

Looking ahead: What's on the horizon for business travel?

Despite another disruptive (and disappointing) year for business travel, the Global Business Travel Association (GBTA) is feeling bullish when it comes to the sector's recovery in 2022 and beyond.

 By Oz Desai 13 Jan 2022



Source: [123RF](#)

In fact, they expect global business travel spending to surge in 2022, with spend ultimately reaching 2019 levels by 2024 – a full year earlier than previously predicted. This is according to the GBTA's annual business travel index, the BTI™ Outlook, which looks at both business travel spend as well as insights and traveller sentiment across 44 industries from 73 countries around the world.

If business travel is to reach 2019 levels (an impressive \$1.4tn) in the next two years, it'll mean a year-over-year surge of 38% in 2022. An exciting prospect.

But are business travellers ready to go? What do they want to get out of their trips? What's changed? And what can business travellers expect in the months ahead?

Below is a closer look at the current state of business travel – and the trends which will shape our trips in the year ahead.

1. Balance, bleisure and a return to normality

A significant take out from the GBTA report is that about half (52%) of c-suite respondents expect their company's business travel spend to reach 2019 levels at some point in 2022. And it's not surprising. Business travel is critical when it comes to things like business growth, client relationship management, an employee training and development.

But will a return to travel mean business as usual?

Although people are desperate to 'get back to normal', there's no doubt that Covid-19 has changed our priorities. Hard lockdown removed pretty much everything except work – no travel, no socialising, no

exercise, no balance in our lives. Business travellers will now demand more from their trips.

We can expect longer trips (in other words, quality over quantity) as well as a focus on health, wellness and personal growth.

Ultimately, most corporate travellers are no longer satisfied to travel purely for business purposes. After having been starved of travel opportunities for almost two years, they want to add in an element of leisure and really make the most of the destinations that they visit. Luckily, companies and TMCs are paying attention and starting to offer 'bleisure' travel as an employee perk, accommodating 'workcation' requests exploring opportunities for digital nomads. Not only is it an important shift in terms of employee wellbeing but it's becoming increasingly important in terms of attracting – and keeping – the right talent.

2. Sustainability

Alongside health and wellness, sustainable travel is also growing in importance. Travellers are becoming more and more aware of their individual environmental footprint. They want to travel, but without having a negative impact on the world around them.

There are a number of ways travel management companies (TMCs) can make a difference:

1. TMCs can build a company's sustainability goals directly into their travel policy, for example, by supporting greener hotels or suggesting suppliers with community-building projects and programmes.
2. Carbon calculators can measure a trip's carbon footprint, and companies can off-set their impact by investing in environmental projects around the world.
3. Booking platforms can also suggest the 'greenest' route – often the most direct – which limits take-offs and reduces the journey time.
4. Finally, new tech allows TMCs to create 'sustainability dashboards' – in order to measure and track a client's sustainability efforts.

Ultimately, this means partnering with travel suppliers who can provide the right advice and guidance around sustainable travel – a must for post-pandemic, international travellers.

3.24/7 support and communication

Although the mood going into 2022 is (cautiously) optimistic, the travel industry is still facing plenty of uncertainty. Travel restrictions continue to change at short notice, and travellers can be forgiven for feeling a measure of trepidation.

As such, business travellers are looking for 24/7 support and proactive, open, ongoing communication from their TMC. After hours or emergency support is important – as is instant access to the latest travel information and alerts. Ideally, direct to a traveller's mobile phone.

4. Risk monitoring and assessment

Unsurprising then that travel risk management will be top of mind in 2022. And according to Desai, when it comes to risk, it's always a good idea to enlist professional help.

Chat to your TMC about their risk management partners – as well as their duty of care capabilities. For example, Corporate Traveller operates a 24/7 emergency assist service, and has strong partnerships with airlines, hotels and ground transport providers so we can bring your travellers home quickly should the need arise.

Traveller tracking is going to dominate tech advancements over the next few years, with customised safety dashboards and new-and-improved risk management solutions leading the way.

“International travel has always carried a measure of risk and unpredictability. Just think of adverse weather events, volcanic ash, terror incidents, strikes and industrial action. Covid-19 has just added a little more uncertainty into the mix. Any TMC worth their salt will understand each destination’s unique risk profile, offer on-the-ground guidance and advice, be able to track your travellers, and bring them back safely.

5. Perks, personal service and peace of mind

There’s little doubt that travellers are less than thrilled by the idea of pre-travel Covid tests (especially if another is required on landing), not to mention the admin of vaccination certificates and concerns around testing positive while away from home.

To make up for it, they’ll be expecting a little more TLC. TMCs are doing a lot of work in terms of building traveller confidence through information, vetted suppliers and personalised service. But their purchasing power means that they can also secure the best rates, deals and travel perks around. Which is music to the ears of both bookers and travellers alike. Think early check-in, late check-out, free upgrades, priority boarding and lounge access.

If you ask a business traveller to compile their 2022 wish list, ease of travel; wellness and balance; new experiences and destinations; personal growth and peace of mind are likely at the top of their list. They want to know that they’re being properly looked after, prioritised, and heard.

It’s essential for TMCs to pay close attention. Especially considering the role corporate traveller confidence will play in speeding up the industry’s revival.

ABOUT OZ DESAI

With a proven track record in business management and finance, Oz Desai heads up Flight Centre Travel Group's dynamic Corporate Traveller brand in South Africa. Having worked in retail travel, management and finance environment within the Flight Centre group, Desai's first-hand experience brings great depth to the role of positioning Corporate Traveller as the preferred provider of travel solutions to corporate South Africa.
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