

# Travel and the psychology behind spontaneity



Introduction:

# The UK's spontaneous spirit



“Drop everything and go.” Feels good to say, doesn’t it? To act on impulse. To blissfully transport oneself from a world of structure and similarity into a new world full of new and unexplored sights, sounds, and experiences.

Savvy UK travellers have long taken pride in being adventurous at heart. But as the past two-and-a-half years have knocked their spontaneous streak as global COVID-19 restrictions put the brakes on impromptu travel, these world-wise travellers are a little out of practice.

So as the restrictions lift once more, we’re here with a gentle reminder of just how good it feels to embrace spontaneity and just explore.

That’s why we’ve launched our NOMOFOMO campaign. We want to encourage people to take the plunge and travel spontaneously again. Sharing tips on how to unlock great prices, discover the best last-minute destinations, and reveal whole new experiences. And to top it off, we’re giving travellers the chance to win a number of holidays to help them rediscover the joy of spontaneous travel – just head to [@skyscanner](#) on Instagram and Facebook.

# The psychology of spontaneity, holiday behaviours & its impact

Spontaneity can be defined as a type of behaviour where you act on impulse whenever you feel like it, instead of planning things in advance.

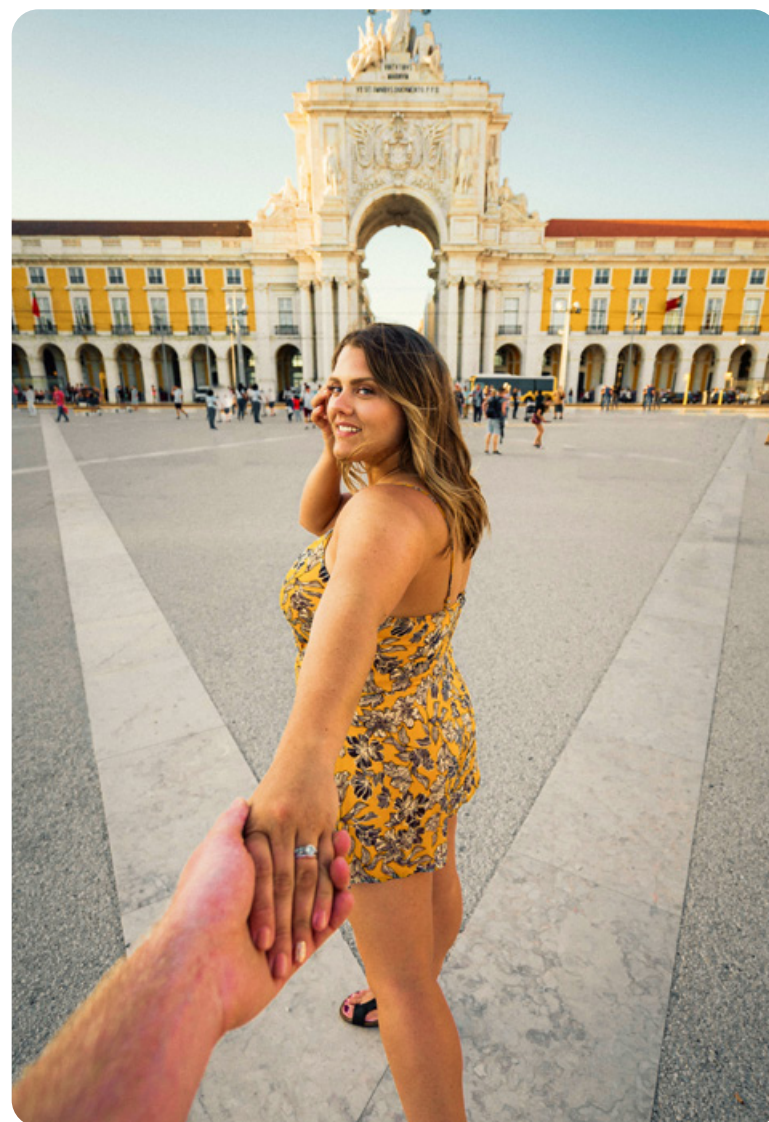
From a psychological aspect, this creates a range of benefits for someone and their relationships with others, as well as helping more people live in the moment. It helps remove the stress and anxiety of thinking about the future, acting as a type of mindfulness.

To dig into the topic further, we partnered on a research study with *Clinical Psychologist and Associate Professor at UCL*, Joe Oliver, who has produced the following report on the psychological impact of spontaneous travel.

## Summary

- Spontaneity is highly associated with overall well-being.
- Spontaneous people are dependable, agreeable and more open to experience.
- Generally, people who plan less for their holidays have overall better well-being.
- People who are more spontaneous report enjoying their holidays more, and this has a substantial positive effect on well-being.





Overall, the report findings provide clear evidence for the benefits of spontaneity and its subsequent positive impact on holiday behaviour and well-being. Being more spontaneous, appears to lead to less planning behaviour, and this makes a substantial difference in well-being.

These findings point to the clear benefits of reducing the amount of time that is put into holiday planning. It is possible that not doing so much planning allows people to better take up opportunities on offer and make the most of them once they are on location.

This suggests that holiday planning, as an activity, could offer diminishing returns, so that those who plan too much could end up spending too much time planning, even to the point that it could stop them from booking a holiday at all.

### Key Findings

The key aim of this research was to explore the relationships between levels of individual spontaneity, personality characteristics, overall well-being and how these variables interacted to affect travel and holiday behaviour.

### Spontaneity

Spontaneity was highly related to all of the personality variables, suggesting that people who are extraverted, more open to experience, are emotionally stable, agreeable and dependable are much more spontaneous. This likely suggests the key personality factors contribute to an ability to act in spontaneous ways. Spontaneity requires creativity and a desire for new and novel experiences, all of which are facilitated by the presence of the positive personality features.

Spontaneity is highly associated with overall well-being, to indicate that more spontaneous people experience higher well-being. Again, this is consistent with the research pointing to the numerous benefits of spontaneity on mental health and well-being.

## Well-being

In addition to the findings reported above, psychological well-being was strongly associated with all of the Big 5 personality characteristics. This is to say that people who were more open to experience, emotionally stable, agreeable and dependable were much more likely to have higher well-being. These personality characteristics are protective against some of the key causes of poor mental health as they lead to people be more active in their lives, connect more with others and do activities that contribute to better well-being, such as exercise, looking after physical health, and engaging in more restorative leisure time.

## Predictors of Holiday Behaviour

Generally, people who planned less far in advance for their holidays had overall better well-being. Spontaneity was particularly central in relation to planning activities so that more spontaneous people tended to plan their activities much later, and as a result, their overall well-being was higher. Although, interestingly, being more structured and organised whilst on holiday was not related to well-being at all. A similar finding showed that people who are more spontaneous reported enjoying their holidays more, and this had a substantial positive effect on well-being.



## Methodology

Joe's spontaneity survey asked 1000 respondents from the UK. Joe's study measured personality characteristics using an abbreviated version of the 'Big 5' Personality Inventory. This looks at personality subtypes; extraversion, agreeableness, openness, stability and conscientiousness, representing the key parts of someone's overall personality.

The study then measured well-being using the Short Warwick-Edinburgh Mental Well-being Scale (SWEMWBS), which provides a snapshot of someone's personal well-being in relation to their ability to do everyday life tasks, connect with others and how self-efficient they are.



Spontaneity was then measured using parts of the Personal Attitudes Scale. This measure looks at the degree to which someone takes risks, is open to trying new things, doing new activities and tasks and generally how spontaneous they feel they are. Finally, the survey asked everyone about their own holiday behaviour, specifically how much advance planning they do before booking a holiday and what they choose to do on their trip. The survey looked at how structured people were on holiday, whether they organised activities whilst away and how enjoyable everyone found their holidays over the last 12 months.

# Research case studies

Joe Oliver also conducted two case study interviews with a spontaneous traveller (Emma, a Senior CBT therapist and Clinical Lead for a busy NHS team in London) and a nonspontaneous traveller (Jon, a corporate trainer and executive coach from Brighton).

When Joe dove into the type of holiday Emma was looking for, she shared; “I like holidays where I can completely switch off and disconnect from work. Work is busy and demanding and I need time on holiday that is just for me where I can please myself.”

Emma also told Joe; “Most of the time, I only book my trips a few weeks before I go and I spend the minimum amount of time possible booking.

I definitely prefer to just get on with booking a trip and make it happen. I don't like getting lost in over-researching and over-preparing. It's easy to go down the rabbit hole, which could stop me from booking altogether!”

In contrast, Joe also conducted a study with non-spontaneous traveller Jon, who shared his preference when booking trips; “With two children, we tend to do a fair bit of planning in advance for our holidays. For me, the main thing for a holiday is to have space from day-to-day responsibilities of work, chores, and duties. When I'm free of those, I can relax and enjoy leisure time. I like to do things that are high in comfort and low in demand; later, once kids are older, I'd want to have holidays that have more adventure and new experiences.”

Enjoying downtime is something both Emma and Jon can agree on, as Joe asked Emma how organised her trips are when she lands; “I like to have a loose plan for when I'm on holiday but then sort the finer details when I arrive. It's better to keep things open and have some latitude to adjust when I'm there. This is better for my well-being. I don't like having constraints on my time and would rather be freer, able to explore, be present, and go with the flow and take opportunities as they present themselves. This opens up my holidays to adventure and I find this exciting!”

Joe also asked Emma about the types of holidays she enjoyed most; “I love holidays that have a mix of things happening; that have downtime and also activities. I like holidays where I can take care of my body and mind. For example, I booked a yoga retreat to Greece, which was great to help me relax. I also had 4–5 days scheduled at the end of the retreat where I had no plans and could just explore where I was staying.”

With more of us looking for that buzz that only a last-minute, spontaneous trip can deliver, we expect the 2023 travel landscape for British travellers to be even busier with people like Emma enjoying impulsive holidays once more!



# The benefits of spontaneous travel

To understand more about the benefits of spontaneous travel and what we can do to reignite spontaneity, we also teamed up with psychologist and presenter Emma Kenny. A favourite on television and radio stations across Europe, Emma is considered one of the leading voices in psychology.

Spontaneity has been directly affected over the last couple of years by the dark days of COVID. The pandemic forced people into new, restricted patterns of behaviour and many haven't yet been able to shake off these shackles. "Breaking free from these constricting behaviours", Emma comments, "is key to getting back on track and also to boosting mental well-being."

And nothing is more freeing than travel. A common concern shared amongst travellers is the planning and decision-making parts. But that's what makes an impromptu holiday so thrilling.

While Emma notes it may seem scary to just "pack a bag and hop on a plane", the rewards are great: "It creates a 'can do' attitude and will remind you of the limitless possibilities that are out there. And because you have no clear set agenda, plans, or expectations, every step you take will involve a sense of adventure which is truly freeing."

This is especially true now there are no more COVID-19 testing and isolation requirements to get in the way. With travel being easy and accessible once again, the possibility of booking right now and being in another country in just a few hours' time is once again achievable.



**“Spontaneity is clinically proven to reduce stress and increase levels of self-esteem, along with promoting contentment and harmony in close relationships.”**

— Emma Kenny, *Psychologist & Broadcaster*

## Emma Kenny's tips for reigniting spontaneous travel

- Don't overthink when an opportunity to do something presents itself. Instead of giving yourself a million reasons as to why that impromptu trip is a really bad idea, why not go with the flow and invite possibilities into your life?
- Find a spontaneity buddy so you can share surprise weekends and trips away. It means you'll both have an injection of excitement to look forward to.
- Say no to others and yes to yourself regularly. Often the plans you make will involve accommodating other people's needs, make sure to consider yours too.
- Surprise the kids! Children love to be entertained and there's nothing more exciting than to find out that you've organized a trip away.
- If you struggle to be spontaneous and you know you need that extra push to get out of your comfort zone, ask your partner, best mate, or parent to help and get them to plan some fun trips away.





# A spontaneous nation: Do UK travellers act on impulse?

We conducted a survey of 1,000 UK travellers to understand their attitudes toward spontaneity. And it turns out, we are some of the most impulsive explorers, with trips booked just 7–29 days before departing being the most popular.

Skyscanner UK booking horizons data shared by our Vice President, Naomi Hahn, indicates British travellers love a last-minute break. Bookings made between 7–29 days before the trip have increased by 12% since pre-pandemic levels indicating spontaneity is definitely back on!

## Daring departures

Over 1 in 3 UK travellers said they've arrived at the airport without a ticket or destination in mind, going on to book a spontaneous trip – and would happily do so again. It's an exciting prospect, with 31% saying they've booked a trip to a destination they knew nothing about!

## Post-pandemic spontaneity grows

The pandemic may have put a pause on impulsive decision-making, but it also led to pent-up spontaneity as 2022 saw an increase in holiday bookings for shorter trips of less than 1 week. According to data shared by Skyscanner's Vice President of Strategy, Naomi Hahn, booking horizons of 7 days or less have grown by 14% from 2019. This highlights the growing appetite for shorter, spontaneous trips as restrictions lift.

53% of the people we asked agreed that the pandemic had limited their ability to be spontaneous, whilst 62% shared that the events of the last two years have made them want to be more spontaneous. So as the world opens up once more, Brits are set to be even more impulsive when it comes to booking trips!

35%

have arrived at an airport without a destination in mind, whilst 31% have booked a trip somewhere they know nothing about.

62%

say the pandemic has made them want to be more spontaneous in the future.



### 🇬🇧 So, just how last-minute are UK travellers?

Over a third of UK travellers (36%) told us they'd previously booked a spontaneous holiday. When drilling into just how spontaneous we are, the survey reveals that of those who have booked a last-minute trip, 18% of respondents actually booked their trip on the day of departure. Whilst 1 in 4 (25%) spontaneous holidaymakers booked their holiday 2-4 days in advance – leaving just enough time to pack! ...And the emotional reaction to making a spontaneous decision? Excited (34%), happy (27%) and carefree (23%) come out top.

### 🤔 Who's more spontaneous? Women or men

When it comes to who's more spontaneous, women seem to hold back on impulse with 50% sharing they wish they were more spontaneous compared to 42% of men. Coming out of two years of COVID restrictions and lockdowns, women said it had impacted their ability to be spontaneous with 26% feeling it stopped their impulsive travel plans, compared to just 17% of men who felt the same.

### 🎁 Experience gifting over 'things'

Of all the travellers we surveyed, the majority told us they value travel over other self-care presents, new clothes, nights out and other treats. So, if we love to travel so much, it may be surprising to learn that 72% surveyed have never received a spontaneous breakaway as a gift!

### ☀️ Summer is the season for spontaneous travel

So is there a preferred spontaneous time to travel? According to our data, there is and UK travellers have embraced spontaneous travel this summer. Looking at 2022 to date, last-minute trips (bookings made <1 week) spiked the week commencing 4th July to 14.7% of all bookings versus the beginning of the year (week commencing 24th January) when they accounted for 7.3% of all bookings.

### 😎 Spontaneity peaks at the age of 31

Our research reveals that UK adults are most impulsive in their early thirties, due to a desire to have fun (51%) and a lack of responsibility (47%). This is coupled with fewer financial commitments (44%) and more disposable income (40%), while 39% put it down to having less fear at that age. But it soon changes, as 37 was revealed as the least spontaneous age, thanks to an increase in responsibilities (42%), having a young family (37%) and a need to be more sensible (30%).



In July, Bookings made less than seven days before departure spiked to 14.7% of all bookings vs. January when they accounted for just 7.3%.



# There's no time (to fly) like the present

Did you know being flexible with where and when you travel unlocks the very best prices? With 10 billion prices searched every single day, Skyscanner offers the world at your fingertips.

And our 'Everywhere' search should be your first stop to spark inspiration and save you money. Just search 'Everywhere' and we'll show you all available options for specific dates, with the lowest prices first – a great tool for those who love spontaneous travel.

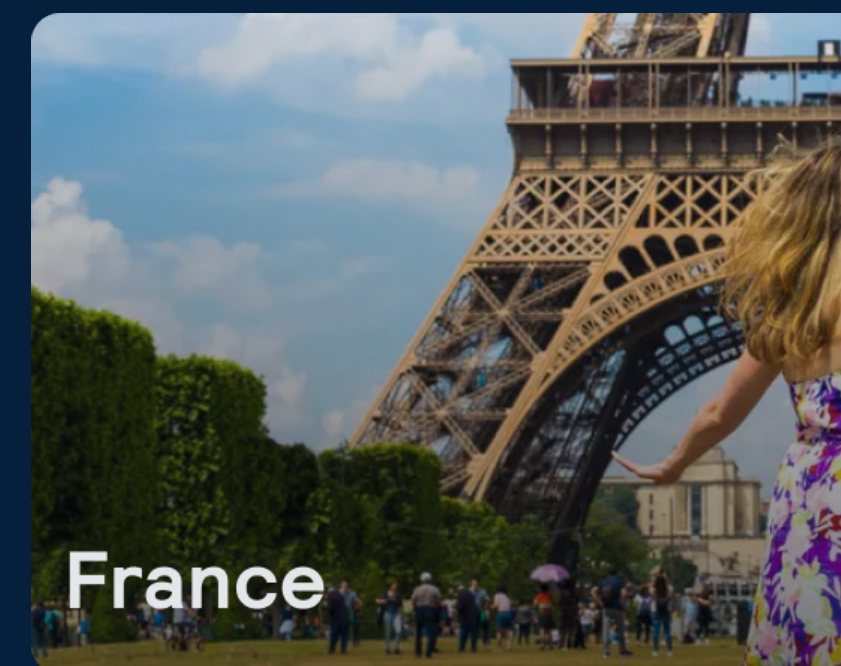
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