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Culture

WHY SURPRISE TRAVEL IS THE LATEST VACATION TREND TO TRY

Julia Cosgrove, VP & Editor-in-Chief of travel site [AFAR](#), on why surprise is the new luxury when it comes to your next getaway.



By Lauren Fisher



The first step of planning any dream getaway always starts with selecting the destination. But for travel junkies and those suffering from a never-ending case of wanderlust, there's a new trend that's shaking up the typical vacation planning process: surprise travel. "Surprise is the new luxury," declares travel website and magazine **AFAR**, which offers spontaneous travelers a personality questionnaire (all you have to do is provide your budget and answer questions that assess your interests and ideal getaway), then delivers the answers to a travel agency that will be responsible for planning your upcoming trip. In most cases, those taking the surprise travel route don't know where they are going until 24 hours before takeoff—or until they arrive at the airport.

We spoke with VP & Editor-in-Chief of **AFAR**, Julia Cosgrove, on how the new method of travel works.

Tell me about the "Surprise Is The New Luxury" travel trend—what is it exactly?

In analyzing trends that are shaping the future of travel for our annual Travel Vanguard's issue, we noticed an industry shift towards surprise and spontaneity. The experiential traveler of today is interested in going deeper in a destination, having fulfilling, hands-on experiences, connecting with locals in a meaningful way, and being awed by exclusive access. An element of surprise can help enhance the overall experience.

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How does the process of going on a surprise vacation work?

Travelers work with an outfitter like **Brown + Hudson** or a travel advisor, such as those on AFAR's **Travel Advisory Council**, explain what they're looking for (this part can be vague!), and let the experts craft the itinerary. The customer can find out whatever level of detail he or she wants in advance—or just give in to pure surprise! Numerous studies have shown that the lead-up to a trip, the anticipation, is the part of travel that people enjoy the most. This trend takes that to a new level, since you don't know ahead of time what your trip will consist of. This also ties into the personalization and customization trend in travel—each individual traveler is interested in different things and there isn't a one size fits all trip.

How is your surprise destination chosen?

Through a personality questionnaire. Brown + Hudson, the outfitter that puts together surprise trips, surveys travellers with questions regarding tastes and interests. Sample questions ask for things like hobbies, interests, travel party size, what you're looking to get out of your vacation—food, activities, culture, etc.

Can you share some examples of surprise getaways AFAR members have gone on?

Since the premiere issue of AFAR in 2009, we've run a feature called Spin the Globe. The premise is that when you're not bound to a prescribed itinerary, you're allowed to enjoy the moment more fully. So we spin the globe in our San Francisco office, and book a trip for a writer. We give as little notice as possible as to the destination, and the writer's assignment is to simply go and return with a story. Over the years, we've sent **Susan Orlean to Copenhagen**, **Jorma Taccone to Kenya** (he came back with [this music video](#)), **Cheryl Strayed to Andorra**, and **Sloane Crosley to Ecuador**.

What about packing—do you get information about climate, suggestions on what to pack?

For our Spin the Globe feature, senior editor Derk Richardson gives a writer 24 hours notice of where he or she is going. Ahead of that, he gives clues as to weather and if any vaccinations are required in advance of travel.

Are there any specific accommodations that travelers can request for surprise travel—like climate, activities, continent preferences, etc?

When you're working with Brown + Hudson or one of our TAC members, you can direct the conversation. If you have no-fly zones and strong preferences, they're amenable, of course. _____

To try the surprise travel trend visit **brownandhudson.com**.



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