

**WHITE PAPER:**

# Destination selection during the traveler's path to purchase

Understanding how British, American and Canadian travel  
consumers choose their travel destination



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## INTRODUCTION: A world of options

For many travelers, picking where to go on their next trip can be just as exciting as getting there. Today's travel shoppers are more attuned to the plethora of choices than ever. Inundated by media, they realize that there are nearly endless possibilities when it comes to choosing a destination and planning a trip.

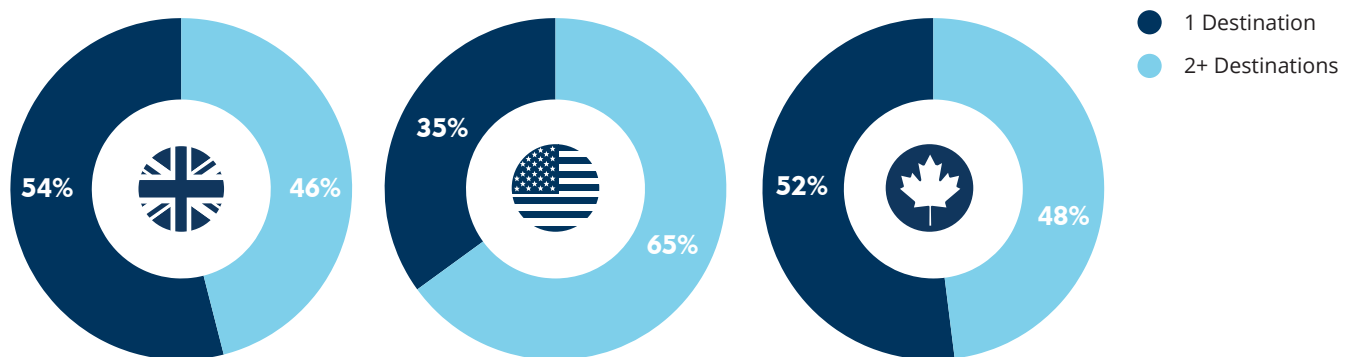
Prospective travelers research multiple locations as they search for inspiration and begin to narrow their choices. Along the way, they turn to various resources, both online and offline. Many travel consumers continue examining different destination options even as they get closer to finalizing their travel purchase, continuing to tap into information from a variety of different places.

Looking specifically at digital travel shoppers in the U.K., U.S. and Canada, it is apparent that choosing a destination is a lengthy and involved process. Understanding when and where travel consumers search for ideas and information sheds light on how to effectively influence travelers' decisions as they plan their next trip.

## CHOOSING A DESTINATION: Where the travel journey really begins

Across the U.K., U.S. and Canada, a significant number of travel shoppers investigate multiple destinations at the start of their booking journey. Specifically, more than half of travel shoppers in the U.K. and Canada begin their trip planning with more than one destination in mind (see Figure 1). In the U.S., just over one-third of travelers weigh up multiple options at the outset. It is hypothesized that variances in vacation time account for this difference. Since Americans typically have less vacation time than their counterparts in the U.K. and Canada, travel is likely an even more highly considered purchase.

Figure 1: Number of Destinations Considered

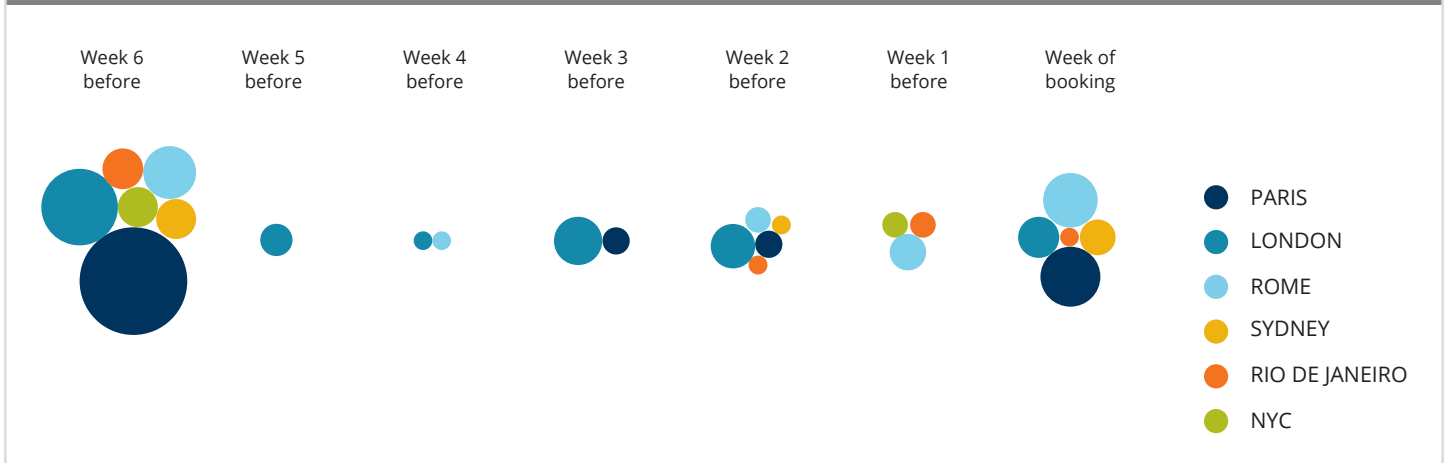


Source: comScore Survey, 2016

## Choosing a Destination: Where the travel journey really begins (continued)

With so many travel consumers undecided on their destination, most pursue time-consuming research. The sample search behaviour of a travel shopper, found in Figure 2, illustrates how bookers can keep multiple destinations in mind from beginning to end — even during the week of booking.

**Figure 2: Destination Research – Sample Traveler Search**



Source: comScore U.S. Desktop Panel, Custom Path to Booking Visitation Analysis Using comScore Proximity Categorization, Weekly Travel Pages, Dec '15 – Feb '16, Online Travel Booker Segment.

While **65% of Americans** start with one destination in mind, that doesn't mean there isn't an opportunity to influence that destination decision.

See a sample Path to Purchase of an American Traveler:

<http://bit.ly/american-travelerinfographic>



This traveler starts their research thinking about destinations across the globe, including Europe, the U.S., South America and Australia. Specifically, they research the cities of Rome, London, Paris, New York, Rio de Janeiro and Sydney. The user narrows in on London, Rome and Paris as their research journey continues, but then they reintroduce other destinations just two weeks before booking. Right up until the week of purchase, the travel shopper continues to engage with online information about locations on three different continents.

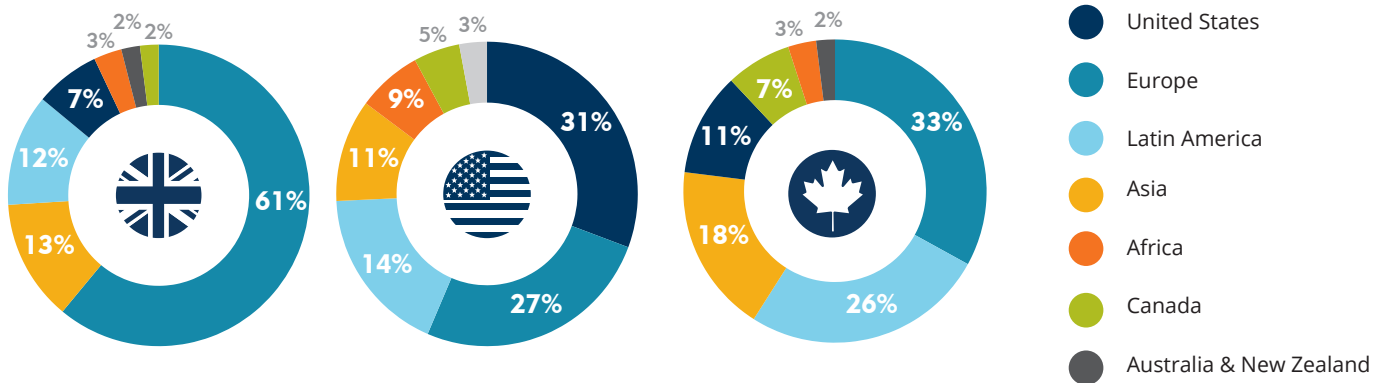
As depicted, engagement with travel content remains strong across the entire booking path as consumers examine different destinations. Even at the end of the purchase funnel, many travel consumers entertain a variety of locations before finalizing their plans, as is the case in Figure 2. Accordingly, there is a significant opportunity for travel marketers to influence purchases, even for travelers who start the process with a pre-determined destination in mind.

## International vs. domestic travel: Global region research

Travelers from the U.K., U.S. and Canada consider wide-ranging destinations when planning a trip. American travelers are two times more likely to travel domestically, while bookers from the U.K. and Canada are two times more likely to set out for international destinations.<sup>1</sup>

Whether or not travelers choose to travel with passport in hand, they tend to research locations around the globe. For U.K., U.S. and Canadian bookers alike, Europe ranks in the top three regions researched (see Figure 3). At 61%, U.K. travel shoppers research Europe the most of the three countries.

**Figure 3: Destination Research by Region**



Source: comScore UK, US, CA Desktop Panels, Custom Path to Booking Visitation Analysis Using comScore Proximity Categorization, Total Travel Pages Across 45 Day Booking Path, Online Travel Booker Segment: December 2015-February 2016.

Among Canadian travel shoppers, Europe is the most popular destination to research at 33%, followed by Latin America at 26%. Cuba and Mexico are among the most frequently booked destinations within Latin America for Canadian travelers.

This search behavioral data reveals that travel consumers look at multiple regions around the world during their trip planning. As they think about possible trip locations during the digital journey, travel shoppers search for and are exposed to a massive amount of online content. As part of this process, consumers turn to several online resources.

Source 1: comScore Survey, 2016

## DESTINATION SELECTION: Where travelers turn to make destination decisions

For travel shoppers from the U.K., U.S. and Canada, selecting a destination is typically not a rash or spur-of-the-moment decision. For most, it is a highly-considered process. This is apparent when looking at the number of visits to travel sites that the average booker makes in the seven weeks leading up to a hotel, air or package purchase.

Canadian travelers conduct the most research, logging 161 visits to travel sites during the seven-week period. American shoppers follow with 140 visits on average, followed by 121 travel site visits for the average British traveler (see Figure 4).



Source: comScore UK, US and Canada Desktop Panel, Custom Path to Booking Visitation Analysis, Weekly Visits per User, Dec '15 – Feb '16.

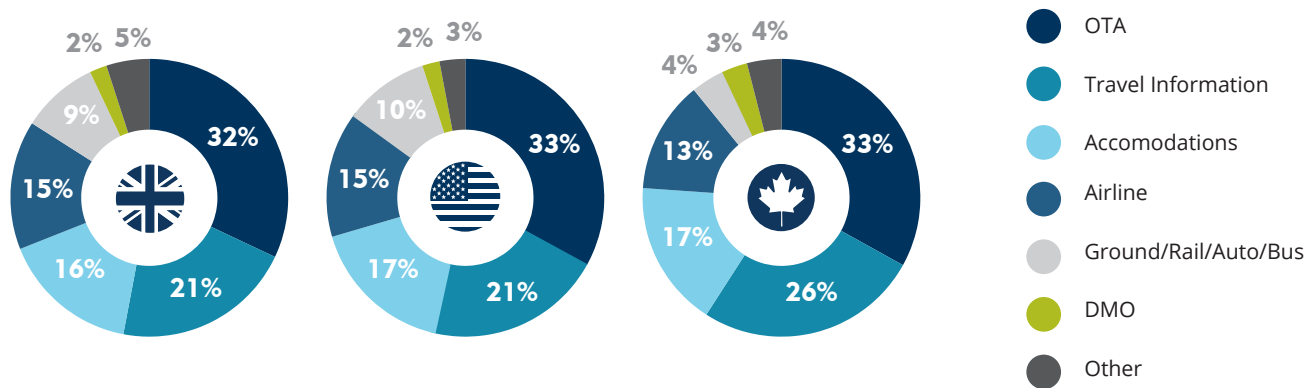
Breaking this down to a weekly basis, average travel site visits per week range from 17 to 23 across the three markets.<sup>2</sup> Clearly, travelers' research — and their exposure to travel content — is intense. As Figure 5 shows, travel consumers across markets engage with content via online travel agencies (OTAs) more than any other resource during the 45 days leading up to a travel purchase. For bookers in the U.S. and Canada, OTAs account for 33% of share to online sites and 32% for the U.K.

Across all three markets, travel information sites (such as Tripadvisor.com and Nationalgeographic.com) play the second-largest role in terms of online resources. Travel information sites account for 26% of site visits in Canada and 21% in both the U.K. and U.S.

Source 2: comScore UK, US and Canada Desktop Panel, Custom Path to Booking Visitation Analysis, Weekly Visits per User, Dec '15 – Feb '16.

## Destination selection: Where travelers turn to make destination decisions (continued)

Figure 5: Resource Usage: Online Travel Content Visitation Share



Source: comScore UK, US and CA Desktop Panels, Custom Path to Booking Visitation Analysis & Categorization, Share of Total Visits per User Across 45 Day Path, Dec '15 – Feb '16, Custom Travel Booker Audience Segment.

Following OTAs and travel information sites, travel shoppers turn next to hotel sites, which claim 17% of share in the U.S. and Canada and 16% in the U.K.

Other resources that travelers use include airline sites, ground/rail/auto/bus sites and destination marketing organization sites, which have the lowest visitation share for the U.K., U.S. and Canada at 2% to 3%.

Given that OTAs have the most significant reach across these markets, they also have the strongest ability to influence destination decisions.

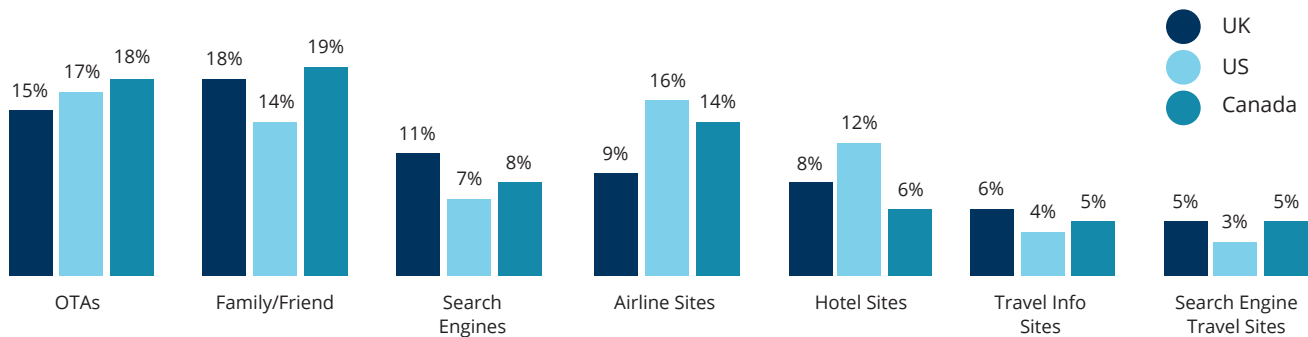
### ► Influential resources impacting destination decisions

With more than half of travel shoppers in the U.K. and Canada and just over one-third in the U.S. considering multiple destinations, there are a number of resources that impact which one they pick.

In terms of destination selection, recommendations from family and friends along with OTAs exert the strongest force (see Figure 6). Eighteen percent of U.K. bookers, 14% of U.S. bookers and 19% of Canadian bookers report that friends and family influence their decision. While friends and family are a significant offline resource, online resources — and OTAs specifically — play a strong role as well.

Looking at each of the three markets individually, U.K. travel shoppers identify friends and family as the most influential (18%) when deciding where to go, followed by OTAs at 15% and search engines at 11%.

Figure 6: Leading Resources for Destination Selection



Source: comScore Survey, 2016

OTAs are the most influential resource for U.S. travelers with 17% attributing their destination selection to online travel agencies. Airline sites follow closely at 16% for American travelers. Recommendations from friends and family are the third most influential for this market at 14%.

Finally, for Canadian bookers, friends and family lead at 19%. At 18%, OTAs nearly match the influence of personal recommendations. Airline sites play the third-strongest role at 14% for Canadian travelers.

As travelers contemplate where their next trip will be, a combination of offline and online resources impact their ultimate decision. Offline, friends and family have the most influence. Online, OTAs claim the majority of visitation share throughout the booking path (as seen in Figure 5) for all three markets.

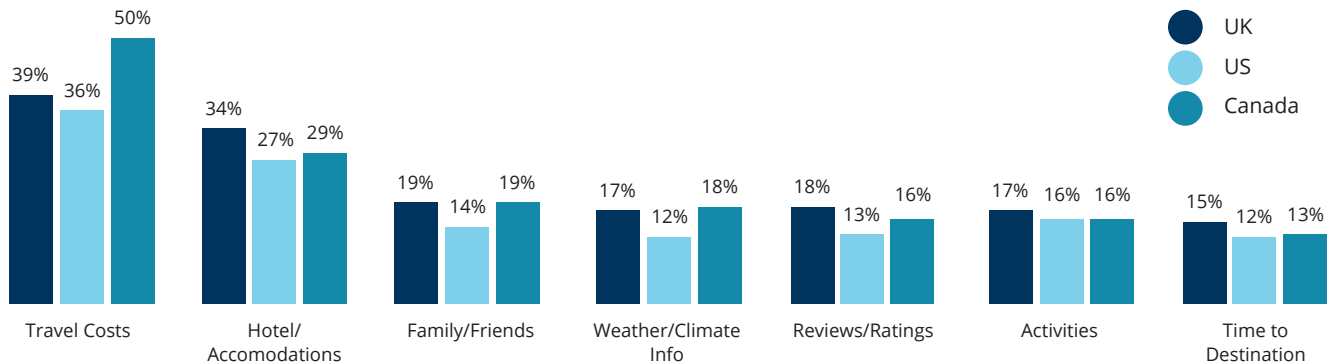
### ▶ Leading factors impacting destination decisions

As they move through the purchase cycle, travel shoppers count on different resources for ideas and suggestions on where to go. But when it comes to making a final decision, there is critical information that plays an influential role for travel shoppers in all three markets.

Not surprisingly, the top factor in destination selection across the three countries is cost (see Figure 7). Among U.K. travel bookers, 39% report travel costs as the most critical factor in their ultimate destination. Similarly, cost comes in at 36% for U.S. consumers. Canadian travel bookers are the most cost-conscious — with 50% citing cost, budget far outweighs other factors for travel shoppers in Canada.



Figure 7: Factors Influencing Travelers' Destination Decisions



Source: comScore Survey, 2016

Behind budget considerations, travelers from all three markets consider hotel/accommodation options when deciding where to go. Thirty-four percent of U.K. bookers, 27% of U.S. bookers and 29% of Canadian bookers consider hotel/accommodation options as paramount to their destination decision.

Additional factors that travelers consider include recommendations from family and friends, information about the weather and climate, reviews and ratings, activities, travel time to the destination and available loyalty programs. However, these play a lesser role when it comes to making the final decision about where to go.

Travelers across markets prioritize budget and accommodation information. This explains the high visitation rates for OTAs, hotel sites and airline sites, where cost information is readily available.

## RISING DIGITAL TRAVEL CONTENT CONSUMPTION

More and more, today's travelers are digitally savvy. Across markets, they spend a significant and ever growing amount of time online engaging with travel-specific content. This reflects how intricate the decision-making process is for travel shoppers while also revealing the extensive reach — and potential — of the digital travel landscape.

Among digital users in the U.K., 75% consume travel content, spending an average of 2.4 billion minutes per month on travel content collectively. That represents a 44% increase year over year.<sup>3</sup>

## Rising digital travel content consumption (continued)



Digital users  
who consume  
travel content



**2.4  
BILLION**  
minutes/month

Minutes spent  
on travel



**44%**  
year-over-year  
increase

Travel consumption  
growth

In the U.S., 60% of digital users interact with travel content. They consume even more travel content than British consumers, spending 8.7 billion minutes per month. As with the U.K., digital travel consumption is trending upward with consumption representing a 41% year-over-year increase.<sup>4</sup>



Digital users  
who consume  
travel content



**8.7  
BILLION**  
minutes/month

Minutes spent  
on travel



**41%**  
year-over-year  
increase

Travel consumption  
growth

In Canada, 70% of digital users engage with travel content specifically. They spend 806 million minutes on travel collectively per month, an increase of 18% year over year.<sup>5</sup>



Digital users  
who consume  
travel content



**806  
MILLION**  
minutes/month

Minutes spent  
on travel



**18%**  
year-over-year  
increase

Travel consumption  
growth

As travel consumers research, plan and make travel purchases, they are receptive to relevant messages at touchpoints throughout the entire booking cycle. With such a large audience that actively interacts with travel content online, there is a significant opportunity to connect with targeted, qualified consumers in the digital space to influence destination decisions.

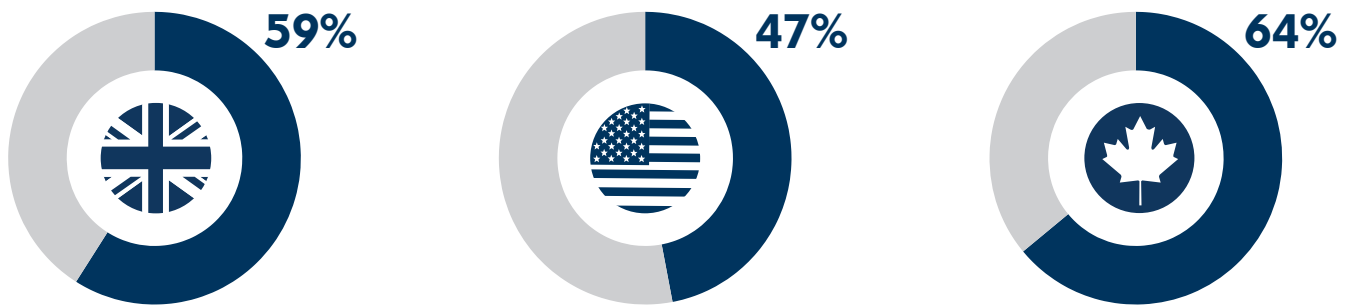
Source 3, 4, 5: comScore Media Metrix Multi-Platform Media Trend Reporting, UK, US, CA, January 2015 – April 2016 data, Total Minutes.

## Online advertising's impact on destination selection

There is fierce competition for digital travel consumers' attention as they navigate the online space to research and choose trip locations. This raises the question of how and where marketing and specifically advertising efforts can make the most potential impact.

Online travel advertising effectively reaches digital shoppers. Nearly half (47%) of American travel bookers specifically recall travel advertising while researching or making a travel purchase (see Figure 8). In the other markets, more than half of shoppers remember travel-related ads. With 59% of U.K. bookers and 64% of Canadian bookers recalling advertising, it is apparent that relevant targeting and messaging can penetrate a crowded marketplace.

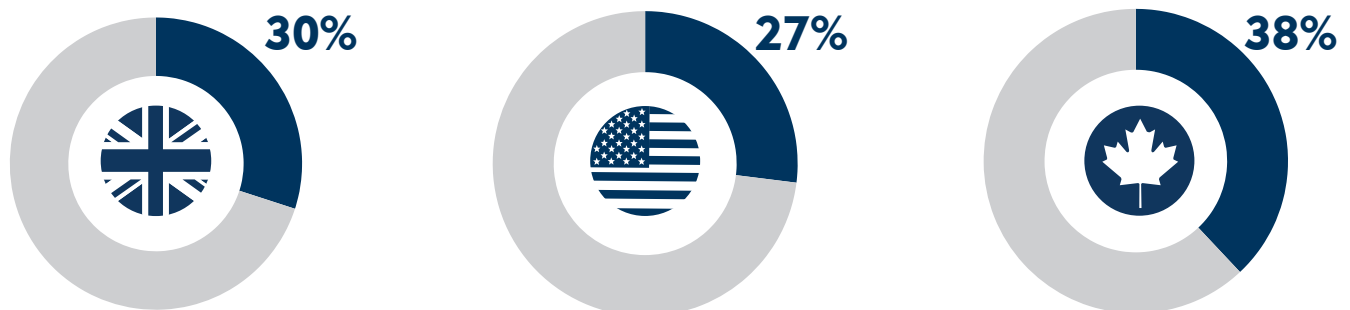
**Figure 8: Travel Bookers Who Recall Travel Ads**



Source: comScore Survey, 2016

While Figure 8 shows that advertising can effectively reach people as they search for travel ideas and information, it can also impact their destination decision. Specifically, advertising is influential for destination selection for nearly one-third of online travel bookers in the U.K. and U.S. and even more (38%) in Canada (see Figure 9).

**Figure 9: Travel Bookers Influenced by Advertising When Considering Multiple Locations**



Source: comScore Survey, 2016

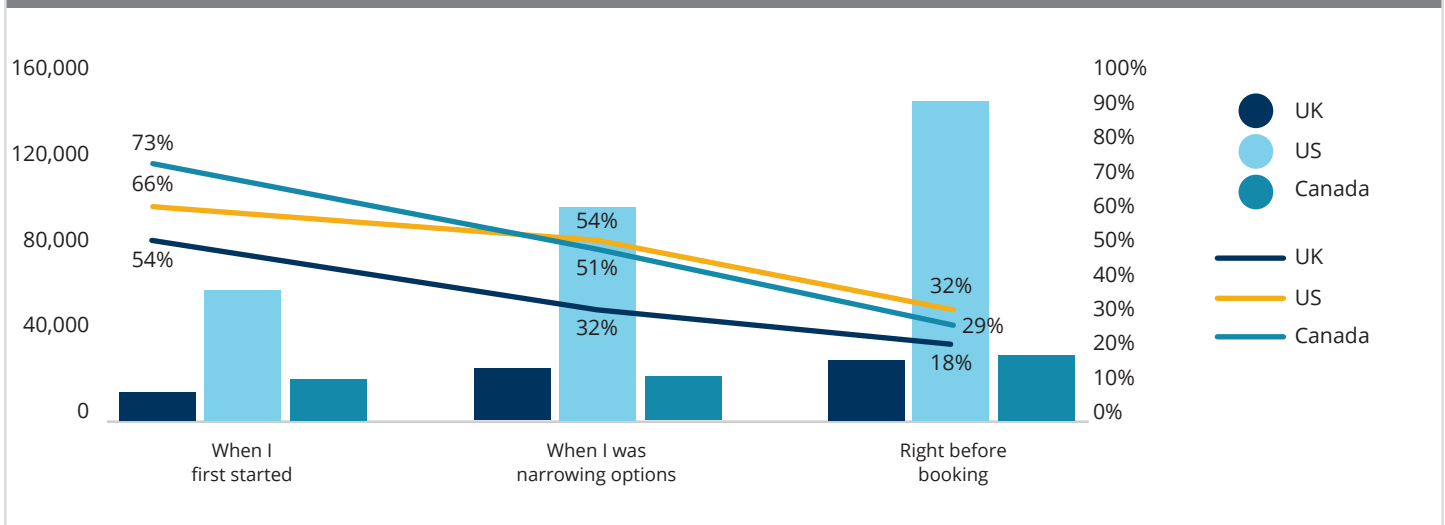
## Online advertising's impact on destination selection (continued)

The potential for advertising to influence destination decisions is significant given the number of travelers who continue debating multiple destinations. With many of those consumers keeping several locations in mind right up until the very end of their purchase cycle, travel marketers have a substantial opportunity to connect their brand with shoppers throughout the purchase path.

As the data reveals, advertising can be influential at any stage of the purchase cycle (see Figure 10). However, across all three countries, it is most effective in the initial stages of the booking path. This coincides with the stage where many consumers are looking for inspiration and are most open to destination suggestions and ideas.

As impression volume increases over the course of a shopper's purchase journey, recall declines, likely due to overexposure. As Figure 10 shows, ad recall starts at 54% for U.K. shoppers before falling to 18% immediately before booking. U.S. and Canadian travel bookers follow a similar pattern, declining from 66% to 34% in the U.S. and from 73% to 29% in Canada.

**Figure 10: Decline in Ad Recall Rate as the Purchase Journey Advances**



Source: Total Impressions Volume Metric; Data Source: comScore UK, US, CA Desktop Panels, Custom Path to Booking Ad Impression Analysis, Travel Booker Segment, Total Ad Impressions in 45 Travel Path to Booking, Dec '15 – Feb '16 Booking Time Period. Average Recall Rate: comScore Survey, 2016.

Despite the decline in recall, travel advertising can still be effective across the booking journey, especially as prospective travelers continue to debate destination possibilities at all stages of booking. While it can be more difficult to reach consumers as more advertisers compete for their attention, an effective marketing strategy that leverages strong targeting and messaging can influence travelers' destination decisions at any point in the path to purchase.

Source: comScore Survey, 2016

Source 2: comScore Survey

## KEY FINDINGS

For destination marketers in particular, there are several key findings from the research on digital travel consumers in the U.K., U.S. and Canada that can inform an integrated marketing strategy.

- Travelers frequently begin their research with more than one destination in mind. More than half of travel consumers in the U.K. and Canada begin researching with multiple destinations. In the U.S., more than one-third of consumers consider several locations initially.
- Overall, recommendations from friends and family and online travel agencies are the most influential resources in the destination selection process. When it comes to making the final destination decision, cost and hotel/accommodation options are the most crucial factors.
- Digital users in the U.K., U.S. and Canada consume a vast amount of travel content online. U.K. digital users consume the most travel content at 75%, followed by 70% of Canadian digital users and more than 60% of U.S. digital users. Across all markets, there is significant year-over-year growth in terms of the amount of time spent on digital travel content per month — 44% in the U.K., 41% in the U.S., and 18% in Canada.
- Recall of travel advertising is high. In the U.K., 59% of travel bookers recall travel ads compared to 47% in the U.S. and 64% in Canada. For consumers who are considering multiple destinations, advertising is influential. Thirty percent of U.K. travel shoppers, 27% of those in the U.S. and 38% of Canadian travel shoppers report that advertising swayed their destination decision.

## CONCLUSION

The journey begins long before travelers pack their bags — it begins with selecting where to go amid an abundance of destination choices across the globe. With a significant number of travel consumers in the U.K., U.S. and Canada open to different destinations as they embark on the travel purchase path, there are poignant opportunities for travel marketers to effectively impact where travelers actually go.

As digital travel content consumption continues to grow year over year across markets, marketers are poised to connect with qualified consumers with timely, relevant messages that can successfully influence destination decisions.

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