

# Charting the summer travel takeoff.

Tracking the significance of travel today and what it means for the booking experience.

# Overview

After years of spending most of their time at (or around) home, consumers are itching to see the world once again. Pandemic restrictions have eased, making it easier to explore new destinations and adventures.

But much has changed in the industry since travel practically ground to a halt two years ago. Consumer demands have shifted, starting from the way they research and book their trip, to how they manage check-in and respond to potential disruptions. What does this mean for travel brands today?

To find out, we took a look at the numbers. We examined anonymized data from Quantum Metric's travel customers, alongside consumer survey feedback, to understand not just how consumers are traveling, but the intent behind it. Findings show:

- 03** Consumers are making up for lost time, booking more travel with more budget.
- 06** Mobile isn't just for booking—it's a multi-touch channel for the travel experience.
- 08** Emotions are high, with travelers feeling extreme happiness or stress about their booking.

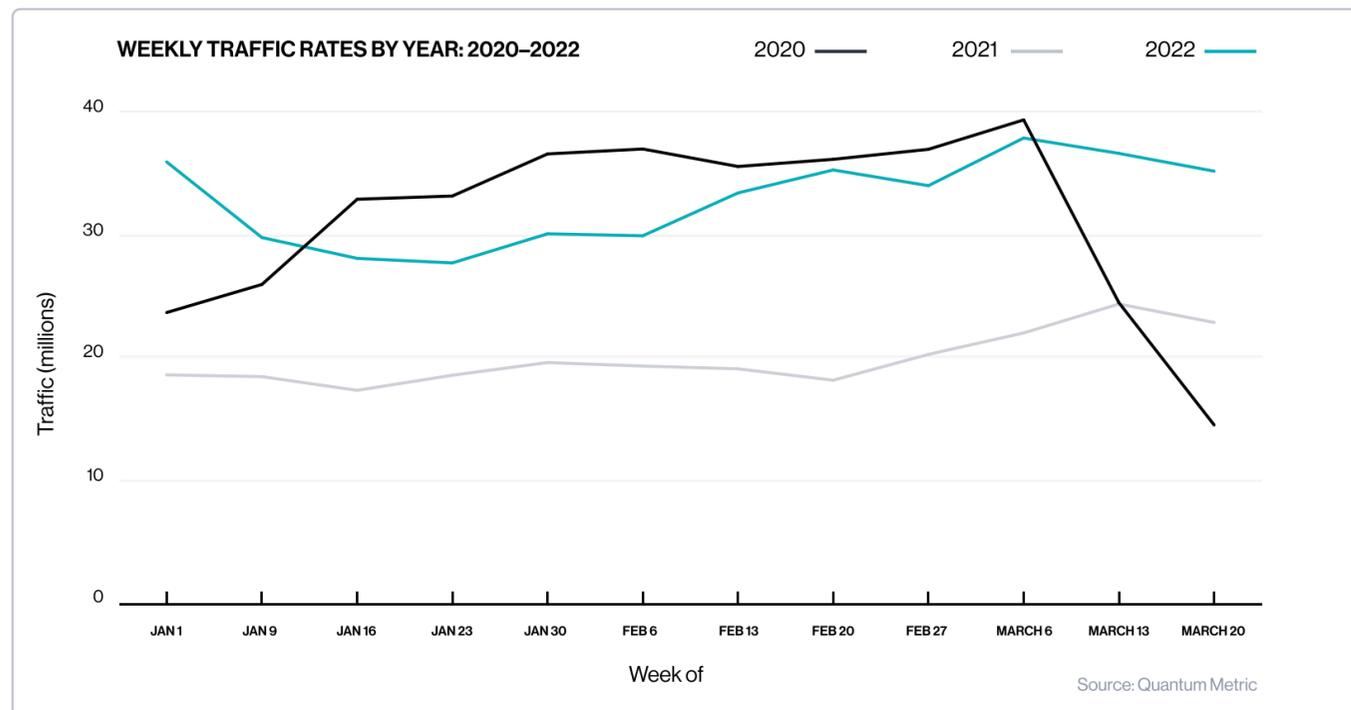
# The people are ready to take back travel.

## Does online shopping ever slow down anymore?

As COVID guidelines begin to ease, consumers are ready to travel once again. Traffic levels over the past three months are now close to those seen in the pre-pandemic days of early 2020.

And they are only growing.

In March, 2022 alone, we've seen significant growth that **has led March to being the best month in over two years with a 142% YoY increase over March, 2020.**

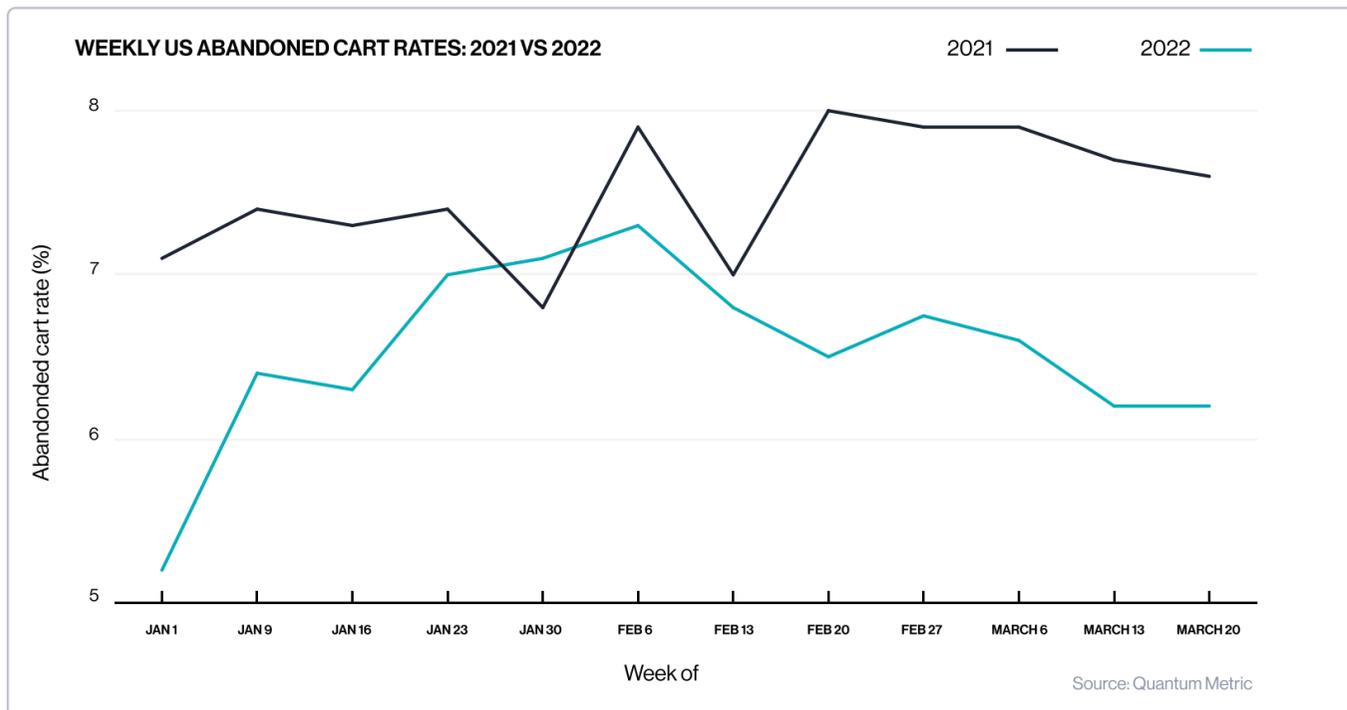


However, it's not just about how many consumers are coming to travel sites, but how much they are booking! Conversion rates overall have seen a steady climb, with weekly conversion rates increasing by 36% between Jan. 2021 and March, 2022.

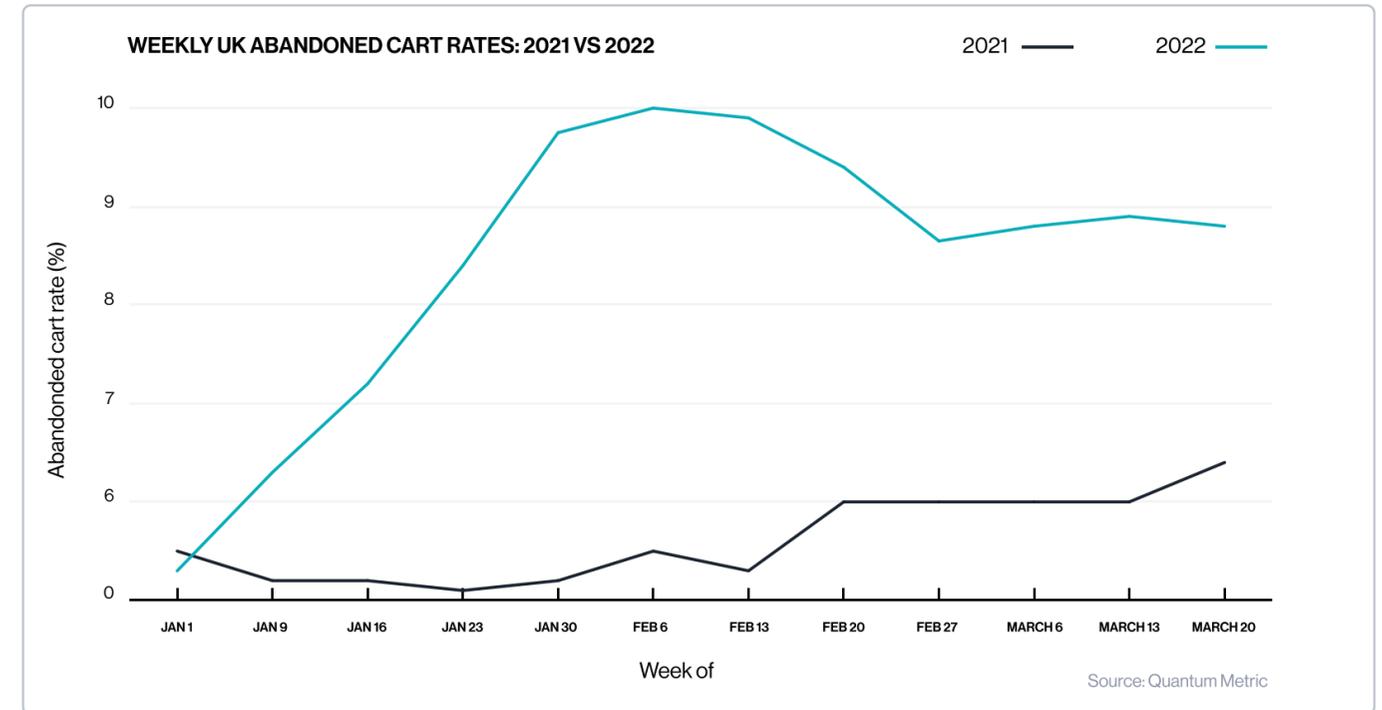
## Pandemic regulations impacted U.S. and UK bookings.

As guidelines ease, travel is seeing an expected boost. In the UK, traffic levels and conversion rates started to increase in November, as mask regulations eased. In the U.S., when mask guidelines loosened at the beginning of March, traffic and conversions saw a big spike, followed by continued week-to-week growth. Average conversion rates in the U.S. for March, 2022 are double what was seen in 2020, while the UK saw an increase of 84% year-over-year.

The new pandemic guidelines also impacted cart abandonment rates, as consumers spent less time wondering “what if?” and more time booking. Despite inflation and rising gas prices in Q1, we see abandoned cart rates significantly drop in the U.S. once we reach the beginning of March. Despite inflation and rising gas prices in Q1, we see abandoned cart rates significantly drop in the U.S. once we reach the beginning of March.



In the UK, abandoned cart rates are lower, but still 42% higher than 2021. This is likely due to concerns about political tensions in EMEA and resulting price hikes.



### Americans work-from-anywhere approach

However, the difference in abandoned cart rates may reflect how consumers in each country approach travel. Working while on vacation is just one example of how consumers are rethinking their travel experience with one in three Americans doing so to save PTO time (33%) or taking vacations as part of a work trip (30%). One in three (36%) have actually lied to their boss about where they were working from (hint: it wasn't their home).

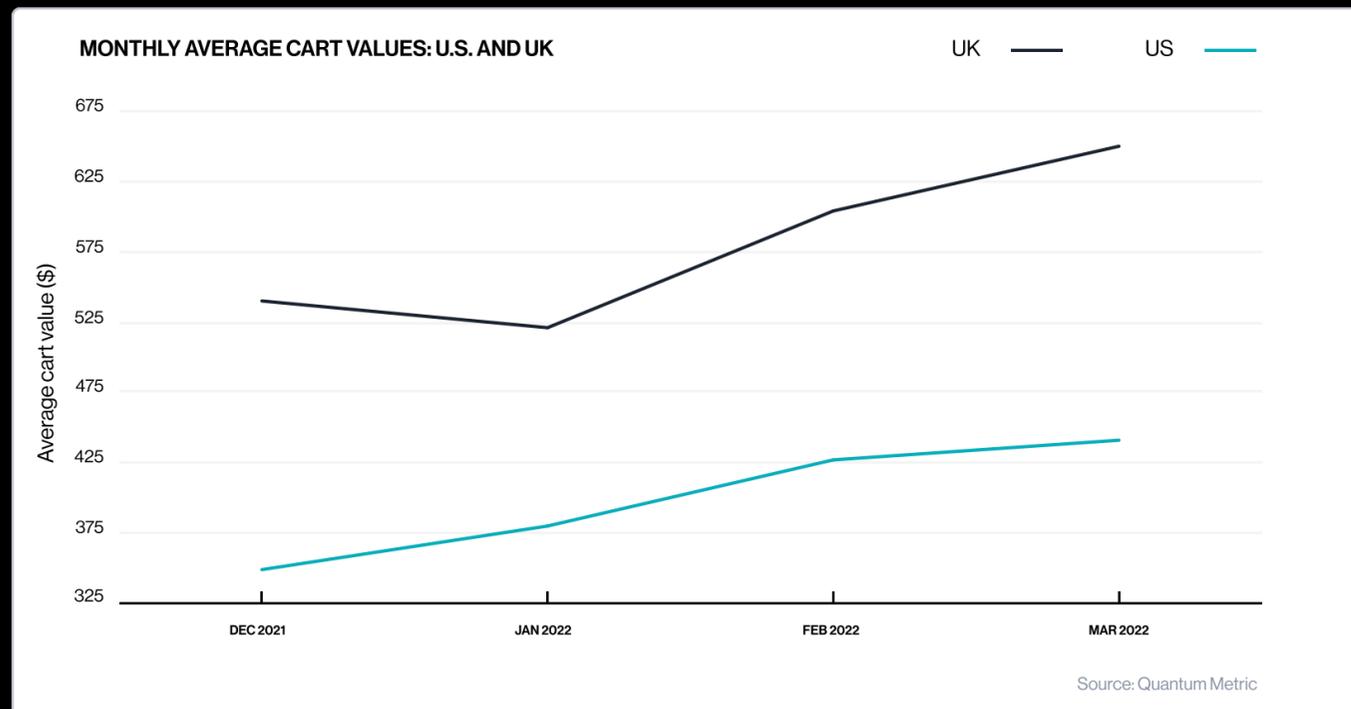
Brits were less likely to do this, with just one in four (25%) either working remotely while on vacation or building vacation into a work trip. This is where it's essential for travel brands to consider how they can build a fuller picture of their customers' experience and needs.

# Revenge travel is on the rise.

Increased bookings are being driven by consumer's desire to make-up for travel time they lost during the pandemic. Nearly two in three (65%) had a trip canceled due to the pandemic. For one in four (23%), it was a honeymoon, anniversary, or other special trip. As guidelines ease, close to half of consumers (40%) have already rebooked in the first few months of 2022, and another 34% plan to do so soon.

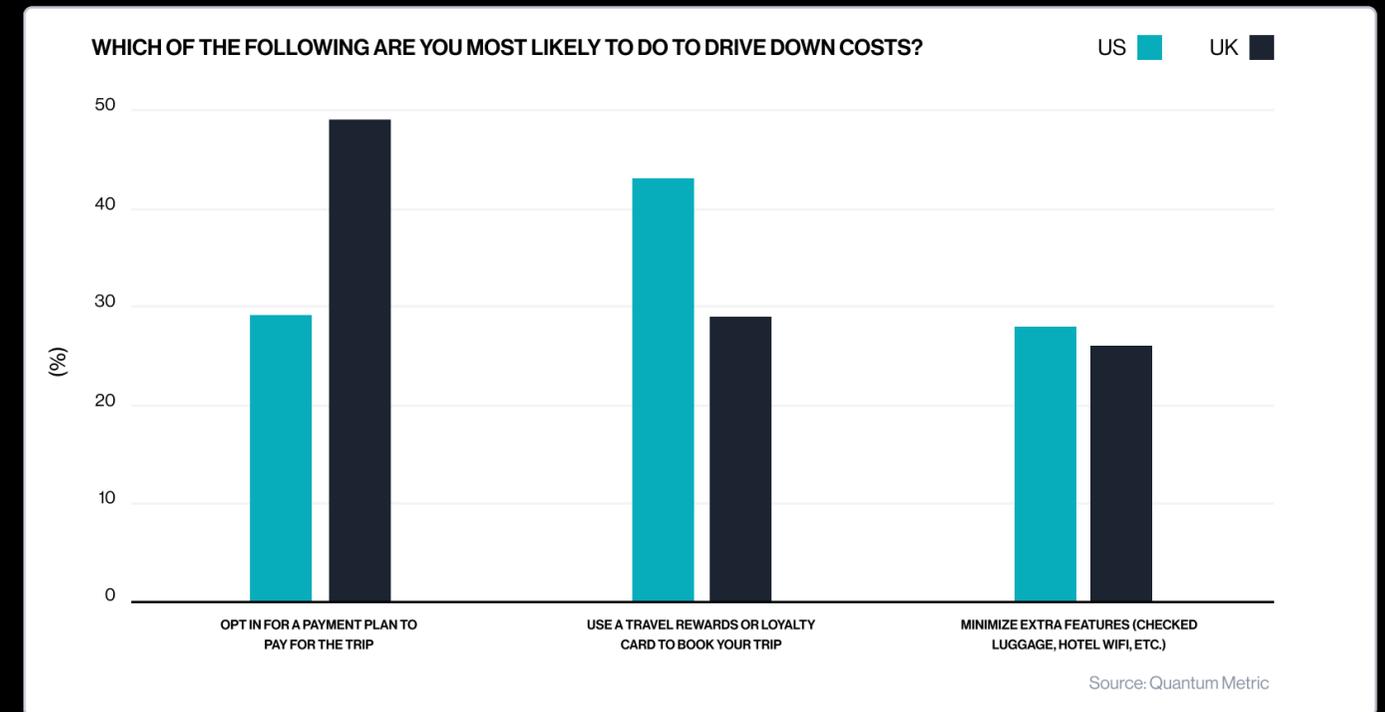
They are "getting revenge" on their lost holidays by spending more. **More than half of consumers (54%) will spend more on their rebooked trips and one in four (27%) say it will be a significant amount.** Some plan to spend thousands. Others won't put a limit on their spending.

Average cart values reflect this, with values growing steadily month-to-month since December, 2021. In the past four months alone, average cart values in the U.S and UK have grown by 26%.



That doesn't mean they don't want a great deal. In fact, over half of consumers (56%) say that their number one factor in choosing a booking is finding what they believe is the best price or deal. The majority (51%) will look at 2-3 sites to make sure they have the best price and one in four (24%) admit they'll look at as many as it takes to feel like they have a deal.

Outside of scouring the internet for a good price, consumers will resort to different tactics to cut down costs. While 45% of UK travelers primarily use payment plan programs such as Klarna to manage costs, US consumers are more likely to look to travel rewards and points (43%).



The best way for travel brands to meet the needs of customers?

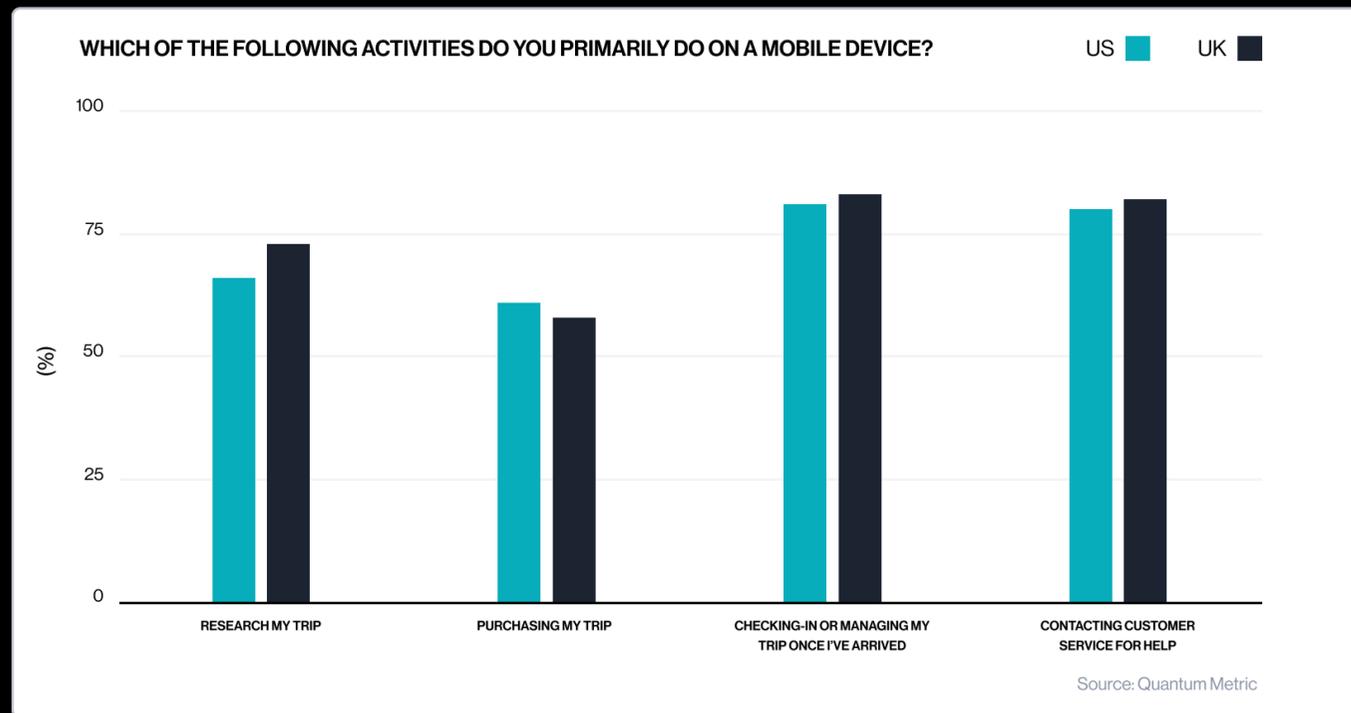
Personalized options.

It's not just about finding the cheapest price, but helping customers feel like they are getting the most for their money. This could include building in extra features or special services into booking bundles or offering unique incentives for booking.

## Welcome to the age of on-the-go travel experiences.

Like retail and other industries, travel has seen mobile adoption skyrocket. Over the past two years, mobile traffic has exploded, with 2022 seeing the highest traffic rates ever. **On average mobile is driving at least 62% of digital booking activity.**

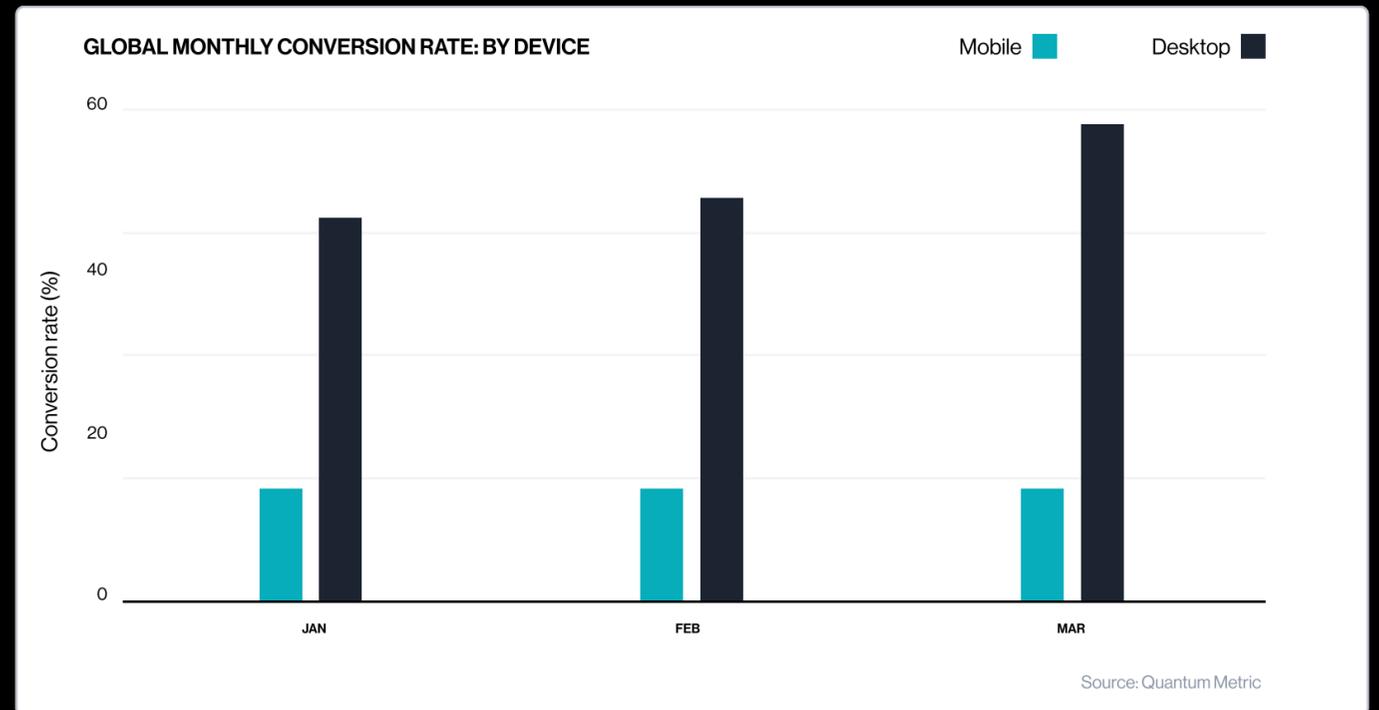
What is all that traffic breakdown into?



To say travelers today are mobile-first, means they are primarily researching their trips, checking-in and even contacting customer service from a mobile device.

When it comes to booking, desktop saw a higher year-over-year increase in conversions versus mobile, and has seen a 24% increase in conversions in the first quarter of 2022.

This was especially the case in the U.S., where conversion rates for desktop saw a big boost in March, driving 61% of bookings for the month. The UK also saw growth in desktop conversions, but the difference between the two digital channels was not as significant.



## Could native apps boost mobile bookings?

Today, one in three consumers (31%) have at least three travel apps on their phone. The majority download mobile apps, because they make it easier to book (57%), and check-in (48%). Just one in three Americans (31%) and 18% of Brits use mobile apps to earn rewards.

So, what should travel brands be considering when it comes to their mobile investments?

### 01 Consumers don't book every part of their travel experience the same way.

Bundled or individual, OTA or brand-specific—consumers have different preferences for different travel bookings. When it comes to airfare and stay, two in five in the UK (38%) book these as a bundle, primarily through an OTA. In the states, one in four bundle through an OTA (27%) and another one in four (25%) opting to purchase airfare and stay individually through their preferred brands.

This is where personalization, especially on mobile web and app, are key to driving bookings. Offering unique travel recommendations or bundles based on each customer's preferences will help to boost long-term loyalty.

### 02 Consumers don't book their entire trip at the same time.

And, typically Americans start much later than Brits. In fact, almost half (47%) of Brits start researching their vacation plans 3-6 months before, while half (47%) of Americans start planning just two months before! The one area Americans tend to book earlier is attractions, with the majority (52%) booking two months in advance, while Brits leave this to the last few weeks before their trip (50%).

# Consumer emotions are soaring high.

Booking a vacation tends to evoke two types of emotions for consumers: either extreme happiness or serious stress. While one will lead to bigger and more frequent bookings and long-term loyalty with a brand, the other is a source for frustration that can cause customer rage and abandonment.

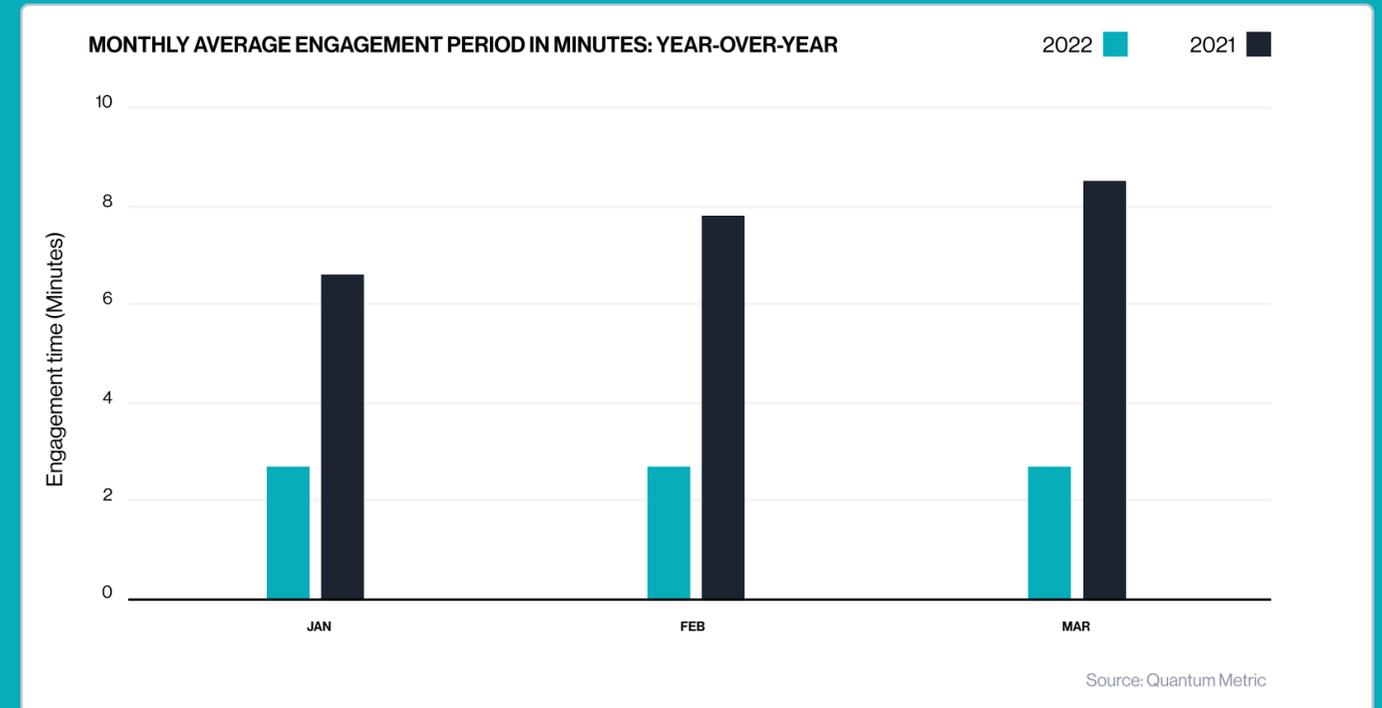
## Riding the happiness wave.

Many consumers love the feeling of booking a trip, especially after a long hiatus. It offers a new kind of adventure and excitement that for one in four consumers say (26%) exceeds the happiness they experience when having sex!

One in four Americans (24%) have even had a couple of drinks while booking travel to get into the celebratory spirit.

Average length of time customers have been engaged with a digital experience over the past few months shows just how happy and excited consumers can be to travel again. Despite growing conversion rates, average engagement has actually dropped to 2.7 minutes per session, a 68% year-over-year decrease. This isn't necessarily a bad thing. It shows a switch from wishful thinking to actually making bookings.

It also means that travel brands have mere moments to influence and impact customers during the booking experience. During these micro-moments, building an effortless experience that is personalized to the customer's needs is critical to booking success.



## Customer stress can fester to rage.

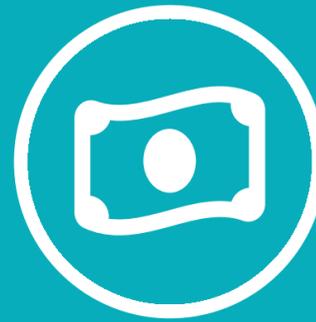
Stress is also a very prevalent feeling among travelers. **Two in three (61%) are more stressed about traveling today than they were before the pandemic, with Brits more anxious (67%) than Americans (55%).**

# What are consumers anxious about when it comes to traveling?



## For Brits, it's having their plans canceled.

One in three (34%) are most concerned about their plans being disrupted and 24% also say feeling confident their trip will have no issues is a major factor when booking. It's important travel brands provide flexibility and transparency when things go wrong to help their customers stay on track.



## Americans are most concerned about finding the best price.

More than one in four (27%) say they are most stressed about finding the best price or deal on their trip. Almost half (43%) even feel that booking and finding the best deal on their vacation is more complicated than doing their taxes. Brands need to make it easy to compare and understand what's included in pricing.



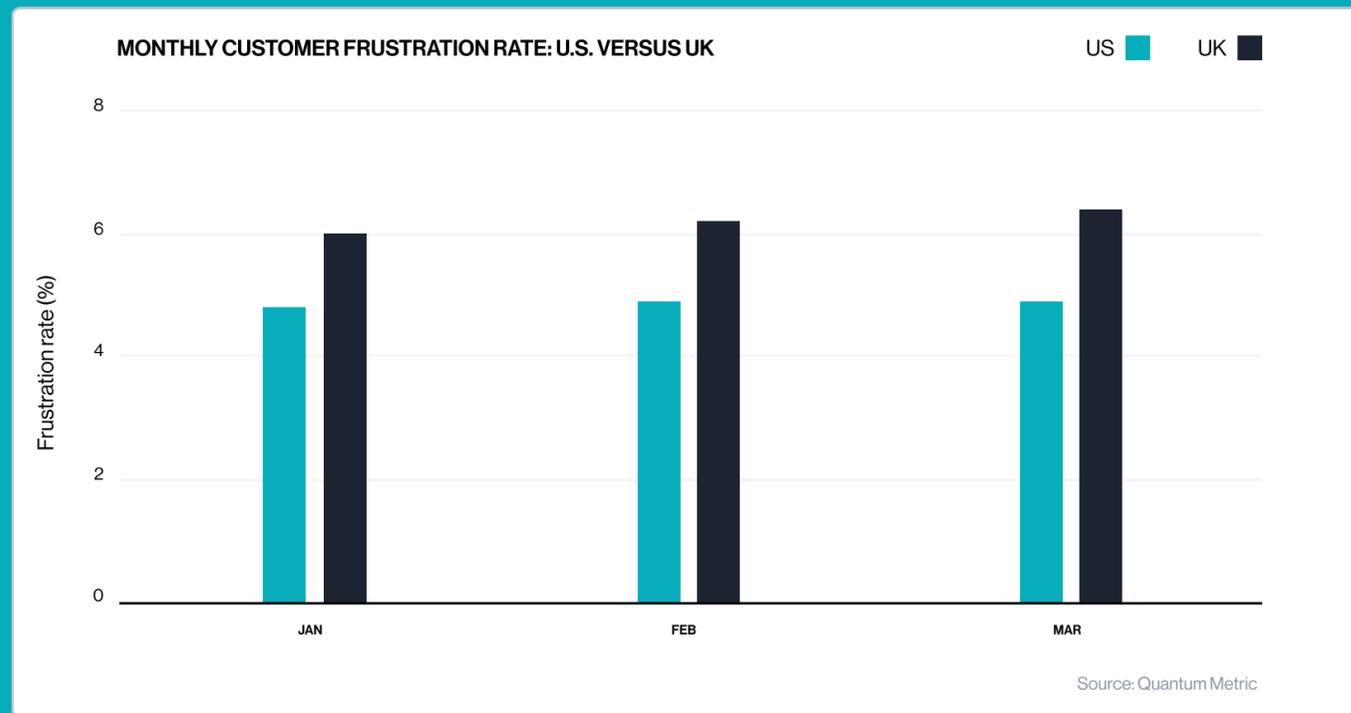
## Both fear being responsible for bungled plans.

One in three consumers in both countries (30%) are worried they don't know all their destination's policies and see the check-in process as the most stressful part of travel. For travel brands, finding opportunities to help your customers feel prepared will be sure to foster long-term loyalty.

## What can brands expect from post-pandemic frustration?

With emotions running high, you'd expect customer frustration to match it. For Quantum Metric customers this isn't always the case. **While we saw year-over-year spikes in traffic and conversions, there has been a 23% decrease in customer frustration since 2021.**

In the U.S., where there was a spike in traffic in early March, there was no spike in customer frustration to match it. However, in the UK, customer frustration has seen a 33% average monthly increase.



Are consumers becoming less forgiving with their booking experience?

It's likely. When asked what would stop them from doing business with a preferred travel brand, two in three in both countries (65%) said poor customer experience. Almost the same number of people would stop booking with a brand due to price hikes of a couple hundred or more (70%).

How brands manage the post-booking experience is also critical to long-term customer retention. **The majority of consumers (60%) would stop booking with a preferred brand after they had a booking canceled or severely delayed.** Two in three (64%) would even stop booking with a brand due to news reports that they were canceling trips more often.



Regardless of if travel brings your customers extreme happiness or extreme stress, it's important for travel brands to remember that this is an emotional experience for the customer, not just a business transaction. In either case, empathy is critical to being able to effectively understand and respond to your customers needs.

# What will help travel bookings to soar in 2022?

## 1. Talk to your customers.

We aren't just talking about actual conversations, but the way a brand presents information on their site, mobile app or through customer support. Travel brands should find every opportunity to be transparent about pricing, protocol for travel issues, and even potential guidelines for consumers once they reach their destination.

## 2. Personalize your experiences beyond booking.

Your customers aren't just engaging with your brand when they book. From pre-booking research, to post-booking check-in and trip management, every moment helps to build long-term brand loyalty.

## 3. Keep your customers' heart at the center.

Consumers are excited, but also trepid about getting back to travel. It's important that your experience supports them every step of the way. The best way to do this is by finding ways to build empathy into your digital strategy.

**Want to learn more how you can improve visibility, raise digital empathy, and win travel bookings ahead of the summer peak?**

Check out our new ebook on how the world's largest travel brands are re-thinking the customer experience and building future loyalists.

# About our methodology.

The findings presented in this report are based on anonymous and aggregated browsing information across a set list of travel sector sites and native apps collected via the Quantum Metric platform from Jan. 2020 through March 2022. Survey responses were taken from a third-party poll of 3,400 consumers 18+, split equally between the U.S. and UK.

## Definitions for metrics shown are as follows:

- **Abandoned carts** refer to the number of sessions where consumers placed items in a virtual cart, but did not complete a purchase.
- **Abandoned cart rate** refers to the aggregated percentage of abandoned carts, during a specific period of time, compared against total sessions.
- **Average order value** refers to the aggregated average amount that consumers purchase per transaction.
- **Conversions** refer to the number of converted sessions, which in turn corresponds to sessions that have completed a purchase.
- **Conversion rate** refers to the aggregated percentage of completed conversions, during a specific period of time, compared against total sessions.
- **Frustration rate** refers to the aggregated percentage of consumers who expressed frustration during their session, during a specific period of time, compared against total sessions.