How people use their phones for travel
In today’s mobile-first world, people turn to their phones constantly to help make travel decisions. To help marketers better understand this dynamic, Google partnered with Ipsos to survey smartphone users to find out more about how phones have become a critical guide before, during, and after their travels.

In this report, Google shares insight into the role our phones play in making travel decisions.
### Methodology

**FORMAT**

15-minute online questionnaire covering travel category.

**POPULATION**

Smartphone users in the U.S., aged 18–64, who used a smartphone for finance in the past month. Quotas set on enumeration data per vertical for age, gender, education, and internet usage frequency.*

**SAMPLE SIZE**

N=500 per vertical

**MARKET**

U.S.

**DATE**

October 2016

*To ensure vertical representation, a soft launch based on the online population was conducted to determine the makeup of each vertical. After the soft launch was complete and each vertical’s makeup was defined, quotas were set per vertical to match this universe. Weighting was applied on the back end if needed.*
Key findings

1. **Smartphones are travel guides.**
   
   More than half of smartphone users turn to their device in I-want-to-go moments. Most often, they’re seeking out discounts and researching activities to do before and during their trip.

2. **Apps are for loyalty and convenience.**
   
   Travelers rely on both apps and mobile sites, but for different purposes. Apps are often used to track loyalty programs and access digital boarding passes, while mobile sites are used to research activities.

3. **Simplicity of use is key.**
   
   For consumers, there is not a more valuable attribute in a travel app than ease of use and navigation. This is nearly twice as important as anything else an app can offer.

4. **Memory is a dealbreaker.**
   
   Taking up too much phone memory is the #1 app-related issue that leads consumers to uninstall a travel app. However, people will give your app another shot if changes are made.
In I-want-to-go moments, more than half of smartphone owners turn to their devices

51% of smartphone owners use their device for travel-related activities

Of those, 71% do so at least weekly
Smartphones have become a go-to resource for nearly every travel need

Top travel activities over the past 30 days

- 44% Looked for discounts or offers
- 35% Looked at things to do/tourist information before visiting
- 32% Looked at things to do/tourist information while travelling
- 29% Looked at flight options
- 28% Checked flight times
- 25% Looked at accommodation options
- 24% Watched videos about accommodation or the local area
- 22% Checked into flight or accommodation
- 20% Found address/contact information of a travel agency
- 20% Booked accommodation
- 19% Looked at rental car options
- 18% Booked a flight
- 18% Used a digital ticket/boarding pass
- 15% Used a loyalty program
- 14% Made a last-minute booking
- 11% Wrote a review for a destination

Base: 500
Q8. Which of the following activities have you done on your smartphone in the past 30 days (using either a mobile website or an app)?
Q9. How often do you do each of the following activities on your smartphone?
To discover new travel apps, people turn most to friends, family, and app stores

Top methods of travel app discovery

- 35% My friends/family are using them
- 35% By browsing app stores
- 31% Saw an ad while browsing the web
- 28% I read about them online
- 27% Saw an ad on TV
- 27% Through search engines
- 27% Recommended to me in the app store
- 25% I see them shared on social networks
- 23% Saw an ad while using another app
- 22% From visiting the mobile website first
- 13% Saw an ad on YouTube
- 12% Saw an ad in a magazine, newspaper or flyer
- 12% Suggested to me in a store or branch or while traveling
- 11% An organization/business informed me about their app directly
- 9% I heard about them on YouTube

Base: 500
Q34. What are the top 3 ways you find out about the travel smartphone apps you use?
When deciding whether to install a travel app, ease of use is top of mind

Top motivating factors for downloading travel apps

- 36% To make a specific activity/task easier
- 32% Recommended by others
- 32% To access discounts or offers
- 20% To complete a purchase
- 19% Got a specific reward for downloading the app
- 19% Past experience with a similar app
- 13% Activity unavailable on the mobile website
- 18% None of the above

Base: 500
Q35. For which of these reasons have you downloaded a travel app in the past? Select all that apply.
Most people have never paid for a travel app. But for those who have, content and reviews are the driving factors.

### Reasons for paying

- **44%** It had the content I wanted
- **40%** The app had good reviews
- **39%** It offered features/functionality unavailable on the free alternatives
- **35%** I wanted an app that is ad-free
- **30%** There were exclusive deals/discounts offered through the app
- **29%** I’m a frequent user of the brand/company offering the app
- **29%** I thought it would be easier to use than free alternatives
- **25%** I wanted to have the same app as my friends
- **17%** There were no free alternatives
- **3%** None of the above

**Base:** 500 *Median

Q22. What is the most you have ever paid for a travel app? Please enter amount to the nearest whole number. Base: Have paid to download a travel app (n=92)

Q23. Why have you chosen to pay for travel apps over other free alternatives?
Of the travel apps people have installed, over half are used at least weekly

On average, users have **2.3 travel apps** currently installed on their smartphone

And **58% of those apps** are used at least monthly

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Number of apps currently installed</th>
<th>Frequency of app use</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>None</td>
<td>Daily 12%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Weekly 28%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Monthly 58%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3+</td>
<td>Never 10%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Base: 500
Q14: How many travel apps are installed on your smartphone (including any that were already installed when you bought it)?
Base: Has travel apps installed on smartphone (n=373)
Q15: Roughly what percentage of the travel apps are installed on your smartphone do you use?
More people turn to mobile sites for travel than apps, but each has a role to play

Travel activities in past 30 days

58% Used an app

65% Used a mobile website

App & mobile site usage for top travel activities
Among those who have performed activity in the past 30 days

Prefer app
- Use a loyalty program: 60%
- Use a digital ticket/boarding pass: 58%
- Check into flight or accommodation: 49%
- Book a flight: 48%
- Check flight times: 46%
- Book accommodation: 41%
- Find address/contact information of a travel agency: 39%
- Write a review for a destination: 38%
- Look at things to do/tourist information while traveling: 37%
- Look at flight options: 37%
- Look for discounts or offers: 36%
- Look at accommodation options: 36%
- Watch videos about accommodation or the local area: 35%
- Make a last-minute booking: 34%
- Look at rental car options: 32%
- Look at things to do/tourist information before visiting: 31%

Prefer mobile website
- Use a loyalty program: 15%
- Use a digital ticket/boarding pass: 25%
- Check into flight or accommodation: 32%
- Book a flight: 33%
- Check flight times: 35%
- Book accommodation: 38%
- Find address/contact information of a travel agency: 46%
- Write a review for a destination: 34%
- Look at things to do/tourist information while traveling: 40%
- Look at flight options: 44%
- Look for discounts or offers: 38%
- Look at accommodation options: 42%
- Watch videos about accommodation or the local area: 38%
- Make a last-minute booking: 45%
- Look at rental car options: 35%
- Look at things to do/tourist information before visiting: 47%
The apps they love most are easy to use and navigate

What features people prefer to have in their favorite travel apps

- 58% They’re easy to use and navigate
- 36% They have good discounts or offers
- 31% I receive useful notifications from them
- 28% I like the way they look
- 26% I’ve personalized them so I get the best experience
- 26% They’re from a brand or company I use a lot in the real world
- 26% There’s a large range of things to explore
- 24% There’s always new things to explore
- 9% None of the above
Offering a wide range of features and storage preferences for future activities are among the keys to building app preference

What users find most valuable about their favorite travel apps

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Feature</th>
<th>Prefer</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Has a wide range of features</td>
<td>64%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Stores my preferences to make future activities easier</td>
<td>62%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Requires sign in for secure access</td>
<td>59%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Uses my current location to provide relevant local information</td>
<td>58%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Stores personal information for a more personalized experience</td>
<td>47%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Specializes in a small number of features that I use frequently</td>
<td>45%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Is free to download but has ads within the app</td>
<td>41%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Stores my credit card/billing information to make future purchases faster</td>
<td>34%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Is linked to my social networks</td>
<td>27%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Charges a fee to download but is ad-free</td>
<td>19%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Base: 500
Q28. Thinking about all of the travel apps that you use, which of the following features do you prefer to have?
If they provide value, push notifications aren’t a turnoff

Most useful notifications

- Trip status (e.g., flight delayed, check-in time) 45%
- New discount or offer 44%
- Price change of a flight you’re looking at 39%
- Reminder of a booking/purchase in progress 38%
- Loyalty points update 30%
- Upgrade to the app itself (e.g., new feature added) 25%
- Recommendation of a product/service 22%
- New product or service available 19%

87% find travel notifications on mobile useful
Q40. Have you stopped using travel apps on your smartphone for any of the reasons below? Select all that apply.

Q41. And have you stopped using travel apps on your smartphone for any of these reasons?

Base: No longer has need for a particular app (n=104)

Q42. You said you've stopped using travel apps because you no longer had a need for it/them. Why did you no longer need it/them?

Remember this: Travelers stop using apps when they're not useful or take up too much memory

Why no longer needed?

48% Was using for one-off trip

42% Other apps covered travel needs

28% No longer customer of company

App-related reasons for abandonment

27% It was taking up a lot of memory
20% It wasn't easy to use or navigate
19% The app contained too many ads
17% I was receiving too many notifications from it
16% It had technical problems
15% Ads made the app harder to navigate
13% It needed to be updated too often
13% Ads were not relevant to me
12% It wasn't as described

Personal reasons for abandoning an app

30% I needed to free up memory
29% I no longer had a need for that particular app
28% It wasn't as useful as I thought
22% I had a similar app that was more useful
21% I had a similar app that was easier to use
15% I forgot I had the app
6% My friends stopped using it
27% It was taking up a lot of memory
20% It wasn't easy to use or navigate
19% The app contained too many ads
17% I was receiving too many notifications from it
16% It had technical problems
15% Ads made the app harder to navigate
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Q42. You said you’ve stopped using travel apps because you no longer had a need for it/them. Why did you no longer need it/them?
The good news: People will reconsider using an app if it’s improved (and trimmed down in size)

Reasons why users re-engage with travel apps

- 27% The app uses less memory
- 26% The app was redesigned, for easier use
- 25% Discount on next purchase
- 24% Exclusive or bonus offers or products
- 23% New features added
- 20% The app uses less mobile data
- 13% Family or friends start using it
- 11% Being linked to the app in a relevant situation online
- 5% Nothing would make me start using the app(s) again

Base: 500
Q43. Thinking about travel apps that you’ve stopped using, which of the following would encourage you to use the app again?
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