

The Future of Storytelling

2026 tourism marketing trends & predictions

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Hello 🖐️

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900+

**destinations trust
CrowdRiff for their
visual content**



Trends Report 2026





The 2026 Tourism Marketing Trends Survey

This annual report surveys **DMOs, travel marketing agencies, accommodations, attractions**, and other tourism brands to capture how the industry is evolving.

Early results were collected for this deck, representing **123 respondents globally** — including participants from **Canada, the U.S., Australia, New Zealand**, and beyond.

Survey topics include:

- AI and automation
- Partnerships
- Content strategy
- Sustainability
- Budgets

Storytelling at Scale

A scenic landscape photograph featuring a body of water in the foreground, a large green tree and autumn-colored trees in the middle ground, and a wooden barn in the background under a blue sky with clouds. The text "Storytelling at Scale" is overlaid on the left side of the image.

Tourism marketing is storytelling at scale

- Powered by technology, grounded in authenticity, and sustained through collaboration
- No matter your team's size or budget, smart choices and scalable systems can help you share what makes your brand truly special
- Authentic storytelling will always be tourism's most powerful differentiator, and there has never been a better time to tell it



From Recovery to Redefinition

Over the past few years, we've seen the industry move from uncertainty to steady confidence.



2024: The Reset

Rebuilding awareness and traveler trust after years of disruption



2025: The Rebalance

Cautious optimism returns; 47% of travel marketers cite content volume as their top challenge



2026: The Redefinition

78% of travel marketers expect stable or higher budgets, and 63% of teams remain small (2–5 staff), fueling savvy, more strategic growth

The New Currency of Creativity



More with less

2026 is about scale, not by adding headcount but by using the right tools and partnerships to stretch every resource



Partnerships drive creativity

68% of travel marketers maintain active partnerships, and 55% co-market with partners to extend reach



Agility & Alignment

Efficiency and collaboration now drive creativity and impact



Working together is the backbone of scaling storytelling

Engagement > Reach

YoY, the trend moves away from reach and impression to engagement related metrics, showing the value of directly connecting with the consumer.

Storytelling Drives Engagement

Storytelling campaigns are driving the most engagement related results

Community-led Stories

In 2026, travel brands will be doubling down on storytelling campaigns to drive impact, and storytelling is crafted in concert with community.



There's nothing to see here

Community-first

Community contributed to the humor of the campaign and led the direction on what to bring to the international stage.

Oulu tapped into international networks

Visit Oulu's team tapped into frameworks and best practices through Destination International's Pathfinder program to scale their visibility

Maintained authenticity

Because of the starting point, the campaign maintained the sense of place while driving economic impact. Oulu now has one of the highest hotel occupancy rates in Finland.



+16%

**Co-marketing participation is up
+16% YoY among DMOs**

Source: Sojern 2025



90%

**Of travel marketers partner with
local businesses, and 81%
collaborate with local creators to
deepen community connection.**

Source: Crowdriff



Visit Northshore

Local content creators

Visit Northshore tapped into a really classic approach: using local creators to tell community-driven stories.

Highly shared and saved

One asset received 1,200 shares on IG and 1,600 saves on Tiktok

AI & Travel Marketing



Smarter tools, bigger impact

- 86% of marketing teams now use AI for planning, writing, or analytics
- 54% measure ROI through time saved and efficiency gained
- 56% of teams spend less than \$5K a year on AI tools, showing that innovation is within reach for teams of any size
- AI is helping marketers plan faster, create more efficiently, and refocus time on strategy



You're **working differently**

----- Productivity sidekick to plan, research, analyze, and execute.

You're **creating differently**

----- From blank page to first drafts — brainstorm, generate, iterate.

The **traveller has changed**

----- AI is now their travel agent, concierge, and co-pilot.

Where you **show up has changed**

----- AI platforms are the new, *rapidly growing*, distribution channels.

In 2025 we recommended...

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Is your website click-worthy?

With websites vital to DMO success, it should be as fresh and enticing as a bakery display case. Hubspot offers tons of [great suggestions for upgrading your site](#)—it can be as simple as adding a CTA to the homepage, making your navigation easier to find, or updating the color scheme so it doesn't look like it was built in 2009 (even if it was).

Looking for inspo? We *love* what Tourism Tofino has done [with their website](#). The visuals alone are enough to get anyone booking a trip, the navigation is super easy to follow, and so many links offer something new to learn. We're also obsessed with their [Last-Minute Tours and Lessons page](#). There are so many ways for visitors to engage with the site and partners!

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"We all know that website traffic is declining."

"Organic traffic is really tanking."

"...website has had a 30% decrease in traffic. It's making us re-evaluate what success looks like in terms of visitation to the site"

The world we're in



New Reality is Zero Click

The rise of generative AI platforms (Gemini, Perplexity, Google AI Overviews) is creating a Zero-Click World.



The Problem

The traveler's first, and often only, interaction with your destination is an AI-generated summary, not your website.



The New Goal

Our mission has shifted from driving clicks to becoming the authoritative **Source of Truth** that the AI assistant trusts and cites.

What does it actually mean for content?

Long(ER) Tail Keywords

We have to shift how we are producing content and be comfortable with not owning the traffic.

The new way of searching is specific, but it also doesn't require as much domain authority to surface.

- How to get to Vancouver Island vs. I'm landing in Vancouver and want to go to Victoria. I'm travelling with my two kids. What is the best way to get there without needing a vehicle?

Your Competitive Edge is Authenticity, Not Volume

AI models prioritize content with verifiable **E-E-A-T** (Experience, Expertise, Authority, Trust) to avoid generating "hallucinations" or generic "AI slop".

- Create in-depth guides with verifiable facts and unique, human-authored insights. (e.g., A local surf instructor's guide to Tofino tides, not a generic "Best Beaches" list.)
- Showcase unique travel stories and user-generated content (UGC) that generic AI cannot replicate, reinforcing local authenticity

Anticipate Traveler's Next Question

Generative search systems perform a "**Query Fan-Out**," breaking a broad query into 10-20 sub-queries to find the most comprehensive answer.

- **Challenge Example:** A traveler asks, "*Whale watching in Victoria, BC?*"
- **AI Fan-Out (Implicit Queries):** "*Best time to go?*", "*Most ethical tours?*", "*Responsible tourism practices?*"
- **Strategic Solution: Content Hubs.** Your content must answer all latent intents simultaneously, rewarding depth over fragmentation. A comprehensive, interlinked content hub is far more likely to be fully cited by an AI than a single-topic page.



Whale watching in Victoria, BC



Best time to go?



Most ethical tours?



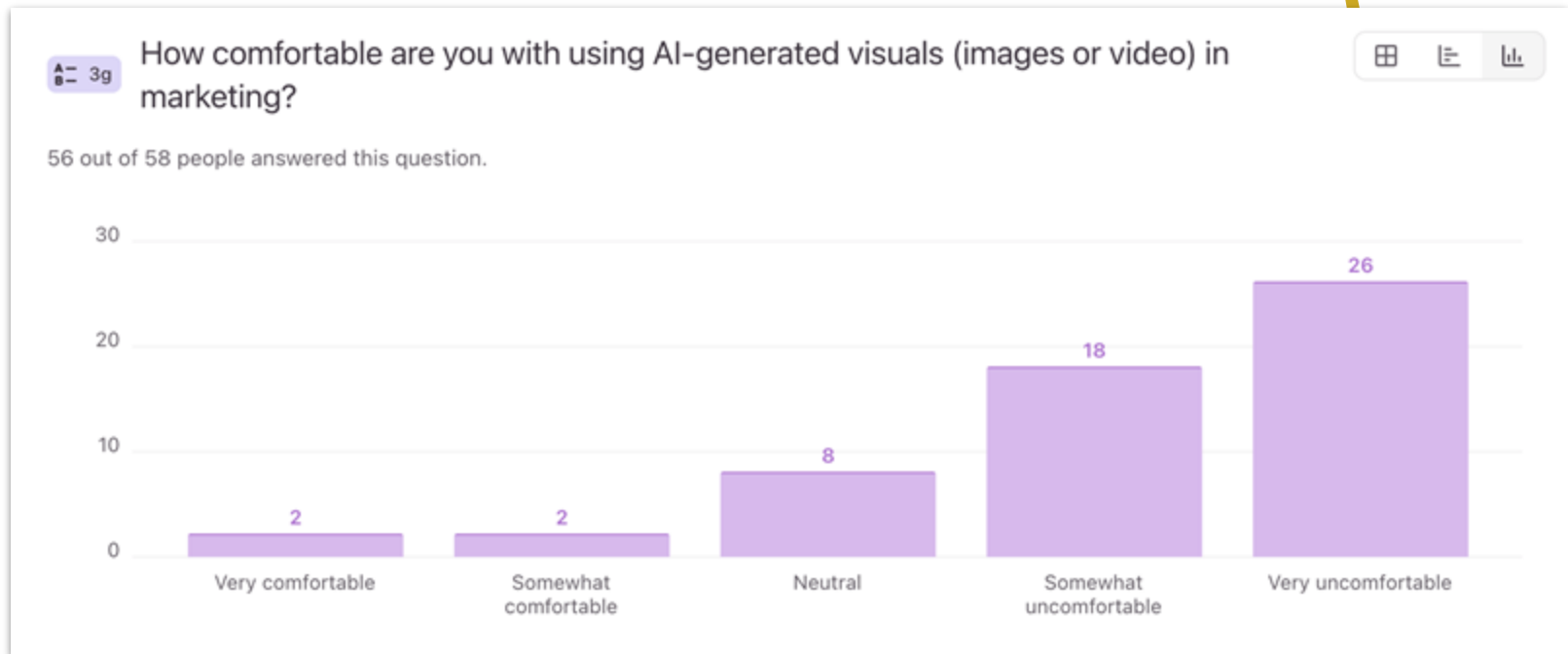
Responsible tourism practices?



What does it actually mean for measurement?

Old Metric	New Strategic KPI	Why it Matters
Organic Clicks	AI Share of Voice (SOV)	Measures your competitive presence and brand authority in AI-generated answers
Website Traffic	Branded Search Growth	Users who see you cited in an AI answer often search for your brand directly later. This tracks brand lift from zero-click visibility.
Last-Click Conversion	Customer Lifetime Value (CLV)	CLV measures the value of attracting the "right-fit" traveler—one who returns and becomes loyal—a direct result of authentic GEO content.

Elephant in the room...



Authenticity is non-negotiable

"We pride ourselves on being authentic." – "We don't use AI-generated images in our marketing."

Brand risk and trust erosion

"I get nervous and cautious when I encounter AI-generated visuals in ads." – "I have seen instances that can be detrimental to brand."

AI visuals feel misleading for destinations

"We are a marketing destination... I am not okay with having AI create the exact place we are showcasing."

Current AI isn't 'there' yet for quality

"AI-generated visuals have not reached a point of... superior to a photographer." – "If we do use AI, it should be clearly identified."

How much is too much?

Look and feel of
the visual

Minor manipulation
of *existing objects*

Add or remove
objects

Major changes to
the scene

Generate realistic
photo or video

1

2

3

4

5

Brightness,
exposure, contrast,
saturation,
color grading video

Fill up a beer, fill
out a plate of food,
make it less cloudy

Change to a
family, remove
lamp post or
power lines

Change the scene,
change the season

Use AI to produce
a 'realistic' photo
or video in your
destination

Authenticity at the heart of it.



**The hesitancy comes
from our values.**



**We know what makes
a place special.**



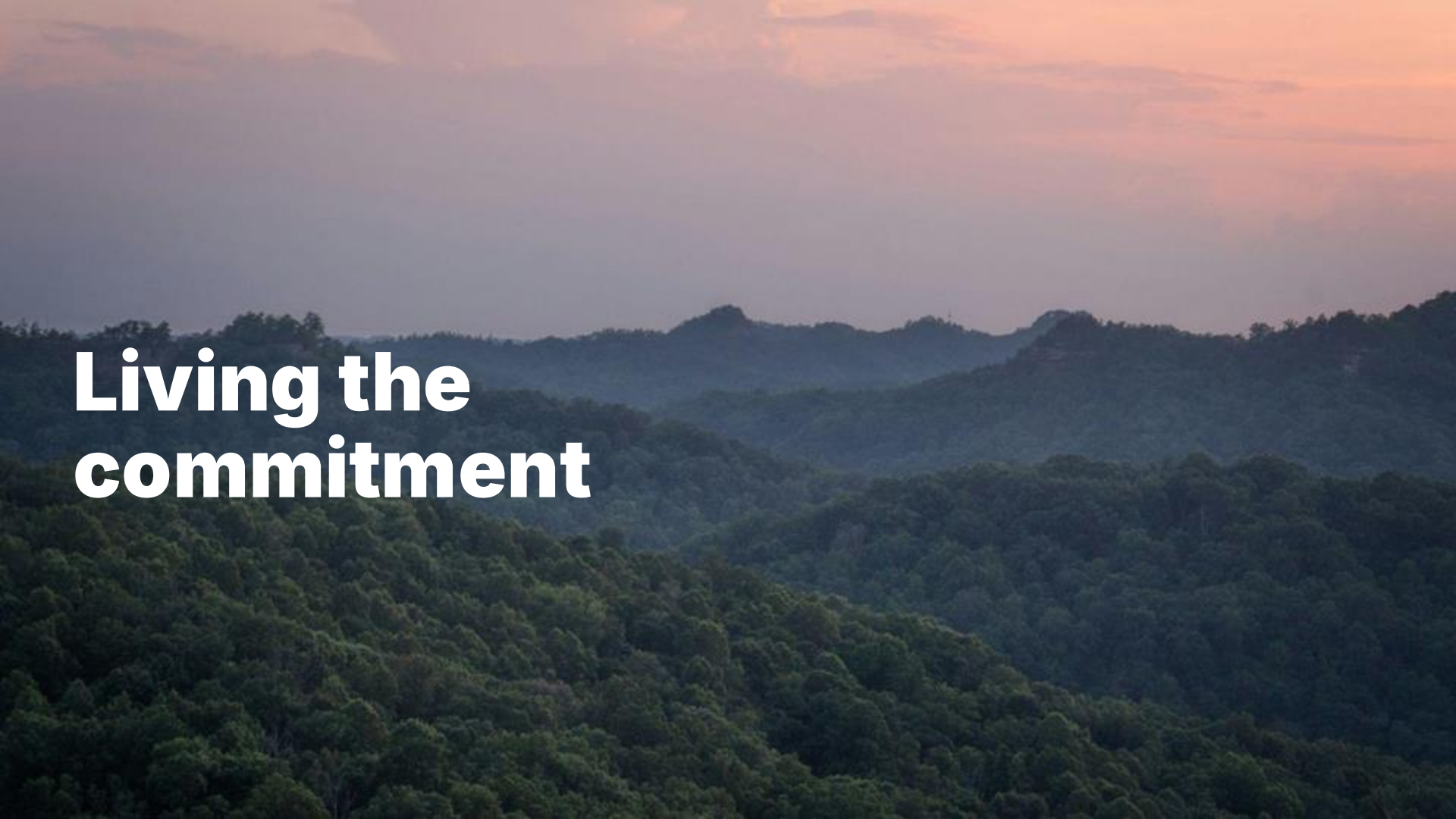
**Travelers desire
authentic connection.**

Using technology that...

Technology gives marketers time back to focus on storytelling, not repetition.

enables human creativity

The goal isn't to automate creativity, but to amplify it through better insights and collaboration.



**Living the
commitment**

Living the commitment

Sustainability has evolved into a defining measure of destination integrity.

90%

Of travel marketers partner locally to integrate culture and community into marketing

60%

Of travel marketers track participation in local programs to measure community impact

26%

Of marketers cite sustainability as top 2026 trend

56%

Measure engagement with sustainability-focused content



"We're mandated to make the travel economy here a regenerative one."

Every campaign centers on enhancing residents' quality of life by encouraging support for local businesses and advocating for stewardship that protects the land.

Jamie Sterling, Executive Director of Southern Gulf Islands Tourism

The art of doing nothing

The campaign encouraged travelers to use their vacation time to unplug and regenerate, supported by a playful “mental white space” toolkit:

Templates, social media status updates, and a message encouraging visitors to let others know they were away in the Southern Gulf Islands and would be **“too preoccupied with revitalizing their soul” to respond.**



Get the least out
of your week.



A photograph of a softball game in progress, viewed through a chain-link fence. The scene is set on a dirt field with white base lines. In the center, a player in a dark uniform with the number 23 is standing. Other players are visible in the background. A scoreboard is visible in the distance, showing the Coca-Cola logo and the word "BUCKET". A banner with "BULLDOG" is also visible. The sky is overcast.

Welcome to 2026

The Future Belongs to the Savvy Teams

Building for 2026

- The year ahead isn't about having the biggest team
- Savvy choices, scalable tools, and strong partnerships drive success
- Every marketer, regardless of size, can scale authentic storytelling through strategic systems and collaboration





The 2026 Opportunity

The future of tourism marketing belongs to those who combine technology, partnerships that scale, and stories that stay true to who they are

Key takeaways

🧐 Use the right tools, build strong partnerships, and tell stories that stay true to who you are.

Confidence is back. 78% of travel marketers expect stable or higher budgets. The industry is moving from recovery to growth.

Small teams, big ambition. Most marketing teams have 2–5 people, making smarter systems essential to scale storytelling.

Technology empowers creativity. 86% of teams use AI to plan, write, and organize. Freeing time to focus on what matters most: authentic stories.

Authenticity wins trust. Real, local, human stories remain the most powerful differentiator in tourism.

Partnerships multiply impact. 68% of travel marketers track partner outcomes. Collaboration is the new growth model.

Sustainability defines success. It's no longer a campaign theme, but a long-term commitment that builds trust and community value.



Get in touch

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