers hold approximately AU$1 billion worth of unspent foreign currency according to research from hospitality group Accor. Some may assume that they will revisit a certain destination again, and that their leftover currency will maintain or grow in value in-between trips. Neither may prove true, and exchanging currency back offers an opportunity to ensure leftover money isn't lost.

Disclaimer: This survey was carried out on 250 Travelex customers in Australia in November 2025.

33%

Year-on-year increase of Travelex Money Card reloads in New Zealand.

50%

of Australians said a trusted brand is extremely important when choosing their travel money provider.

3%

of Australians acquire travel money on the day of their trip.

84%

of Australians use cash when abroad.

49%

of Australians acquire travel money a month or more before their trip.

79%

of Australians use cash for small everyday purchases when travelling.

SPOTLIGHT

Middle East and Türkiye

Batu Dölay
Managing Director
Middle East, Türkiye and Southeast Asia

Inbound and outbound travel across the Arabian Peninsula and Türkiye continues to gain momentum – reaching or exceeding pre-2020 levels in many countries over the last 12 months.

While travellers heading to Türkiye are benefitting from the continuing depreciation of the Turkish lira, they have also faced growing inflation rates up to around 30% making spending in the country more costly. The average transaction value in our Turkish stores is up by a third year-on-year with tourists acquiring more currency to cater for rising prices. Outbound travellers from gulf countries are increasing purchases of Southeast Asian currencies, reflecting the growing popularity of the countries in the region. Relatively short flight times, flourishing investment opportunities and growing cultural relationships have made Asia an attractive proposition for Middle Eastern travellers.

This is especially true of **China, which has granted Middle Eastern travellers visa-free entry, resulting in a spike of in-bound traffic from the region. Purchases of Chinese yuan have subsequently surged 63% in Bahrain, and 47% in Oman year-on-year, indicating this drive has been successful.** Sales of the Singapore dollar, Malaysian ringit and Vietnamese dong are also increasing double-digit across various Middle East markets year-on-year.

High amounts purchased and left-over.

We recognise the relative wealth and spending patterns across individuals in the Middle East shape how outbound travellers choose to travel, acquire and spend their travel money when abroad. In Qatar, for example, many travellers prefer to purchase high volumes of foreign currency – typically more than they will spend on their trip, accounting for the large number of Qataris returning home with a significant volume of left-over currency. Furthermore, in the UAE, nearly two in ten travellers returned with over 2,500 Emirati dirham's worth (£520/$680) of foreign currency.

Our research revealed the Middle East travellers are pre-trip planners, who despite acquiring large sums of cash, also favour having a card when travelling. Nearly half of Emirati travellers acquired cash before their trip - higher than those choosing to take a credit or debit card. While a third of respondents said they acquired their travel money a month before they departed, just 7% said they choose to acquire their cash on the day of their trip. In the UAE, outbound travellers strongly value the reputation of their travel money provider. Just under half of those surveyed said it is extremely important for their travel money provider to have good reviews/reputation at 49%, and or being a trusted brand at 48%. Interestingly, it is the same amount as those who prioritise exchange rates at 49%.

Disclaimer: This survey was carried out on 250 members of the public in the UAE in November 2025.

33%

The increase in average transaction value in Türkiye year-on-year.

7%

of Emirati travellers acquire travel money on the day of their trip.

49%

of Emirati travellers said they see both great exchange rates and a travel money provider's reputation as extremely important.

96%

of Emirati travellers return with travel money after their trip.

49%

of Emirati travellers return with more than 2,500 AED after their trip.

SPOTLIGHT
Asia

Jun Otani
Trading Director
Japan

Batu Dölay
Managing Director
Middle East, Türkiye and Southeast Asia

Cameron Hume
Global Wholesale Director and Managing Director
Greater China

Countries across Asia present a diverse range of cultural, socio-economic and political dynamics – ensuring regional variations of how travellers acquire and spend their travel money, and where they travel to.

Geopolitics impacts Chinese currency preferences.

In China, year-on-year sales of Saudi riyal, Egyptian dirham and Omani rial soared with reciprocal travel between China and the Middle East strengthening. Our data also shows Chinese foreign currency popularity is heavily influenced by geopolitics: ties and investment with Hungary and Kazakhstan saw sales of the forint and tenge up 269% and 168% year-on-year, respectively.

East Asia and Southeast Asia stays local.

East Asian travellers continue to prioritise regional travel. In Singapore and Malaysia, eight of the ten top selling currencies over the last 12 months were for fellow Asia-Pacific countries. This regionalised travel trend may be driven by regional cultural and work dynamics, with lower annual leave allowances making it more difficult for locals to take longer international trips. The diversity of Asian landscapes and experiences also offers plenty of variety without needing to travel far outside the continent. Whilst Korea remained a consistent favourite among Japanese travellers, sales of the British pound, euro and Australian dollar also grew over the last 12 months. This trend could be driven by tertiary education opportunities in these markets, as high tuition fees and an uncertain political climate made US universities less attractive for Asian students.

Variations on spending and acquisition.

In Japan, similar variations are present with how money is acquired and spent: for example, families going on holiday prefer to prepare by acquiring travel money in the weeks or months before their trip, while business travellers typically leave purchasing foreign currency to the last minute.

Interestingly, Japan remains a largely cash-led market, due to the locals' high trust in currency, low crime rates and aging population. However, the country is undergoing a rapid transformation, driven by government cashback incentives and ambitious targets to drive cashless payments for the future. On the other hand, China has evolved into a primarily cashless society, dominated by mobile payment and QR codes. Inbound tourists arriving in either country should be aware of these differing payment landscapes and prepare their travel money accordingly. Despite the rapid shift to digital payments domestically, over half of Chinese outbound travellers spend some cash when they are abroad – roughly the same as Japanese tourists. Cash, therefore, remains a travel essential, even for those living in a cashless society – further reflected in the fact that two thirds of Chinese travellers use more cash abroad than they do at home (compared to less than a third of Japanese).

Disclaimer: This survey was carried out on 250 members of the public in China and 250 members of the public in Japan in November 2025.

269%

The increase in sales of Hungarian florint in China year-on-year.

79%

of Japanese travellers take a credit card with them on their trip.

66%

of Chinese travellers use more cash when they travel than they do at home.

26%

of Japanese travellers use less cash when they travel than they do at home.

SPOTLIGHT

United Kingdom

Jacqueline Kelleher
Retail Director
UK and Europe

Whether it's a luxury holiday in the Caribbean or a budget adventure to a European Christmas market, experiential travelling has become increasingly central to UK holidaymakers' choice of destinations over the past year.

In the Americas, for example, we've seen a sharp increase in the number of British travellers heading to Saint Vincent and the Grenadines – a destination known to offer an authentic Caribbean experience. Similarly, Dominica has enjoyed a recent influx of eco-tourists – travellers who seek out unspoiled natural environments in contrast to more traditional, resort-based tourism. We've seen that sales of the East Caribbean dollar rose 84% year-on-year as a result, whilst sales of the Barbadian dollar increased 25%.

Advertising and investment driving travel.
Several African and South American countries have also surged in popularity, with sales of Brazilian real up 102%, Chilean peso up 101% and Moroccan dirham has increased by 22% year-on-year. These rises in these countries can in part be attributed to:

- Concerted advertising campaigns targeting UK travellers
- Investment in tourism infrastructure
- An emerging trend of tourists seeking new and novel destinations.

Closer to home in the UK, ongoing cost-of-living concerns coupled with travellers opting for seasonal experiences such as European Christmas markets is what is driving UK-based holidaymakers to Czechia and Poland. Sales of Czech koruna and Polish złoty are up 13% and 16% respectively year-on-year.

More travellers taking cash than card.
Cash may have only accounted for 12% of domestic payments in 2023, but it remains the most popular form of travel money for UK travellers with four out of five of those we surveyed saying they take cash when travelling. More than half of travellers use cash more when they travel than they do at home, and nearly one in ten prefer to use cash while abroad. Half of cash users said they carried cash to use it for purchases where cards aren't accepted – like tipping and souvenirs.

Half of respondents also said they used a credit card when away, whilst three in ten said they used a debit card. Cards are seen as a safer and easier way of travelling with, spending and budgeting money compared to cash, and more convenient to use. For the majority of travellers, a combination of cash and card offered the most benefits.

British travellers also demonstrated a clear preference for pre-trip planning, with more than a third of travellers acquiring their travel money a month or more before their trip - compared to just 6% on the day. Brits, it would seem, are increasingly embracing the peace of mind that comes with securing their currency in advance.

Disclaimer: This survey was carried out on 250 Travelex customers in the UK in November 2025.

102%

The increase in sales of Brazilian real in the UK year-on-year.

79%

of British travellers use cash when abroad.

84%

The increase in sales of East Caribbean dollar in the UK year-on-year.

52%

of British travellers use more cash when they travel than they do at home.

6%

of British travellers acquire travel money on the day of their trip.

Leonard Stolk
Managing Director
Europe

SPOTLIGHT
Europe

Amid Europe's ongoing affordability crisis, the last 12 months saw a marked increase in European holidaymakers shifting from traditional tourist hotspots like Spain, Italy and France to alternative, more affordable destinations in Eastern and Southeastern Europe and beyond.

Certain Balkan destinations saw huge growth in popularity - with sales of Albanian lek and Serbian dinar surging across Europe, as travellers seek the same warm climate offered by nearby Greece and Croatia at lower cost. Croatia's adoption of the euro in 2023, and the impact on rising prices coupled with growing inflation, has likely influenced this trend for tourism to move further south.

Similar shifts were seen in certain North African markets, particularly Morocco and Egypt - both of which have seen double digit growth in visitor numbers year-on-year.

These destinations are close enough to Europe and offer a variety of all-inclusive affordability, luxury getaways or cultural experiences, catering to travellers of all ages. Both countries have also been heavily promoted through national tourism campaigns with sales of Moroccan dirham and Egyptian pound growing substantially over the last 12 months as a result.

Further afield, the once-expensive Japan has seen a modest rise in European visitors since the yen began to fall in value in mid-2024 - reflecting travellers' preferences for adventure, novelty and affordability.

Cash remains king for travel.

We're seeing cash usage slowly declining domestically across Europe, but it remains an essential resource for most travellers: nine out of ten travellers we surveyed in the Netherlands said they use cash when abroad, with nearly six out of ten using more cash abroad than at home, and one in ten only using cash when abroad. More than three quarters of travellers reported they also take either a credit or debit card when travelling, reflecting how neither cash nor card alone fully meet travellers' requirements. European travellers also said they prefer to take cash to pay for small items and tips, and for safety where cards aren't accepted. They also expressed concern that their cards may not work or in case it gets stolen. A card was overall seen as a safer method than carrying lots of cash; more convenient to budget and pay; and overall useful for higher-value purchases.

Our research highlights travellers increasingly preferring to acquire their travel money in advance of their trip: **just 7% of European travellers reported acquiring their travel money on the day of travel, with half of travellers acquiring their currency - either in-store, or ordering online - in the fortnight leading up to their trip.**

Disclaimer: This survey was carried out on 250 Travelex customers in The Netherlands in November 2025.

1,582%

The increase in sales of Albanian lek in Germany year-on-year.

7%

of Dutch travellers said they acquire travel money on the day of their trip.

75%

The increase in sales of Serbian dinar in Switzerland year-on-year.

91%

of Dutch travellers use cash when abroad.

35%

The increase in sales of Moroccan dir-ham in the Netherlands year-on-year.

59%

of Dutch travellers use more cash when they travel than they do at home.

Philip Bowcock
Chief Executive Officer

Conclusion

Despite market-specific nuances, it's evident that, around the world, most travellers acquire and spend travel money in similar ways with a mix of cash and card.

What does this mean for the market in 2026 and beyond?

The 2026 opportunity lies in designing business models around real traveller behaviour: resilient demand, blended payment preferences, earlier planning, and a longer travel money lifecycle. The brands that win will be those that meet customers before, during and after the trip, with solutions that flex to how people actually travel. No single payment method meets all customer or partner needs. The dominant behaviour is cash and card, balancing security, budgeting, convenience and acceptance. Travellers are also shifting decisively toward pre-trip planning, with most purchasing travel money weeks in advance. This creates clear opportunities for earlier engagement, digital ordering and bundled propositions.

Finally, rising levels of leftover foreign currency represent both a customer value gap and a material opportunity for post-trip engagement, repatriation and recycling.

Travelex worldwide money

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