

RETAIL

34pc of shoppers plan to return to malls in 2021

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People are excited about future in-person shopping. Image credit: National Retail Federation

By KATIE TAMOLA

While consumers' comfort levels remain low for in-store shopping and flying, there is pent-up excitement and demand for these activities, according to a new report.

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According to a report from outcomes-based platform LoopMe, consumers are more likely to return to shopping malls than they are to flying. As the COVID-19 pandemic continues to develop, consumers intend to shop both online and in-store in 2021.

"Brands that have alternative buying options should continue to keep awareness high on services like curbside pickup, online buying or delivery options," said Dan Lapinski, associate vice president of strategic partnerships and product marketing at LoopMe, New York. "Additionally, keeping consumers up to date on the steps your brand has taken for a safe in-store shopping experience will resonate positively.

"Keep your advertising engaging and relevant to the concerned consumer," he said. "Augmented reality advertising technology has come a long way and provides a fun medium for previous in-store shoppers to try on fashion items and clothing from the comfort of their own home."

LoopMe surveyed 1,700 U.S. consumers within their audience pool in late December 2020 and early January 2021.

Comfort, excitement and intention

The report probed three areas for consumer sentiment: comfort, excitement and intention.

When it comes to in-store shopping, consumers are most comfortable at grocery stores compared to shopping at malls, big-box retailers or apparel stores.

One in four consumers reported they are feeling very uncomfortable regarding shopping at malls or shopping centers. However, 72 percent intend to shop for clothing or fashion products online and in-store, compared to 28 percent who plan to shop online only or in-store only.

Although some are uncomfortable with in-person shopping, consumers are most excited to shop in-store for their

fashion and clothing items. More than a quarter of consumers, 26 percent, reported being "very" excited to shop for apparel in-store, compared to 21 percent who are "very" excited about returning to malls.

While only 11 percent of consumers are shopping at malls or shopping centers, 24 percent of consumers are returning to shop in-person at big-box stores including Walmart and The Home Depot.

More consumers are expecting to return to malls, with only 17 percent not planning to return in 2021.

Desire to travel is also high, despite levels of discomfort.

One in five consumers are reporting that they are somewhat excited to return to air travel, and 24 percent are reporting they are very excited to do so.



Twenty percent of consumers are reporting that they are somewhat excited to return to air travel. Image credit: JetSmarter

Sixteen percent of consumers are reporting feeling comfortable in returning to air travel and 12 percent are reporting they are feeling very comfortable to do so.

The report notes that 38 percent of consumers are feeling uncomfortable about traveling by air in 2021, and that consumers who do fly are more likely to travel by domestic flights than international, at a rate of 13 to 6 percent.

Up up and away

Arguably, no luxury sector has been as severely impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic as travel and hospitality, but some industry watchers see pent-up demand and vaccine rollouts as reasons for cautious optimism ([see story](#)).

Although consumers may be feeling uncomfortable about returning to in-person shops or airlines, some have already begun to do so. Brands across industry sectors continue to highlight their dedication to safety procedures in welcoming consumers back.

With its "Something to Feel Good About" initiative, Beverly Hills Conference & Visitors Bureau is calling attention to its world-class service and new safety standards, as well as its upscale shopping and dining options ([see story](#)).

While many travelers have avoided commercial flights, opting for trips within driving distance, the wealthiest are opting for private aviation.

According to a new survey from online platform [Private Jet Card Comparisons](#), 41 percent of new private aviation clients plan to continue flying privately "regularly" after the pandemic. Furthermore, about four in 10 respondents who were flying privately before the pandemic expect to increase their usage once the pandemic ends ([see story](#)).

"Front and center on every major airline's creative messaging is safety and flexibility," LoopMe's Mr. Lapinski said. "For these airlines, it's about staying top of mind about their offerings and the improvements they've made to safety, and that prevalent commitment and messaging will pay off."