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Summer Travel 2026: How Costs Are Shaping Summer Trips

Polling by **Morning Consult** on behalf of the **American Hotel & Lodging Association**

JULY 2026

Objectives

Measure traveler sentiment around travel costs and how rising costs are impacting their decisions

Methodology

This poll was conducted between June 15-June 17, 2026, among a sample of 2,201 Adults. The interviews were conducted online, and the data were weighted to approximate a target sample of Adults based on gender, age, race, educational attainment, region, gender by age, and race by educational attainment. Results from the full survey have a margin of error of plus or minus 2 percentage points.

Executive Summary

Travelers feel the squeeze from higher prices, but most are adapting their plans (e.g., choosing closer, cheaper options and trading down in hotels) rather than canceling trips.

- **Costs are up, but most people still plan to go.** A majority (57%) of adults say summer travel feels more expensive than last year, yet many still consider taking a trip important this year.
- **People adapt by changing the trip, not skipping it.** The top cost management tactics are choosing a less expensive destination (33%) and traveling closer to home (33%), followed by driving instead of flying (30%). Only 18% are canceling or postponing the trip.
- **Lodging trade-down is visible.** Many plan to choose more budget-friendly hotels or prioritize properties with included amenities like breakfast. This may shift revenue toward midscale and select-service brands.
- **Transportation costs shape decisions.** Elevated airfares and gasoline prices help explain the shift to closer, drive-to trips and cheaper destinations, even as gas prices have eased month over month (BLS CPI release; AAA Fuel Prices).

The Prices Driving Travel Decisions

Travel inputs remain elevated, keeping value top of mind

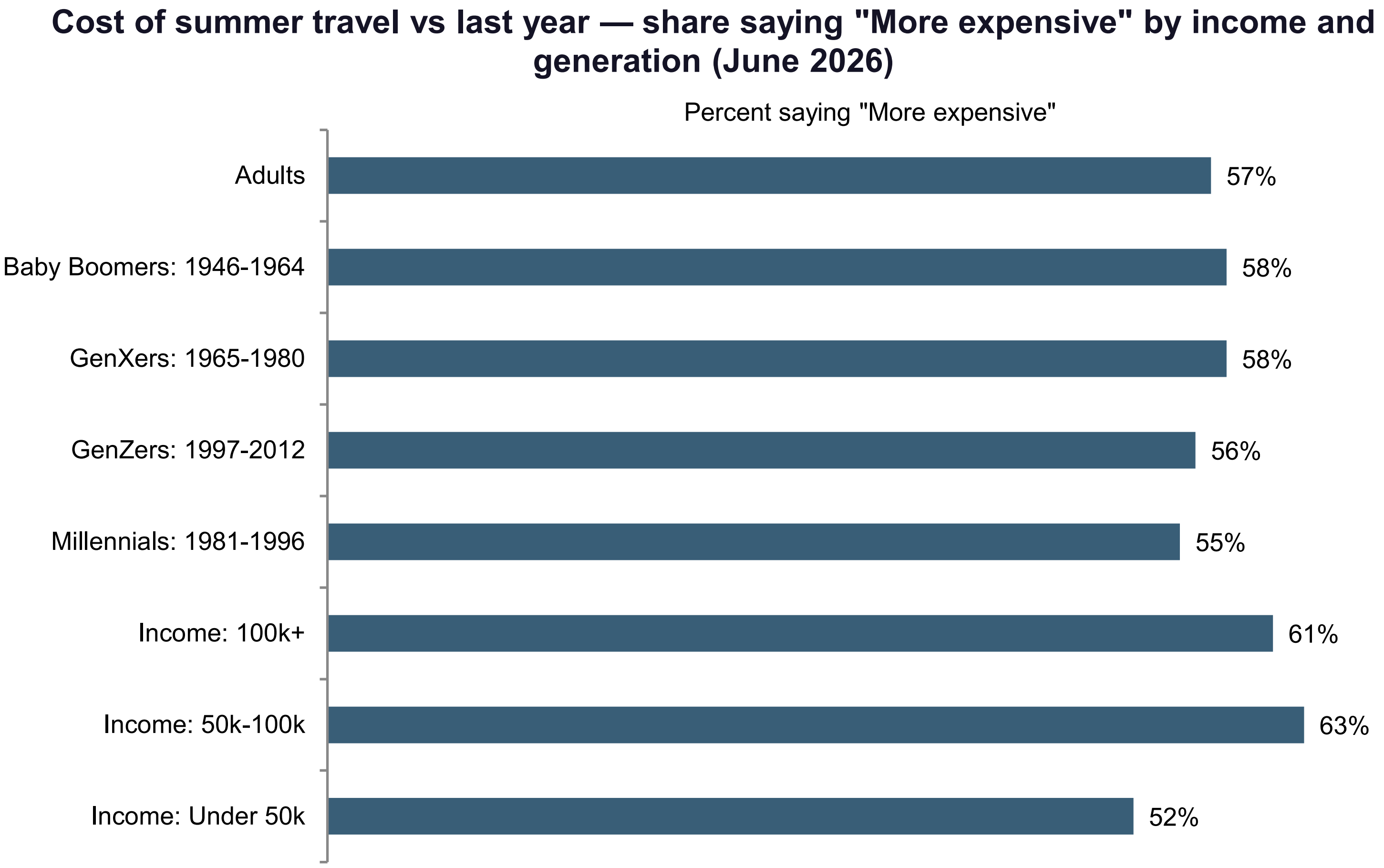
Airfare and fuel costs are high enough to influence how and where people travel, even as gas prices ease month to month. This backdrop favors drive-to trips, closer destinations, and hotel options that deliver clear value.

- **Airfares remain elevated year over year.** Airline fares rose 26.7% vs. last year in May 2026, and “lodging away from home” also increased month over month. This helps explain plans to drive, pick closer destinations, or seek value brands (BLS CPI release).
- **Gas prices are lower than last month but higher than a year ago.** The national average was about $3.93 per gallon on June 23, 2026, down versus a month earlier but above last year. Month-to-month relief may slow, but not reverse, the shift toward shorter, closer trips (AAA Fuel Prices).
- **Inflation keeps budgets tight and value in focus.** Energy-related travel costs have risen more than 20% year over year, which pushes travelers to look for clear value and simple savings (BLS Economics Daily).

Perceived Costs And Willingness To Travel

Most adults say summer travel is more expensive than last year

A majority notice higher travel costs, with the strongest pressure among middle-income households. This creates momentum for cost-saving adjustments rather than outright cancellations.



- **Most adults feel prices are up.** Fifty-seven percent say summer travel is more expensive than last year. This signals broad price pressure on planning and budgets.
- **Middle-income travelers feel the squeeze most.** Sixty-three percent of those earning \$50k–\$100k say “more expensive” vs. 57% overall, while 52% under \$50k say the same. Expect more cost-saving adjustments from the middle market to keep trips feasible.

Younger and higher-income adults still prioritize a trip despite higher prices

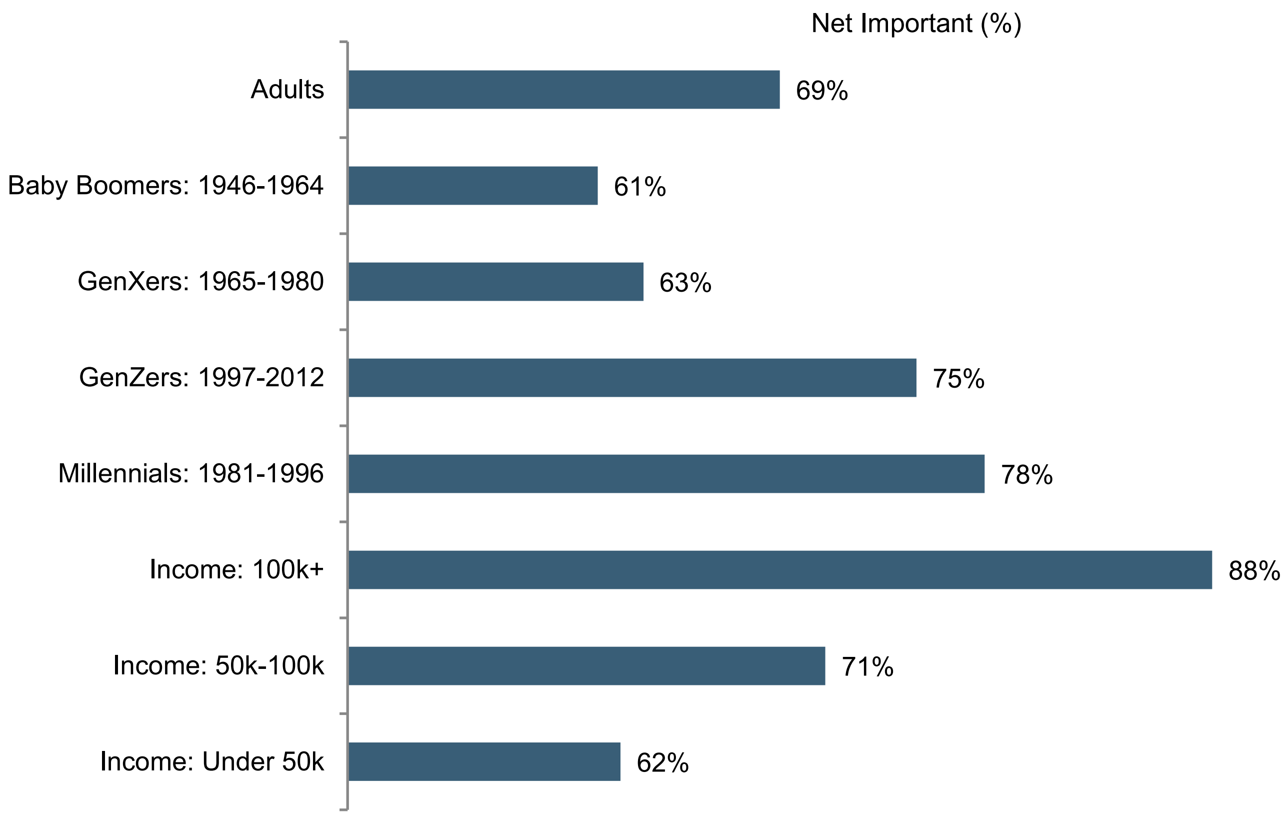
Most still want to travel, led by younger and higher-income adults. The opportunity is to help them fit trips to today's prices without sacrificing experience.

- **Travel remains a priority despite higher prices.** Sixty-nine percent say taking a summer trip is important this year, highlighting that demand is resilient even as budgets tighten.

- **Younger adults are most determined to take a trip.** Net Important is 75% among Gen Z and 78% among Millennials, compared with 61% among Boomers.

- **Income shapes travel plans.** Net Important reaches 88% among $100k+ households vs. 62% under $50k. This points to a two-track market: affluent travelers protect the trip; lower-income travelers need concrete savings to stay in.

Importance of taking a summer trip even with higher costs (June 2026)



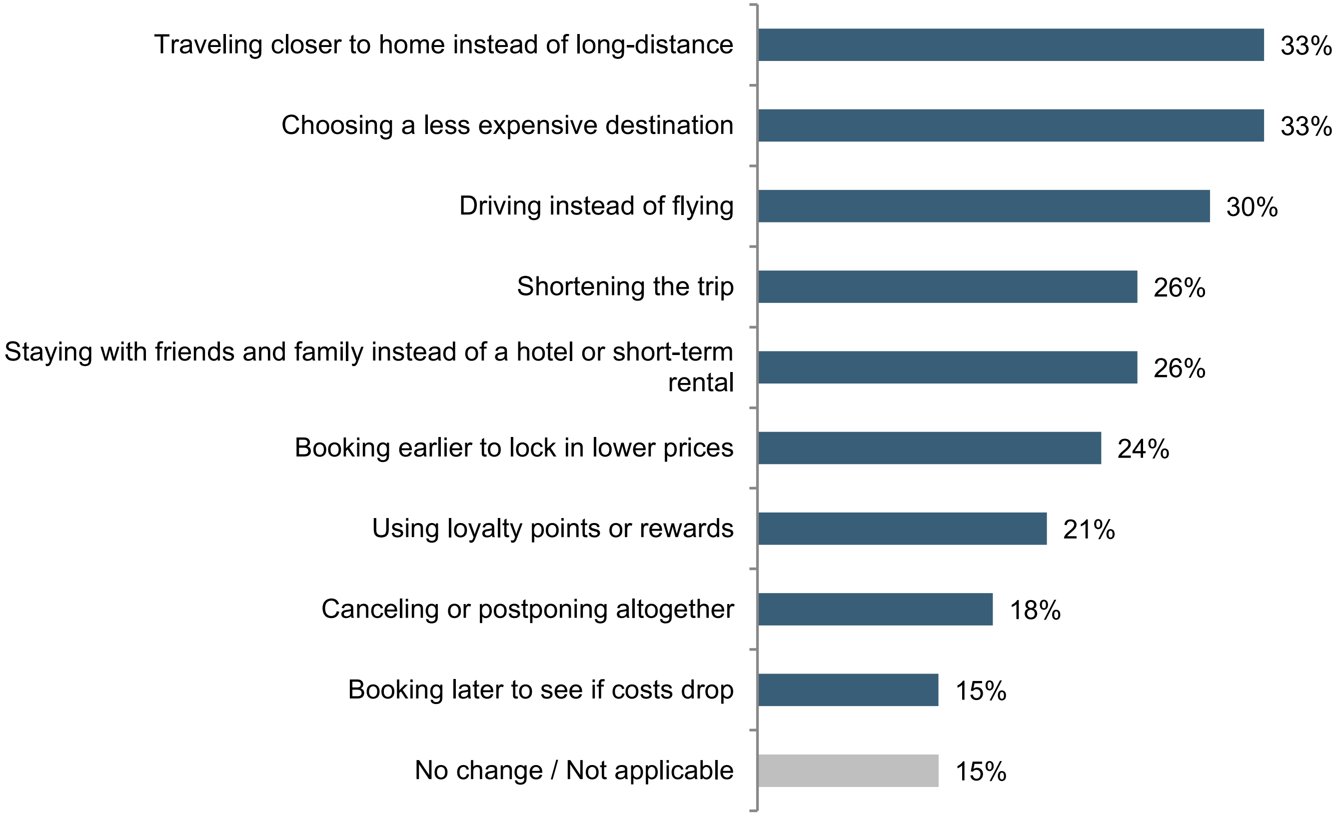
How important is taking a summer trip to you this year, even with higher costs? *Among those who notice travel costs are up or about the same*
Net Important = %Extremely + Somewhat important

How Travelers Are Adapting Plans

Travelers reshape trips rather than cancel outright

Adjustments like picking cheaper or closer destinations and driving instead of flying are more common than canceling.

Cost-management adjustments when travel feels more expensive (June 2026)



- **People reshape the trip to fit the budget.** Thirty-three percent choose less expensive destinations or stay closer to home, while 30% shift from flying to driving. This will redirect demand toward value destinations and nearby, drive-to markets.
- **Trips get shorter and more resourceful.** Twenty-six percent plan to shorten the trip and 26% plan to stay with friends or family.
- **Repeat travelers adapt more aggressively.** Every cost-management tactic is higher among repeat travelers (those who traveled last summer and plan to do so this summer), with more planning to use loyalty points (30%) and choosing a cheaper destination (40%) than the general population.

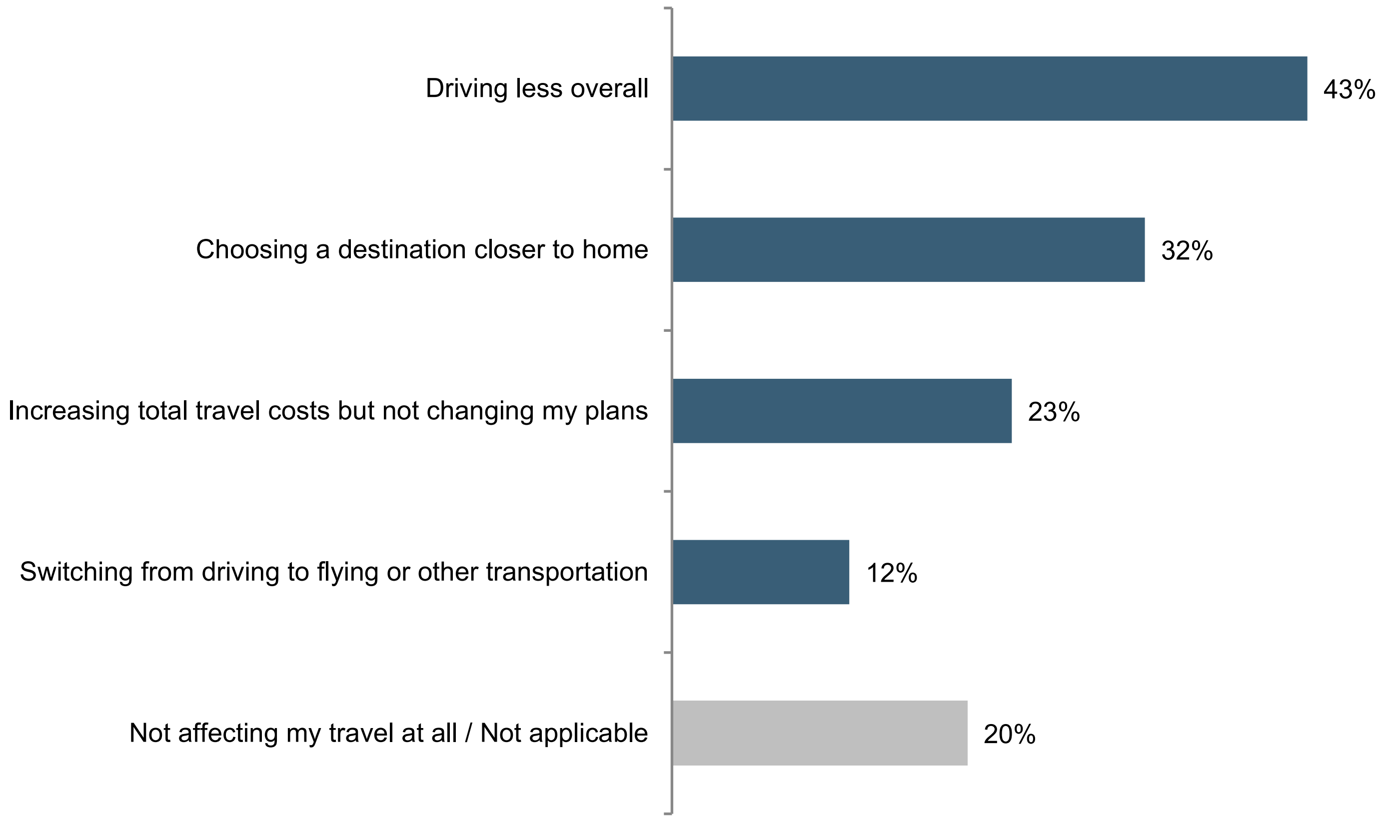
If travel feels more expensive, which adjustments have you made or do you plan to make to manage costs? Please select all that apply.
Among those who notice travel costs are up or about the same

Gas prices push trips closer to home and reduce driving

Gas prices nudge many travelers to drive less and pick closer destinations. The effect is strongest for middle-income households, which shapes where and how they will travel this summer.

- **Higher fuel costs compress distance and reduce driving.** Forty-three percent say they are driving less overall and 32% are choosing destinations closer to home. This concentrates demand in regional markets and shortens average trip distance.

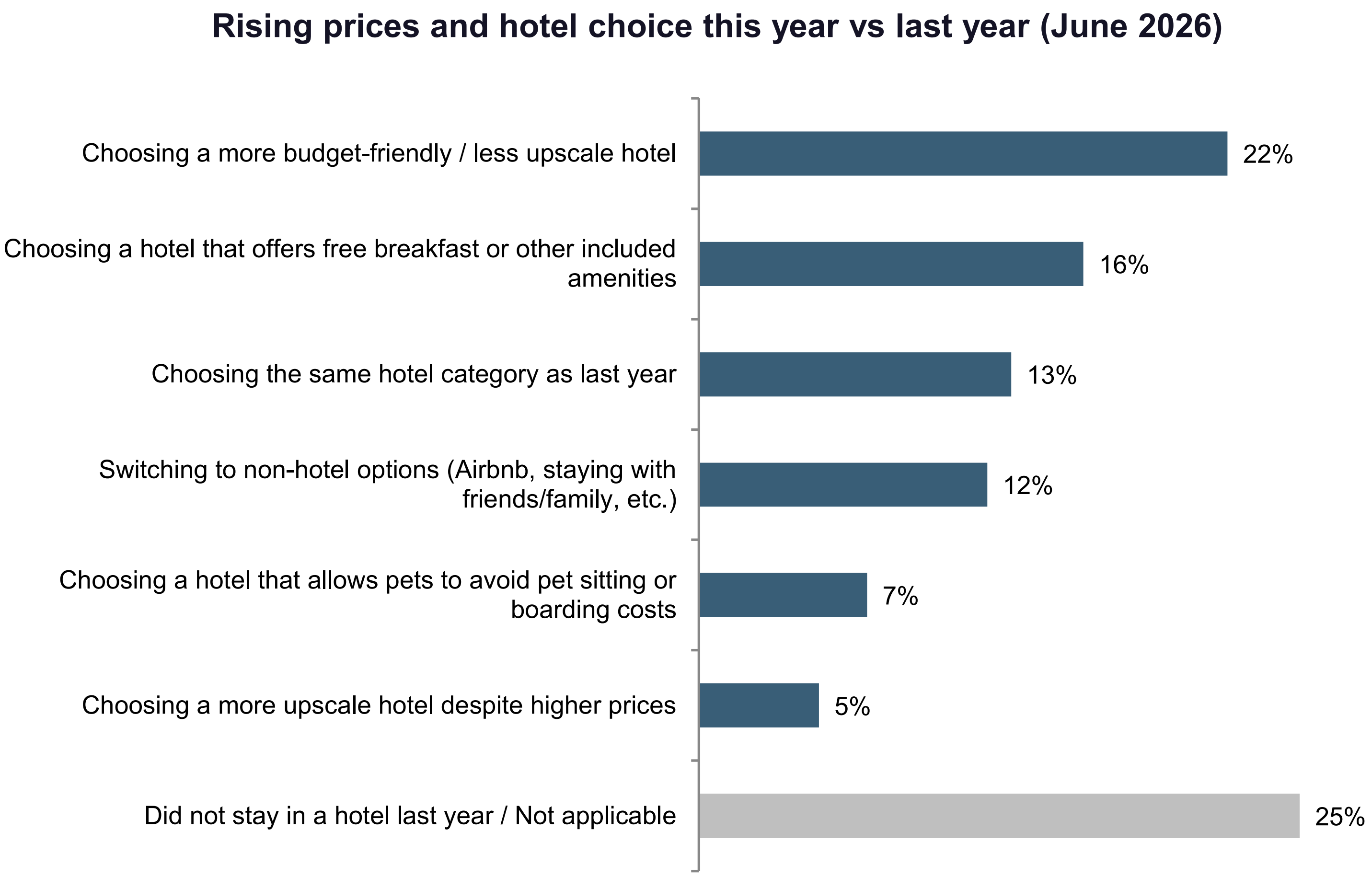
How current gas prices affect travel plans (June 2026)



 How are current gas prices affecting your travel plans this year? Please select all that apply. *Among those who notice travel costs are up or about the same*

Rising prices shift hotel choices toward value and amenities

More guests intend to trade down or seek properties with included amenities.



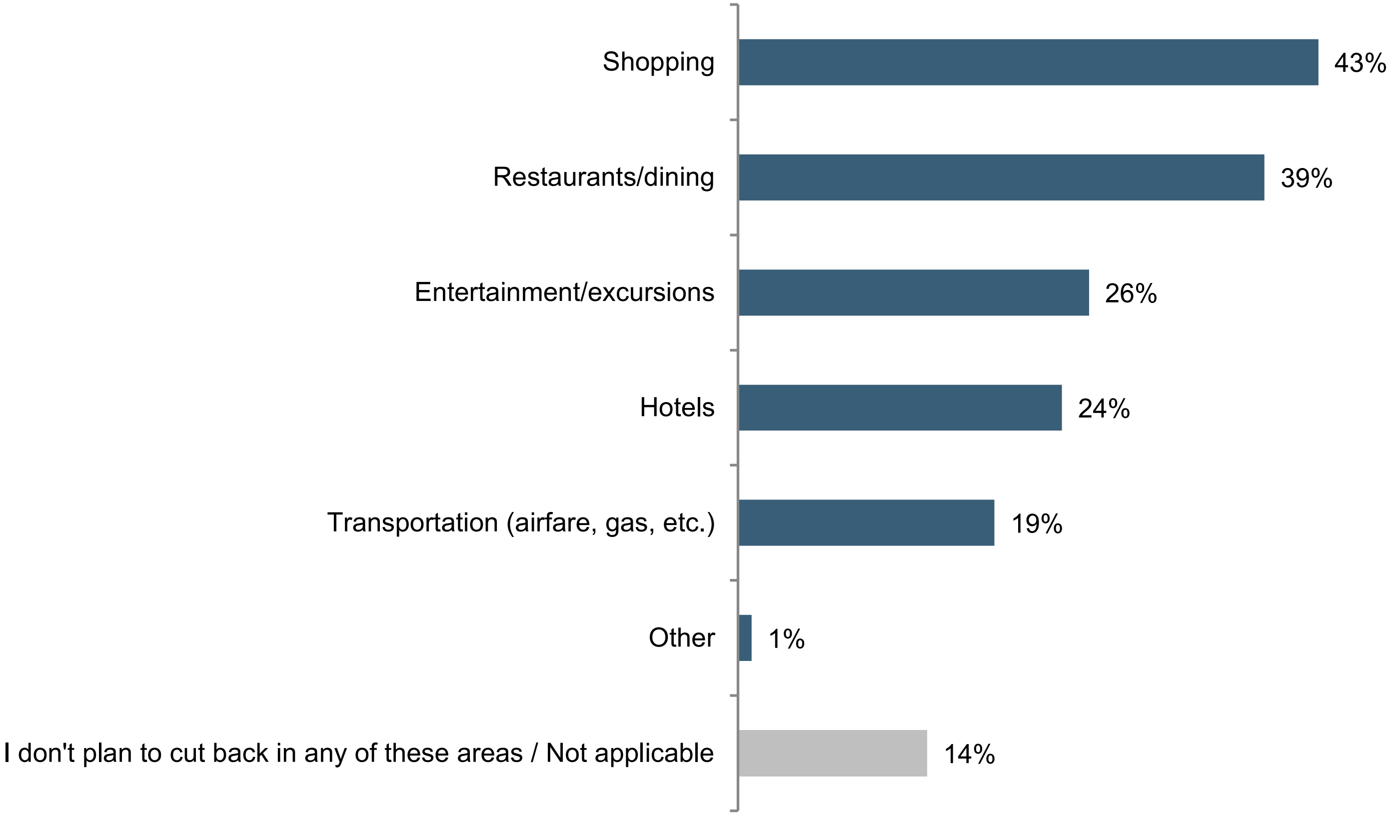
- **Value tiers gain share as prices rise.** Twenty-two percent plan to choose a more budget-friendly hotel this year, and only 5% plan to move upmarket. This points to trade-down pressure on room rates, with opportunity for midscale and select-service brands.
- **Included amenities matter more.** Sixteen percent say they will pick hotels with included perks like breakfast. Repeat travelers are even more likely to choose such hotels (20%).

If you stayed in a hotel during your summer travel last year, how are rising prices influencing the type of hotel you plan to stay in this year?
Among those who notice travel costs are up or about the same

When cutting back, travelers target shopping and restaurant spending

Travelers plan to protect the trip but economize on shopping and dining first, with some looking to save on lodging as well.

Where travelers will cut back most due to rising costs (June 2026)



- **On-site spending is first to be trimmed.** Shopping (43%) and restaurants/dining (39%) top the cut list.
- **Hotel spend is a key savings lever for many.** Twenty-four percent expect to cut back on hotel spend, with this share higher among $100k+ households at 31%.
- **Transportation is least likely to be cut.** Just 19% expect to cut back on transportation, suggesting travelers try to protect "getting there" while economizing on what they do once they arrive.

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If rising costs are impacting your summer travel plans, where do you expect to cut back most? Please select your top 2.
Among those who notice travel costs are up or about the same

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