



The Retreat

## The 9 biggest wellness travel trends of 2026

From star bathing to sauna socials, these trends and retreats promise to make wellness travel feel less like a doctor's visit and more like a vacation

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Intermittent fasting. Cryotherapy. **Pleasure-dampening GLP-1 drugs**. Silent retreats. Dark retreats. In our obsessive, high-tech pursuit of longevity, we're also craving a bit of lo-fi, sensory-igniting fun, especially on vacation. **Wellness tourism** is one of the fastest-growing segments of travel, predicted to reach over \$1.4 trillion by 2027. Longevity clinics and biohacking clubs aren't going away. In fact, they'll be more ubiquitous than ever, but next year they'll be the mainstay of **business or bleisure travellers** looking to maintain their health goals on the road and combat jet lag. The leisure traveller is tired of optimising every inch of their life and just wants to let loose a little. Wellness-minded hotels and retreats have taken note and are offering more opportunities to dance to DJ beats, stargaze under dark skies, sweat to sauna performances and, most of all, socialise.

We're going back to basics, looking to centuries-old healing practices and tapping into a bit of mysticism with modalities like soundbaths and astrology. Stargazing will be the preferred way to meditate and **desert landscapes** are where we'll go to find our zen. Cultivating purpose is key to longevity, and we'll hone new passions and seek out a new breed of wellness adventures. And at the gym, we'll skip burpees in favour of brain exercises. This will be the year of **women's health**, but also family-focused wellness, with more spas offering multi-generational retreats.

Prioritising your health on holiday has never been easier. Bring the kids. Go solo. Socialise with strangers in the sauna. Have a glass of green juice or champagne. Wellness your way is the new mantra. Here are the trends, resorts, retreats and destinations that promise to make **wellness travel** less like a doctor's visit – and more like a vacation in 2026.

## You'll seek out mindful hobbies

**Blue Zones** research underscores that having a passion helps us find purpose, all key to living not just a longer life but a healthier, happier life. A 2025 study conducted by the Harris Poll and Marriott Bonvoy found 96 per cent of US travellers want to explore personal hobbies while travelling. For years, these were mostly sporty passions like surfing, skiing, tennis and golf. Now, resorts are developing retreats around low-key hobbies that force us to slow things down. In South Africa, **Sterrekopje**, a dreamy farm in the foothills of the Franschhoek mountains, offers soil-to-soul gardening retreats. Over four days, the property's resident landscaper schools guests in regenerative farming, local fynbos and the art of botany, as they pop in and out of nurturing treatments in the Bath House. Mah Jongg, a tile-based game that originated in **China** in the 19th century, has invaded the US and is riding on the heels of pickleball in terms of social activities.

Rancho La Puerta, a wellness stalwart in Baja California, **Mexico**, lures newbies with week-long, beginner-focused **retreats** led by Mah Jongg masters, while Lake Austin Spa Resort has seen a boom in interest in its two- and three-day “**Spa Hjong**” retreats, which include social play and strategy tips, and culminate in a tournament. And Tennessee’s Blackberry Mountain is seeing more guests combine active pursuits, like hiking and mountain biking, with artistic endeavours, such as trailside painting, sketching classes, and ceramics and raku-firing workshops in the on-site artists' studio.