

TRAVEL WITH PURPOSE

2026 Belongs to Hobby-led Holidays and Passion-first Planning

In 2026, travellers are no longer choosing destinations purely for postcard value. Instead, they are asking a more revealing question: what do I love doing – and where in the world can I do it better?

Whether your passion means chasing tulip season in the Netherlands or perfecting pâte à choux in Paris, hobby-led holidays are reshaping travel into something more personal. Less about ticking off landmarks. More about leaning into lifestyle.

Marriott Bonvoy calls these trips “passion pursuits”, and the data support the shift. 72% of global travellers have already taken a trip centred on a personal hobby. Among Gen Z, that figure rises to 84%. Closer to home, Flight Centre’s latest Global PR Survey shows that 83% of South Africans cite food and gastronomy as a primary driver of their travel choices.

PURPOSE IS THE NEW PASSPORT STAMP.

According to Zay Ferguson-Nair, Flight Centre South Africa’s Customer Experience Leader:

“Travel will remain deeply personal in 2026. People want journeys that mirror what lights them up, whether that’s yoga, photography, gardening, or baking the

perfect croissant. Travel is no longer only about where you’re going, but why you’re going there.”

It is a subtle shift, yet a meaningful one. The destination is no longer the headline. The passion is.

SIX WAYS TO LET YOUR PASSION PICK THE PLACE

1. For the Gardeners and Flower Fanatics

From March to May 2026, Keukenhof Gardens in the Netherlands becomes a living spectrum of colour. More than seven million bulbs transform the landscape, and cycling paths cut through fields of tulips in full bloom. Timing here is everything, and when you arrive at peak season, the reward is unmistakable.

Closer to home, Namaqualand in the Northern Cape delivers its own annual spectacle between August and September. For most of the year, the terrain appears stark and subdued. Then spring arrives, and the desert floor bursts into carpets of wildflowers. It is a reminder that nature’s most dramatic performances are often fleeting.



Keukenhof Gardens



2. For the Yogis and Wellness Seekers

When pace becomes pressure, distance can restore perspective.

From March to June, Ubud in Bali offers sunrise yoga overlooking rice terraces and plant-based cuisine rooted in local produce. The setting does much of the work. The rest is breath and intention.

In Gauteng, the Magaliesberg offers a more accessible reset in April, May, or again in September. Eco-lodges and forest retreats host digital detox weekends, aerial yoga sessions and guided hikes that feel far removed from city routine. The change of scenery may be subtle, but the shift in mindset is tangible.

Sunrise Over the Magaliesberg



3. For the Photography Obsessives

Some landscapes demand to be captured properly.

Iceland's South Coast, best visited between late February and April, delivers blue-hour light across glaciers and black-sand beaches. Long exposures reveal skies that shimmer and shift in ways no filter can replicate. Conditions can be unpredictable, yet that unpredictability is part of the appeal.

Between June and August, the Drakensberg Mountains in KwaZulu-Natal offer crisp winter air and sharply defined ridgelines. Golden light sweeps

across the peaks in the late afternoon, turning an already dramatic landscape into one of the southern hemisphere's most rewarding natural studios.

4. For the Readers and Dreamers

Literary travel is less about sightseeing and more about stepping into a narrative.

In March 2026, Bath in England hosts the Jane Austen Festival, transforming the city into a Regency-inspired stage set. Bonnets, ballroom dancing and live readings add theatrical texture to streets already steeped in Georgian architecture.

Back home, the Franschhoek Literary

Festival each May brings leading South African authors together in a setting framed by vineyards. Panels unfold beside fireplaces, discussions stretch into the evening, and the atmosphere encourages reflection as much as debate.

5. For the Bakers and Foodies

For those who plan their days around flavour, travel becomes an edible itinerary.

June in Paris offers Champagne picnics, time-honoured pâtisseries and baking workshops led by award-winning chefs. It is indulgent, certainly, but also immersive.

From March to May, harvest season in Cape Town and Stellenbosch delivers its own culinary rhythm. Artisanal bakeries, chocolate ateliers and relaxed picnics sit alongside seasonal food festivals that celebrate local craftsmanship. Here, the experience is rooted in both flavour and provenance.



EXPERT TIPS FOR PLANNING A HOBBY-LED HOLIDAY

- **Track Global Calendars Before Flight Prices.**

Before you shortlist destinations, establish when your passion peaks. Cherry blossom season, truffle harvest, a major e-sports championship, or a chefs' congress all operate on tight timelines. Competitive fares are irrelevant if you arrive after the moment has passed.

- **Book the Experience First, the Flight Second**

For hobby-led holidays, the event defines the journey. Ferguson-Nair advises securing limited-access tickets, such as festivals and masterclasses, before confirming accommodation through your Flight Centre Travel Expert.

- **Pack with Purpose**

Prioritise equipment over outfits. Photographers should check voltage compatibility for chargers. Yogis may prefer to travel with their own eco-mat or strap rather than rely on studio gear.

- **Leave a Day for "Creative Drift"**

Hobby-led travellers often overschedule. Building in one open day allows space for unexpected discoveries, which frequently become the highlight.

- **Match Local Expertise to Your Niche.**

Work with your Travel Expert to connect with local guides who share your interests. Shared enthusiasm can turn a structured itinerary into genuine exchange.

As Ferguson-Nair concludes: "The map expands in unexpected directions when you follow what makes you feel most alive. Passion becomes both the journey and the destination. And that's a trend worth packing for."

In 2026, travel is not about collecting places. It is about refining identity. The suitcase still closes the same way. What changes is the reason you packed it. 📌



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