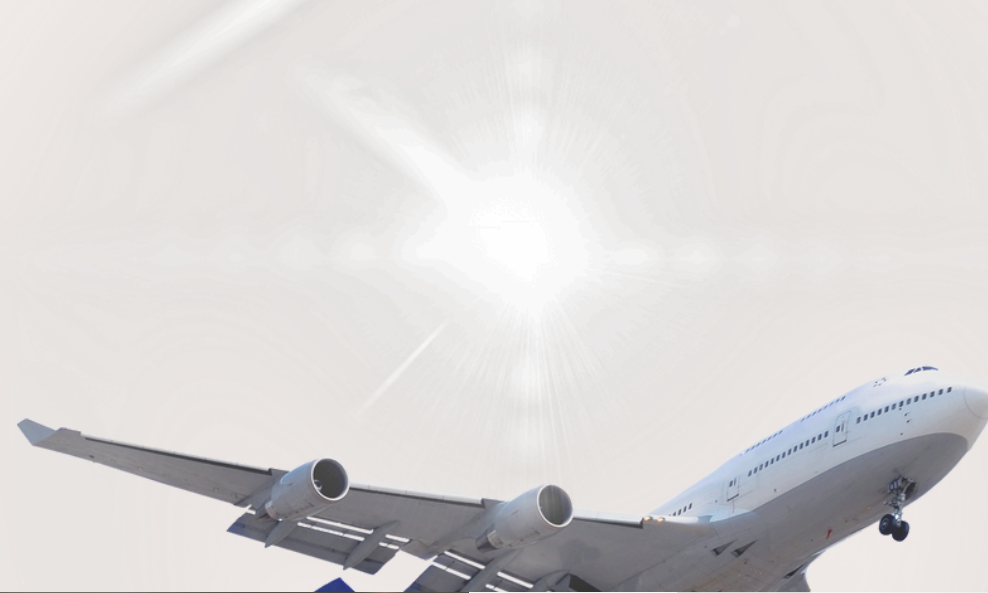


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Travel in the Digital Age

CARMEN WATTS

Travel starts online



- The media has become a valuable resource for travelers planning their trips.
- The new digital world is continuing to transform our view of places to travel.

How People Discover Travel in 2020s



Publications



Influencers



Social media

Aesthetic Travel Culture

- Travel becomes “instagramable.”
- Wanting to capture content as you saw online (trend)
- Expectations vs Reality

#Beachsunrisephotos



Algorithms + Viral Destinations

- Viral content has boosted certain locations' tourism and popularity
- Travel becomes trend-based
- Certain trends you see more of due to your algorithm



#LA

#pinkwall

Aside from traveling to a destination with good-looking locals, the study also pointed out that these young travelers purposely pick vacation destinations that will be aesthetically pleasing for photos.

Some even said they had left a trip early when the photos didn't meet their expectations.

– Caroline Cubbin Published July 31, 2025

TIME

Things started to change sometime around 2013, when a few intrepid travelers began posting photos of the canyon on social media—sometimes with a geolocation tag attached. Suddenly, anyone with an internet connection could navigate their way to this stunning, out-of-the-way location. The crowds quickly started to grow. And then, in 2015, the other shoe dropped: Justin Bieber showed up with a film crew. They were there to make the music video for Bieber's song "I'll Show You," and they shot in several spots along Iceland's south coast, including the canyon. As the video fades in, we see Bieber in jeans and an oversized hoodie, walking in his sneakers along a cliff edge. "My life is a movie / And everyone's watchin'," we hear Bieber sing from the canyon rim. Since the video was posted on YouTube in November 2015, it's been viewed more than half a billion times.

–Paige McClanahan June 20, 2024

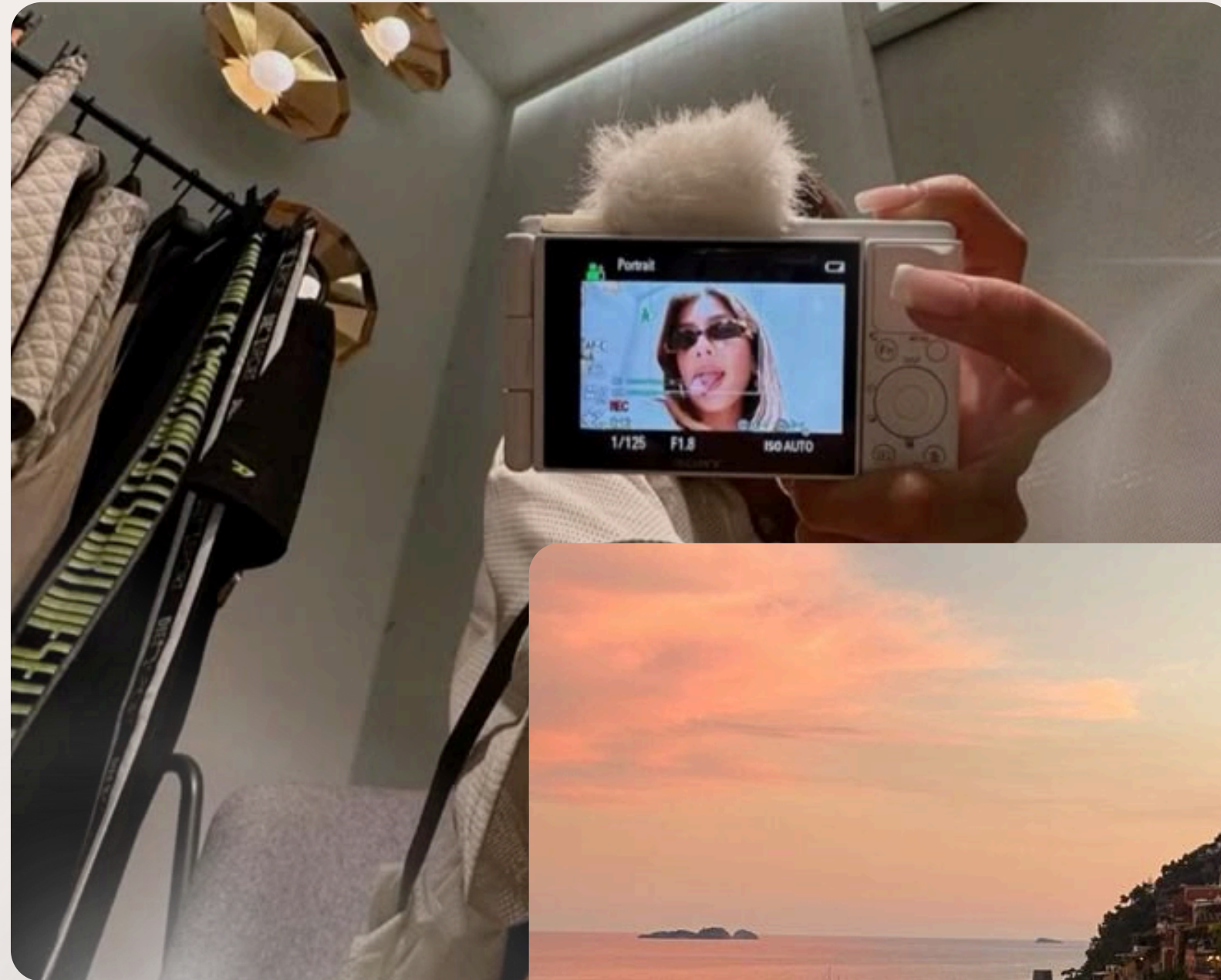
TRAVEL

Gen Z picks travel destinations based on hot locals and aesthetic backdrops for selfies, study says

Influencers

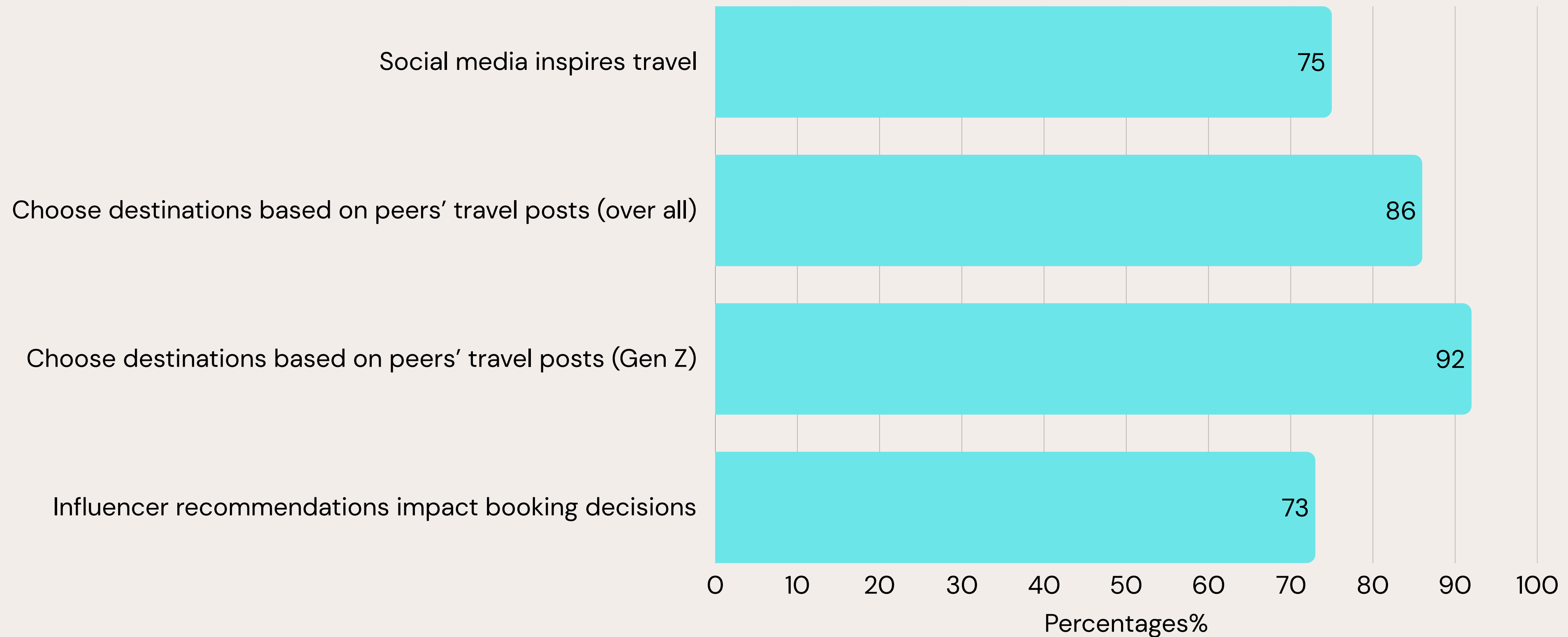
"Influencers shape travel choices."

- Social media users trust creators' recommendations because they feel more personal and relatable than traditional ads.
- Many influencers are social media professionals who create content that is visually appealing, persuasive, and trend-driven.
- Their posts give viewers a "preview" of what a future trip might look like.
- Travelers can see details like which restaurants they visited, what hotels they stayed at, and what activities they did.



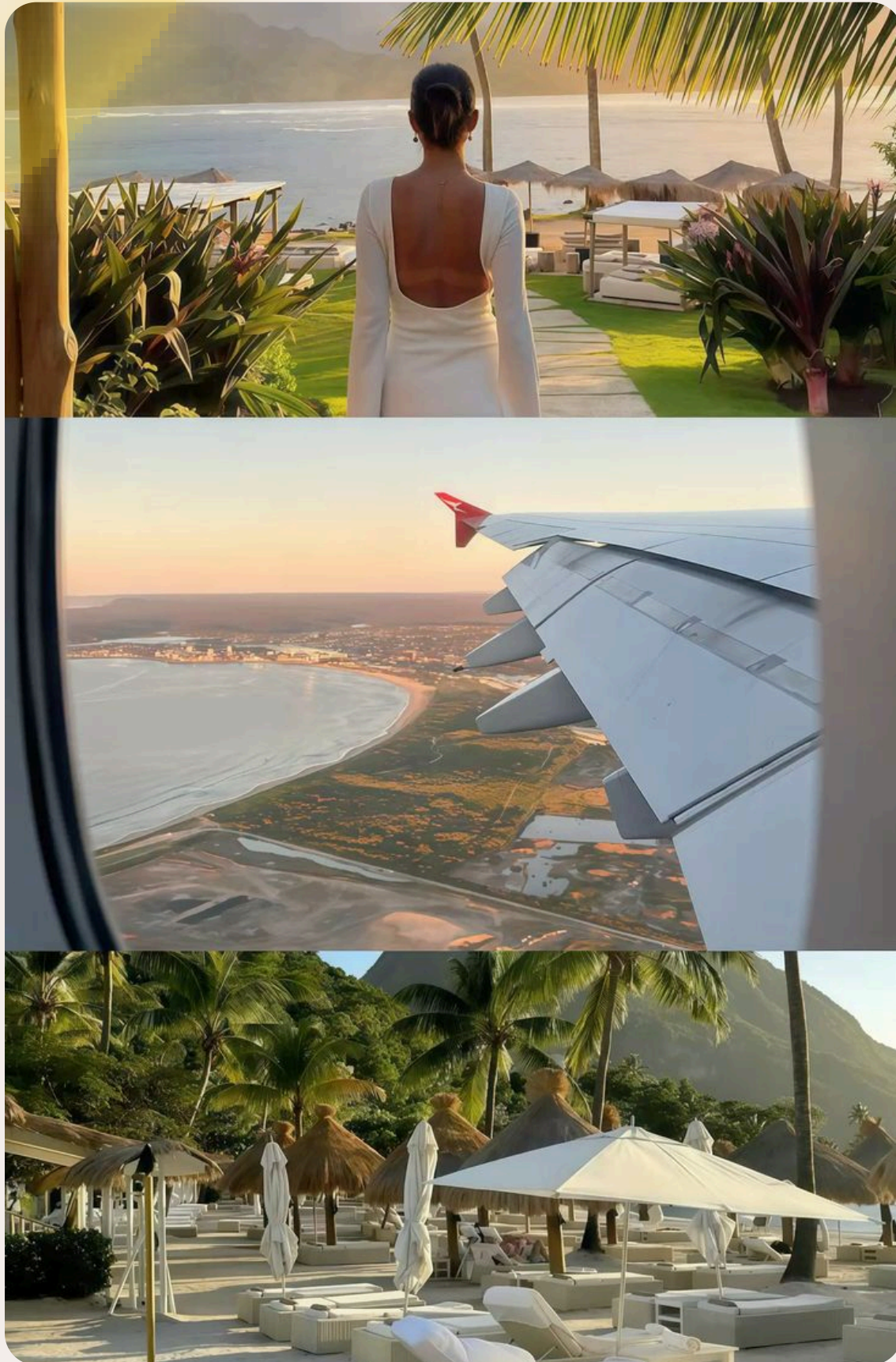


Social Media Influence on Travel



Digital Storytelling = Digital Identity

“Travel is part of online self-branding”



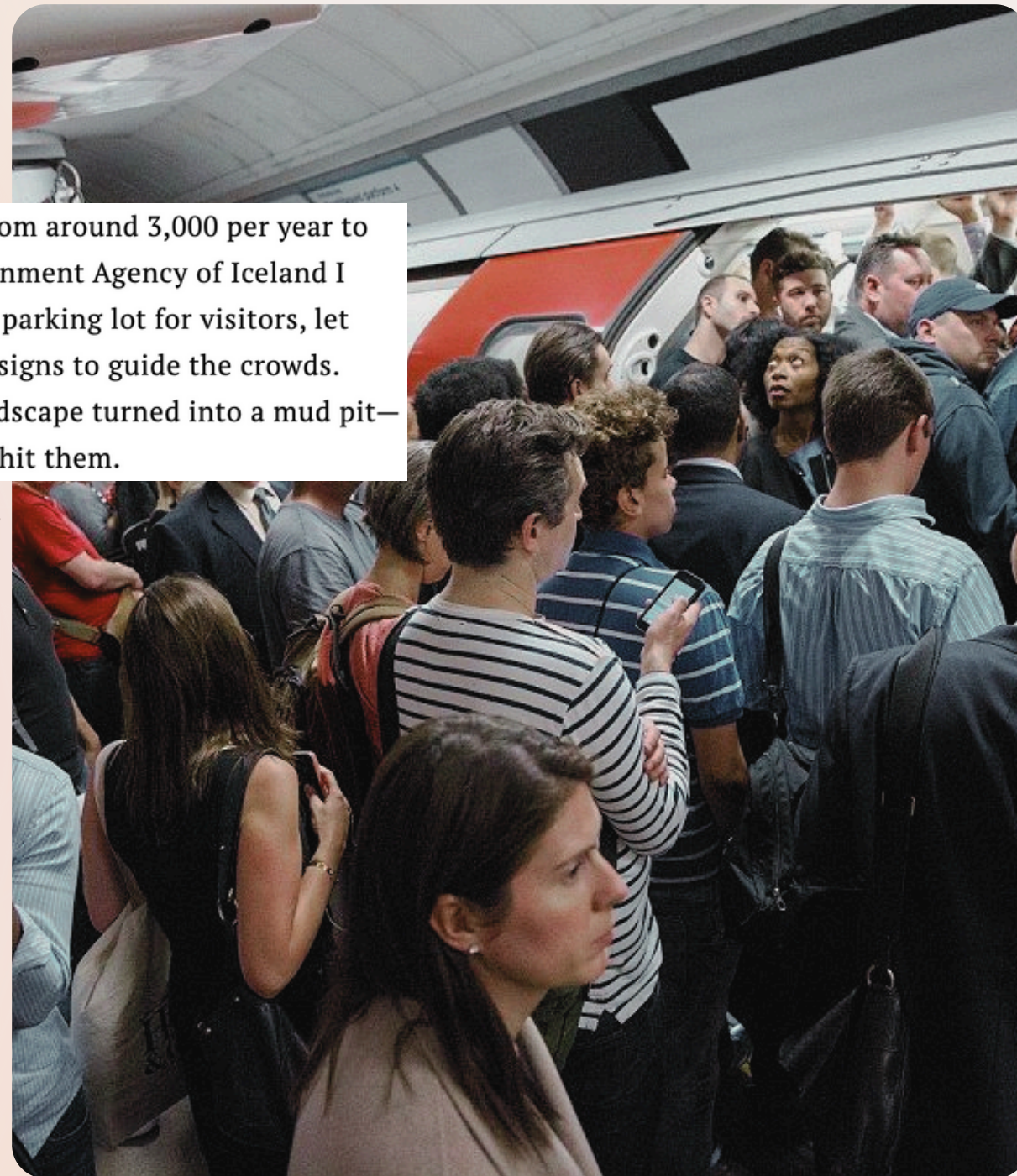
- Travel content shows lifestyle + identity
- Where you go becomes part of how you're perceived. EXAMPLE:
 - **Paris + Dubai = Luxurios**
 - **Thailand + Brazil = Fun and Adventurous**
 - **NYC + Fashion forward and trendy**
- Posting becomes part of the experience

Real-World Impacts

- Over-tourism
- Crowding
- Environmental strain

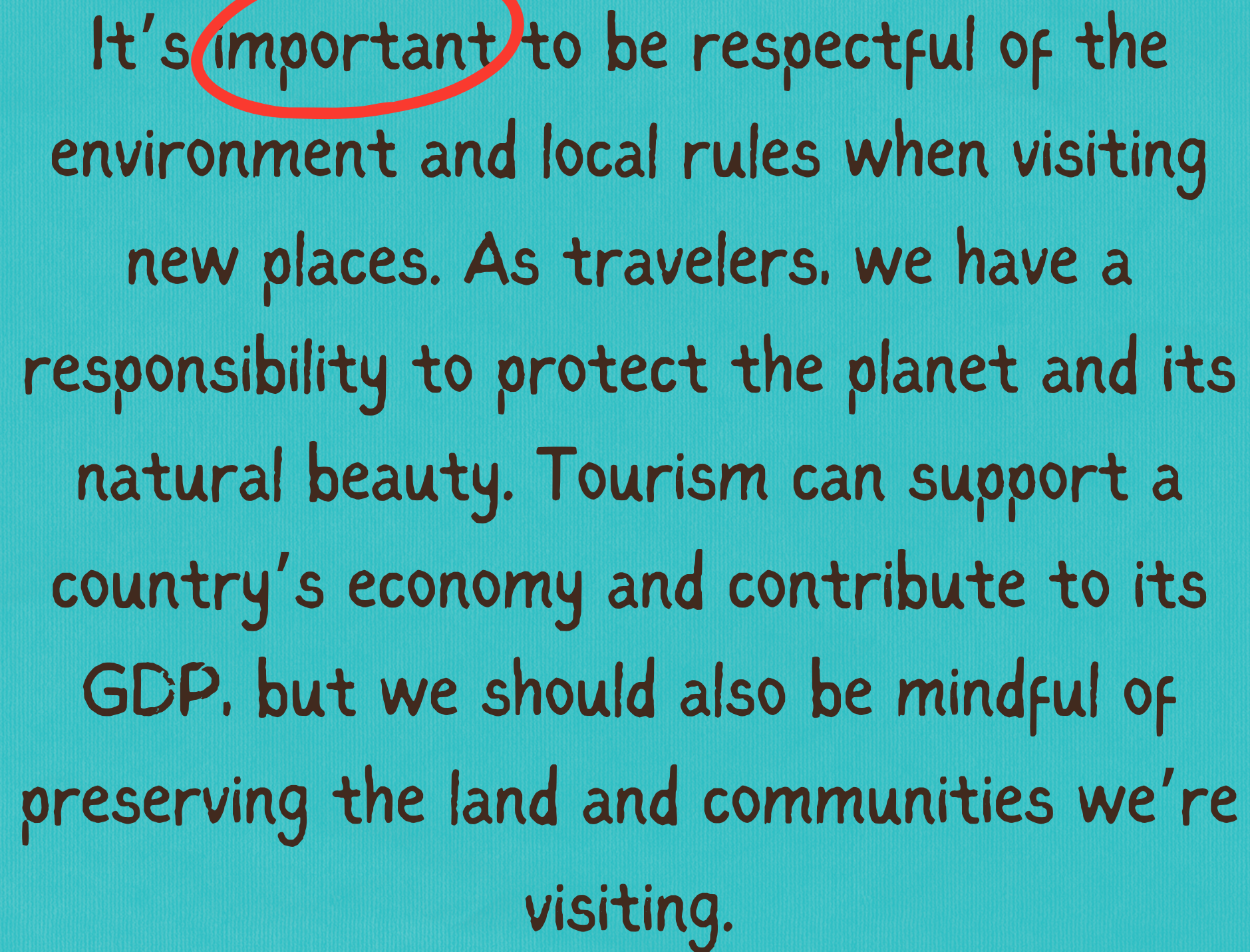
Within a few years, the canyon's visitors grew from around 3,000 per year to 300,000, according to an employee of the Environment Agency of Iceland I spoke to. But back then there wasn't even a real parking lot for visitors, let alone any bathrooms, walkways, or interpretive signs to guide the crowds. Without any infrastructure to protect it, the landscape turned into a mud pit—and the owners of the canyon barely knew what hit them.

—Paige McClanahan, *Time* June 20, 2024



2050 Prediction

- AI-planned travel becomes the norm
- Algorithmic feeds replace traditional travel planning
- Immersive previews (VR) with travel influencers



It's important to be respectful of the environment and local rules when visiting new places. As travelers, we have a responsibility to protect the planet and its natural beauty. Tourism can support a country's economy and contribute to its GDP, but we should also be mindful of preserving the land and communities we're visiting.

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The End

THANK YOU