

EASOL



BETTER DAYS ARE COMING

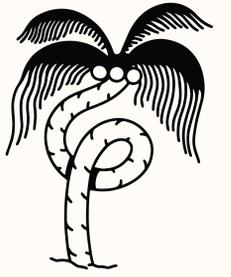
**EXPERIENCE ECONOMY
TREND REPORT**



With a golden era for experiences on its way, here's how the world is going to travel in 2021 and beyond.

***“The secret of life, though,
is to fall seven times and to
get up eight times.”***

Paulo Coelho, The Alchemist



BETTER DAYS ARE COMING

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After an extremely challenging 12 months for the experience economy, we're on the brink of an era-defining period for our sector. This has been supercharged by a new wave of experience businesses and huge pent-up demand within a society who – now more than ever – can't wait to spend money on creating memories. Here, in the first of a series of Easol trend reports, we reveal the key trends set to reshape and redefine the experience economy and bring us all back together once more.





As we collectively emerge from lockdown – a period that has separated us from many of the things that define us – our appetite for travel and experiences has grown like never before. While the events and experiences sector took a heavy hit as the pandemic spread, last December saw Airbnb become the world’s biggest online travel company, soaring to a huge \$100bn valuation after going public in December – an early indicator of a major rebound within the sector.

Confidence in the market could be found elsewhere, too. The Economist noted at the turn of the year that the major players in what it calls the “crowd business” sector – worth an estimated \$183bn – had already priced in a return to normality in 2021 after a tough 2020 – a much faster recovery than initially expected. Meanwhile, by charting patterns in behaviour following past pandemics, including the Spanish Flu in 1918, both economists and cultural commentators expect the next 10 years to replicate the Roaring Twenties of a century ago – a decade of economic growth and widespread prosperity that was accompanied by an explosion of creativity.

Coupled with the prospect of freedom as a worldwide vaccination programme gets underway, this represents a major opportunity for those in the experience economy. What happens in 2021 could redefine the entire 21st century and how businesses adapt to the events of the past 12 months will be crucial.

“Our world has been turned upside down and, in terms of sectors, tourism has taken it on the chin”, says Jake Hauptert, chairman and CEO of the Transformational Travel Council.

“Yet it’s also given us an opportunity to be introspective and take a step back. We’ve been through the trauma and now the healing can begin. Tourism has developed some bad habits over the years and now it has a unique opportunity to go back to its roots and focus on connection, meaning and impact. I feel we’re about to see a shift towards a more thoughtful, ethical and empathetic approach to travel.”

This chimes with our outlook at Easol, where our mission is to help give everyone greater access to life-changing experiences – something the world needs now more than ever. At the start of the year, we turned to our global community and interviewed thousands of experience creators and consumers for their perspective on the future of the experiences sector. Based on their responses, we’ve identified six key trends that will define the experience economy in 2021 and beyond while also highlighting those businesses that thought on their feet and successfully weathered the storm of the pandemic.

When taken together, we see plenty of cause for optimism as we all begin to get back to sharing great moments with others and doing what we love.



04



EXPERIENCE ECONOMY
TREND REPORT 01



TREND 01

THERE'S ENORMOUS PENT-UP DEMAND FOR TRAVEL



Before the pandemic, many of us took travel for granted. Over 40% of us were taking three to five trips each year. Yet this past year, nearly everyone has had to cancel their travel plans. Now, after completing Netflix, mass-baking banana bread and going stir-crazy confined by our four walls, we're hungrier than ever to travel again, party again and see our friends and family.

As many as a third of us plan to spend more on travel in 2021 compared to previous years and over half plan to return immediately to 2019 levels. We want to get back out there – something that's further illustrated by the fact that, after the approval of the Pfizer vaccine, Skyscanner saw a 48% week-on-week increase in searches from the UK for travel between 1 April and 31 August 2021, showing that there is a pent-up appetite to get exploring again.

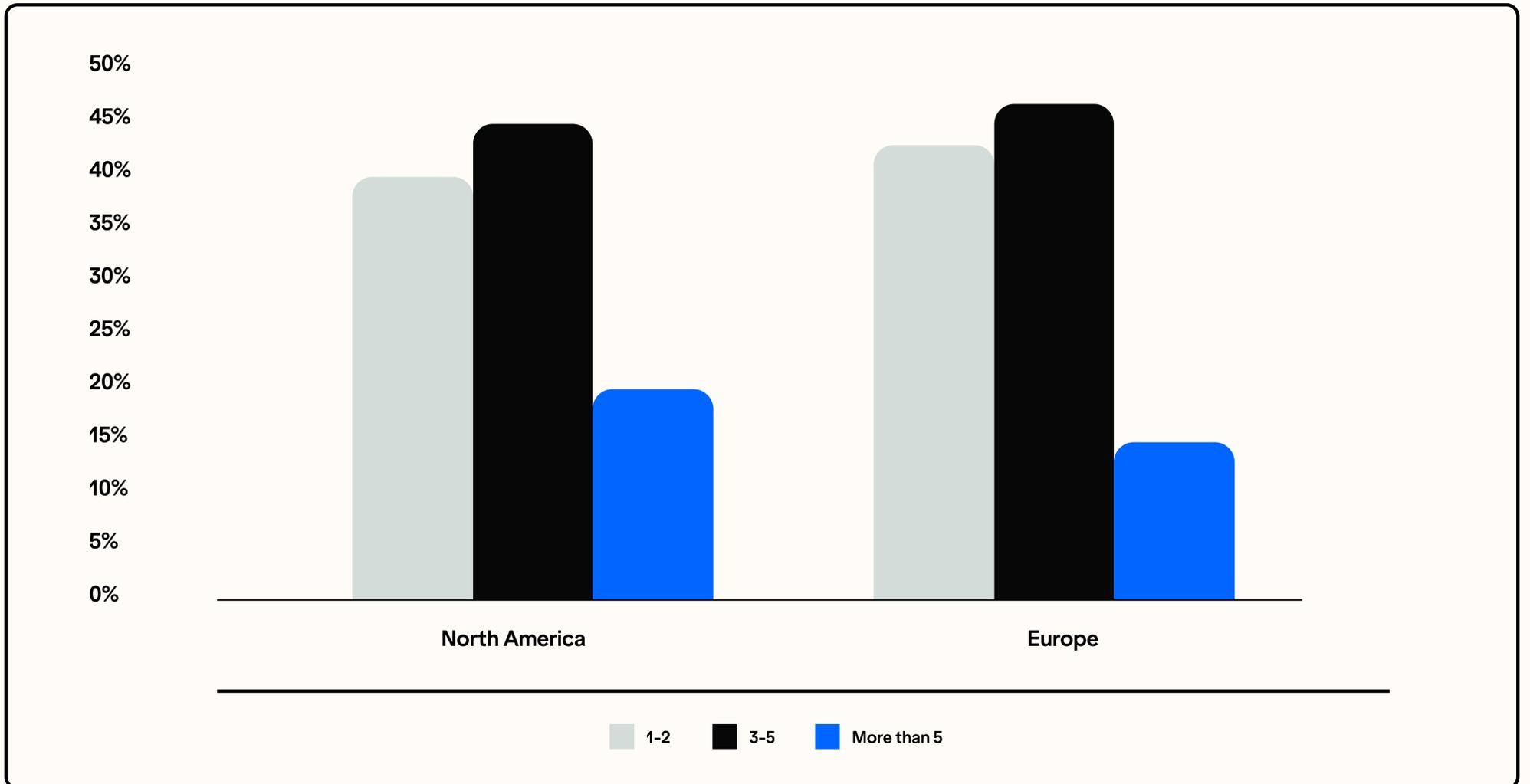
“As soon as events do open up in the UK, everything's going to go mad,” says Rob Masterson, managing director of Mustard Media – one of Europe's leading music festival and events companies, with Elrow, Lovebox and Lost & Found on its books.

“We're seeing people buy tickets for holiday-type events – those events are powering on and there's a massively pent-up consumer demand. It looks like we might see the whole summer in a month in September. I hope we have six months of instant partying as soon as it does end.”

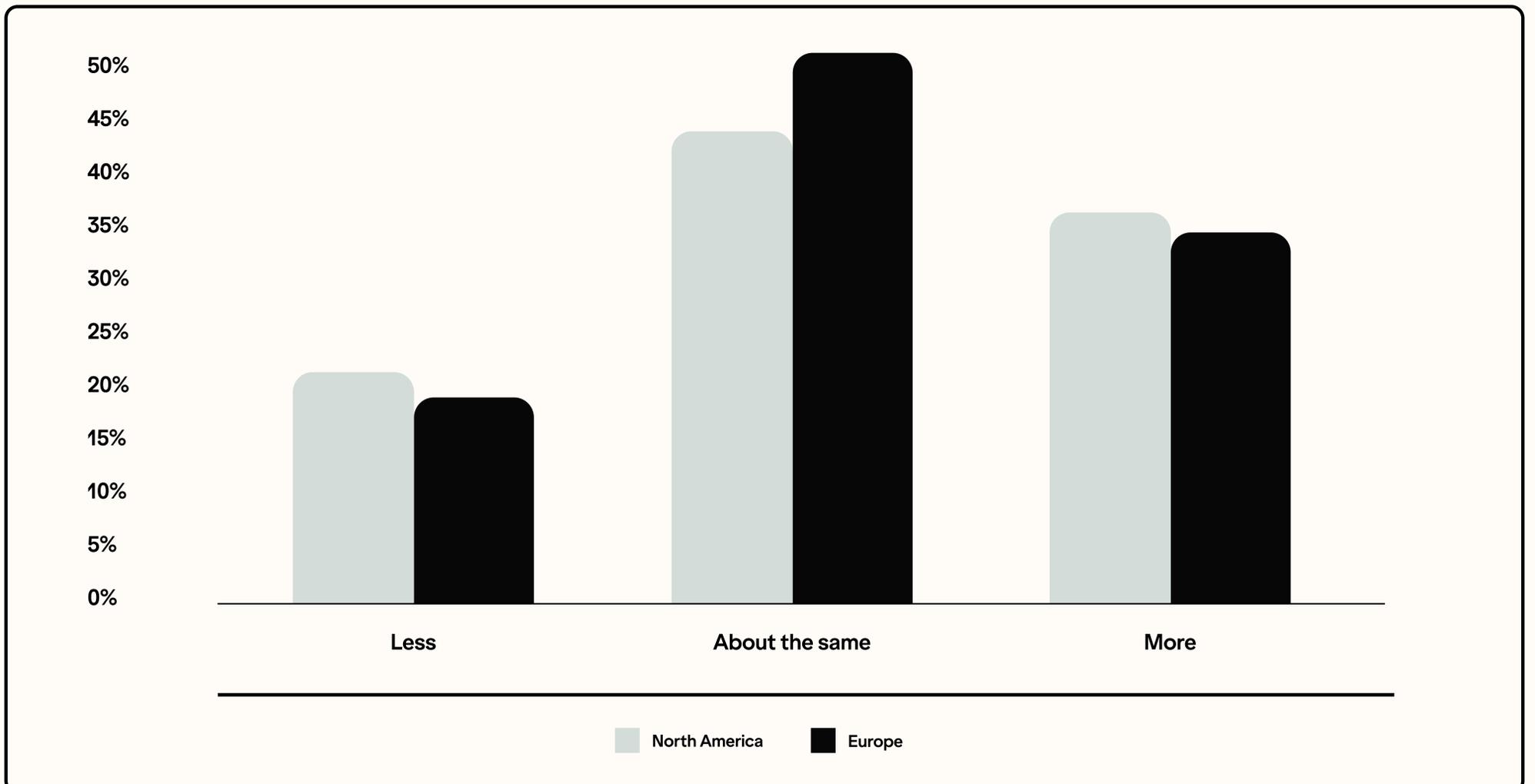
A big part of this demand comes down to missing being with other people, something that Sean Hoess, co-founder and CEO of Wanderlust – a yoga lifestyle company that operates events across 20 countries worldwide – has witnessed among his customers.

“Last year the world shut down for us and it was awful,” he says. “But at the very few live events we did manage to put on last year in Italy and Portugal, people were hugging, crying – it was a massively emotional experience. These events sold out so quickly and I'd like to say it was testament to the brand but it was simply that people were desperate to commune in some way.”

How many trips do you usually take in a year?



Are you planning to spend more or less on travel in 2021 compared to previous years?





CASE STUDY 01

THE FESTIVAL CREATING HYPE TO FUNNEL A SURGE IN DEMAND

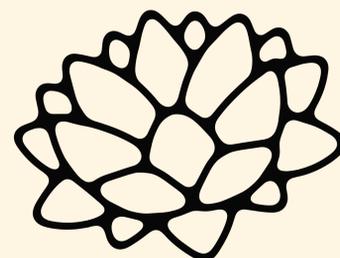


Set on Costa Rica's Pacific coast, Envision is one of the world's most unique lifestyle festivals, spanning art, culture and wellness. 2020 marked a milestone as Envision celebrated its 10th birthday, yet the event took place just weeks before coronavirus closed down the country. Forced to delay their 2021 event, the Envision team have used the downtime to recalibrate the business, diversify and focus on building hype for 2022, which – despite being a year away – has already recorded an impressive triple digit growth in ticket sales. Envision's Head of Sales - Sean Choi outlines how they did it.



Q What effect did the pandemic have on your business?

A We were super lucky – a couple of weeks after our 2020 event, Costa Rica closed its borders to international travel. If that had happened just a few weeks earlier it could have been the end of Envision but we dodged the bullet and are in a really good place. We had a successful 2020 event and have had time to plan. We scaled the team back a bit and focused on when we could hold our next event before deciding that 2022 was the earliest.



Q What informed your final decision to cancel the 2021 edition and how did you manage existing ticket holders?

A There was a lot of discussion and we weighed up our risk tolerance – what we gain versus what we lose – and it just didn't make sense to continue with 2021 plans. We usually start building our events six months before they happen – a huge undertaking with 3,000 volunteers and 500 to 1,000 paid staff, which – for a festival with only 7,000 attendees – is a significant ratio, so it could have been devastating to put all of the resources into build only to have the festival get cancelled. It could've tarnished the brand and left a lot of people feeling disappointed. We told ticket holders who had purchased 2021 tickets onsite at our 2020 event that their tickets would be automatically transferred to the next year and opened a window in which they could get a refund or transfer to any of the following three years.

Q What appetite have you witnessed for next year's event?

A When we launched for 2022 we did six times the revenue compared to the same period last year, even though the event is more than a year away. Clearly the appetite was there and the nature of Envision helped – it's a destination event and everyone has been itching for a vacation. We've done a good job in PR in the past few years that has built us up as a destination event.

Q How have you approached building hype and marketing an event taking place over a year away?

A The hype is there but it's just a matter of funnelling it into something tangible. People are just sitting in their apartments eager to go outside, so even just showing a few beautiful images of the jungle goes down well. We've doubled down on high-quality content, upped our marketing spend and did a multi-part video series with strong messaging around it.

Then our secret sauce is our limited-duration launch periods – building and building hype before launching a closed loyalty sale, then growing more hype, going on sale for two weeks then off sale... and then starting again. Looking at the data, something like 80 per cent of our sales happen at these pivotal periods of sale – at the launch, during the limited-duration sales.

I'd be remiss to not mention (and recommend!) our creative strategy agency Spekk - who have been exceptional thought partners through it all and who developed much of the strategy that has led to our success.



Q Where else have you made changes to the business?

A We were very intentional on baseline metrics for sales and basket value per attendee, making things super easy to add on at the point of purchase, including things like massages and facials and ATV excursions – crazy cool activities that people have the option to buy when they're checking out. Even though it's a year and a half away we have people signing up for these things now and through this we've increased our average basket value in a very meaningful way.

Q Has coronavirus made you rethink how you operate in future?

A We started diving pretty heavily into an online media concept adjacent to the Envision brand, incubating an idea to introduce a series of masterclasses focused around each of Envision's guiding pillars. We're also launching a physical year-round community where people can invest in condos – and it's like Envision all year round - I'm excited to see what happens there.

Q What have you learnt about the experience industry over the past 12 months?

A I've seen both how fragile and how resilient the industry is – we've seen so many companies go belly up and I feel for them, but also witnessed how some have met adversity with innovation in really commendable ways. I've also seen how necessary the experience industry is for quality of life for so many people, myself included. You don't really know what you've got until it's gone and this last year has really cemented the value for me – that moment of clarity when you're in a crowd, sweaty, having fun with people you love. It's being able to recreate those moments for people that's really special.



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EXPERIENCE ECONOMY
TREND REPORT 01



TREND 02

THE EXPERIENCE SECTOR IN PARTICULAR LOOKS SET TO EXPLODE

Surging demand for post-pandemic travel bodes well for an industry in need of good news but there are also signs of a culture shift in the way we travel.

“What we’re noticing is that as well as greater demand right now, people are also being more intentional with how they approach travel,” says Hauptert. “Travellers are becoming actively engaged and understand they have a role to play – it’s not just about entertainment. Meanwhile experience providers are recognising the role they play in guiding people towards their desired outcomes.”

Experiential travel – whether music festivals, surf camps, yoga retreats, cookery schools or other immersive skills-based escapes – has emerged as an antidote to mass tourism in recent years, reconnecting us with our original motivations for travel: to broaden our minds, challenge ourselves outside our comfort zones, meet people from different backgrounds and achieve a sense of personal transformation.

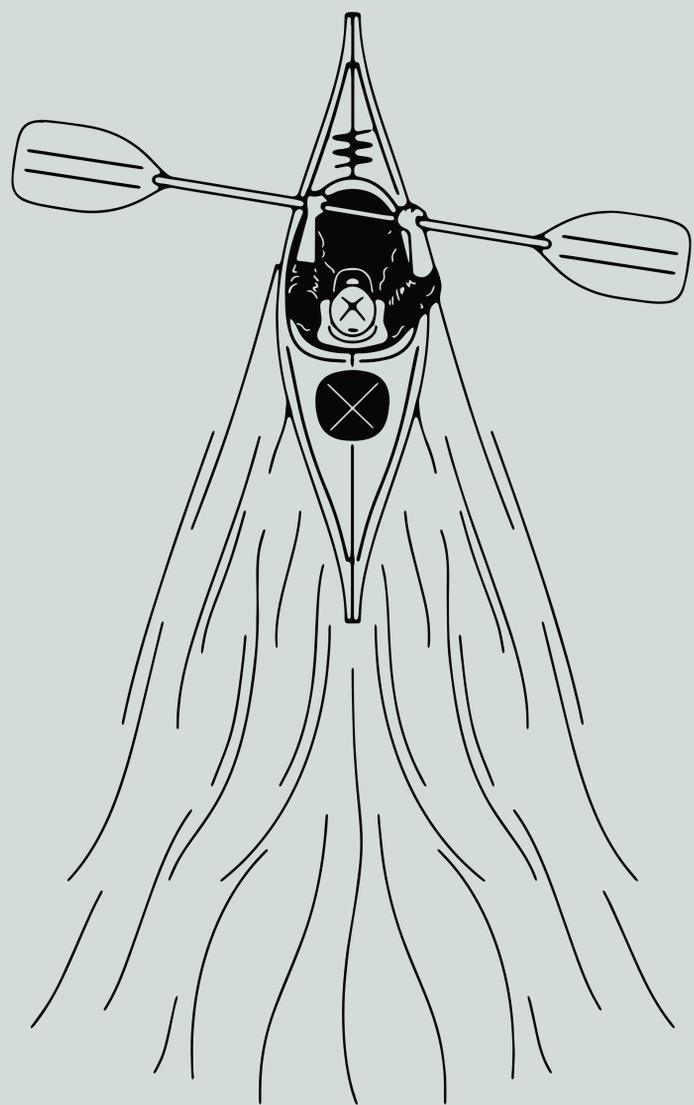
In a world where we are always “on”, there is an increasing desire for real connection and authenticity.

When asked what type of holiday our respondents would go on if they were only allowed one trip, over 85% said they would choose an experience holiday. And 86% are planning to go on an experience holiday of some sort in 2021. Festivals and active group holidays top the list of experiences our respondents are most likely to go on.

“What we’re seeing from leading-edge experience designers is a recognition that we’re heading towards a ‘transformation economy’,” adds Hauptert. “A transformation economy works towards desired outcomes – which could be learning new skills, cultivating traits of compassion and empathy, discovering new hobbies or a new way of engaging with the world. For experience providers, it’s not necessarily a product that you design but a process that you can support your guests in – the question is how can we design an experience to empower a guest to approach it with an open mind and an idea of what they want to get out of it.”

This concept first started to take off after the global financial crisis of 2008, which saw a widening income gap between generations. Following the crash, millennials, who will comprise 75% of the global workforce by 2025, began to rethink success as something other than material prosperity. Instead, happiness and having a purpose became the new success.

Expenditure on experience-related services grew four times faster than expenditure on goods between 2014 and 2016 and more than three in four millennials now choose to spend money on a desirable experience over a material possession. This shift shows a growing acknowledgement of studies by Thomas Gilovich from Cornell University, who asserted that we derive happiness from experiences, not things. Gilovich explains that one of the enemies of happiness is adaptation: after buying a material good, we are happy for only a short period of time. Experiences, however, can stay with us forever.



85%

of travellers would choose to go on an experience holiday
if they could only take one trip in 2021.

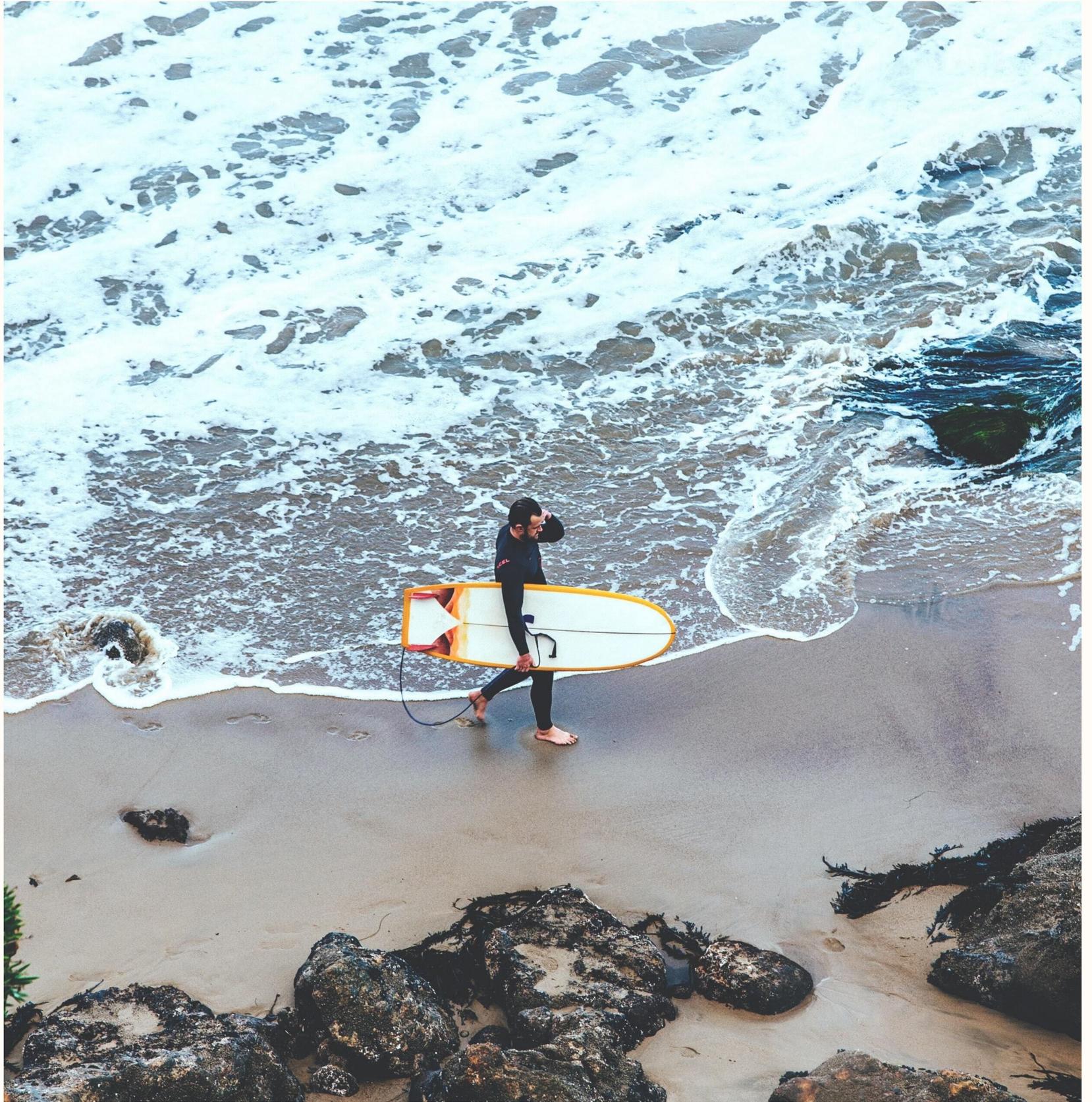
86%

of travellers are planning to go on an experience holiday in 2021.

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EXPERIENCE ECONOMY
TREND REPORT 01



TREND 03

**CORONAVIRUS WILL CONTINUE TO
SHAPE THE EXPERIENCE ECONOMY
THIS YEAR**

The international rollout of several vaccines has instilled confidence in many. However, mass vaccination remains a logistical challenge and the emergence of new mutations are likely to mean that coronavirus will continue to shape the experience economy for the foreseeable future, if not forever.

“My nature is to be optimistic and I believe that as the vaccines are administered there will be a real demand for real-life human experiences and that will benefit all event producers,” says Hoess.

“However I’m not a scientist and it’s important we listen to them – a lot are saying the jury’s still out on when this will be over and there are hundreds of millions who need vaccines.”

61% of us are either somewhat or extremely concerned about contracting Covid while travelling, with 47% somewhat concerned with becoming seriously ill.

Although young people are statistically less likely to get seriously ill, they also show a high level of concern. Interestingly, it’s low coronavirus cases and the removal of lockdown restrictions that will make North American respondents feel most comfortable resuming travel in 2021 while, for Europeans, it’s the roll-out of a vaccine that’s most likely to get them travelling again.

These findings illustrate the need for creators to reassure customers that stringent safety and hygiene measures are in place. In 2020, 71% of experience creators introduced enhanced cleaning and the mandatory wearing of masks to make their experiences coronavirus-safe, while 50% implemented temperature checks. In the future, creators may want to consider offering travel insurance packages that provide adequate care should their customers contract coronavirus abroad.

According to Masterson, consumer behaviour continues to be significantly affected by the pandemic.

“It seems that consumers are becoming more cautious. Experience companies are having to be very vocal and transparent and honest about their booking and refund policies – which is only a good thing. And in terms of bookings,

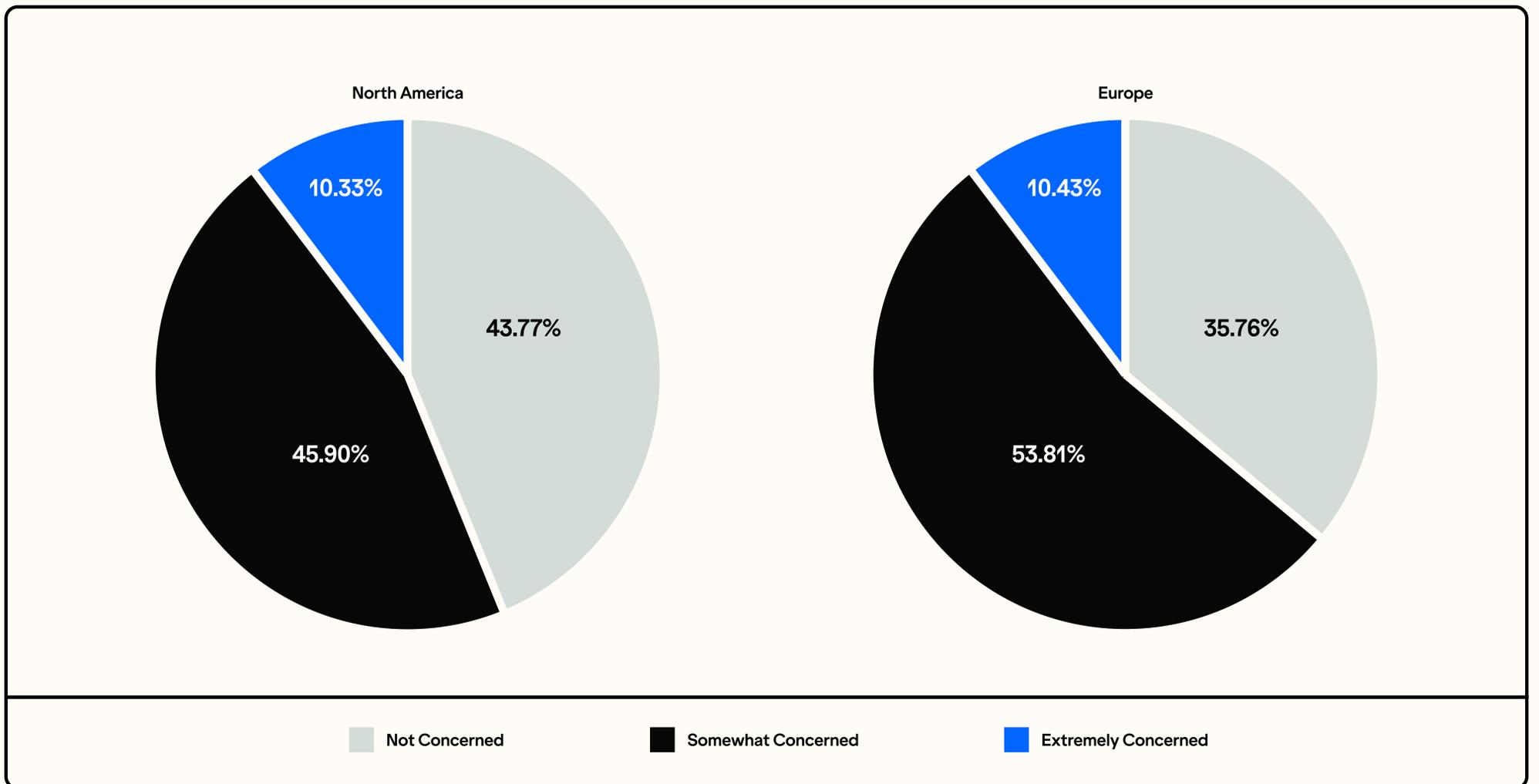
companies will need to offer payment plan options so people can book without having to risk too much cash.”

Post-pandemic, there is also an opportunity to either create new kinds of experiences (see the following case study) or adapt the length or location of the experience. 75% of experience creators have pivoted their business amid the pandemic and the majority of them are selling shorter and more local experiences that can be set up at short notice.

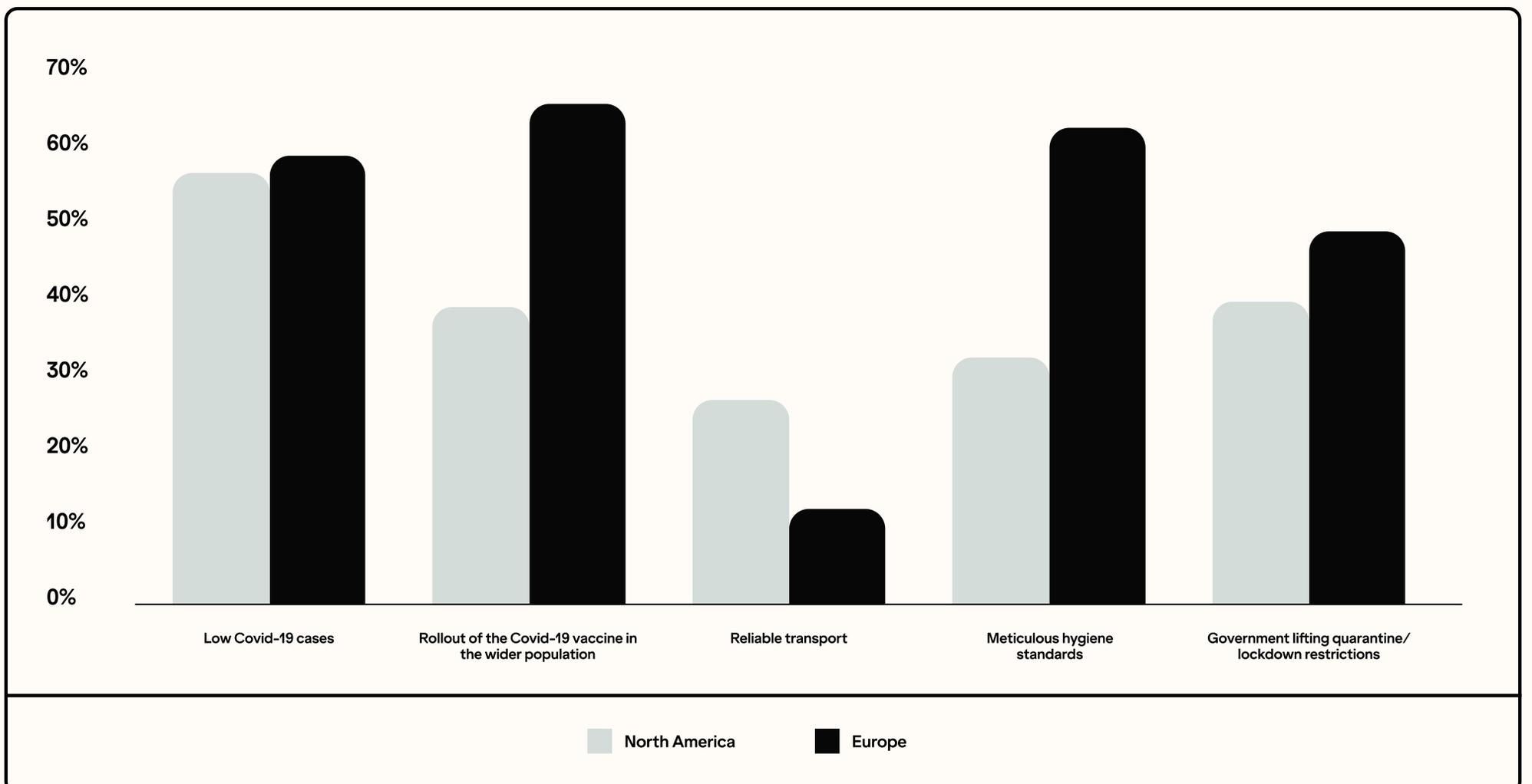
“There’s a lot of opportunity in being super reactive and being in tune with the consumer demand rollercoaster that we’re all living and breathing,” adds Masterson. “It seems one week is terrible for sales and the next week there’s some positive news and suddenly everyone is up for buying tickets. So the question is how can you maximise that and remain reactive.”



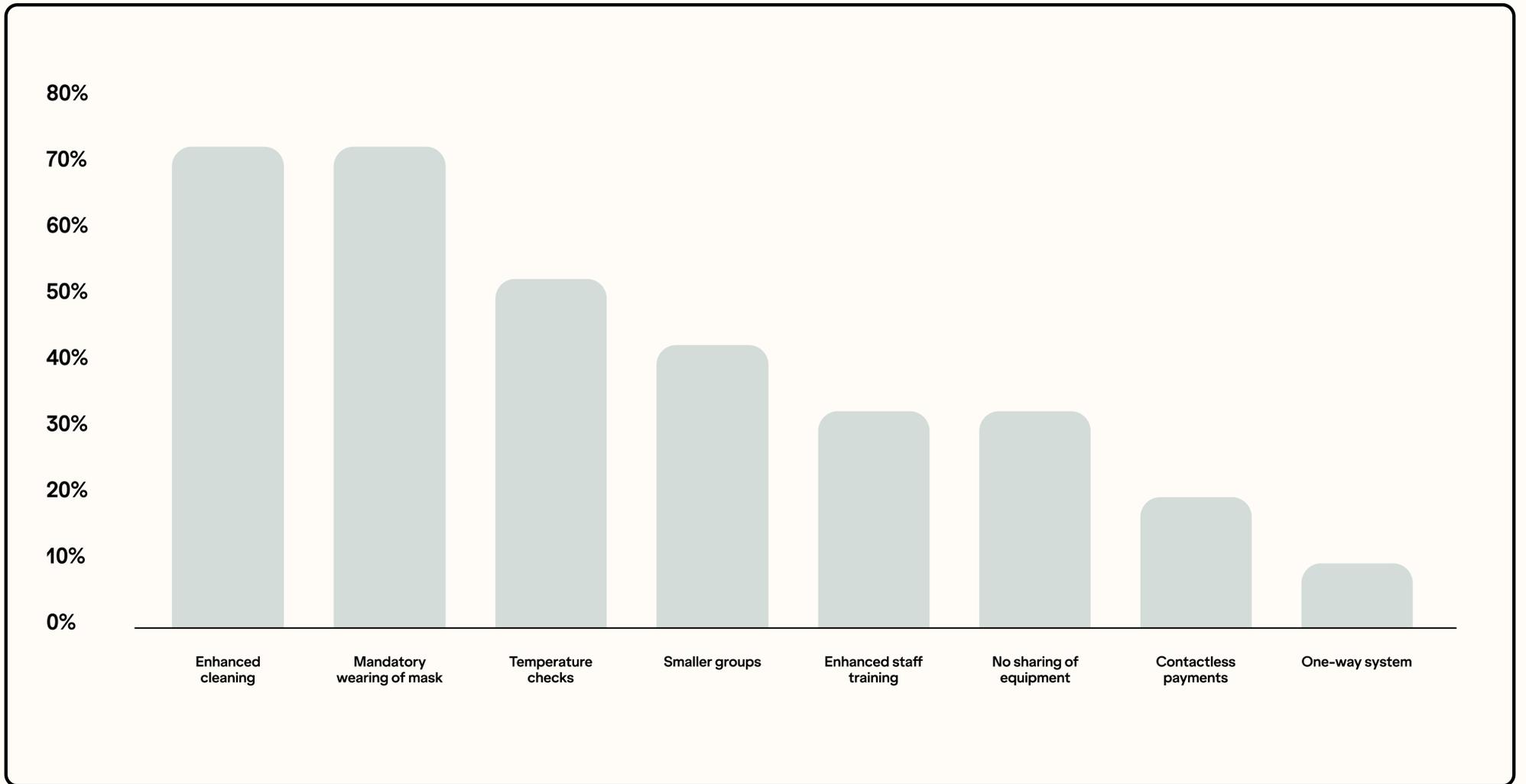
How concerned are you about contracting coronavirus while travelling?



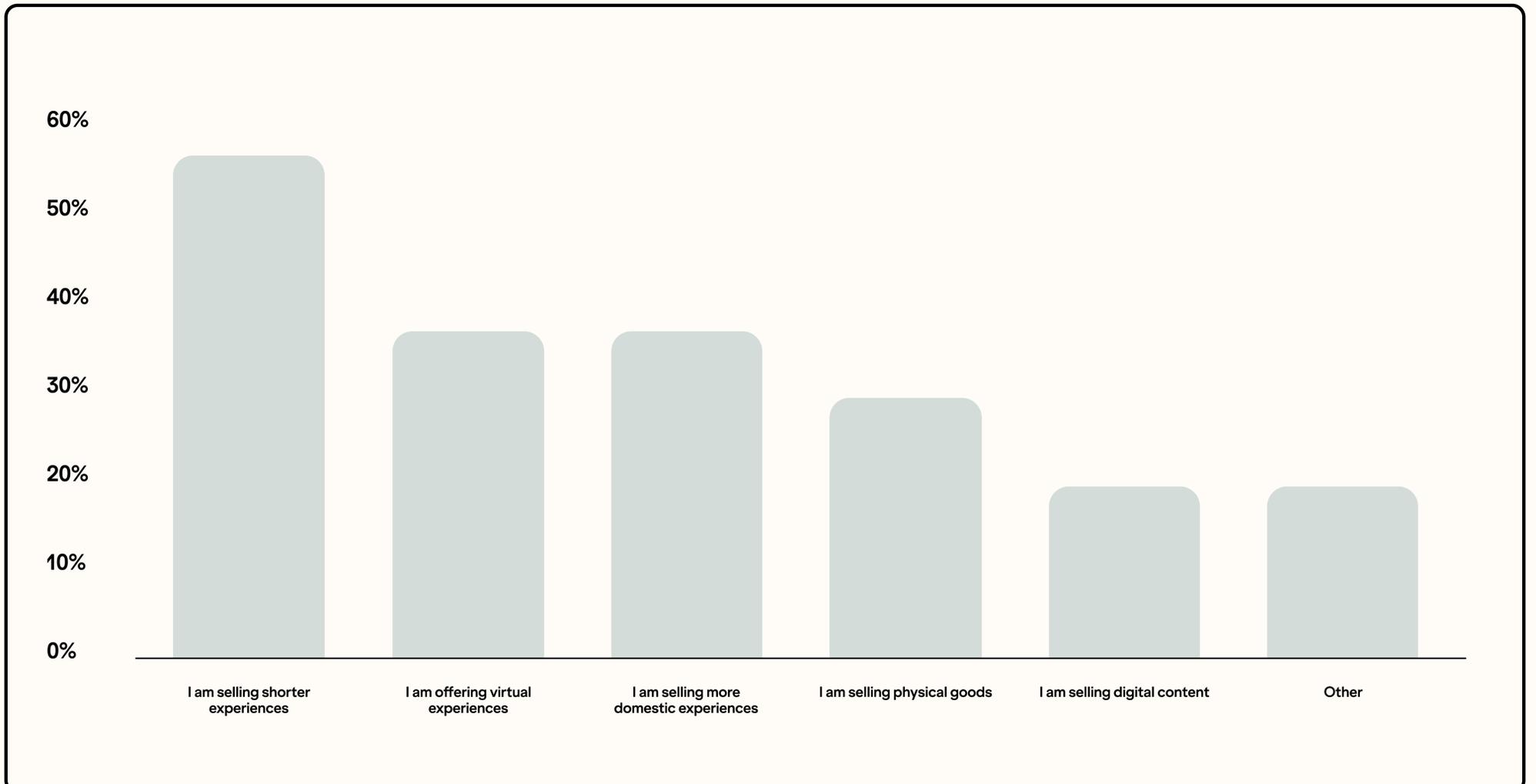
What will make you feel most confident to travel in 2021?



What steps have you taken to make your experience coronavirus-safe?



In what way have you pivoted?





CASE STUDY 02

THE EXPERIENCE BUSINESS BORN IN LOCKDOWN



With their cabin-in-the-woods concept giving urban-dwellers an opportunity to lock away their phones, disconnect devices and embrace nature, British creators Ben Elliott and Hector Hughes launched Unplugged right at the height of the pandemic. Yet, thanks to a flexible approach to bookings and their digital detox offering proving increasingly popular among a society dependent on screentime during lockdown, their business has not only remained intact but has a bright future ahead, with expansion plans already underway. We spoke to Ben Elliott to find out more.



Q What factors gave you the confidence to launch Unplugged during the pandemic?

A We were very fortunate with timing – the end of the first lockdown coincided with the time our cabin was ready, which worked out perfectly. People had suddenly gone from spending all their time in front of their screens with no differentiation between work and home to having some element of freedom, which led to plenty of interest and PR. Since then we've all had to lock down again and we have been affected but – in a way – the first lockdown proved good for us.

Q How have you set up the business to remain reactive amid shifting restrictions?

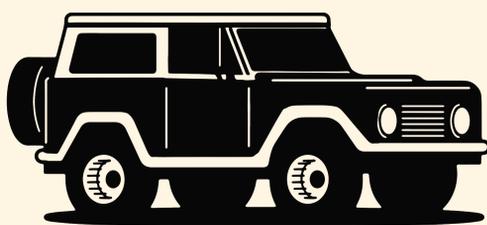
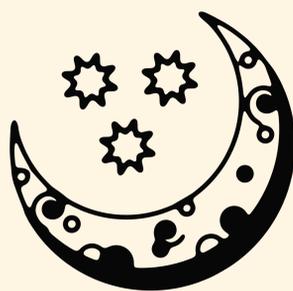
A We hope that customers reschedule rather than cancel and – on the whole – people have done just that, which is great. We've always given people flexibility to cancel and we don't charge people to cancel – we felt that giving more at this stage will reward more in the longer term. I'm sure we will have challenges when we have more cabins but for now it's very manageable.

Q What factors do you feel give your business resilience in this climate?

A Although we can't have guests in the cabins right now, what isn't going to change is people's device dependency and how much time they're spending on their screens. The demand for Unplugged should still be there – people aren't going to return to their offices and will spend more time in front of screens and we should be able to help people solve that. The whole topic of screen dependency has evolved but we're still at an early stage. We compare it to yoga 15 years ago, which was seen as a bit hippyish but is now mainstream – the same with meditation.

Q How do you anticipate 2021 will compare to last year?

A Although there is some degree of hesitation, which is understandable, bookings are continuing to come in, which is great. And we've also been able to reschedule some of those cancelled bookings for March and April. I think we'll see people continue to travel within the UK, which is a good thing for us. And there will be more of a focus on mental health and wellbeing – hopefully we can provide a way of solving some of the issues that people have faced during lockdown, which will help the industry grow massively. We want to have six cabins by the end of the year and will hopefully fill them up as we have done the first one.



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EXPERIENCE ECONOMY
TREND REPORT 01



TREND 04

CONSUMER CONFIDENCE IN GROUP TRAVEL IS BOUNCING BACK



When signing up for an experience vacation, meeting like-minded people is one of the most important aspects for travellers in our community. As social creatures, we thrive on interaction with others – something we’ve been starved of over the past 12 months.

While we may have got together for games night with our friends in the early days of the pandemic, virtual hangouts quickly became a chore. Plagued by screen fatigue, most of us made an effort to stay in touch with close family and friends, but peripheral friendships have suffered. Research by Dr Marlee Bower and Dr Roger Patulny indicates that people began to shrink their social networks during the pandemic. Meanwhile micro-interactions with people in our communities are much more challenging to facilitate via digital communications.

During the pandemic, Wanderlust pivoted to online yoga classes, with Hoess noting an interesting trend.

“And it was specifically the live classes they were choosing, for the sensation that you were practising ‘live’ with other people – it’s psychological and clearly something people needed. If we can release that human want for actual human contact – hugs, relationships, hooking up and all the fun things – then that will be good for all of us.”

Perhaps this explains why 77.4% of us would still be comfortable joining a group holiday with people outside our household in 2021. While catching up with our nearest and dearest will be a priority for many, meeting new people after a year under restrictions is sure to seem like a much needed breath of fresh air. However, with coronavirus in mind, smaller groups are preferred with 23% of people only feeling comfortable with groups of up to 5 people and 35.93% comfortable with 5-10 people. Yet 74.11% of solo travellers would be comfortable sharing a room with another participant in their experience holiday group.

77.4%

of travellers would feel comfortable joining a group holiday with people outside their household in 2021.

59%

of travellers would prefer group sizes of up to 10 people.

81%

of North American solo travellers would consider sharing a room with another participant.

70%

of European solo travellers would consider sharing a room with another participant.



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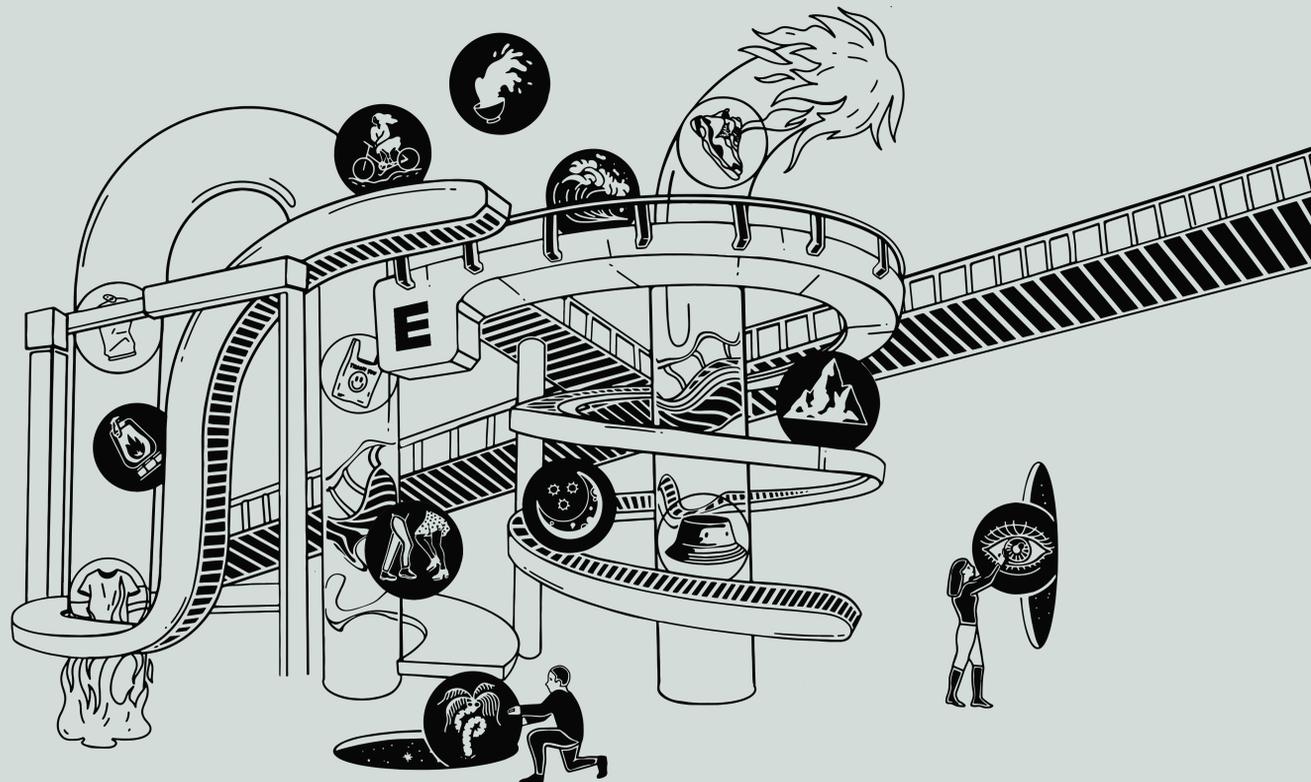


EXPERIENCE ECONOMY
TREND REPORT 01



TREND 5

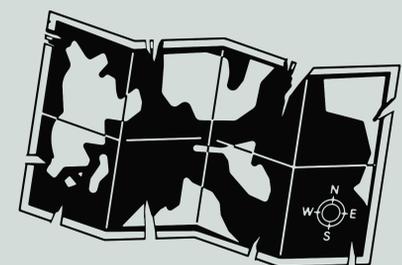
**EXPERIENCE BUSINESSES SHOWING
WILLINGNESS TO ADAPT WILL
BENEFIT THE MOST**



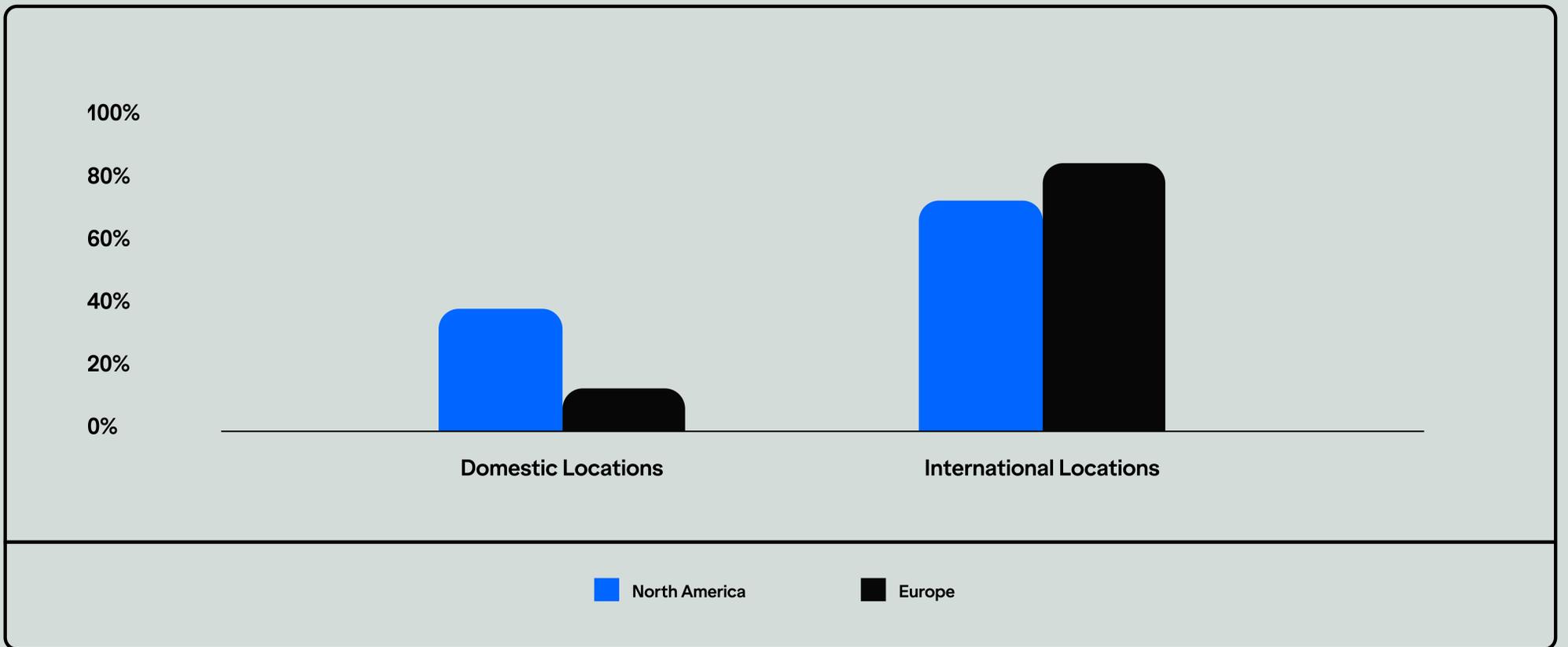
In times of uncertainty, travellers value booking flexibility more than ever. The good news is that 88.84% of travellers are still happy to put down a deposit if offered a free change of dates – confirmation that appetite for travel remains. The question seems not whether they will embark on a trip but when. Yet when asked whether they would be happy to pay a premium for booking flexibility, the response was somewhat mixed. Within our creator community, over 90% have offered a free change of dates outside their standard terms and conditions in 2020. The majority will continue to provide more flexibility in the future.

75% of creators plan to run more trips and increase their offering in 2021 to recover some revenue lost during the pandemic. Domestic experiences might be an excellent opportunity to explore, especially for North American creators. While 31.91% of North American travellers will prefer a domestic destination in 2021, only 12.35% of European travellers prefer a domestic over an international destination. Of course, the sheer scale and diversity of North America may play a role in the results. When asked why travellers would prefer a domestic location, the higher affordability of domestic locations was the top reason for North Americans. In contrast, Europeans stated that the top reason they will stay local was that they felt safer close to home.

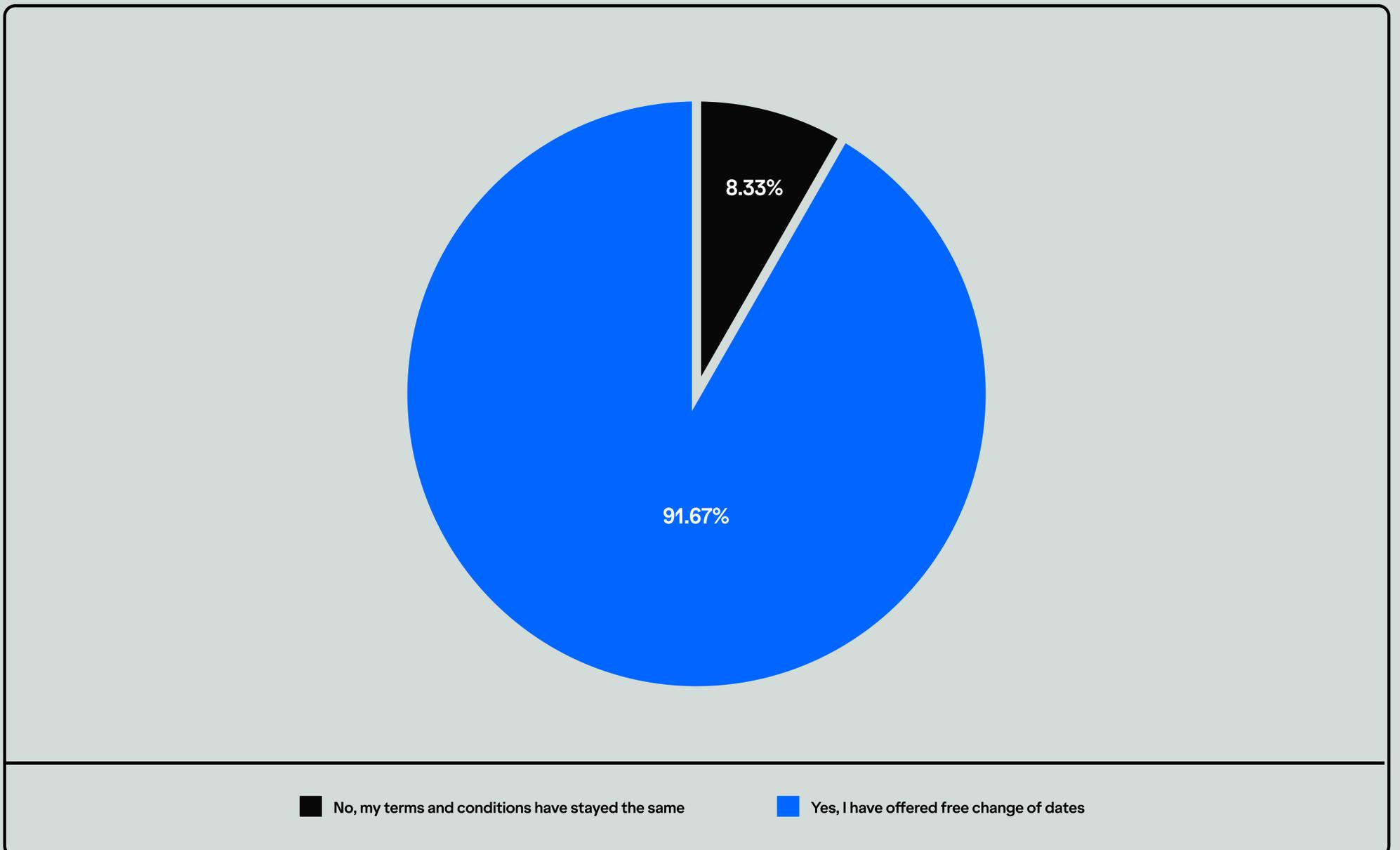
“Assuming we can emerge from this, we will emerge with a hybrid business that will potentially be more resilient,” says Hoess, who aims to further integrate live and virtual events post pandemic. “I’m planning two types of event this year. The first is something that can be socially and safely distanced – I’ll change the format to remove elements that cluster people together and make it as safe as possible. The second is a series of micro-experiences. Here I plan to test everyone before entry and again when they are there and just make sure they can have an experience that, although isn’t distanced, is as safe as possible thanks to testing on site.”



When choosing the destination, would you prefer domestic or international locations?



Have you offered your customer the option to change their booking dates outside your normal terms and conditions during coronavirus?





CASE STUDY 03

THE SURF CAMP ADAPTING ITS BUSINESS TO ENSURE SURVIVAL



Since launching in 2013, Magikvanilla Surf Camp in Ericeira, Portugal, has gone from strength to strength. With the season running from May to October, co-founders Susie and Steve were anticipating their best year yet in 2020 but the arrival of coronavirus and a national lockdown severely limited the number of guests they could host. However, blessed with a loyal customer base and by taking a bold decision with existing bookings, the future's already looking brighter. We spoke to Susie about navigating the trickiest of years.

Q How has the pandemic forced you to rethink your business plan?

A We usually open in May but because of a national lockdown we had to wait and eventually opened in June. We cut capacity by half and altered the setup so everyone had a private bathroom, unlike before. Luckily the structure had enough space to do that. Once we got our safety and hygiene certificates it ended up playing to our advantage to advertise the fact that we were following all the necessary guidelines.

Q How did you handle the postponement of bookings ?

A To start with we sent out a general email and social media messages saying that we're all living in challenging times and that we appreciate how people couldn't plan much. We said we would be doing our best to accommodate requests and changes and hopefully put people at ease. For cancellations we usually refund 50%, with the other 50% being non refundable. After a lot of thought we decided to keep that rule but informed guests

that the non-refundable 50% could be stored as credit to use at our camps at a future date. We haven't put a deadline on it and have said that doesn't have to be in 2021. And if life changes completely, our guests can also pass on or sell this option to someone else.

Q How has it affected your visitor numbers?

A Occupancy was down. Our maximum capacity last summer was 20 and we had three weeks with 18 guests, for all the other weeks the average was just eight to 10 people. Usually we have about 400-450 weeks sold each season but last year it was just 160 weeks.



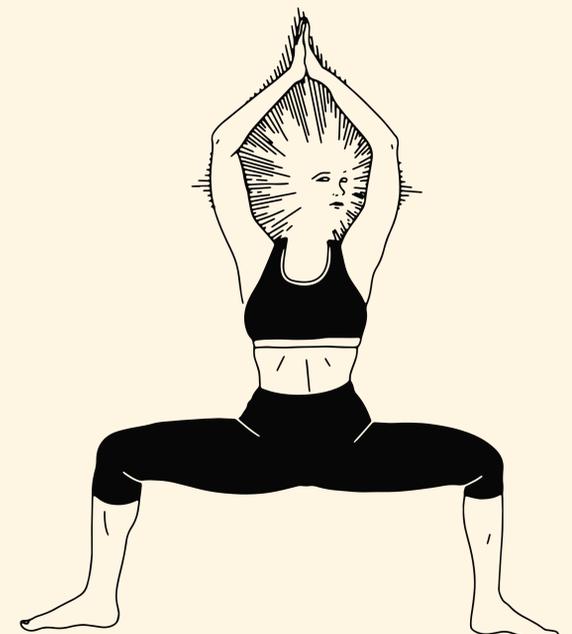


Q How did your customers receive this?

A What we have in our favour is a very loyal customer base – about 30% of all guests since 2013 have returned and we have some who come here twice a year. This helped us this year and we've only had to issue one refund – everyone else has decided to travel at a later date. And we had people paying in full, too, even after lockdown, saying they were coming in 2021 and how they wanted to support small businesses – we had a lot of people who did that for us, which was overwhelming and a really positive experience.

Q How have you noticed customer behaviour change since the arrival of the pandemic?

A Our core booking period is usually from February to May and then a second wave in August who book for September or October. But this year there was a lot more last-minute booking – including someone from the Emirates, which we've never had before. He booked two days before he arrived. A lot of people chose to hire cars and many drove from Spain, France, Italy and Germany. People also decided to take a longer holiday. Another thing we noticed was that people would book for a week and then extend for an additional two or three weeks – maybe they got news of their country going into lockdown or had plans for travel elsewhere that had to change so they'd extend with us. We had a lot of people extending their stays, including one who hasn't left yet!



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EXPERIENCE ECONOMY
TREND REPORT 01



TREND 06

**THE GLOBAL EXPERIENCE
COMMUNITY IS OPTIMISTIC
FOR WHAT THE FUTURE HOLDS**



82.78% of North American respondents felt either somewhat optimistic or extremely optimistic that travel would return to normal in 2021 compared to 69.93% of Europeans. It is not only consumer confidence that is bouncing back, though. 75% of creators said they felt optimistic about their experience business in 2021 and 58.3% expect their business revenues to fully recover to pre-coronavirus levels within the next 12-24 months.

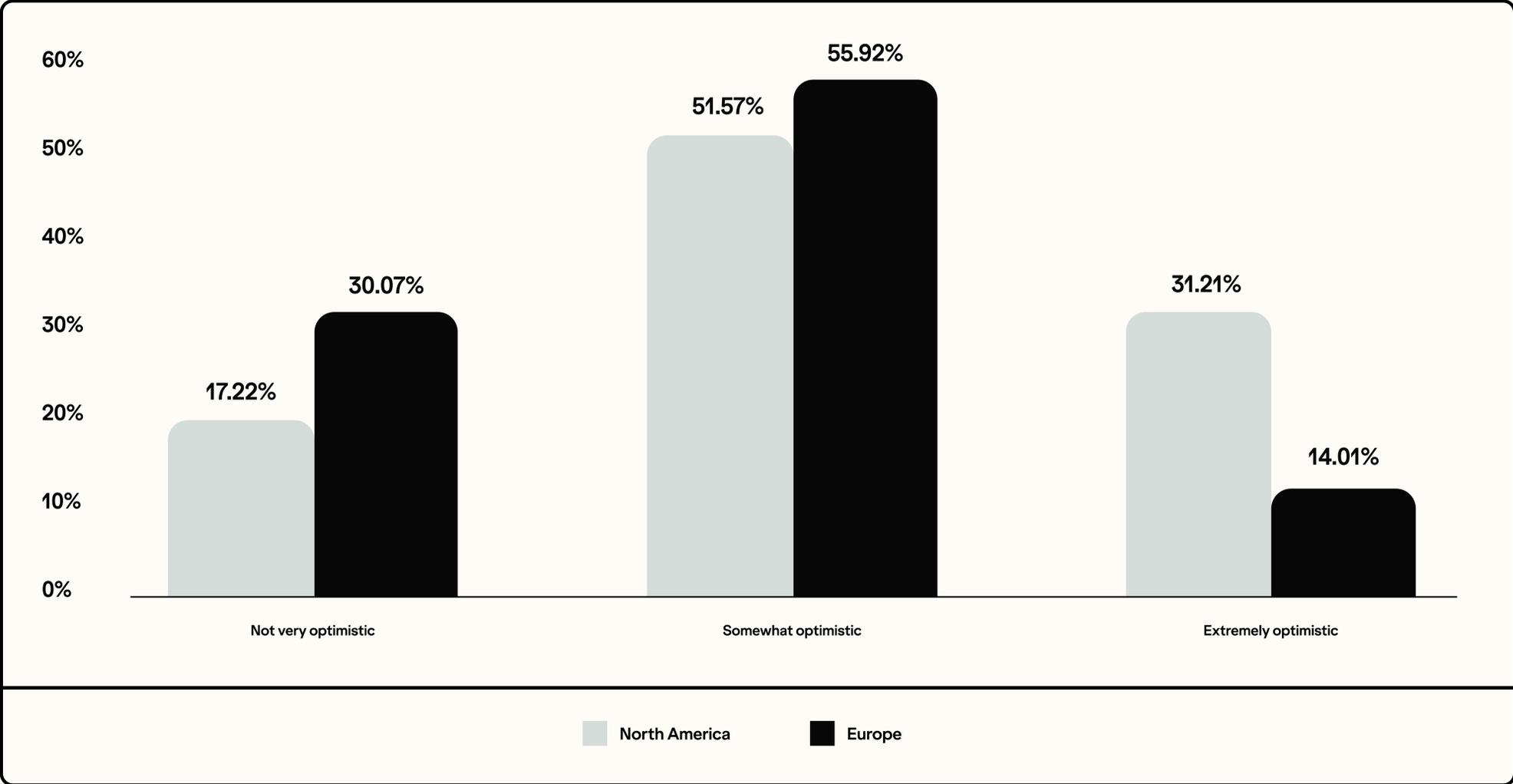
This is backed up by a recent McKinsey report that notes that ‘tours and activities’ has been one of the fastest-growing categories for venture-capital investment in travel, something that indicates strong post-pandemic confidence in the sector. It concludes that once people feel safe to travel in groups again, then the demand will come back – good news for both creators and consumers in the year ahead.

“The events sector has proved an extremely innovative sector despite being one of the worst hit. Everyone’s had a really tough time but people have been able to innovate and come up with ways to keep themselves afloat,” says Masterson, who has already witnessed a shift in the music event industry that means a swifter recovery is likely. “The whole industry is becoming more flexible and everyone’s playing ball. Artists are now willing to be booked on the basis that they would play one show and if it gets rescheduled it will be on those dates.”

With the risk of cancellations and rescheduled events more evenly shared throughout suppliers and event producers, wary experience creators will be more inclined to get the show back on the road. “Travel is going to be cheap for a while, which will make it a lot more affordable to get to events – this is especially good for destination type events,” says Hoess. “If the risk gets shared by everyone, it makes a huge difference. At a time when cancellations and postponements are still very likely, if experience creators like me can keep our risk low, it’ll be worth putting up the initial stake to get an event going.”



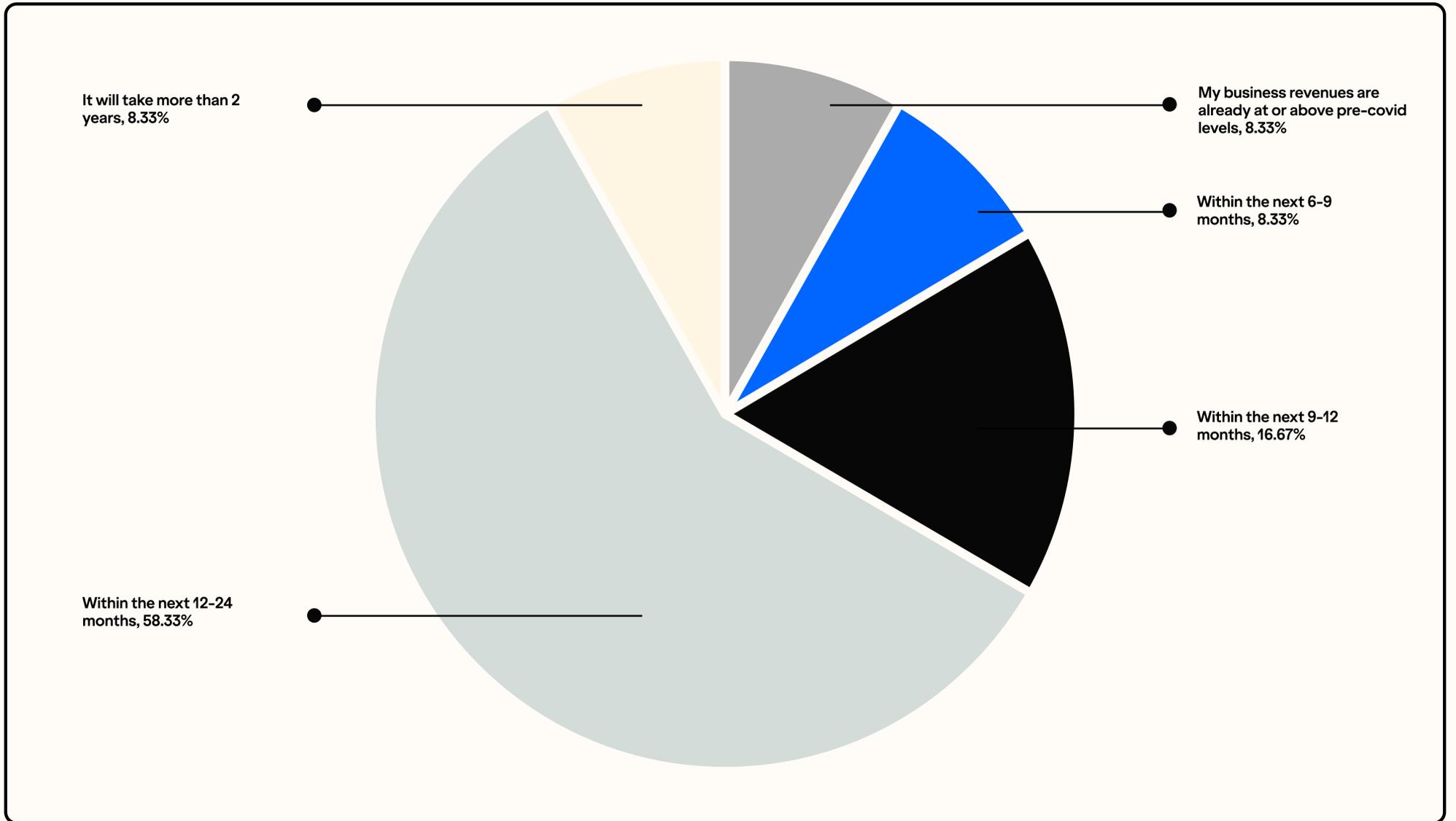
How optimistic do you feel about travel returning to normal in 2021?



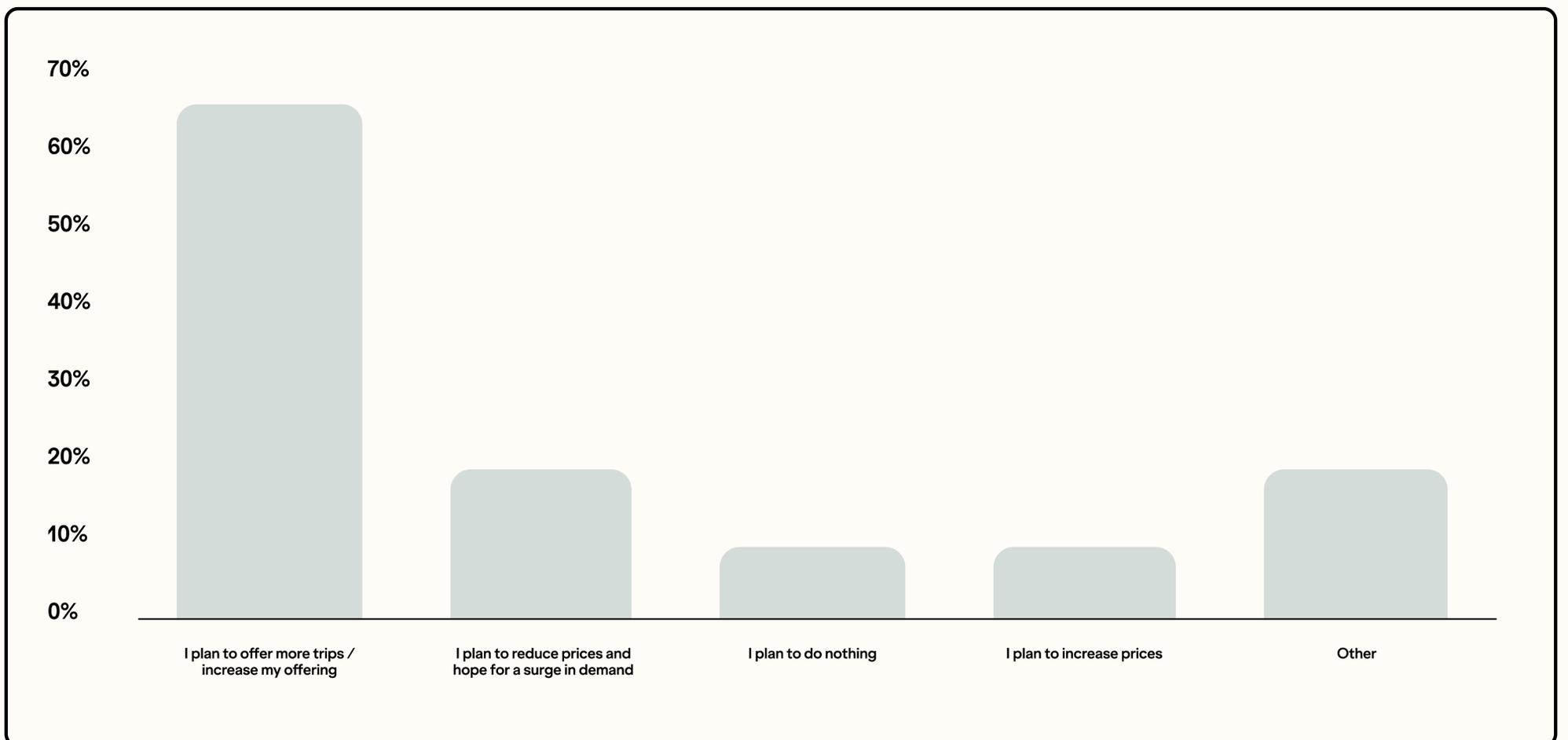
75%

of creators felt optimistic about their experience business in 2021

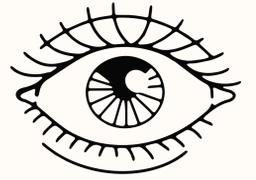
When do you think your experience business revenues will fully recover to pre-Covid levels?



If your revenue in 2020 has suffered from the pandemic, how are you planning to recoup your revenue in 2021?



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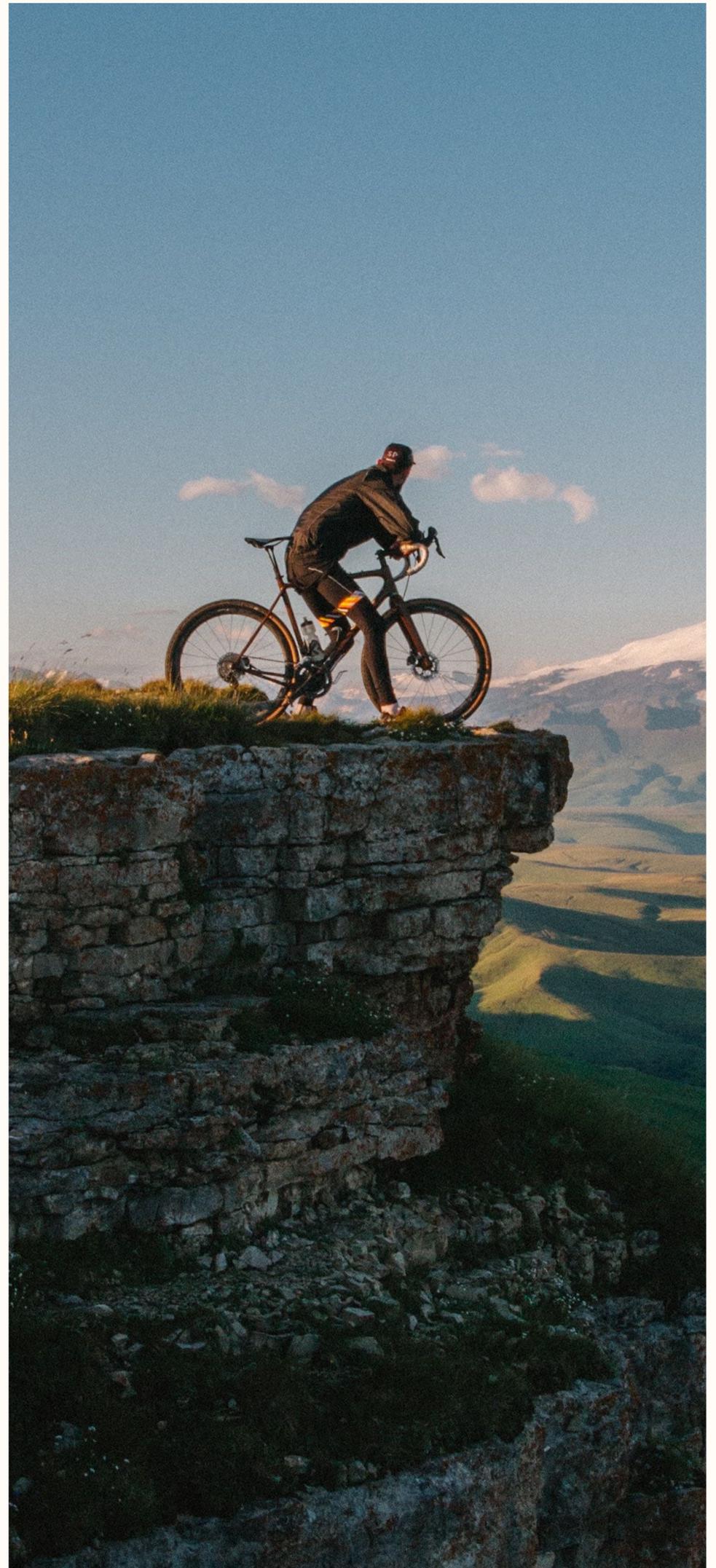
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