



SITE / MARITZ RESEARCH

Investigating the Power of Incentive Travel Across Generations

Results Preview: 25 March 2026



Investigating the power of incentive travel across generations



- As the global workforce continues to diversify and evolve, understanding what drives performance across generational cohorts has become increasingly urgent. While much attention has been paid to GenZ—those born between 1997 and 2012—emerging evidence suggests that motivational dynamics are shifting across all generations, not just GenZ.
- This collaborative research initiative between SITE (Society for Incentive Travel Excellence) and Maritz seeks to uncover how different generations—Boomers, GenX, Millennials, and GenZ—perceive, value, and respond to various workplace reward strategies, particularly incentive travel experiences.
- By exploring the intersection of generational psychology, program design, and personal/professional goals, we aim to inform the future of reward and recognition in a multi-generational world.

Investigating the power of incentive travel across generations

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With thanks to:



site Foundation



Survey Instrument / Methodology



- **Objective:** Understand how generations comparatively view, prefer, and are impacted by opportunities to earn travel experiences
- **Target Population: Employees:**
 - Born between 1946 and 2005 (Boomer to Gen Z)
 - Employed full time, part time, or independent contractor to business(es) representing a variety of industries (excluding non-profit)
 - Having an opportunity in the last 3 years to earn travel (primarily group, accepting up to 50 with individual only) within incentive and/or recognition programs offered by an employer or partner company
- **Survey:** The survey included 186 variables (places to check a box or enter a number), 11 short-answer (other-specify) text boxes, and 3 long-answer (comment) text boxes (shown as 57 questions).
- **Collection:** Panel sourced, with data collected January 30 – March 6, 2026.
- **Sample:** After initial data cleaning 1,000 respondent surveys were included in the panel-provided data set. Please note on further cleaning, 40 records were flagged as cautionary on quality and most often excluded from results.

Today's presentation

One narrative out of a very rich data repository from which multiple additional narratives will be extracted over the months to come

Today we focus on

1. Who took the survey & Where they work
2. What motivates them in general
3. What motivates them specifically to win the travel reward
4. What aspects of the reward did they consider to be impactful and effective
5. What destination type





Who I am and Where I work

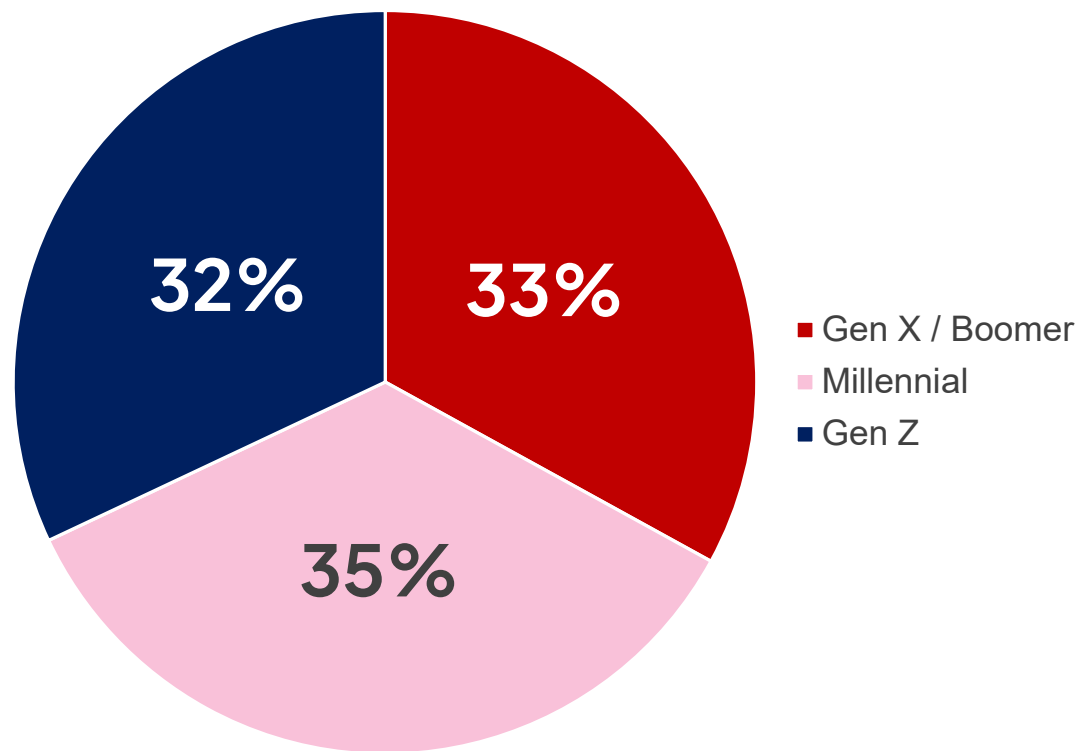


1.

Who I am and where I work

Our survey has captured a generationally balanced, but rather unique, cohort of incentive qualifiers working in smaller enterprises offering a broad range of rewards and recognitions including travel incentives

Generational split of respondents



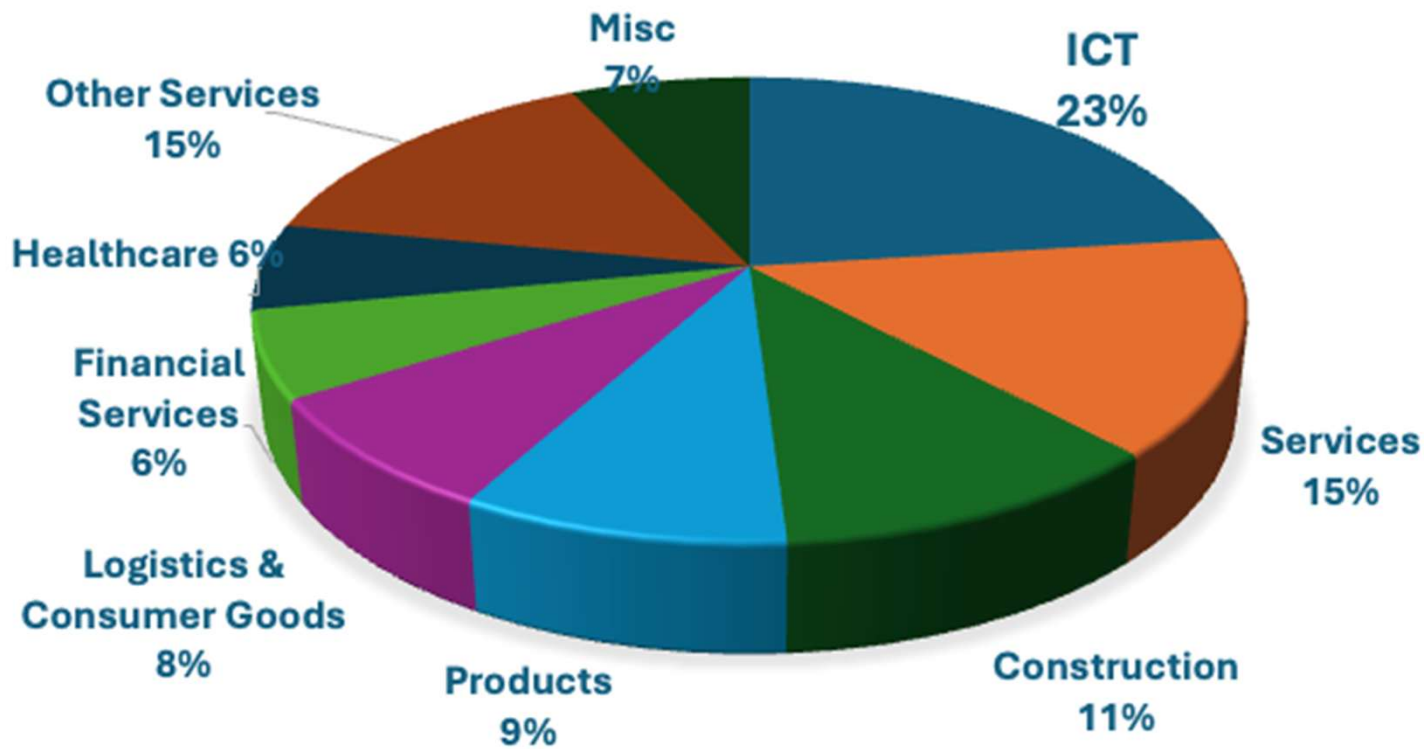
The respondents

Survey captured an interesting, if somewhat untypical demographic:

- 75% of survey takers were with their companies for less than 10 years
- Less than 10% across all generations worked remotely
- Of 10 different job functions or roles within their organisation, 60% were in Operations or Technology
- Less than 10% in sales
- 60% had a college degree
- 80% earned less than USD\$150,000 per year



Respondents by industry sector

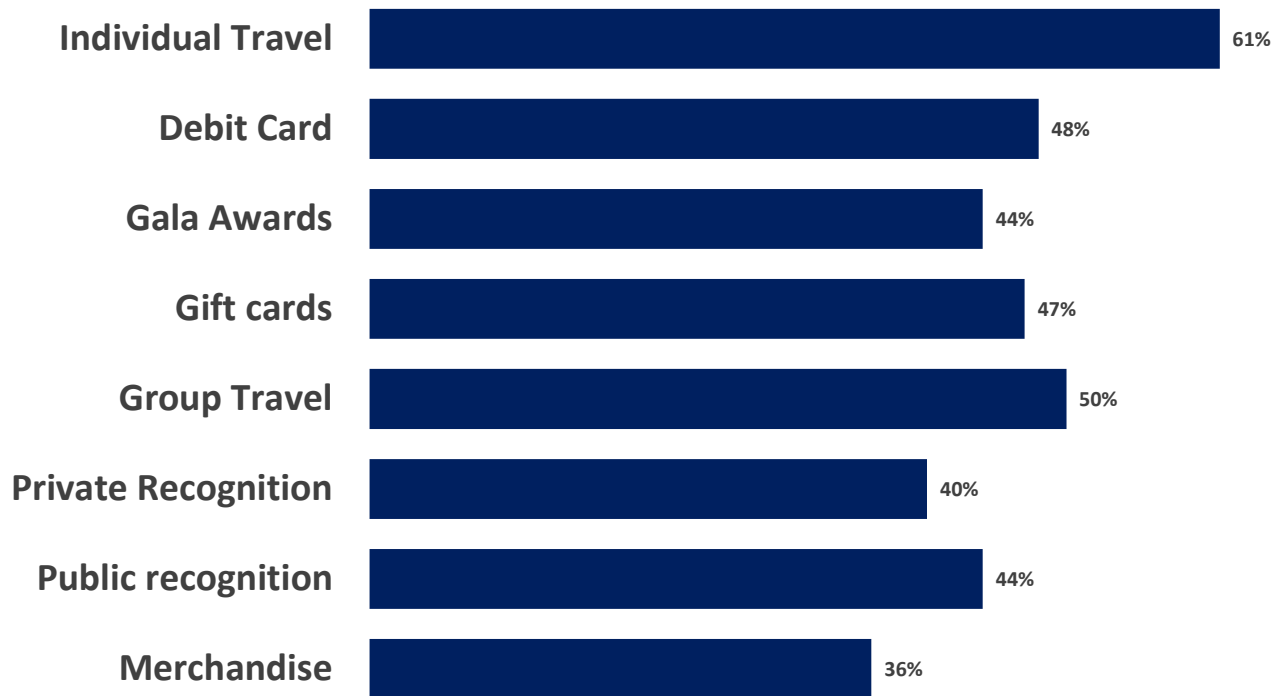




What motivates me

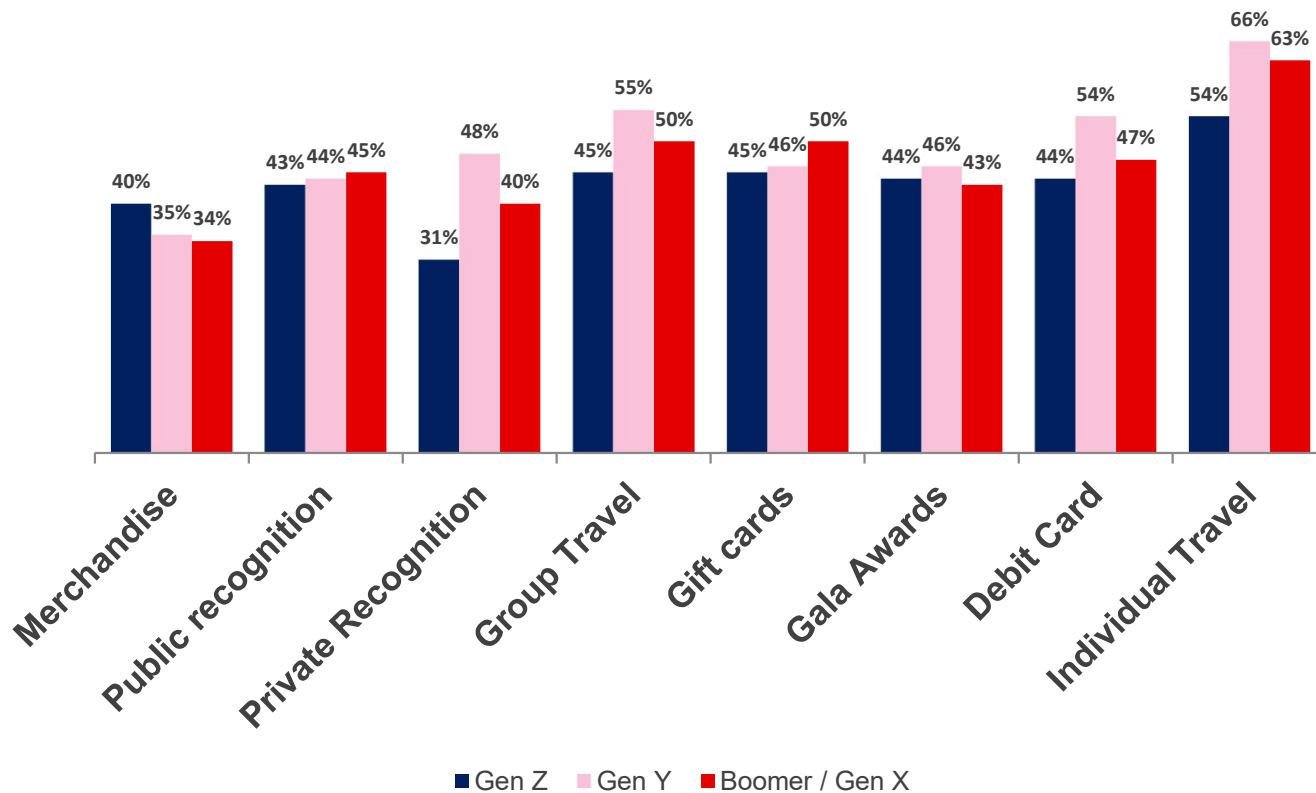


2. What motivates me



Q1. Please rate how motivating each of the below would be to you if offered as part of an incentive or recognition program: (Scale: 1=Not motivating at all to 5=Extremely motivating)

2. What motivates me: generational differences



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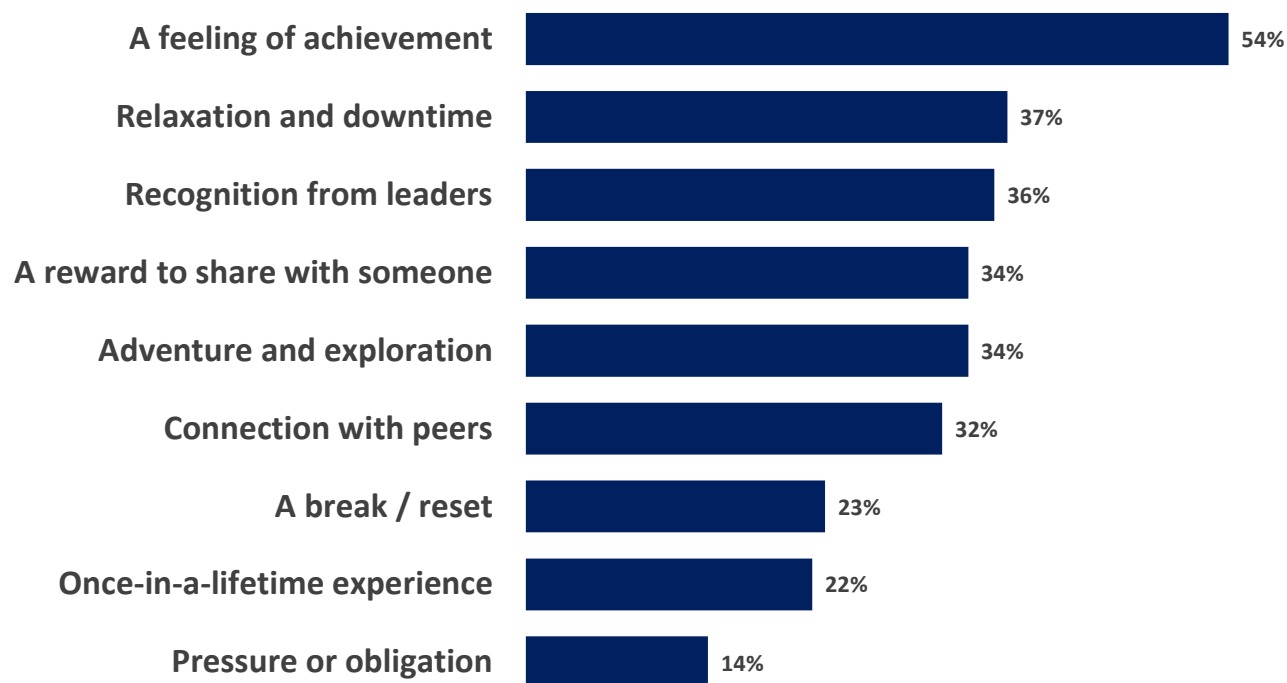
2A. What motivates me to win the travel award?



2A. What motivates me to win the travel award – generational differences

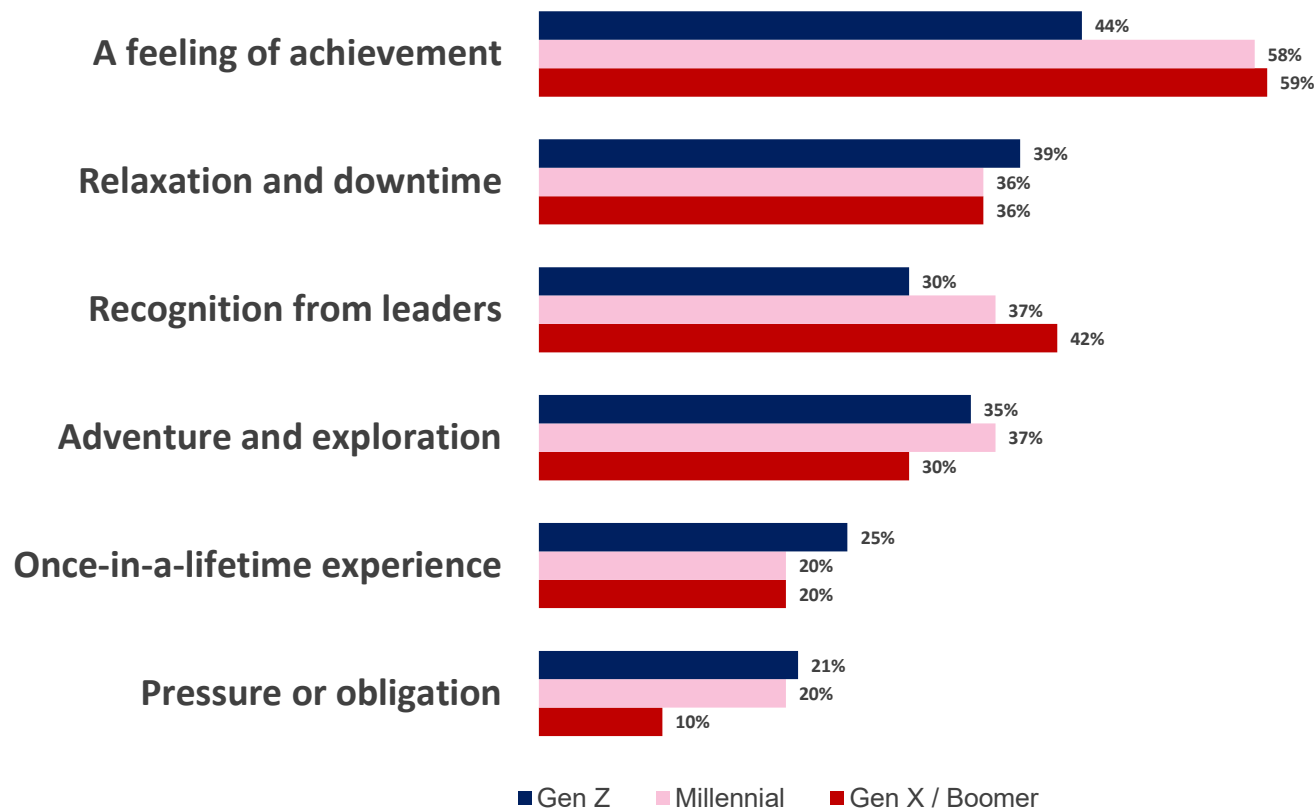


2B. What group travel means to me



Q10. Which emotions or personal outcomes best describe what a group travel experience means to you? (Select up to 3.) n=960

2B. What group travel means to me – generational differences





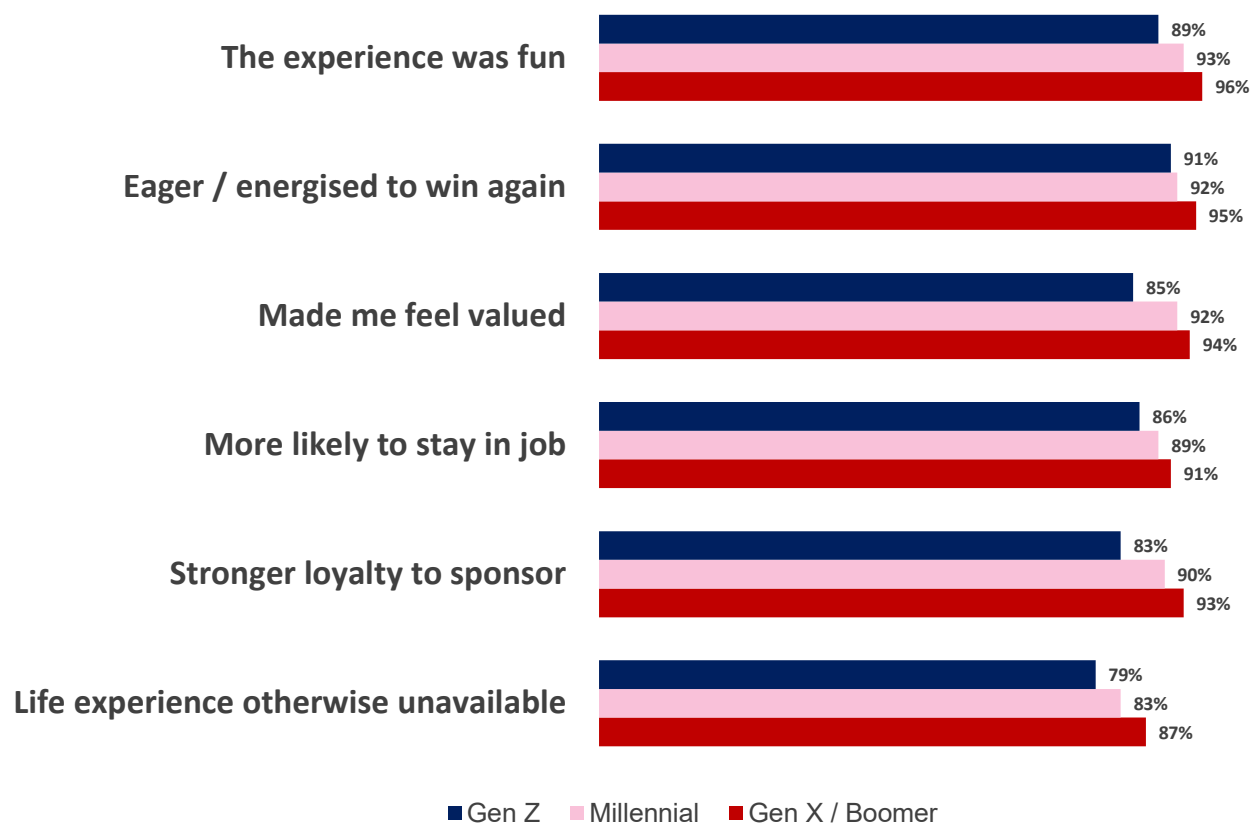
What works



3. What works – impact and effectiveness



3. What worked – impact and effectiveness by generation

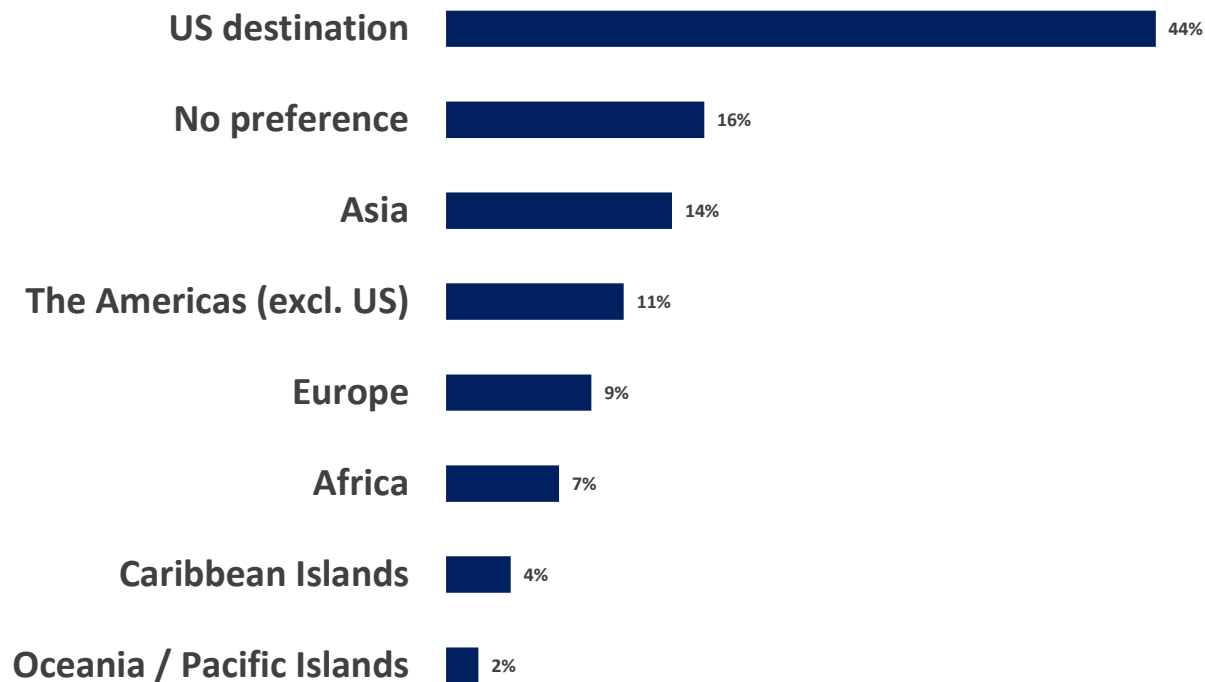




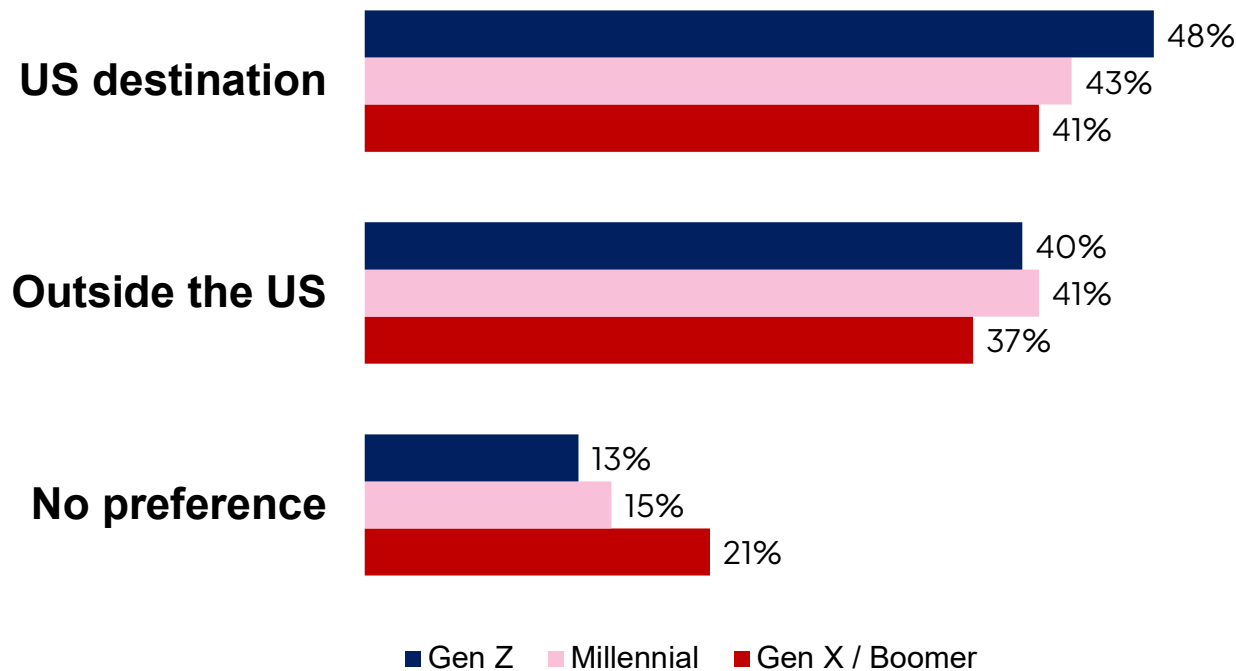
Destination Preferences



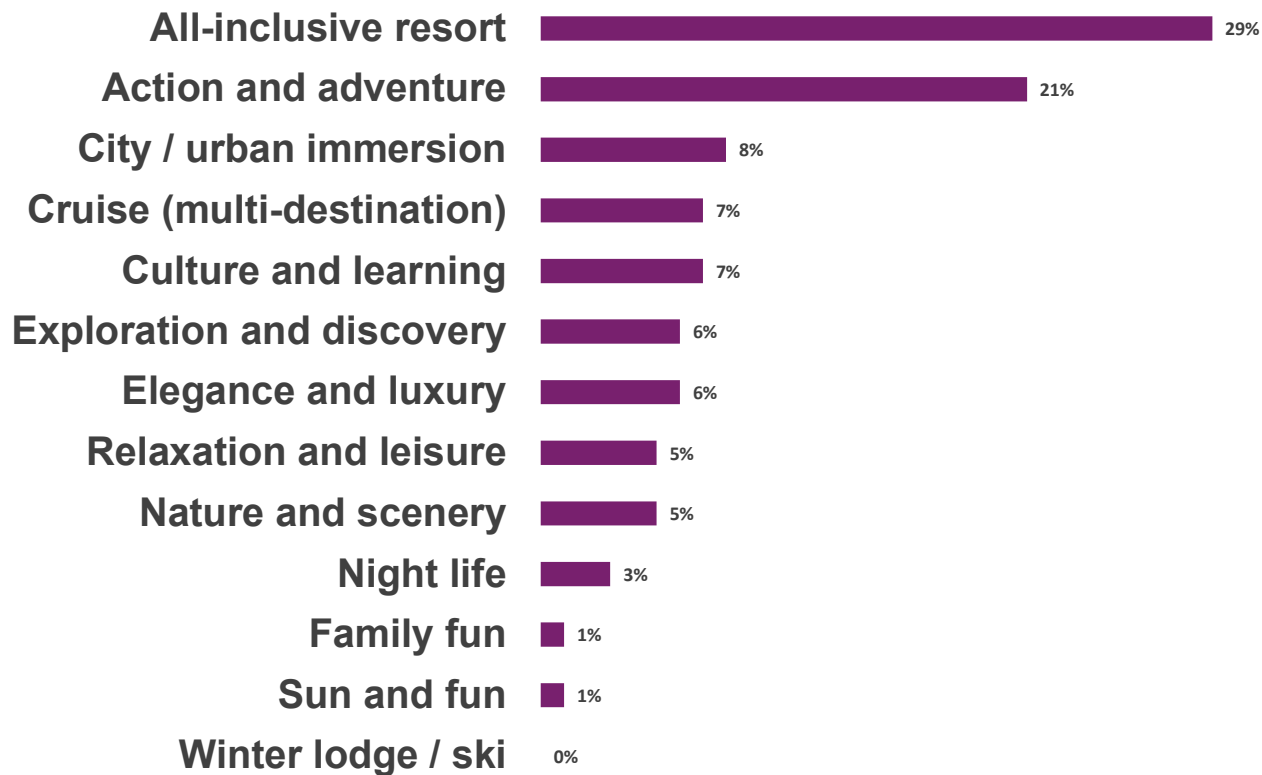
4. Destination preferences – all respondents



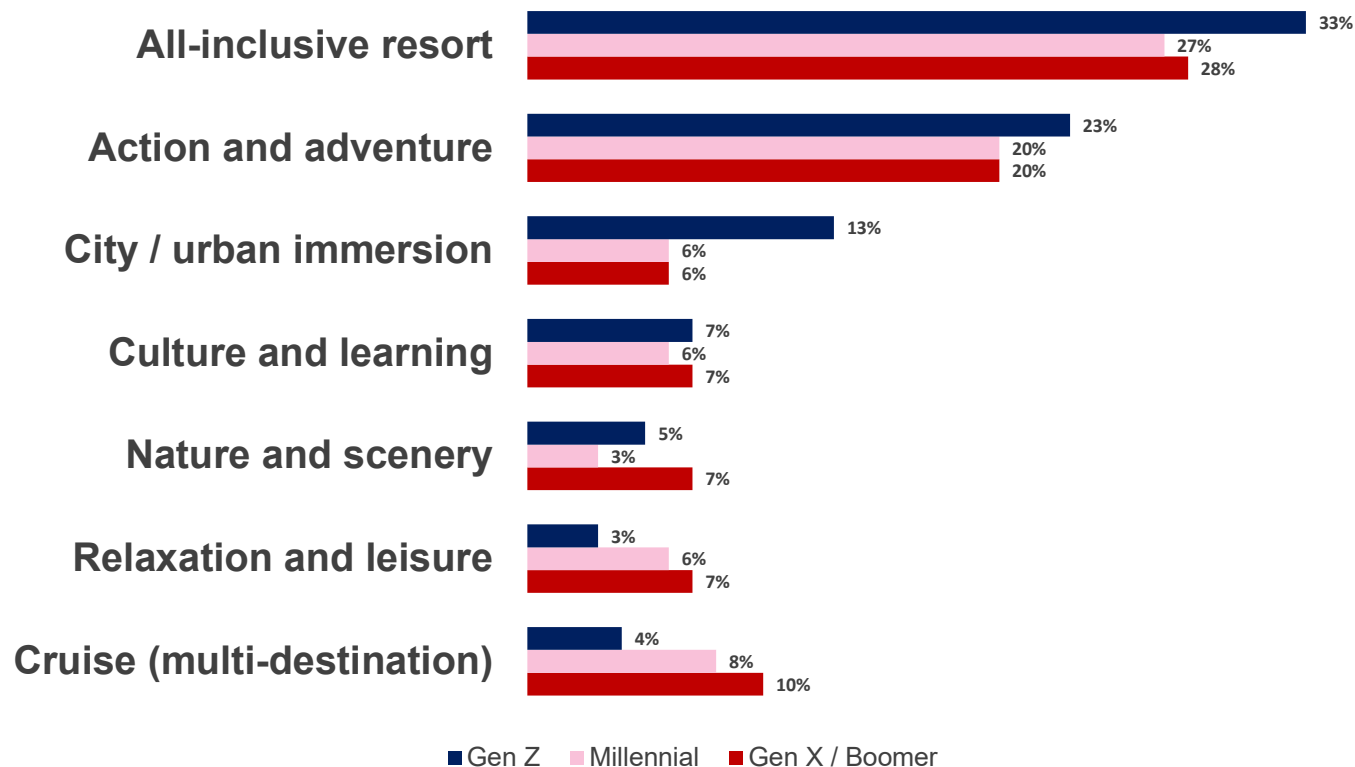
4. Destination preferences – generational differences



4. Preferred trip theme – all respondents



4. Preferred trip theme – generational differences





What this means For incentive travel organisers



What this means for incentive travel organisers



WHAT THE DATA TELLS US

The qualifier profile is broader than assumed

60% work in operations or technology — not sales. Incentive travel is motivating the wider workforce.

Travel is the #1 motivator — for every generation

61% rate individual travel "extremely motivating." Group travel follows. Both outperform cash, gift cards, and all other rewards.

Winning means achievement, not just reward

54% say a group travel experience means "a feeling of achievement." The intrinsic value is as important as the trip itself.

The business case is measurable

89% are more likely to stay in their job after winning a trip. 89% feel stronger loyalty to the sponsoring company. 93% are eager to win again.

Gen Z participates — but needs a different frame

Less motivated overall, but individual travel remains their top reward. Work-life balance concerns and the group format need to be addressed in programme design.

FIVE DESIGN IMPERATIVES

1. Make guest flexibility non-negotiable

Guest inclusion with winner flexibility is the single strongest predictor of how valued, special, and loyal winners feel. Restricting guests or mandating who they bring measurably reduces impact.

2. Prioritise novelty — send winners somewhere new

First-time destinations drive higher scores on feeling valued, motivation to win again, and the sense of a life-expanding experience. Familiarity breeds lower returns.

3. Design for achievement, not just enjoyment

Build recognition moments into the trip itself. For Gen Z especially, the connection between winning and feeling valued needs reinforcing — it does not happen automatically.

4. Longer trips, fun-forward themes, moderate group sizes

Five or more nights, beach/island or adventure themes, and groups of 11–50 consistently produce the highest emotional and loyalty impact. All-inclusive + activity is the winning formula across all generations.

5. Broaden your audience and your ambition

The workforce winning travel is ops-heavy, tech-heavy, and multi-generational. Expand programme eligibility beyond traditional sales roles — and design the entire experience to serve a more diverse, younger audience.

What this means for incentive travel organisers



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