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Solo travel skyrockets, with everything from flights to tech-powered tools making it easier than ever

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March 1 is National Plan a Solo Vacation Day, but travelers need no dedicated day to inspire what is quickly becoming one of the most industry-impacting trends in travel. Data compiled by Kayak.com shows that a whopping 50 percent of American travelers plan to take a solo trip this year, with Google searches for “solo travel” skyrocketing 223 percent in the past decade alone. Diving into solo travel can feel intimidating – even as a travel journalist who has traveled solo for over a decade, I still feel it sometimes. However, as the landscape shifts from traveling accompanied to going it alone, some of the biggest brands in aviation and hospitality are opening new avenues designed to make the solo travel experience a breeze.

Trends in travel

Solo travel is a trend that has been growing slowly but steadily for years, but increased travel among the youngest generations has sent it skyrocketing in popularity. Recent data compiled by United Airlines shows that Gen Z travel-

ers are the most likely to embrace solo travel, with approximately 70 percent flying solo. Millennials follow suit, with 65 percent of the cohort embracing the solo travel experience, as do 57 percent of travelers of the Baby Boomer generation.

With the spark to travel solo often comes the daring to explore new destinations. Though there’s nothing like a close-to-home trip, data from United reveals that some of the most popular spots for solo travelers tend to be more far-flung, including Brazil, China, and Korea, for the intrepid traveler not letting the lack of a travel companion get in the way of crossing off a bucket list destination.

Routes and repositioning

United Airlines reaches far beyond compiling data on the trend, opening new doors – and routes – to an enhanced solo travel experience. One route, in particular, feels fatefully designed for the solo traveler – a new daily flight connecting United’s Houston hub to Medellin, Colombia, which I was able to experience last month. Whereas coastal Cartagena charms and the capital city of Bogotá caters to the business traveler, the Medellin route speaks

directly to the solo explorers. Hidden among rich, rugged mountainsides hiding coffee farms and colonial-era villages, Medellin emerges as arguably the biggest hub for remote work and the growing “digital nomad” lifestyle in Latin America. Buzzing with expats and long-term travelers, Medellin is an easy place to connect with others, with a local population that emanates immense excitement at a new chapter in its city’s history.

More than just an additional flight offered by “the world’s largest airline,” United’s Houston-Medellin route provides a gateway to Colombia’s “city of eternal spring” from the West Coast and heartland of the United States. Prior to the introduction of the new route at the end of 2024, the city was only connected to the U.S. via East Coast hubs like Miami.

The new flight is so popular that even just a few months after its debut, it’s already selling out. When I boarded the flight on my own solo trip to Medellin, several of my fellow passengers expressed having already flown the route, in some cases multiple times, making solo travel to this trending destination even more hassle-free.

When they disembark, visitors can explore coffee plantations like Capilla del Rosario, tour revived neighborhoods like Comuna 13 and the newer Constelaciones project in Comuna 3, and even try new experiences like vintage car tours with local tour operators through the city center and hill-sides.

Tools for travelers

New flight connections to hotspots for solo travel alone aren’t the only way United is positioning itself to be a top choice for travelers taking to the skies alone. Tools to smooth the planning and preparation process from start to finish help, too. United’s digital magazine Hemispheres recently launched a new AI-powered trip-planning tool featuring every destination the airline offers covers.

While the youngest generation of travelers might be most familiar with AI, this is a tool anyone can use. A simple search pulls up data-backed recommendations for where to visit as a solo traveler, jump-starting the process of planning a solo trip. For those already planning their experience with a destination in mind, recommendations for where to eat, where to

stay, what to do, and bucket list experiences help bring together an itinerary.

Another new feature includes seamless AirTag integration through the United app. Customers can securely share the location of AirTag or Find My accessories with United customer service agents for faster bag tracking.

Points-counting travelers will also find it easy to earn miles through the free-to-join MileagePlus program and book international tickets starting at just 20,000 miles. The Money+Miles feature allows members to apply as little as 1,000 miles toward their journey.

Plan a solo trip

All the planning and preparation in the world and the ease of solo travel still require a leap of faith. Seasoned solo travelers among United employees have recommendations for that. One such employee recommended soaking it all in and using the experience to reflect on life and grow as a person.

For the record number of travelers taking to the skies solo, it’s now easier than ever to get the planning out of the way and on to the fun.

The best U.S. cities for affordable fun – without breaking the bank

By **ANIKA JINDAL**
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Finding fun without breaking the bank can be tricky, especially when the average American spends over \$3,600 annually on entertainment. However, WalletHub’s latest study identifies the U.S. cities that offer the best balance of entertainment, cost, and recreational opportunities, ensuring fun is available for all interests and budgets.

Based on a detailed analysis of over 180 cities across 65 key metrics, including everything from fitness centers per capita to movie ticket prices, WalletHub’s ranking highlights the cities that offer the most fun at the best value. The results show that despite rising costs, there are still plenty of exciting, affordable places to live and visit.

Las Vegas: The entertainment capital

Las Vegas is undeniably America’s most fun city. Known for its extravagant nightlife, world-class casinos, and endless entertainment options, Sin City doesn’t disappoint when it comes to things to do.

While it’s most famous for its casinos and nightlife, Las Vegas also boasts an impressive number of music venues, comedy clubs, and spas. The city also features a wide variety of recreational activities, including bowling alleys, hiking trails, and sports stadiums.

Despite its reputation as a pricey destination, Las Vegas offers many affordable options, such as rea-

sonably priced burgers and fitness club memberships. And for those who enjoy partying, the city is one of the few where public drinking is allowed, adding a unique twist to the experience.

Orlando: Amusement parks and affordable fun

Orlando, home to world-renowned amusement parks like Disney World and Universal Studios, ranks second on the list. Though known for its tourist-heavy attractions, Orlando is surprisingly affordable in many areas, including hotels and restaurants. The city also stands out for its sports scene, with numerous sports stadiums and a top-tier ranking for soccer enthusiasts.

Orlando also offers a wide range of recreational options, including fitness centers, spas, arcades, and performing arts theaters, proving there’s much more to this city than theme parks.

Miami: Beaches, sports, and water fun

Miami takes the third spot, offering an array of outdoor activities, from water sports to fishing and boating. With miles of coastline and an abundance of parks, residents and visitors can stay active while soaking up the sun. The city is also home to major sports teams like the Miami Dolphins and Miami Heat, making it a haven for sports fans.

In addition to its outdoor appeal, Miami features a thriving food



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scene, with affordable, high-rated restaurants and bars scattered across the city. For those with a sweet tooth, Miami also ranks high for its number of ice cream shops, perfect for cooling down after a day of beach fun.

Other notable mentions

■ Atlanta, GA: Known for its vibrant nightlife and plentiful recreational activities, Atlanta ranks fourth overall. The city also offers an impressive number of fitness centers and affordable entertainment options.

■ New Orleans, LA: Famous for its rich culture and lively music scene, New Orleans ranks fifth. The city is a hotspot for jazz lovers and foodies, offering a diverse range of activities at a reasonable cost.

Why fun doesn’t have to be expensive

As WalletHub analyst Chip Lupo points out, “The most fun cities offer affordable options for year-round fun for their residents, which is good for residents’ wallets and

their mental health.”

While some of these cities are known for attracting tourists, they provide a diverse range of activities for everyone, from locals to visitors, without breaking the bank.

For those looking to enjoy their city without overspending, the key is to find the balance between affordability and variety. From enjoying local sports, trying out a new restaurant, or taking advantage of outdoor recreation, these cities offer endless possibilities for having fun on a budget.