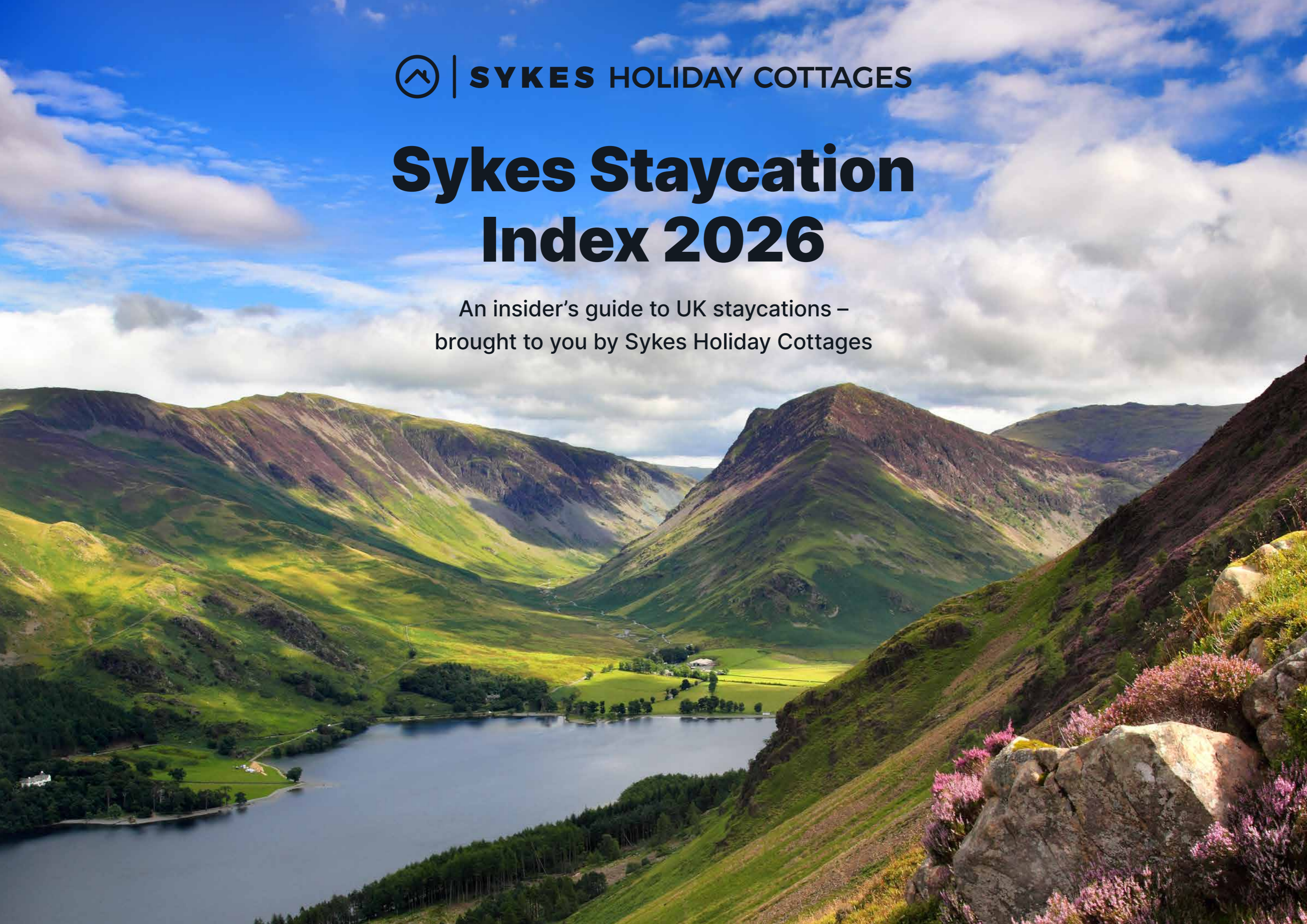




SYKES HOLIDAY COTTAGES

Sykes Staycation Index 2026

An insider's guide to UK staycations –
brought to you by Sykes Holiday Cottages



Welcome to the annual Sykes Staycation Index

In this year's report, we explore all there is to know about the UK staycation landscape – highlighting leading destinations, key traveller profiles, and the trends set to shape holidays for the remainder of 2026 and beyond.

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Welcome

The UK staycation market continues to show strong resilience, with demand holding firm as more Brits choose to holiday closer to home. While domestic travel remains popular, traveller behaviour is evolving – with shorter, more frequent breaks and a growing demand for off-peak trips.

Younger generations, particularly Gen Z, are playing a key role in shaping this shift. Their preference for flexible, experience-led travel is influencing how and when people holiday, while digital tools – including AI – are transforming the way trips are planned and booked. At the same time, the enduring appeal of UK destinations highlights the ongoing importance of local tourism.

As the sector adapts, the opportunity for growth remains clear. The staycation market is not just thriving but continuing to evolve to meet changing traveller needs.



A stylized, handwritten signature in black ink.

James Shaw,
Chief Commercial Officer



The big picture

Here, we've summarised the headline takeaways drawn from our booking data and a nationwide survey of 2,000 UK holidaymakers. UK staycations remain resilient, with steady demand, rising spend and evolving travel habits shaping how – and how often – Brits holiday.



Domestic demand holds strong, with 64% of Brits planning a UK break this year, and 38% choosing it as their main holiday — up 4% year-on-year.

Bookings continue to grow steadily, up **2% year-on-year**.

Spending remains robust at **£1,171 on average per main UK trip**.

Staycations play a vital role in the UK economy, with domestic tourism generating over **£32 billion** in annual overnight visitor spending (Source: UK Parliament).



Shorter, more frequent breaks are now the norm, with Brits taking **three UK trips per year on average**, and over half (51%) of 2025 bookings classed as short breaks (six days or less).

Planning windows are tightening, with average lead times now at around **101 days**, while nearly a third (31%) of trips in 2026 are being booked within a month of departure.

Off-peak travel is gaining momentum, with bookings up year-on-year for October (+11%) and January (+12%) 2025, as Brits look to avoid peak prices and crowds.



Demand continues to concentrate around key UK hotspots, with regions such as Cumbria, Cornwall and North Yorkshire remaining firm favourites.

Unique and experience-led stays are on the rise, with bookings for standout properties up **26% in 2025**, alongside growth in farm stays (+16%) and huts, pods and yurts (+10%).



Younger travellers are driving the trend, with over half (53%) of 18–28s opting for a UK main holiday (+8% year-on-year), and 72% planning a trip overall.

Solo travel continues to surge, with bookings up **25% year-on-year in 2025**, making it the fastest-growing traveller type.



The UK's favourite holiday hotspots

From long-standing go-tos to rising stars, we reveal where British travellers are booking now and the destinations tipped to take off next.

Top regions for 2026 based on bookings:

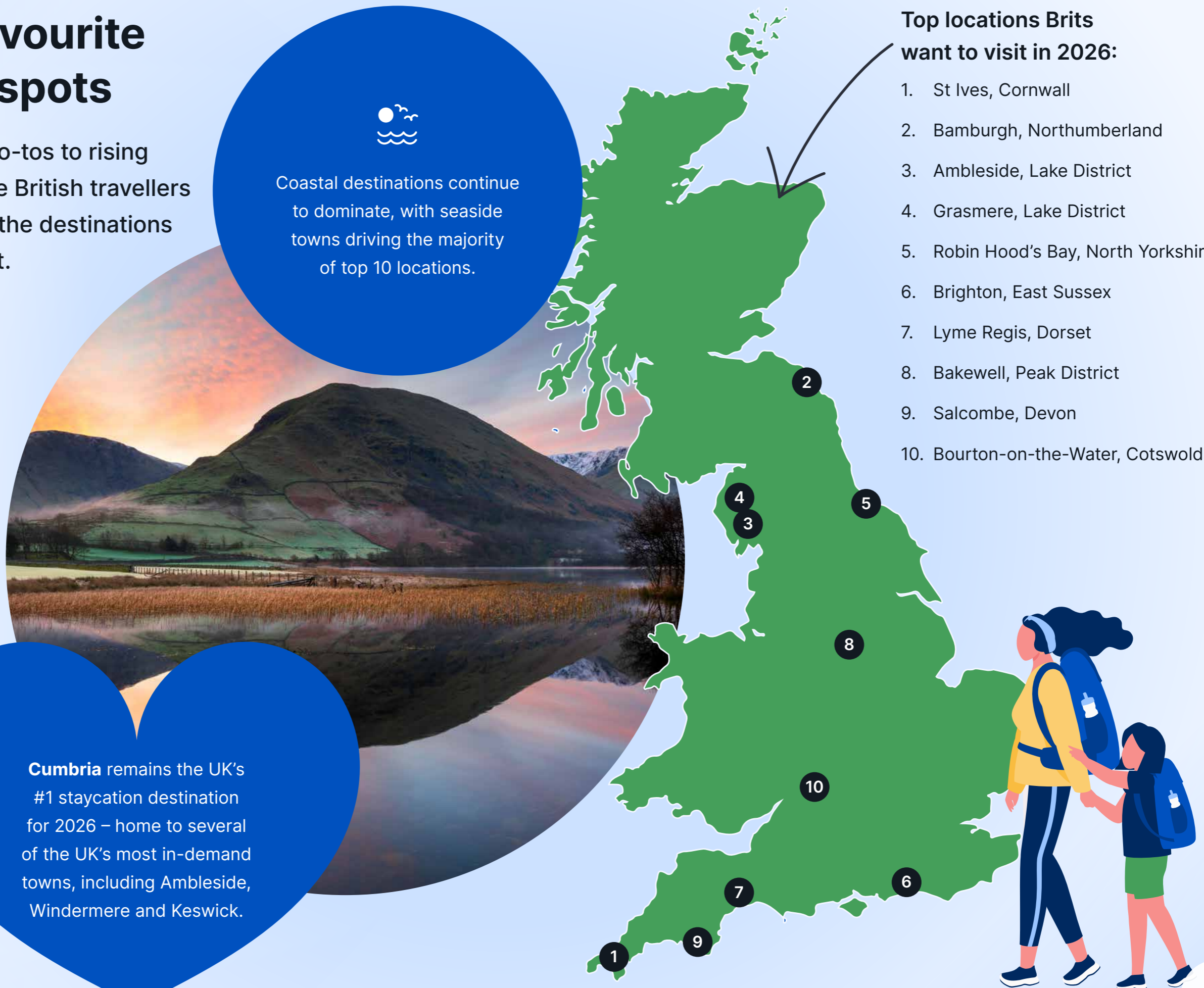
1. Cumbria
2. Cornwall
3. North Yorkshire
4. Devon
5. Gwynedd
6. Northumberland
7. Dorset
8. Anglesey
9. Derbyshire
10. Conwy

Cumbria remains the UK's #1 staycation destination for 2026 – home to several of the UK's most in-demand towns, including Ambleside, Windermere and Keswick.

Coastal destinations continue to dominate, with seaside towns driving the majority of top 10 locations.

Top locations Brits want to visit in 2026:

1. St Ives, Cornwall
2. Bamburgh, Northumberland
3. Ambleside, Lake District
4. Grasmere, Lake District
5. Robin Hood's Bay, North Yorkshire
6. Brighton, East Sussex
7. Lyme Regis, Dorset
8. Bakewell, Peak District
9. Salcombe, Devon
10. Bourton-on-the-Water, Cotswolds



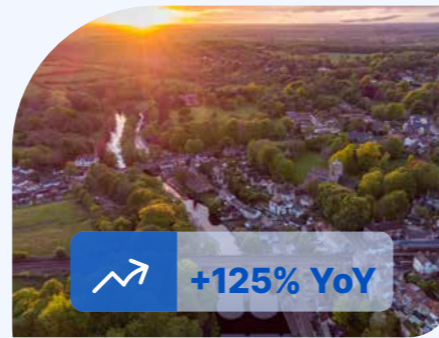
Destinations tipped to take off next

Top 10 'trending' locations in 2026, based on year-on-year bookings growth.

From coastal gems to countryside escapes, these rising destinations are set to capture travellers' attention in 2026 and beyond.



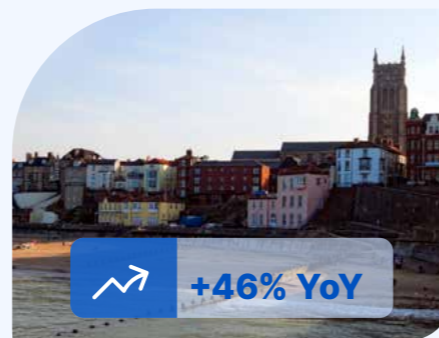
Sykes Staycation Index 2026



1
Boroughbridge,
North Yorkshire



6
Borth-y-Gest,
Gwynedd



2
Cromer,
Norfolk



7
Oban,
Argyll and Bute



3
Teignmouth,
Devon



8
Hayle,
Cornwall



4
Praa Sands,
Cornwall



9
St Agnes,
Cornwall



5
Aberystwyth,
Ceredigion



10
Beddgelert,
Gwynedd

2026 travel trends

We've analysed our own customer data, plus insights from a bespoke consumer survey, to identify the travel trends impacting holidaymaker behaviour in 2026 and beyond.



Budget breaks

Affordability is a key driver in 2026, with travellers increasingly seeking better value without compromising on experience.

23% of Brits are choosing cheaper destinations – rising to **30% of Gen Z** and **33% of millennials**.

Cost pressures are also keeping holidays closer to home, with **20%** opting for a UK break instead of travelling abroad.

This shift is bringing more affordable, under-the-radar destinations into focus.

Top 10 affordable towns for a week's stay in 2026:

1. Louth, Lincolnshire
2. Saltburn-By-The-Sea, Redcar & Cleveland
3. Haworth, West Yorkshire
4. Hornsea, East Riding of Yorkshire
5. Staithes, North Yorkshire
6. Thirsk, North Yorkshire
7. Hereford, Herefordshire
8. Liskeard, Cornwall
9. Okehampton, Devon
10. Morpeth, Northumberland





Set-jetting holidays

TV and film are increasingly influencing travel decisions, with on-screen destinations driving real-world demand.

Over **two-thirds (67%)** of UK travellers would consider visiting a location featured in a film or series, particularly Gen Z and millennials.

Top set-jetting locations for 2026:

1. Birmingham & Black Country
(Peaky Blinders)
2. Northern Ireland
(A Knight of the Seven Kingdoms - Game of Thrones prequel)
3. Northumberland
(Jurassic World: Fallen Kingdom)
4. Buckinghamshire
(Bridgerton)
5. Lake District
(Bridget Jones)



Multi-stay holidays

Brits are increasingly looking to maximise their time away, with multi-stop trips in the UK on the rise.

Nearly two-thirds (64%) are planning or considering a multi-stay UK holiday, increasing to **74% of millennials** and **85% of Gen Z**. A further 23% say they're more likely to consider this type of trip than five years ago.

On multi-stay holidays, Brits visit an average of three locations per trip, rising to four among Gen Z.

Coastal destinations lead (65%), while younger travellers are also incorporating foodie stops.



AI-powered holiday planning

Here we explore how travellers are increasingly using AI tools to plan and personalise their trips, from itinerary-building and destination discovery to budgeting and route optimisation.

AI is rapidly reshaping how Brits plan their holidays, with younger travellers leading the charge and using smart tools at every stage of the journey.



AI is influencing decisions, with 15% of Brits saying it shaped their choice of destination – rising to 28% for millennials and 30% for Gen Z.

End-to-end planning is on the rise, with almost a third of Gen Z using AI to both build full itineraries (28%) and find accommodation (30%).

Travel planning remains the top use case, followed by finding places to eat and choosing where to go.



Trust in AI is shaping behaviour, with men 57% more likely than women to rely on it when making travel decisions.

Gen Z are driving adoption, with 55% using AI for destination inspiration, compared to 26% of Brits overall.



The impact is also being seen in real-world behaviour, with Sykes reporting a **1,389% increase** in referral traffic from LLMs between January – March 2026 compared to the same period in 2025.



The Digital Planner

- Gen Z or younger Millennial
- Male
- Typically takes multiple UK breaks per year
- Comfortable using AI across everyday life, not just travel

When are Brits staycating?

Unpacking the seasonal factors behind Brits' holiday decisions, from high-demand travel times to the increasing demand for off-peak escapes.



Summer remains the peak period for UK breaks, but travel habits are shifting, with Brits increasingly extending their holidays into the shoulder and off-peak seasons.



Late summer still leads demand, with August the most popular month to travel, followed by May and July.



Spring is gaining ground, with May rising sharply in popularity since 2023 and April bookings up 15% year-on-year in 2025.



Off-peak travel is on the rise, led by October (+11% year-on-year) and January (+12% year-on-year) as travellers look to avoid peak prices and crowds.



Winter is strengthening as a travel season, with 2025 bookings up 5% year-on-year.



Short breaks are driving flexibility, accounting for over half (51%) of all 2025 trips – and 43% of 2026 trips to date, with an average stay of six days.



Late booking behaviour is increasing, with nearly a third (31%) of trips booked within a month of departure.



Most popular months to travel

1. August 2. May 3. July



Fastest-growing off-peak months

1. January 2. October



Who's booking UK breaks?

Meet the staycationers behind the bookings and explore how and why different generations are holidaying in the UK.



Gen Z (18-28)

The UK-first explorers

Leading the staycation surge, Gen Z are the most likely to holiday at home – and to do it often.

- 53% plan to take their main holiday in the UK
- 72% will take a UK trip overall
- Average three UK breaks per year
- Most likely generation to travel with friends
- Driving demand for frequent, social and flexible trips

Top 3 locations:

1. St Ives, Cornwall
2. Brighton, East Sussex
3. Robin Hood's Bay, North Yorkshire



Millennials (29-44)

The experience-led spenders

Balancing family, partners and experiences, millennials are the biggest investors in UK breaks.

- Highest average spend: £1,306 per main UK break
- Most frequent travellers: four trips per year
- 50% travel with children under 18
- 68% travel with a partner
- Strong demand for family-friendly and experience-led stays

Top 3 locations:

1. St Ives, Cornwall
2. Brighton, East Sussex
3. Ambleside, Lake District



Gen X & Boomers (45+)

The traditional staycationers

More selective but consistent, older travellers favour familiar formats and partner-led trips.

- Around 60% plan a UK break each year
- Lower likelihood to choose the UK as a main holiday vs younger groups
- Prefer travelling with a partner (60–70%)
- Strong preference for cottage-style and countryside breaks

Top 3 locations:

1. St Ives, Cornwall
2. Ambleside, Lake District
3. Grasmere, Lake District



Pets are part of the plan

27%

of 2025 bookings included a pet, highlighting the continued importance of pet-friendly travel.



About Sykes Holiday Cottages

Sykes Holiday Cottages is a holiday cottage rental agency with more than 30 years' experience in the industry.

Owned by parent company Forge Holiday Group, who manage over 30,000 accommodation units, Sykes now has more than 25,000 properties available across the UK and Ireland, taking over three million people on holiday each year.

While the business has grown significantly over the years, Sykes' commitment to offering quality accommodation to travellers – and being the best choice for holiday homeowners – remains unchanged. Sykes has been recognised as 'Best Large UK Holiday Cottage Booking Company' at the British Travel Awards for 12 consecutive years.

Headquartered in Chester and with regional offices around the country, its team work with customers and owners to deliver the best British breaks available.

Explanation of methodology

Sykes' bookings data for 25,000 properties in 2026 was used to provide a snapshot of the staycation market, while comparisons with equivalent YTD and full-year figures from 2023 to 2025 were used to identify market trends. Supporting consumer research of 2,000 UK adults was carried out by OnePoll in April 2026

¹ Contribution to UK economy methodology - £23.98 billion. Calculated based on the number of Brits who plan to stay in the UK for their main UK break in 2026(34%) (taking into account UK adult population - 54.6 million) multiplied by planned spend on their main summer break (£1,292).

Contact us

For further information on the report findings, methodology or press enquiries please contact sykescottages@citypress.co.uk

To book a holiday, visit www.sykescottages.co.uk or follow us on Facebook, TikTok, Instagram and LinkedIn.

To find out more about becoming a holiday let owner, please visit: www.sykescottages.co.uk/letyourcottage



