



BACK TO BUSINESS

CAUTION PREVAILS

Duty of care moves to the next level for travel in a post-pandemic world

TIME TO REBOOT

Is the industry ready to take business travel bookings back online?

DIVERSITY IN TRAVEL

Corporate travel must tackle diversity, equity and inclusion shortcomings



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Here we go...

Large-scale events are back and appetite for business travel is there but restrictions hamper the anticipated autumn rebound



BY ANDY HOSKINS, EDITOR-IN-CHIEF,
BUSINESS TRAVEL NEWS EUROPE

Flying start? More like a false start. Business travel did not quite take off as hoped in the early weeks of September, although things were moving in the right direction. Several TMCs publicly reported consistent week-on-week growth in transactions in the region of 20 per cent and, mercifully, a desperately needed overhaul of travel restrictions to and from England was announced – it was widely welcomed but long overdue.

Few are doubting that the appetite for international travel is there. It's more that organisations are still returning to their offices – a shift intrinsically linked with the return of business travel – while some are extending travel bans and, of course, many nations remain hamstrung by a mire of complex travel restrictions and regulations across Europe and globally.

On a more positive note, September has ushered in the return of large-scale, in-person travel events – a marker of sorts on this industry's journey of recovery. The mood in the room was one of elation as we welcomed more than 700 people to the Business Travel Awards Europe in early September. It was our industry back doing what it does best: networking, greeting old friends – with a hug

or fist bump – establishing new relationships and, above all, celebrating by raising a glass not only to our winners and finalists, but to an industry reunited. See pages 12-17 for details of all the winners, what our judges said about them, and why Clive Wratten, chief executive of the Business Travel Association, received a standing ovation upon landing the Outstanding Contribution to Business Travel accolade.

“

Sustainability and DEI are two key subjects where the attention they are receiving is beginning to translate into essential action

Next up for the BTN Group is Business Travel Show Europe which takes place on September 30 and October 1 at ExCeL London – a new home for the long-established event – with complementary



content online. I'll have the privilege of putting the questions to a cast of business travel superstars in two of the 50-plus panels, masterclasses and TED Talk-style sessions.

Prominent on the conference programme are the subjects of sustainability and diversity,

equity and inclusion (DEI) – two key subjects where the attention they are receiving is beginning to translate into essential action.

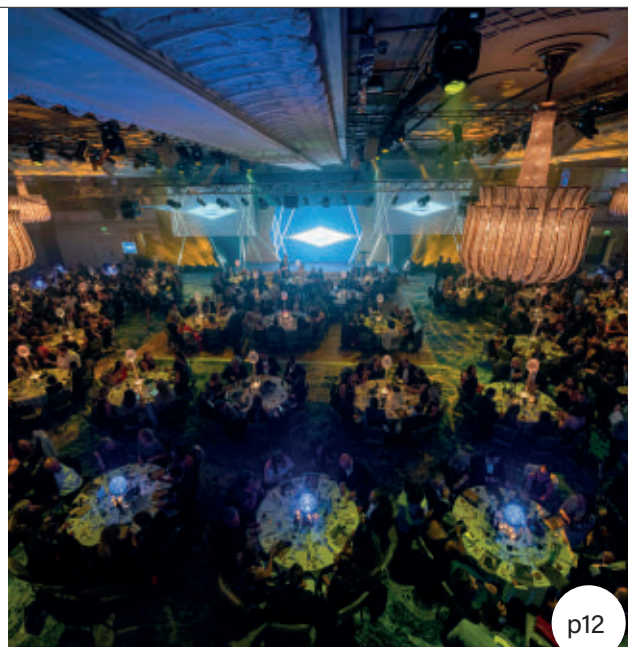
Both are also covered within this issue, as we explore the particular challenges of measuring the environmental impact of accommodation programmes (p54-56) and take a look at how business travel fits into one corporate's wider net zero goals (p58-59).

Meanwhile, our comprehensive diversity in travel section (p36-53) charts the experiences of people of colour, the LGBTQ+ community, those facing physical and mental health challenges, and of female business travellers in today's world and, crucially, what the corporate travel industry can do to level up. It's essential reading.

• As ever, we welcome your feedback.
Email ahoskins@thebtngroup.com

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A series of features examining what it means to be a person of colour, part of the LGBTQ+ community, a sufferer of physical or mental health challenges, or a female travelling on business in today's world. Learn how the business travel industry can – and must – up the ante on diversity, equity and inclusion, and how to source diverse travel suppliers.

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Corporate demand for hotel sustainability data is growing, but accommodation providers and customers alike face multiple challenges in this area

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Will business travel recovery pick up speed as expected this autumn? *BTN Europe* seeks the views of four European travel associations

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BA to launch self-service portal for corporate clients

British Airways aims to launch a self-service account management portal for corporate clients by the end of this year. The carrier's head of sales Mark Muren told *BTN Europe* the portal will allow travel managers to view reporting, such as performance against deal targets, and access "all things news-oriented and administrative. It will also be a place where waivers and favours are able to be executed, hopefully in a fairly seamless way." The portal will also be accessible to TMCs, which are likely to be the first users of the tool, and BA's own account management team.

All three major US carriers have launched similar portals in recent years, and Muren said there is the same need in Europe, especially for better visibility of deal tracking. He added that BA has worked closely on the portal with joint-venture partner American Airlines: "They have been extremely transparent about the things in their tool that they love and things that they are thinking about evolving. It's going to be a game-changer on this side of the Atlantic."



LUFTHANSA OFFERS LIE-FLAT SEATS... IN ECONOMY

Lufthansa has started offering passengers in economy class on certain long-haul routes the option to book an entire row of seats for a surcharge of between €159-€229.

Passengers can book the 'Sleeper's Row' upgrade at check-in or the gate but advance reservations are not possible. Passengers will be given a row of three or four seats to themselves along with a "pillow, blanket and

mattress topper of business class quality" and a special seat belt to ensure safety. Passengers booking the upgrade are also allowed to pre-board.

The airline is offering the upgrade on long-haul flights of around eleven hours or more – for example on routes to the Far East, the United States' west coast, Central and South America, or southern Africa. A maximum of three Sleeper's Rows are offered per flight.



Former CTM duo launch premium TMC for SMEs

The former CEO of North America for travel management company CTM, Chris Thelen, and the TMC's former general manager UK, Julie Cope, have teamed up to launch TakeTwo Travel Solutions. The start-up TMC is targeting premium SMEs initially in the UK and Europe with plans to expand to the US.

It has already signed clients – include organisations from the finance, investments and architecture sectors – with combined pre-Covid annual travel spend of £11.5 million and has a new business pipeline of a further £40 million.

Thelen and Cope, respectively chief executive officer and managing director of the new company, have recruited 20 staff, the majority of whom were victims of swingeing job cuts at TMCs during the course of the pandemic. The team is currently working remotely but expects to move into an office further down the line while an announcement regarding a US operation is expected before the year's end.

Help is at hand

Head to businesstravelnewseurope.com/resources to discover a wealth of special reports, travel planning tools and all the latest *BTN Europe* podcasts

Travel restrictions and requirements

Your real-time resource centre for the latest global travel restrictions and requirements – powered by Sherpa

BTN Europe's special reports

- Sustaining the Future: addressing the urgent need to reduce the environmental impact of business travel
- Wheels in Motion: exploring ground transport's critical role in business travel's post-pandemic recovery
- Europe's Leading TMCs 2021: the essential annual guide to the continent's leading travel management companies

Two podcast series

Catch up on all the latest podcasts in *BTN Europe's* 'Week in Review' and 'In Conversation With' series

ATPI Halo to focus on environmental impact

Travel management company ATPI is launching a new division focusing on sustainability, technology innovation and future work forces. Called ATPI Halo, the division will also ensure the TMC works towards carbon neutral status. ATPI says Halo is “an incubator of new ideas and services focused around sustainability [and] designed to support each of the existing client-focused business units around the world to grow and evolve”. The TMC will offer advice not only on measuring and mitigating environmental impact, but also on reducing travel programmes themselves to help cut emissions, as well as bespoke and accredited carbon offsetting schemes. The TMC will officially launch ATPI Halo at the end of September.



Deals and relationships at risk through lack of travel

Some 40 per cent of small- to medium-sized businesses (SMBs) say they fear they will not be able to develop and maintain business connections if business travel does not increase in the next 12 months, according to a survey. The research, by SAP Concur, showed 95 per cent of travellers in such companies are willing to travel in the next year and worry that if trips do not restart their companies will face severe consequences. More than a third (35 per cent) of SMBs felt there will be fewer deals signed as a result of business travel not resuming and 38 per cent of travellers said they will earn less money as a result.

Passenger demand won't recover until 'at least 2023'

International Airlines Group, the owner of British Airways, Iberia, Aer Lingus and Vueling, expects to operate around 45 per cent of 2019 passenger capacity in the peak third quarter of 2021, but says it will take “until at least 2023 for passenger demand to reach the levels of 2019” and is therefore “restructuring its cost base”. The group achieved passenger capacity of just 21.9 per cent of 2019 levels in the second quarter of this year, up marginally from 19.6 per cent in Q1. Luis Gallego, IAG Chief Executive Officer, said: “In the short term, our focus is on ensuring our operational readiness, so we have the flexibility to capitalise on an environment where there's evidence of widespread pent-up demand when travel restrictions are lifted.”



MAJOR SHAKE-UP FOR ENGLAND'S TRAVEL RULES

The traffic light system for arrivals into England is to be replaced by a single red list with simplified entry measures for the rest of the world from 4 October.

The new system will also see pre-departure tests scrapped for people arriving in England from countries not on the red list and who are doubly vaccinated. Day 2 PCR tests are also

expected to be replaced by cheaper lateral flow tests from the end of October. Testing for unvaccinated passengers from non-red countries will continue to include pre-departure tests, day 2 and day 8 PCR tests.

At the time of going to press, it remained to be seen whether Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland would follow suit.

SilverDoor parent company acquires key competitor

Habicus Group, the parent company of serviced apartment agent SilverDoor, has acquired long-standing competitor The Apartment Service. Details of the deal were not disclosed, but the acquisition brings together two of the largest global serviced apartment agents with pre-covid turnovers of nearly £100 million for SilverDoor and £30 million for The Apartment Service.

“This acquisition creates by far the largest independent serviced apartment agent in the world,” said SilverDoor group CEO Stuart Winstone. “The Apartment Service was one of our closest rivals. This is a significant deal for our sector.” The deal “was not Covid-related”, said Winstone, adding: “We're always looking for opportunities and talking to competitors about the opportunity to acquire them.”

Guest appearances

Visit businesstravelnewseurope.com/columnists to discover expert insight from recent guest contributors

Cryptocurrencies in the travel industry – an unlikely marriage? *Corporates appear to have little appetite while associated risks remain* • By Matthew Chapman, chief technical officer, Vibe

There will be nowhere to travel if you do not take your environmental impact seriously *Plan to be net zero by 2030 or we are all going to be in trouble* • By Sam Cande, Cande Consulting

Green fuels present a complex but essential step towards clean flying *ReFuelEU proposal aims to mandate use of SAFs but green fuels alone won't clean up aviation* • By Matteo Mirolo, aviation policy officer, Transport & Environment

BEAT BOX

The BTN editorial team provide their take on the key developments in their respective business travel beats



The appetite is there but barriers remain

BY MARK FRARY
digital editor, BTN Europe

PEOPLE have started returning to offices more frequently in recent months, commuter trains and tubes have become busier, and travellers are starting to fly again. The first big face-to-face events have also started to happen. If the euphoric hugs at the Business Travel Awards were anything to go by, people are desperate to see each other again in person.

Yet companies in the sector are still hanging on by their fingernails. The final furlough money is trickling through hands and companies are now having to make big decisions on their future – just look at easyJet's recent huge refinancing, for example.

The UK government's early lead in vaccination rollouts has now been eaten away and its policies on international travel are looking regressive compared to others. The pressure is fast growing on the government to remove some of the hurdles and allow unfettered business travel to happen again. It cannot come a moment too soon for most in the sector.



Optimism amid bursting bubbles

BY MICHAEL BAKER
executive editor, transportation

HONG Kong and Singapore have abandoned plans for a quarantine-free travel bubble; the Tasman travel bubble between Australia and New Zealand proved short-lived; and the EU has U-turned on easing restrictions for US visitors, an understandable move considering that not only had the US failed to reciprocate but also boasts several state governors hell-bent against implementing even the most basic requirements to control the spread.

Meanwhile, Delta Air Lines this month released data from its Covid-tested flights from the US to Rome, showing the effectiveness of 72-hour testing. Only five of 10,000 passengers who tested negative on pre-flight tests later tested positive for Covid-19 at the airport either prior to departure in the US or upon arrival in Italy. That came amid a comparably high infection rate in the US.

As the delta variant has made it clear that Covid-19 is something we will just have to learn to live with, evidence that vigorous testing can still allow for safe global travel is welcome news indeed.



RFPs: Keep an eye on supply

BY DONNA M. AIROLDI
senior accommodation & meetings editor

SEVERAL major hotel CEOs in quarterly earnings calls have noted the resilience of average daily rates during the pandemic compared with other crises. But could rate recovery hit a stumbling block in the months ahead?

The number of planned hotel room openings in Europe is expected to hit an all-time high in 2021, with more than 100,000 rooms added to supply by the year's end, according to STR. That growth is expected to continue into 2022, with a further 100,000 openings. Europe's previous peak was in 2019, when nearly 75,000 new rooms were added.

Additional rate recovery, naturally, will depend on continued demand growth, and will vary by market. The European region reached occupancy levels as high as 70 per cent of its 2019 levels in the first week of September, according to STR. Those levels, however, started to fall as summer leisure travel began to wind down. With the hotel RFP season underway, travel buyers may want to research the supply pipelines of their key markets before finalising any proposed rate increases.



Disruptor failures are industry's loss

BY ADAM PERROTTA
tech & payments editor

COVID-19'S devastating effect on corporate travel came into sharp focus with the late August announcement that Upside Business Travel would wind down operations in late September.

Launched in 2016, Upside initially focused on providing booking services to the unmanaged corporate travel segment. Its platform garnered interest from Flight Centre Travel Group, which in 2019 acquired a 25 per cent stake in Upside, touting plans to incorporate its technology into its own SME-focused Corporate Traveller brand.

Despite the widely recognised potential of Upside's capabilities, the harsh realities of the Covid-induced travel shutdown made clear there was no path forward for the company, which noted "lingering uncertainty about when and if business travel will return to pre-pandemic levels" in its closure notice to clients.

Sadly, Upside is the most recent in a series of Covid-induced travel business failures, and it almost certainly won't be the last. Even after corporate travel as a whole recovers, the demise of Upside and other once-promising industry upstarts could prove to be among the most significant long-term effects of the pandemic.



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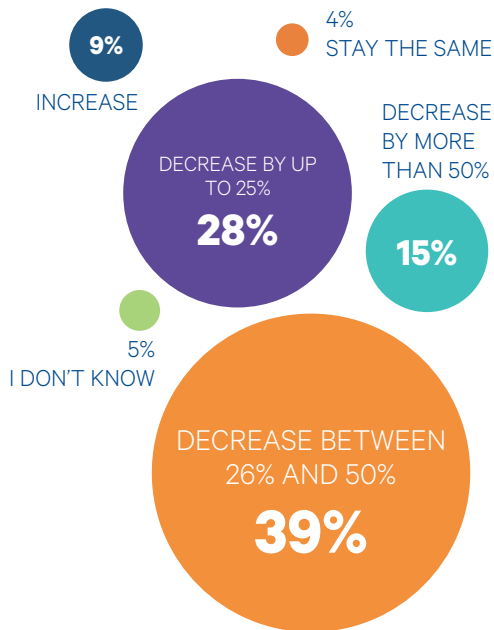
ON THE REBOUND

Hopes of meaningful business travel recovery had been pinned on Q3 of this year, but will it become a reality? New research suggests European travel managers believe employees are increasingly happy to hit the road

THE OUTLOOK FOR 2022

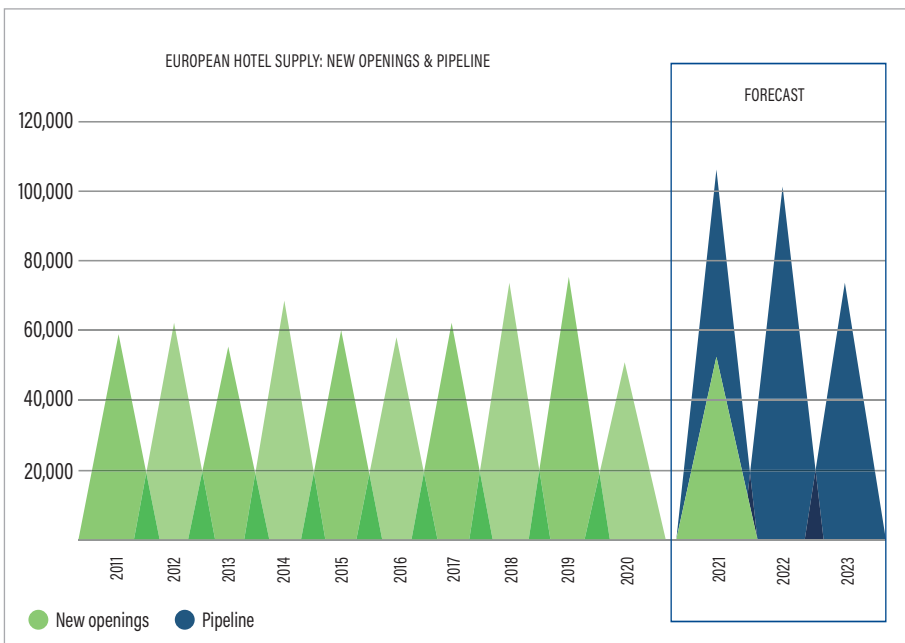
A survey of 313 European travel buyers for the Business Travel Show Europe found that while Covid will affect business travel spend for 2022, some are bucking the trend

How do you expect your travel spend to change in 2022 compared to pre-pandemic levels?



European travel buyers were also asked how long it would take for spend in the business travel sector as a whole to return to pre-pandemic levels. Some 27 per cent said it would take five years to fully recover, while eight per cent said it would never return.

PERCENTAGE OF PRE-COVID SPEND	WITHIN 12 MONTHS	WITHIN 2 YEARS	WITHIN 5 YEARS	NEVER
Up to 19%	11%	2%	2%	27%
20-39%	20%	9%	6%	4%
40-59%	24%	18%	9%	5%
60-79%	31%	41%	25%	19%
80-99%	6%	9%	23%	4%
100%	1%	6%	27%	8%



RECORD NUMBERS OF NEW ROOMS

Data from hotel data experts STR in August revealed that 2021 should be a record year for hotels in Europe, at least in terms of the number of new rooms opening. At that point, more than 50,000 new rooms had opened and the forecast is for more than 100,000 by the end of the year – an all-time record. This is in part due to delayed openings from 2020 but the company says the pace of openings is not expected to slow significantly in 2022, with a further 100,000 room openings

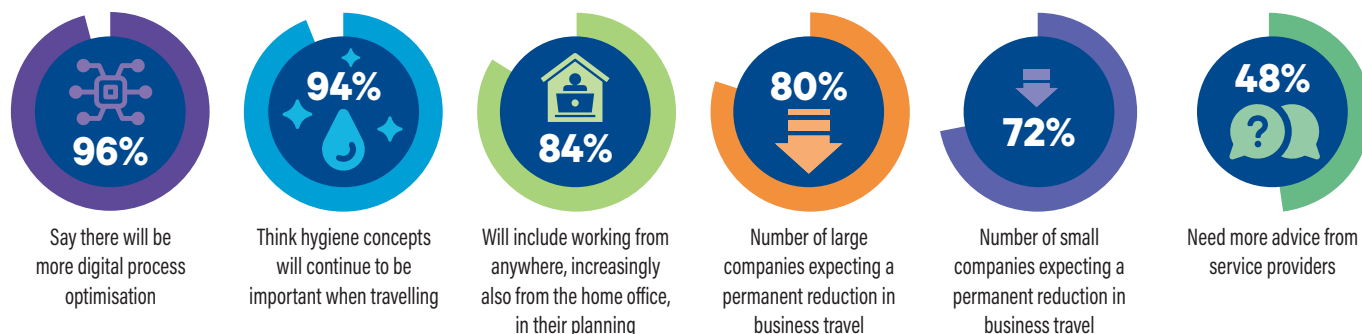
Source: STR

GERMAN BUSINESS TRAVEL SPEND AT HISTORIC LOW

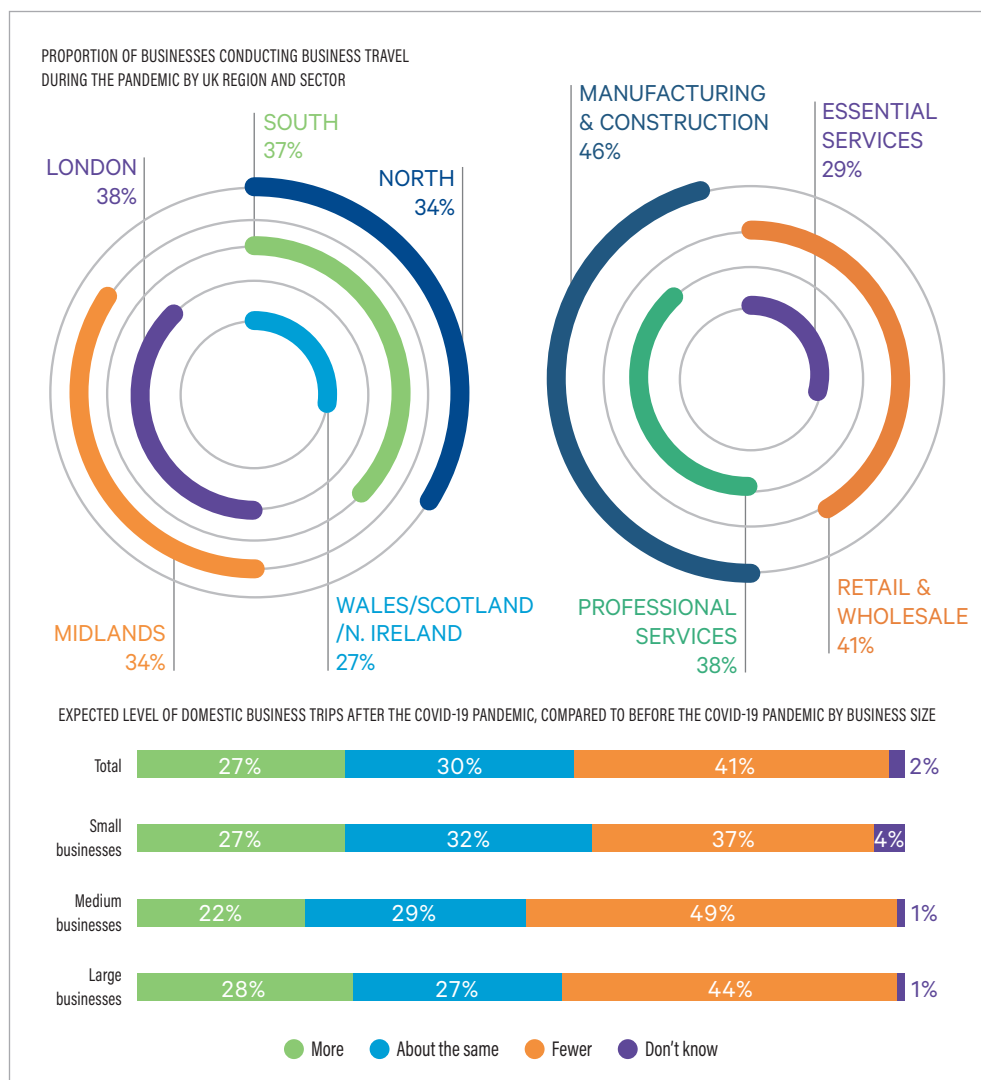
The toll of the pandemic on Germany's corporate travel spend became evident with the announcement by the German Business Travel Association (VDR) that it had fallen to €10.1 billion in 2020, 81.7 per cent lower than in 2019 and the lowest level since it started collecting data 19 years ago

	2020	2019	%CHANGE
NUMBER OF BUSINESS TRIPS	32.7 MILLION	195.4 MILLION	-83.3%
NUMBER OF BUSINESS TRAVELLERS	3.3 MILLION	13.0 MILLION	-74.9%

WHAT GERMAN BUYERS THINK



Source: VDR, geschäftsreiseanalyse.de



UK DOMESTIC BUSINESS TRAVEL: MORE CARS, FEWER TRIPS

Domestic business trips in the UK are set to fall after the pandemic, according to research from the government. Some 41 per cent of companies expect to make fewer trips than before Covid, 30 per cent expect no change, while 27 per cent expect their employees to be making more trips.

The survey was commissioned by the UK government to study the impact of the Covid pandemic on the demand for non-commuting domestic business trips. Market research firm Ipsos Mori conducted the survey online with 465 decision makers for domestic business trips in January 2021. Drilling down into the detail, the survey found differences between the amounts of domestic business travel carried out during the pandemic by companies in different parts of the UK and in different sectors as well as expectations of levels of travel when Covid is over, as shown in the charts alongside.

Source: Department for Transport, gov.uk/government/publications/business-travel-during-covid-19-a-survey-of-uk-businesses



THE BEST OF THE BEST

Business Travel Awards Europe 2021 winners revealed
as event reunites the travel industry in style

More than 700 people gathered at the Grosvenor House Hotel on London's Park Lane on 9 September for the 26th annual Business Travel Awards Europe, where the winners across 22 categories were announced to an industry reunited.

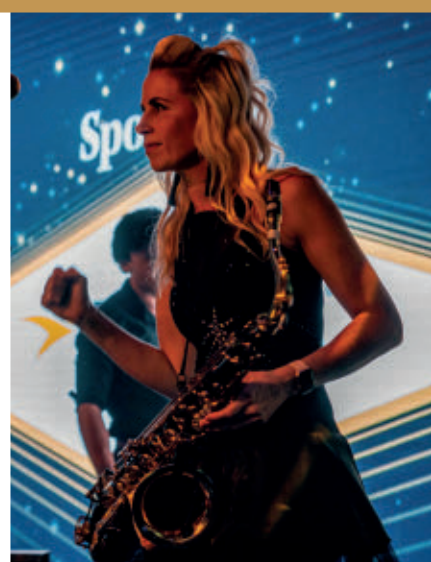
The black tie event, organised by the BTN Group, got underway with a champagne reception and entertainment from Frobacks before a three-course gala dinner and awards ceremony hosted by comedian Rob Beckett.

While all categories reflected the outstanding efforts of finalists in a year like no other, several were specifically designed to recognise organisations and people acting for the greater good of the industry, with Clive Wratten, chief executive of the Business Travel Association, receiving the Outstanding Contribution to Business Travel award and Festive Road landing the Covid-19 Crisis Response award.

Meanwhile, Calum Hawley of Endeavour Mining was named Travel Buyer of the Year and the Ministry of Defence - Defence Travel Team and American Express Global Business Travel was named Travel Team of the Year.

Winners were selected by a nearly 30-strong judging panel of independent business travel buyers and consultants from across Europe. Turn the page to discover the winners and highly commended finalists in all categories and read what the judges had to say about them.





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TRAVEL PARTNER OF THE YEAR – HOTEL BRAND

MELIA HOTELS INTERNATIONAL

Profile: Leisure at heart, business in mind – our corporate slogan – conveys our perfect harmony between heart and mind, between the exceptional hospitality we offer and the excellence and rigour of our management. *What the judges said: "Melia quickly pivoted to address the realities of Covid-19 with new cleaning protocols and procedures to reassure guests but also delivered innovative workspace solutions. The group also showed strong ambition to develop its sustainability efforts for the long-term and to support future preferred partnerships as carbon reduction becomes top of mind for many European and global travel managers."*

FINALISTS: Hilton, Melia Hotels International, Premier Inn, Radisson Hotel Group, Wyndham Hotels and Resorts



TRAVEL PARTNER OF THE YEAR – SERVICED APARTMENT PROVIDER

Profile: Frasers Hospitality, a member of Frasers Property Group, is a global hospitality operator with hotel residences and boutique lifestyle hotels across Australia, southeast Asia, north Asia, Middle East, Africa, Europe and the UK.

What the judges said: "Judges noted that many entrants extended rates and accommodation to crisis workers but, from a partnership perspective, Frasers Hospitality stood out for its concerted partnership working hand-in-hand with NHS Scotland. The group took swift action to find new types of client and support healthworkers, resulting in a new business that will carry the company into the future."

FINALISTS: The Ascott; Edyn; Frasers Hospitality; Roomzzz Aparthotels; Staycity



ACCOMMODATION INNOVATION SYNERGY GLOBAL HOUSING – SYNERGY SMART

Profile: SynergySMART is an industry-first, cloud-based pre-arrival inspection tool that streamlines the implementation and reporting of Synergy's strict health and safety protocols across its supply chain. *What the judges said: "Well done to Synergy for the swift rollout of this simple but effective solution which negates the need for travel managers to send questionnaires to individual providers, helps fulfil their duty of care, and builds confidence among travellers."*

HIGHLY COMMENDED: TRIPBAM - Smart Sourcing; **FINALISTS:** Edyn Portal, National Corporate Housing - Single Source Solution, SilverDoor Apartments - Orbi, Synergy Global Housing, TRIPBAM, Wyndham Hotels and Resorts



TRAVEL PARTNER OF THE YEAR – MOBILITY PROVIDER

Profile: Enterprise is the world's largest vehicle rental company, providing choice and flexible mobility to corporate travel customers in more than 100 countries.

What the judges said: "Enterprise was notable for its various – and rapid – innovations during the Covid-19 crisis that included one-way rentals, pod buses and more. Judges were also impressed by the company's excellent approach to corporate partnerships and innovation. Collaboration on sustainability efforts also stood out, as well as Enterprise's creative leveraging of all types of ground transport modes to meet today's evolving mobility needs."

FINALISTS: Avis Budget Group, Enterprise, Sixt



**TRAVEL PARTNER OF THE YEAR –
CHAUFFEUR OR TAXI PROVIDER
FREE NOW FOR BUSINESS**

Profile: Free Now for Business is the multi-mobility solution for companies in ten countries and 100 cities in Europe.

What the judges said: "Free Now for Business demonstrated exceptionally strong corporate partnership and solid pandemic-era assistance. The company was also praised for pushing beyond traditional category definitions and integrating multimodal transportation options. Sustainability was a key driver for a transition to multimodal models and demonstrated Free Now's ability to forge new solutions when challenged to innovate."

HIGHLY COMMENDED: Addison Lee

FINALISTS: Addison Lee, Blacklane, Brunel Carriage, Free Now for Business, Minicabit, TBR Global Chauffeuring



**TRAVEL PARTNER OF THE YEAR –
RAIL OPERATOR
LONDON NORTH EASTERN
RAILWAY (LNER)**

Profile: London North Eastern Railway (LNER) is on a mission to transform rail travel for the customers and communities we serve. LNER calls at 53 stations along the East Coast route and our vision is to be the most loved, progressive and responsible way to travel, for generations to come.

What the judges said: "LNER has shown serious commitment to the business travel market, best demonstrated by the creation of a Corporate Advisory Board, its engagement with key corporate travel associations, and its willingness to listen to and act upon the feedback of travel managers and business travellers alike."

FINALISTS: Avanti West Coast, Heathrow Express, London North Eastern Railway (LNER), TransPennine Express



**TRAVEL PARTNER OF THE YEAR –
EUROPEAN AIRLINE
BRITISH AIRWAYS**

Profile: British Airways is a global airline and the UK's flag carrier, flying customers to where they need to be across an extensive network for more than 100 years. We connect Britain with the world and the world with Britain, placing customers and sustainability at our heart and providing service excellence.

What the judges said: "The judges felt British Airways had been a true partner to their many corporate customers throughout the course of the pandemic, proactively working with them, listening to the needs of corporates and offering greater flexibility during this challenging period, even in the face of the many challenges bearing down on airlines."

FINALISTS: British Airways, Easyjet, Virgin Atlantic Airways



**TRAVEL PARTNER OF THE YEAR –
GLOBAL AIRLINE
DELTA AIR LINES**

Profile: From 24/7 account support to innovative products and services, Delta is dedicated to travel professionals and their customers' needs, to ensure a safe, enjoyable experience – every time.

What the judges said: "Delta has demonstrated strong account management in a crisis, and also supported the return-to-travel with 400 airport tours for travel managers and other travel service professionals in 80 countries. Looking beyond Covid, buyers praised its long-term view on distribution and airline retailing, and its carbon offsetting programme for all flights."

FINALISTS: ANA - All Nippon Airways, Cathay Pacific Airways, Delta Air Lines, Qatar Airways



**TECHNOLOGY INNOVATION –
TRAVELLER EXPERIENCE
AMERICAN EXPRESS GLOBAL
BUSINESS TRAVEL – TRAVEL
VITALS**

Profile: American Express Global Business Travel launched Travel Vitals in July 2020 as a single source of up-to-date information, with data aggregated from hundreds of sources.

What the judges said: "Keeping on top of constantly changing travel restrictions has been almost impossible at times and although there were several solid sources out there, Travel Vitals proved exactly that – vital. Moreover, it was made available freely to all – not just its clients."

FINALISTS: Agiito - Covid Shield, American Express Global Business Travel - Travel Vitals, CIBTvisas - Entry Guide, PPHE Hotel Group - Contactless Services, Travelpot - Travelpot+



**TECHNOLOGY INNOVATION –
CORPORATE BOOKING PLATFORM
CORPORATE TRAVEL MANAGE-
MENT EUROPE – LIGHTNING**

Profile: Built on CTM's proprietary technology framework, Lightning replicates the consumer travel booking experience, driving efficiency, adoption, savings, productivity and compliance.

What the judges said: "CTM showed strong, multifaceted innovation and on-point pivots. Indeed, Lightning was the first booking tool in Europe to roll out ATP Co's RouteHappy Airline Reassurance UPAs to offer additional intelligence about airlines' Covid measures and requirements at the time of booking."

FINALISTS: American Express Global Business Travel - NEO, Click Travel Booking Platform, CTM Europe - Lightning, TapTrip - Vessul, Travel Centric Technology - HotelHub, TravelPerk Booking Platform



TRAVEL PARTNER OF THE YEAR – EUROPEAN TMC

GRAY DAWES TRAVEL

Profile: We're there as an extension of our clients' own organisations – their out-of-house travel department. With our trademark emphasis on the personal touch, we help clients to travel... better.

What the judges said: "The TMC was praised for its brilliant approach to people and partnership – the way it handled and helped employees affected by restructuring, its approach to staff development, retention and communication, and the way it responded to clients' changing needs during the pandemic. Judges were also impressed by its new business wins – surpassing targets – in trying circumstances."

HIGHLY COMMENDED: Agiito

FINALISTS: Agiito, Click Travel, Gray Dawes, Travel Counsellors for Business



TRAVEL PARTNER OF THE YEAR – GLOBAL TMC

WINGS TRAVEL MANAGEMENT

Profile: Wings is an independent global TMC with wholly owned operations in the UK/Europe, Africa, Asia, Middle East, USA and South America. Our staff are experts at handling complex travel and logistics.

What the judges said: "Wings might not be the best-known name in this category, but the work they have performed for clients during the pandemic takes the concept of partnership to another level, going well beyond what is expected of them – even in the most challenging of circumstances – to keep their clients in key industries moving."

HIGHLY COMMENDED: ATPi

FINALISTS: American Express Global Business Travel, ATPi, BCD Travel, Corporate Travel Management, TripActions, Wings Travel Management



TECHNOLOGY INNOVATION – PAYMENTS AND EXPENSES

UATP – CREDIT SOLUTION

Profile: UATP is a global corporate travel payment solution owned and operated by airlines. The network consists of airlines and TMCs that issue charge cards accepted by merchants around the world.

What the judges said: "UATP offered a niche solution for an acute issue caused by the pandemic to recuperate funds from purchased flights cancelled due to Covid-19. While it was not the only solution to do so, it was unique in its ability to preserve value for the buyer as well as the supplier and also kept the TMC in the mix to manage the payment mechanism on behalf of the client."

FINALISTS: American Express Global Business Travel - Neo1, AirPlus International - Virtual Cards, HRS Group - Invisible Pay, UATP - Credit Solution



TRAVEL PARTNER OF THE YEAR – MEETINGS AND EVENTS

REED & MACKAY EVENTS

Profile: Reed & Mackay delivers corporate travel and event solutions, helping businesses to connect effortlessly across the globe. Established as a family business nearly 60 years ago, we are recognised as a global leader for the delivery of extraordinary service in the travel and events arena.

What the judges said: "Reed & Mackay have demonstrated their ability to undertake some seriously complex events in the depths of the pandemic and shown clear, unwavering client support that went above and beyond expectations."

FINALISTS: Agiito, American Express Meetings and Events, CWT Meetings and Events, Hilton - EventReady, Reed & Mackay Events, Your Event Solutions



TECHNOLOGY INNOVATION – MEETINGS AND EVENTS

CVENT – ATTENDEE HUB

Profile: Cvent is a leading meetings, events, and hospitality technology provider. Founded in 1999, the company delivers a comprehensive event marketing and management platform and offers a global marketplace in which event professionals collaborate to create unmatched experiences.

What the judges said: "Cvent were quick to adapt to the changing business landscape, conducting some impressive work with multiple use cases which have a significant positive impact on the industry. Conference booking ability end-to-end is super critical for corporates."

FINALISTS: Cvent - Attendee Hub, Meetingselect, TroopTravel - TROOP Meetings Platform



ACHIEVEMENT IN ENVIRONMENTAL SUSTAINABILITY

Profile: Hilton is a leading global hospitality company with a portfolio of 18 brands comprising more than 6,500 properties and more than one million rooms in 119 countries.

What the judges said: "Hilton have shown seriously impressive commitment to reducing their environmental impact and the consideration of its impact on local communities. Crucially, they are tracking and reporting progress in a detailed, transparent manner and have achieved several ISO standards which is itself no mean feat. Measuring and communicating the data is key."

HIGHLY COMMENDED: Air France - KLM
FINALISTS: Air France - KLM, American Express GBT, Cathay Pacific Airways, Delta Air Lines, Frasers Hospitality, Hilton



**ACHIEVEMENT IN DIVERSITY,
EQUITY AND INCLUSION
AMERICAN EXPRESS GLOBAL
BUSINESS TRAVEL**

Profile: Inclusivity is at the heart and soul of GBT and the culture we create, which enables us to work together in a collaborative, respectful environment. We are steadfast in our belief that DE&I is applicable to everyone.

What the judges said: "Judges felt GBT's work to promote diversity and inclusion permeated throughout the entire organisation, with employees living and breathing its positive and comprehensive policies that provide a shining example to all those doing business with the TMC."

HIGHLY COMMENDED: London North Eastern Railway (LNER)

FINALISTS: American Express Global Business Travel, Hilton, London North Eastern Railway (LNER), TripAdvisor



**ACCOUNT MANAGEMENT TEAM
OF THE YEAR
IHG HOTELS & RESORTS**

Profile: IHG Hotels & Resorts is one of the world's leading hotel companies, with around 350,000 colleagues across more than 100 countries and a family of 16 brands.

What the judges said: "Judges were won over by IHG's quick formation of a dedicated Covid response taskforce and the diverse work it conducted, including its repatriation efforts and the housing of asylum seekers. Some of the things they did were seriously impressive – not the sort of actions you'd expect of their day-to-day activities. They delivered remarkable support not just to corporate customers but to wider society, the NHS, and the homeless."

FINALISTS: Addison Lee, Click Travel, IHG Hotels and Resorts, SilverDoor Apartments



**OUTSTANDING CONTRIBUTION
TO BUSINESS TRAVEL
CLIVE WRATTEN, CEO, THE
BUSINESS TRAVEL ASSOCIATION**

Profile: Clive is CEO of The Business Travel Association (BTA), the representative association for the business travel community across the UK. He has worked in the travel industry for more than 40 years and joined the BTA in summer 2019.

The judges said: "Never has there been a more appropriate winner of this kind of legacy award, with Clive having represented and campaigned for the business travel industry at the highest levels in its darkest hours."

HIGHLY COMMENDED: Julia Lo Bue-Said, CEO, Advantage Travel Partnership
FINALISTS: James Parkhouse, CEO, Agiito; Matthew Holman, Owner and Founder, Simpila Mental Health and The Business Travel Wellbeing Community



**COVID-19 CRISIS RESPONSE
FESTIVE ROAD**

Profile: Festive Road is a consultancy on a mission to create better travel and meetings management. We provide insights, strategy, sourcing, delivery and engagement services to the whole ecosystem.

What the judges said: "Festive Road harnessed their knowledge and expertise to guide the buyer community through the uncertain days of the pandemic, making its Permissible Travel Framework available to the whole industry and in doing so supporting many corporates as they assessed their travel programmes in the most bewildering circumstances."

HIGHLY COMMENDED: Business Travel Association
FINALISTS: Addison Lee, ATPi, The Business Travel Association (BTA), Enterprise, Festive Road, HRS Group, United Airlines



**TRAVEL BUYER OF THE YEAR
CALUM HAWLEY, GLOBAL
TRAVEL MANAGER,
ENDEAVOUR MINING**

Profile: Calum Hawley joined Endeavour Mining in 2018 following a career in the international student travel market.

The judges said: "Calum's work on behalf of his organisation's travellers during the pandemic can only be described as extraordinary. Among his many achievements was the organisation of charter flights to/from Africa to repatriate stranded travellers and to allow the business to continue operating – flights that were additionally made available to other companies with the same needs."

FINALISTS: Andrew Carne, bp; Phil Clarke, BBC; Richard Eades, bp; David Short, National Grid; Deborah Short, GlaxoSmithKline



**TRAVEL TEAM OF THE YEAR
MINISTRY OF DEFENCE –
DEFENCE TRAVEL TEAM
AND AMERICAN EXPRESS
GLOBAL BUSINESS TRAVEL**

Profile: The MoD/GBT have worked tirelessly to get medical professionals and personnel to the frontline as quickly as possible, and to support them throughout the pandemic.

What the judges said: "The exceptional work the teams did to support front line personnel during the pandemic was of national importance to the UK and required the rapid creation and implementation of new travel processes, ad hoc hotel openings and the provision of facilities on a vast scale."

HIGHLY COMMENDED: BT Group and American Express Global Business Travel
FINALISTS: bp, G4S Travel Team and ALTOUR, ITN and Reed & Mackay



CAUTION PREVAILS

As we emerge from the Covid-19 crisis, managing risk and duty of care for travellers has never been more paramount, writes **Rob Gill**

Duty of care and managing risk have been key elements of travel buyers' jobs for many years. But this focus has become even more acute during Covid-19 - particularly as organisations step up business travel at a time when the pandemic is far from over.

But, of course, Covid and other diseases are not the only risk as the recovery in global business travel hopefully gathers momentum – natural disasters, civil unrest, terrorism and other dangers have the potential to create serious disruption, or worse, for travellers and their organisations. So, what lessons have been learnt from the pandemic and will it fundamentally change how organisations manage duty of care and risk once the Covid crisis starts to diminish?

EMERGING FROM THE PANDEMIC

Talk to pretty much anybody in the corporate travel world and there is unanimous agreement that organisations have put traveller wellbeing at the top of their priority list – ahead of issues such as costs and savings, at least for now. The introduction this autumn of new travel risk standard ISO 31030 will also ensure awareness around duty of care processes remains top of mind.

Jorge Mesa, co-chair of GBTA Europe's risk committee, says: "Just as 9/11 changed the awareness of security risk, the Covid-19 pandemic is

doing the same for health risk and driven renewed attention on duty of care, which is now the top travel programme priority. As people resume business travel, awareness of and addressing travel risk will be more important than ever – to both address the organisation's legal obligation of duty of care, but also to restore employee's confidence in travel."

Covid has "brought into sharp focus the legal obligation to research, plan and implement a strategy to mitigate the risks", adds Suzanne Sangiovese, commercial and communications director at security specialist Riskline. "Keeping up to date with the latest restrictions, regulations and travel requirements can be challenging, with countries around the world delivering various levels of response," she adds. "Despite a global pandemic with the same science and research available to all, each country has made different decisions to address the situation with regulations even changing between regions within a country."

POLICY EVOLUTION NOT REVOLUTION

Pre-Covid, most corporates had travel policies that addressed duty of care and risk management, including pandemics, so it has largely been a case of tweaking policies rather than ripping them up to manage the specific risks created by Covid.

Christophe Carnier, president of German business travel association VDR, says most companies already had policies in place before the pandemic, so it



was mainly “small wordings that needed to be changed” during the crisis.

The fact many organisations stopped almost all business travel for long periods also allowed time for corporates to evaluate existing policies.

Brewing giant Heineken, which is now working with travel management company TripActions, has taken this approach during Covid. “With very little corporate travel, we had time to align teams internally across the organisation to collaborate and build a robust travel programme with duty of care at the core,” explains Thomas Bey, Heineken’s global procurement category leader, business services.

Lotten Fowler, general manager of Swedish business travel association SBTa, adds: “Some buyers have taken the opportunity to rewrite their entire policies now there’s less travel but restrictions concerning the pandemic would still be temporary.”

APPROVALS PROCESSES

One of the clear trends during the pandemic has been the requirement for travellers to gain approval for

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Some buyers have taken the opportunity to rewrite their entire policies now there’s less travel but restrictions concerning the pandemic would still be temporary

any business trip at a much higher level within their organisation than pre-Covid – often from very senior executives. But this is something that will have to be loosened as more travellers get back on the road.

“The use of approvals has been very prevalent as companies wanted to control who was travelling due to safety concerns,” says Festive Road consultant Katie Virtue. “As more restrictions ease, some approval procedures are following suit and being lessened. Companies have found that it’s not feasible to manage every trip individually as volume increases and the time for approvals can be cumbersome if multiple levels are needed, especially for simple trips deemed safe.”

But this still presents potential problems for travellers who face ever-changing entry requirements or even outright bans when travelling overseas.

“We’re seeing two angles on travel approval,” adds Jim Ranney, director of global business consulting at American Express Global Business Travel. “The first, and most important, is driven by traveller wellbeing, ensuring that the employee won’t be put at undue risk on any trip, given the Covid dynamics at the destination.

“The second angle is approval driven by ‘business-critical need’ – many companies have struggled financially through the pandemic and have approvals in place to ensure travel is for revenue-generating trips only, such as customer visits.”

Covid has again highlighted the importance of traveller tracking and booking through approved corporate channels, stresses Belinda Hindmarsh, CWT’s senior vice president, global market management and development. “We have seen an even greater focus on organisations mandating the booking of travel through the correct channels,” says Hindmarsh. “We expect an increase of booking in-policy as companies subject more – or all – bookings to formal, hard-stop approval processes.”

VACCINATION QUESTIONS

One of the most vexing challenges facing corporates is the potential of sending unvaccinated travellers on business trips, says VDR’s Christophe Carnier, with vaccine hesitancy or opposition still a significant factor in some countries. “The challenge is how to deal with travellers and employees who don’t want to get vaccinated,” says Carnier.

“Every company will recommend their regular travellers get vaccinated to reduce the risk before going on a business trip but it’s not mandatory,” he says.

“It’s personal data, so if they’re going to countries that are not at high risk or don’t have variants, you would not ask the travellers if they are vaccinated. But if we’re talking about people going to more high-risk countries, it’s probably acceptable to ask them.”

Giving clear pre-trip advice to travellers on the latest

risks and recommended health precautions is already a crucial step to reducing the risks of a traveller falling sick while on a trip.

Simone Buckley, vice-president of marketing at TripActions, adds: “Continuing to review duty of care policies and protocols in response to changing situations and unexpected events is crucial for an organisation to mitigate risk and keep travellers safe.”

Most agree that the roll-out of Covid vaccinations across the world should help to fuel business travel’s recovery but it’s not the only issue.

Paul Cronje, CEO of Clyde Travel, part of the Focus Travel Partnership, says: “Vaccinations will feature, but it will also come down to the increase of supplier services – air and rail – and the consistency of safety protocols. Ultimately it will be consumer confidence that determines the recovery.”

Scott Davies, chief executive of the Institute of Travel Management (ITM), stressed the continued importance of Covid testing: “Vaccination status will continue to be a factor in the allowance of travel but rapid, robust, cost-effective testing is the critical element to allow travel to facilitate commerce once again.”

RISK AND RECOVERY

It can be tempting to just concentrate on Covid but the chaotic Afghanistan evacuation and a host of natural disasters this summer have highlighted the complexities of managing risk and duty of care.

“Covid-19 has been all-encompassing and there’s a risk that travellers are in danger of developing a blind spot when it comes to other travel risks – the risks travellers contended with before Covid are still out there such as other medical and security risks,” emphasises Jorge Mesa, from GBTA Europe’s risk committee.

Bob Quick, executive director and founder, Global Secure Accreditation, says: “When considered alongside outbreaks of civil unrest and the ever-present threat of crime, natural disasters and terrorism, the need for a robust, tested and formalised risk management process – that also gives travellers confidence – has never been more abundantly clear. There is no better time for the introduction of ISO 31030 this autumn.”

Quick says the standard will become a global benchmark for travel risk management and help organisations make “the right decisions to support employees within a framework of good practice guidance developed by a truly global community of experts”.

He believes travel risk management guidance will become increasingly standardised, but adds: “Of course variety will remain, and policy will to a degree mirror an organisation’s personality.”

Meanwhile, business travel recovery could be held back by individual country or regional Covid restrictions, even if corporates want to resume business trips to these



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Every company will recommend their regular travellers get vaccinated to reduce the risk before going on a business trip, but it’s not mandatory

destinations. “We actually see many companies starting to ease their restrictions compared to early in the year, but travel is not always at the company’s sole discretion,” adds American Express GBT’s Jim Ranney. “Given the number of country-level restrictions still in place, there remain many barriers to travel.”

Companies are already facing potentially tricky decisions about the risk of sending people on trips, says CWT’s Belinda Hindmarsh. “Risk and opportunity go hand-in-hand; companies are making qualified risk decisions related to travel and finding a path that works for them to get back on the road,” she says.

“In the next two to three years the focus of travel managers, risk departments and HR teams will be guided by the rules and regulations put in place of the governments around the world.”

The pandemic may also have reshaped how organisations think about duty of care – going beyond compliance and safety to encompass wellbeing and mental health more widely. “As business leaders also face the same health challenges as the rest of their employees, conditions such as stress, anxiety and burnout have started to form part of the lexicon when it comes to the business travel continuity,” says James Wood, International SOS’s head of security solutions. “This in turn has led to the realisation that duty of care goes beyond compliance and is business critical.”

So many things are out of organisations’ control that having the right policies to reduce risk and enhance duty of care for employees is one of the few things they can get right as these uncertain times continue. Be prepared for the unexpected.

Healthy outlook

Traveller wellbeing is not a new concept but few corporates are measuring and monitoring it



BY JULIE AVENEL, VICE PRESIDENT AND GENERAL MANAGER FOR GLOBAL BUSINESS CONSULTING (GBC) AT AMERICAN EXPRESS GBT

Today there's a greater awareness of the connection between mental and physical health, and a growing understanding about the link between the wellbeing of employees and the performance of the business. This reflects a wider consumer or cultural trend, where concepts such as mindfulness and self-care have become increasingly popular.

We've seen wellbeing move into the management mainstream, with companies shaping employment policy and practice around both mind and body. During the disruption brought by the pandemic, some companies offered yoga sessions and counselling – as well as advice about setting up an ergonomic workstation – to help their people successfully make the adjustment to remote working.

Perhaps the focus on wellbeing arrived later in business travel than other areas of corporate life. Traditionally, the sector focused on the physical aspects of travel, such as comfort, safety and security. Mental health was almost an afterthought in the 'road warrior' culture. In some organisations, a punishing travel schedule was a sign of commitment and even a badge of status. Managed travel tended to think in terms of the trip and little attention was paid to the cumulative impact of lots of trips.

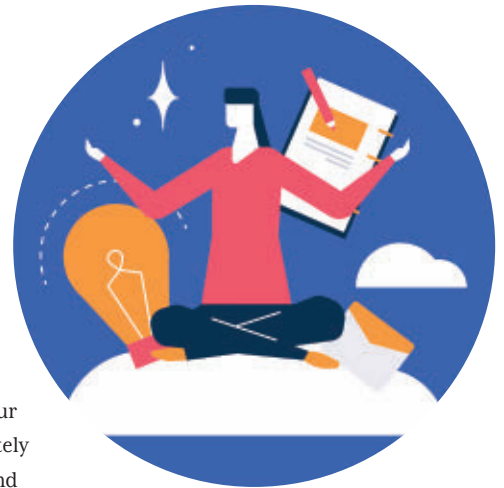
But even before the pandemic, business travel was putting increasing emphasis on wellbeing and considerations such as work-life balance and a more holistic interpretation of

traveller experience. We've started to shift our focus from travel to the traveller and ultimately to the employee. As organisations look beyond the pandemic, our sector has an opportunity to inform – and even lead – the conversation on employee wellbeing in our organisations.

Right now, businesses are pondering a hybrid future where work is divided between offices, homes and anywhere in between. For employees, this will mean more flexibility and a chance to find a better equilibrium between work and, for example, family life. For employers, it will see questions about employee mobility become intertwined with management practices and employment policy. Increasingly, travel and HR will work together to service the mobile workforce.

Wellbeing offers a way for travel managers to take steps towards a deeper relationship with HR. Travel has access to a rich store of travel data, relating to the frequency and duration of trips made by a traveller, the length of time between trips and even arrival and departure times. By combining this data with HR information – such as job codes, tenure and age – travel managers can build invaluable reporting and key performance indicators (KPIs) that capture how frequent business travel impacts employees.

Surprisingly, few organisations currently have specific KPIs related to traveller wellbeing in place. Without them, they cannot understand how frequent business travel is impacting the company and its people. It's



a cliché but it's true: you can't manage what you can't measure. In the case of traveller wellbeing, that means you cannot identify employees who might be at risk of burnout or fatigue – and you can't take the necessary pre-emptive actions to support those travellers.

KPIs can include wellbeing questions in traveller satisfaction surveys and adding travel-specific questions to employee engagement surveys, ultimately in order to try and reduce the number of traveller profiles identified as at risk of burnout.

When you consider the potential for improved employee wellbeing, the benefits of closer collaboration between travel and HR are clear, but the relationship doesn't have to end there. Mobility and travel are more and more integral to the employee experience – and that creates more scope for travel managers to support their HR peers on people issues ranging from employee wellbeing, rewards and recognition through to diversity and inclusion, talent retention and acquisition.

Working together to apply data insights and techniques from disciplines like behavioural science can make them even more effective. We're at the start of this journey but it's clear that travel can become a strategic partner to HR, and the results could be transformational – for travellers and for the entire organisation.

RETURN TO TENDER

Is it time to negotiate new airline deals? **Amon Cohen** examines whether it's really feasible amid a landscape of uncertainty

Here's another box to tick on the business travel recovery check-list: the return of the corporate air deal. "We had almost no RFP [request for proposal] activity for 12 months but now it's picking up again. There really is a reactivation of air sourcing negotiations," says Olivier Benoit, global air practice leader for Advito, the consulting wing of BCD Travel.

"It is a good time to create fresh agreements," he continues. "Travel buyers are beginning to build a programme that will meet their requirements for ramp-up time. It's not only anticipation, it's also observation. Since February 2021 there has been a pick-up in domestic travel in countries including the US, China, Australia, Russia and Japan; and in inter-continental travel since April."

Until now it has suited airlines and their clients alike to roll over deals struck pre-coronavirus with, generally, only minor tweaks. A typical

case is Sodexo, which had an annual pre-Covid air spend of \$40 million and global, regional or local contracts with 30 carriers.

"I haven't been able to do a normal tender since then because you need to supply data for the previous 12 months, and what we have done in the past is not representative of what we will do in the future," says senior global indirect buyer Gavin Harvey. "No airline has taken away the terms we had before. They haven't talked about volume commitments. They don't want to tear up existing contracts while we wait for volumes to pick up."

Some buyers believe continuing uncertainty about their own demand on one hand and the routes and frequencies suppliers can offer on the other means the moment has still not arrived to negotiate new agreements.

"The best way is to extend what you currently have with the same conditions," says Esther van der Aa, global travel manager for Vanderlande Industries. Another travel manager, speaking on condition of anonymity, is awaiting more



consistent data before undertaking a full tender. “I hope to have meaningful data by 2023,” he says.

But perhaps there is a compromise between these two positions. Advito advocates what it labels dynamic sourcing: instead of hammering out a deal and then seeing whether targets for triggering discounts were hit by the end of the agreement period, performance is managed much more actively throughout the contract.

Benoit believes there is no realistic alternative when border closures could wreck travel strategies for supplier and client alike. “We will focus more on top routes and factor in the level of uncertainty for part of the programme, so running an RFP still makes sense but with some adjustments built in,” he says.

“Today we are not really talking about targets and volume or share commitments. They are pretty irrelevant. How can you commit to deliver to an airline based on volume or value when you have such a high level of uncertainty, not only on your side but on the airline’s future schedule? Airlines do know that, so in current negotiations less time is being spent on requiring the corporate to commit to very strict goals. You can work on soft goals. If they are not met, it doesn’t impact the discount,” explains Benoit.

Jeopardy-free discounts sound wonderful for the buyer, but why should sellers agree to something so one-sided? Two reasons, says Benoit. One is that the deal gives them data to position themselves for when demand does finally become more stable. The other, he says, is “a kind of leap of faith. It’s a bet. They know the potential value their large clients will bring when activity levels ramp up. The corporate segment used to be the highest value segment for airlines and it will remain like this post-pandemic.”

Harvey also believes airlines will show flexibility to keep their best customers. “They know there will be a recovery and they want to make sure they will still have a partnership with us,” he says. “They also know that if we have a lowest fare on the day policy they won’t get the volume otherwise.”

But the anonymous travel manager is much less sure carriers will be so obliging. “Airlines are being flexible on deals you negotiated with them two years ago but will not be flexible on targets you commit to now, so only go to market if you are sure you can deliver,” he says. “I wouldn’t enter into revenue- or segment-based targets but into market-share targets. It’s the share that matters to airlines.”

Van der Aa believes proof of intent will also play a key role. “You will need to show you can steer your employees’ travel behaviour and are able to mandate,” she says.

Yet however disciplined travellers are the paradox is that swingeing capacity cuts may mean there are no seats for them to book on preferred carriers. “Some routes really have reduced availability and we have noticed that



often only business class is available,” van der Aa says.

Harvey is experiencing the same problem. “There may have been four flights per day and now there is only one, so tickets are going quite quickly,” he says. “It’s a challenge for buyers. Even if you have discounts, companies will see their fares going up on some routes.”

Advito forecasts that even for companies which routinely fly in business class, limited capacity means lower booking classes will fill up early, thus pushing up average fares. Buyers can counteract some of the pain, says Benoit, by pressing suppliers to include discounts on J and other higher fare classes as well as Z and other classes at the bottom of the ladder. “There are far fewer business class seats, so just a small pick-up in transactions will very quickly close all the lowest classes,” he says.

The good news is that some carriers recognise an implicit contradiction between their commercial strategy of courting corporate clients and their revenue management strategy of shutting the lower fare classes those same clients rely upon to keep down average ticket price.

They are responding, says the anonymous travel manager, by introducing new fares, most notably on long-haul business class. “Previously, only the J fare was available one-way at 70 per cent of the price of a return J fare,” he says. However, since reduced schedules are making it difficult for customers to fly in both directions with the same carrier, they are offering discounted one-way fares in lower fare classes for the first time.

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How can you commit to deliver to an airline based on volume or value when you have such a high level of uncertainty, not only on your side but on the airline’s future schedule?

Work • *trips*

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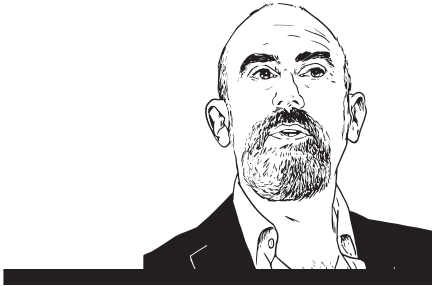
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On a whinge and a prayer

Ongoing uncertainty leaves all corners of the travel industry experiencing turbulence



BY AMON COHEN



I have a cunning entrepreneurial plan. I am informed by my children of a popular dating app called, for reasons entirely unclear to me, Hinge. My idea is to launch an app that brings together grumpy old people like me not for romance but to moan about leading issues of the day. I call it Whinge.

One of the first topics I will air for complaint on Whinge is incontinent repetition of the phrase “emotional rollercoaster”. I have a brick on standby to lob through my TV the next time I hear these two words uttered together.

I mention this because “emotional rollercoaster” is a phrase I’ve heard bandied about a few times to describe our rising and plunging hopes for the post-Covid recovery of business travel. Perhaps a more apposite symbol from the fairground would be the carousel. Every time we think business travel is about to move clear of Covid, we seem to swing round and end back where we started.

For it is now pretty clear that travel, especially business travel, is going to be just about the last aspect of pre-Covid life to return to something like it was. In recent weeks I have sat in pubs and at football matches (albeit watching Yeovil Town, where spectators were naturally self-isolated long before Covid), and seen young people carousing at pop festivals. Yet travel is still controlled strictly. I’m unclear what the difference is: is Covid from foreigners worse than Covid from my fellow Britons?

A couple of months ago it seemed autumn

2021 would mark the great business travel fightback. But whereas there is plenty of business travel industry activity, not least Business Travel Show Europe, travel volumes – though improving – remain low.

Many travel managers I’ve spoken to report recent extensions of travel bans within their organisations, in several cases to January 2022 at the earliest. There are various reasons. One is that although vaccination has suppressed infections to some extent, and certainly reduced hospitalisations and deaths, it isn’t ending the pandemic but instead converting it into an endemic. We’re slowly realising travel maybe affected by Covid for years to come.

Next is the lingering restrictions on travel even for people who have been vaccinated. Here in the UK, the continuing requirement for testing both before and after entry to the country is deterring visitors.

I have seen arguments rage on social media between travel folk for and against testing. It’s hard to know who is right when we’re not medical professionals, but what is clear is that testing will remain a major deterrent to travel unless it is made quicker, easier and cheaper. However, many travel professionals now believe the UK government, which alone has the power to resolve this issue, has limited interest in reviving business travel.

While all this doubt lingers, spare a thought for suppliers trying to plot a return to profitability amid hugely scary uncertainties.

Their fairground ride is the ghost train.

Volume will be “unintuitive for the next few years,” British Airways head of sales Mark Muren told me recently. Muren was referring to the difficulty of building data-driven agreements with corporate clients, but the remark applies equally to his network planning colleagues trying to figure how much frequency to restore to their schedule.

As I mentioned in that article, complaining about one’s flag carrier is a national sport for travel managers, and so would fit very nicely as a specialist section within my imaginary Whinge app. But this is a time for flexibility and tolerance within the travel eco-system. Muren argued BA is embodying that philosophy by creating more flexible fare types and allowing pre-Covid negotiated discounts to roll on without penalties for missed targets.

“We all have to be incredibly patient with each other as we get back in,” he said. So, memo to me and any other Whingers out there: business travel is stuck in an unfairground right now. Let’s dial down the grumbling until we have found our way to escape it.

• Amon Cohen is a specialist business travel writer, conference moderator and media trainer

SHOW TIME!

Business Travel Show Europe to reunite the industry at London ExCeL on 30 September and 1 October

Business Travel Show Europe is back with a new location and new features but also essential combination of high-quality educational content, many and diverse exhibitors, and top networking opportunities that make this a must-attend event for the whole industry.

Taking place at ExCeL London on 30 September and 1 October, the free-to-attend event features an additional hosted buyer-only programme on 29 September and supplementary content available online throughout the show, enabling those who cannot travel – or prefer not to – to attend aspects of the event in a virtual environment online.

Visitors to ExCeL will be able to meet with more than 125 exhibitors from across the business travel industry, pick from nearly 50 panel debates, talks and masterclasses, and experience new features including the Ethical Travel Trail, Wellness Cafe and BTN Innovation Zone.

This year's conference agenda is jam-packed with sessions to help you rebuild and refine your travel programme, ensuring it – and you – are post-pandemic fit and ready to support your travellers when they hit the road again. Buyers, suppliers, consultants and other experts will tackle the most pressing travel topics, including sustainable travel, risk management, cost-cutting, using science to improve compliance, working with TMCs – and much more. Check out the following pages for all the details.

BUSINESS TRAVEL SHOW EUROPE

30 SEP – 01 OCT 2021
EXCEL, LONDON

WHEN & WHERE

Organised by the BTN Group, Business Travel Show Europe takes place on **30 September & 1 October at ExCeL London** and online on Swapcard.

Register to attend at **businesstravelshoweurope.com**. A visitor pass to Business Travel Show Europe includes access to The Meetings Show, which is co-located next door at ExCeL. Business Travel Show Europe is open from **09.30-17.30 on 30 Sep and from 09.30 to 17.00 on 1 Oct.**



REGISTER FOR THE FREE TWO-DAY EVENT AT **BUSINESSTRAVELSHOWEUROPE.COM**

BUSINESS TRAVEL SHOW EUROPE – AT A GLANCE

■ CONFERENCE PROGRAMME

The Business Travel Show Europe conference programme is jam-packed with 64 hours of invaluable content and knowledge sharing from industry visionaries, disruptors, and innovators. Topics covered include sustainability, diversity, behavioural economics, traveller management and much, much more.

■ EXHIBITORS

Visitors have the chance to meet with more than 125 leading travel suppliers from all corners of the industry, including airlines, TMCs, hotel groups and the latest start-ups and innovators all showcasing their products, tools and services to help you deliver value for your business and safety and security for your travellers.



■ WELLNESS CAFÉ

A recent report found that UK businesses have doubled their investment in wellness activities and programmes over the last 12 months, while traveller wellbeing is increasingly falling under the spotlight of travel managers at companies large and small.

The Wellness Café at Business Travel Show Europe will be a peaceful space and an oasis of calm on the busy show floor. Supported by BTA Cares.



■ ETHICAL TRAVEL TRAIL

Brand new for 2021, the Ethical Travel Trail will take attendees on a journey across the show floor, letting them discover, meet and hear from the people and companies championing sustainability, diversity, equity and inclusion, carbon neutrality and human rights to challenge behaviours for the good of the planet.



■ BTN INNOVATION ZONE

This area will showcase many of the most innovative products introduced to the business travel market in the last two years. Exhibitors include Fly Green Alliance, Thrust Carbon, Trees 4 Travel, Unlocked Data, Climate Neutral Group, Element Travel Technology, Grapevine, PayPense, PredictX and Hubli.

■ COMPLEMENTARY ONLINE CONTENT

For those that aren't able to make it to the in-person event at London ExCeL, a first-class online experience with access to education, suppliers and networking over the course of the event will be available instead.



■ THE BUSINESS TRAVEL INNOVATION FACEOFF

Taking place online, The Innovation Faceoff

will feature six presentations of cutting-edge products, technologies and services developed by the start-ups listed below. The Business Travel Innovator award winner will be named at 15.25 on the second day of the event.

- **Climate Neutral Group:** Netherlands-based CNG's Travel Scan Program assesses company travel data to find opportunities to reduce or replace flights, reduce business class flights and switch to more efficient routes or flights using more sustainable fuels.

- **Element Travel Technology:** provides corporate travel technology directly to corporate buyers and enables smaller TMCs to provide it to their corporate clients. Element contracts with primary suppliers to support corporate buyers or TMCs with consulting and ongoing servicing.

- **Grapevine:** the white-labelled TMC service uses AI engine Marvin to integrate TMC data sources on booking to identify booking opportunities and provides personalised messages to the traveller or bookers with in-policy recommendations to increase conversions and TMC commissions.

- **PayPense:** Germany's PayPense eliminates cash advances by making all travel purchases billed and paid by the company. Through sophisticated integration with players including Amadeus Cytric and HRS, pre-booked travel items help generate travel budgets for every trip that enable travellers to pay additional expenses by uploading corresponding receipts.

- **PredictX:** PredictX Scenario Builder allows travel managers to take their historical programme, remove parts of it that are no longer valid, project future volumes and merge them with fare and rate data as it happens, allowing them to instantly see where the programme is trending and to explore the impact of change.

- **Hubli:** a new product offering designed to help global organisations to attract and retain the best talent and empower their teams to succeed from anywhere without sacrificing safety and control will be officially launched at Business Travel Show Europe. Hubli was previously known as meetingsbooker.com.

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CHANGING PRIORITIES: BUSINESS TRAVEL SHOW EUROPE'S ANNUAL TRAVEL MANAGER SURVEY

Travel professionals are worried about changes to their roles, keeping up to date with travel restrictions and more general uncertainty surrounding the pandemic, according to Business Travel Show Europe's annual survey of travel managers about the biggest challenges they foresee over the next 12 months.

For the last five years, a pressure to cut costs has featured in first or second place. This year, cost cutting dropped out of the top ten altogether to sit in 13th position.

Airline pricing, Brexit, appointing a new TMC, budget and availability all maintain their places in the top ten. The pressure to be more sustainable – which entered the chart for the first time in 2020 – has dropped back out again to number 11.

Clare Francis, travel supplier category manager at Willis Towers Watson, who is a speaker at the Business Travel Show Europe, said: "Travelling for business has become a lot more complicated in the past 18 months, with the introduction of Brexit, the Posted Workers

Directive and AI considerations, as well as the obvious Covid-related quarantine and testing requirements.

"However, since many colleagues haven't travelled for an extended period of time, many of these new and confusing restrictions are still unknown to them, so education and communication are going to be a big part of our 'reimagining travel' strategy. It's no longer possible to make spur-of-the-moment decisions to hop on a plane and visit an international client which will come as quite a shock to many who have been used to doing this for years."

Scott Davies, CEO of the Institute of Travel Management, added: "The results of this survey echo the sentiment that we are hearing from our buyer community around the challenges of conveying accurate information to travellers and bookers. This isn't just regarding different Covid travel restrictions and testing protocols, but also regulatory requirements for business travellers entering and travelling within the EU."



BUSINESS TRAVEL SHOW EUROPE 2021 - CONFIRMED EXHIBITORS

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BUSINESS TRAVEL SHOW EUROPE 2021 - CONFERENCE PROGRAMME

**BUSINESS
TRAVEL
SHOW
EUROPE**

30 SEP - 01 OCT 2021
EXCEL, LONDON

WEDNESDAY 29 SEPTEMBER

(PRE-SHOW HOSTED BUYER PROGRAMME)

13.50: Terra incognita - Mapping managed travel's future in a totally changed landscape

15.15: Back on the road again! - The great corporate travel round table

16.40: Heresy! - Your chance to say the unsayable about managed travel

THURSDAY 30 SEPTEMBER

10.00: Make your travel programme truly sustainable by 2030

10.00: Re-tool travel as a professional purchasing category

10.00: Ten quick wins to get you started in travel management

10.40: Business Travel Innovation Faceoff PredictX & Climate Neutral Group (streamed)

11.05: Ted-Style Talk Behavioural Science and your Travel Programme: Travel Managers as Choice Architects (streamed)

11.20: Business travel managers as choice architects - using behavioural economics to influence winning decisions

11.20: Corporate payments - achieve more savings, more data, more process efficiencies

11.20: Covid, Brexit, tax and A1/Posted Workers Directive - why mobility compliance is European travel managers' new challenge AND new opportunity

11.20: Going through the numbers - how to use data analytics to get the most out of your business intelligence

12.00: Business Travel Innovation Faceoff - Grapevine & Hubli (streamed)

12.25: Ted-Style Talk - The Science of Compliance (streamed)

12.40: Let's fix the way we pay TMCs

12.40: Online booking and expense management - how to choose it, how to implement it, how to maximise adoption

12.40: Take your hotel relationship management to the next level post-Covid

12.40: Therapist's Couch - I need help!

13.45: Ted-Style Talk - Business travel: digital and sustainable? (streamed)

14.00: Doctor's surgery - everything you wanted to ask about business travel and health

14.00: Goodbye travel manager, hello business travel micro-services engineer?

14.00: Pressing reset on your airline agreements

14.00: Travel policy - your key to balancing maximum compliance with traveller experience

14.40: Business Travel Innovation Faceoff - Element & PayPense (streamed)

15.05: Ted-Style talk - (Re)-invent yourself to (Re)-build (streamed)

15.20: Beef up pre-trip approval for you and your travellers

15.20: Get up, stand up - bringing diversity, equity & inclusion to corporate travel

15.20: Reinvent your mature travel programme

15.20: Safety and security - a best practice guide for beginners

FRIDAY 1 OCTOBER

10.00: Can you buy better through New Distribution Capability?

10.00: Choosing a travel management company and other partners

10.00: Transitioning from travel management to interaction management - how do we control travel alongside virtual meetings?

11.05: Ted-Style talk - (Re)-invent yourself to (Re)-build: Adding Revenue Management to the Travel Manager's Skillset (streamed)

11.20: Can airline choice really green my travel programme? Is Sustainable Aviation Fuel the answer?

11.20: Navigating the new normal for meetings procurement

11.20: Using data for improved savings and control

11.20: What's my travel management career path post-Covid?

12.25: Ted-Style Talk - Business Travel: Digital & Sustainable? (streamed)

12.40: Diversity, equity & inclusion - let's organise!

12.40: Integrating travel payment and expense with your other company processes

12.40: Sustainability - how to reduce your company's travel-related carbon emissions

12.40: Vaccines, testing, quarantine, health passports - what's the medical outlook for business travel?

13.45: Ted-Style Talk - Behavioural Science and your Travel Programme: Travel Managers as Choice Architects (streamed)

14.00: Forecasting Forum 2022 - the travel price and risk outlook for the next 12 months

14.00: Negotiating the best savings and value with travel suppliers

14.00: Tighten up your contracting to avoid hidden fees and mark-ups

14.00: Work closer with your HR department to get the best for your travellers

15.05: Ted-Style Talk - The Science of Compliance (streamed)

15.20: Car rental - find the savings in a fast-changing category

15.20: Communication - how to engage travellers and other stakeholders in your travel programme

15.20: Managing traveller well-being post-pandemic

15.25: Business Travel Innovation Faceoff Final (streamed)

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TIME FOR A REBOOT?

The shift to offline travel bookings has “reached a turning point” but how swiftly will online adoption return? **Amon Cohen** reports



Adoption rates for corporate online booking tools moved in only one direction from their introduction in the mid-1990s right up to 2020. But, as with pretty much else everything in life, coronavirus changed all that.

“Many companies put a complete freeze on travel or only allowed it if authorised by their CEO,” says Guy Snelgar, senior vice-president for global travel technology integration with Partnership Travel Consulting. “They locked down their OBTs as part of their travel ban or because the tools were not updated to match where their policy was.”

Mondelez International is a textbook example of Snelgar’s observation. The confectionery and snack food giant switched off its OBT when the virus struck because it doesn’t allow self-service booking to high-risk countries. “With the pandemic by default putting every market in a high-risk country, online booking become a non-choice. It was not a

secure way of providing a service,” global lead for travel, expense and card programmes Adrian Witschi said on a recent *BTN Europe* podcast.

The big question, as with so many disruptions caused by coronavirus, is whether the trend will prove permanent. Snelgar believes firmly that the retreat to offline is not only temporary but has already abated.

“We’ve just reached a turning point,” Snelgar says. “Companies are signalling they are about to open up travel again, albeit in a controlled way, and they want to switch their OBTs back on with new rules.”

Examples of those new rules may include trip approval by a line manager or other internal stakeholders such as human resources, and requirement of confirmation by travellers that they are fully vaccinated.

“As soon as you have rules like that, technology becomes the best way to enforce it,” Snelgar continues. “Technology doesn’t forget you need two jabs or to check you’ve acknowledged you have read the Covid rules for the country

you are visiting. Instead of sending travellers a complex set of rules, the tool will tell them what to do.

“All the things OBTs are good at – configuring rules, communicating information and managing approval processes – have become even more important in the post-Covid world. Some organisations are enforcing use of the OBT because that is the guaranteed way to to meet duty of care obligations by showing you have risk-managed every trip.”

Tony D'Astolfo, senior vice-president for North America at Serko, provider of the OBT Zeno, agrees with Snelgar about the resumption of online bookings. “We do have customers who took their sites down to remove all risk of people making a booking while they had travel bans. They have switched them back on,” he says. “We’ve done a lot of work to provide information at the point of purchase to help users make informed booking decisions.”

One company which feels very comfortable booking online is the academic publisher Springer Nature Group. It switched recently to the predominantly digital travel management company TripActions and global travel manager Sammit Khanndeparkar believes the online environment does exactly what Snelgar outlined: steering the appropriate information and policy rules to travellers at point of booking to ensure correct behaviour.

Springer Nature operates a traffic light policy. “If you try to book a country on the red list, the system tells you that you can’t,” Khanndeparkar says. He sits in on a company crisis management call every Monday, after which policy and pre-trip information is adjusted for travellers country by country.

Khanndeparkar says everyone in the company wins. His travellers prefer self-service to picking up a phone, while changes to the booking tool are made by TripActions, and traveller communications are handled by Springer Nature’s internal comms and crisis management teams. “I’m getting more time to strategise,” he says.

Both Khanndeparkar and D'Astolfo also refer to the heavy furloughing and redundancies made by TMCs since March 2020 in response to plunging booking volumes. “Offline service is unreliable at the moment,” says Khanndeparkar.

Another point on which the two agree is that the long-term financial advantages of online booking will help it prevail. “Finance guys have become very comfortable with not paying for their people to travel,” notes D'Astolfo, and therefore as travel resumes they will want to see costs kept as low as possible. Online booking transactions are generally much cheaper than offline. Additionally, Khanndeparkar estimates that the well-established concept of visual guilt, where self-service travellers feel obliged to choose cheaper options, lowers average prices by eight to 15 per cent.

But not everyone agrees online is the way ahead – at least not for some time yet. Offering the caveat that his



clientbase overwhelmingly comprises small and medium enterprises, Travel Counsellors managing director for corporate travel Kieran Hartwell says not a single one of his customers is booking online currently.

“OBTs lack personalisation,” Hartwell argues. “People want reassurance and there is a lack of trust of what online tools tell them in a dynamic situation where the rules are changing constantly. They want someone to navigate the trip for them every step of the way, from searching to in-trip support.”

Issues travellers want to talk through with their counsellor, Hartwell adds, include visas, travel ban exemptions, vaccinations and testing. “Wanting a human you can speak to in order to navigate all of that is a moment but who knows how long that moment may be?” he says. “Twelve months? Eighteen months?”

Needless to say, D'Astolfo does not agree. “We’ll get a smaller amount of a smaller pie initially but it will snap back pretty quickly and we will eventually gain a larger market share because of a younger demographic that don’t want to talk to people when they book,” he says.

And Snelgar remains confident that anything humans can do to help business travellers book a trip, OBTs can often do better. If they can’t, he advises, it’s usually because the booking tool hasn’t been set up properly. “A large proportion of OBT users are not making the most of the potential for configuration, such as approval processes and rules,” he says. “It’s not because technology can’t do it but because whoever is responsible for configuring the tool is not pulling their finger out.”

“

All the things OBTs are good at – configuring rules, communicating information and managing approval processes – have become even more important in the post-Covid world

The future of Commercial Cards and business travel spend

Business travel spend is likely to look very different post-pandemic.

James Sykes, Head of Commercial Cards, Lloyds Bank and David Legg, Head of Corporate Card Products, Lloyds Bank discuss how they're adapting their products and services to support customers.

After an incredibly disruptive 18 months which saw international trips grind to a halt and domestic travel significantly scaled back, business travel – and business travel spend – is starting to pick up. But new ways of working and restrictions on visiting other countries mean business travel is likely to look very different post-pandemic.

The future of business travel

While it's not yet clear exactly how business travel will evolve over the coming months, a number of changes seem likely. We'd anticipate that the number of international trips will reduce in volume compared to pre-2020 levels, for example, but that those trips which are made will be more significant in scope. It's likely more senior colleagues will be making them and they may be longer with a higher cost associated with them.

With the rise of hybrid working and a growing number of companies forgoing their office spaces, we'd also expect to see more domestic meetings and events being booked locally as colleagues seek opportunities to connect and collaborate as a team.

It's important that businesses' travel departments plan for these changes and, hopefully, a significant increase in activity. It's our role as a Commercial Card issuer to make it as easy as possible for our customers to manage their travel spend and be agile in responding to their evolving needs and spend requirements.

To that end we've been exploring how we can use technology to make the experience of both the traveller claiming travel expenses and their approver, simpler and more efficient.

For example, our new mobile app improves the expense experience for cardholders, by automating expense claims and making the process as touchless as possible. You simply open our app, take a photo of a receipt and the information is automatically uploaded within our expense management system.

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TAKING TO THE TRACKS

Many companies are switching travellers from air to rail in order to reduce their environmental impact, including French retailer Decathlon. **Andy Hoskins** reports

Among the many measures companies are adopting as they pursue sustainability goals and carbon reduction targets is modal shift – actively steering their business travellers away from short-haul flights and on to high-speed train services.

Easier said than done, perhaps, for rail and air go head-to-head on a relatively limited number of routes in some countries and there remains a mindset that business travellers will only take to the train for journeys of up to four hours. Beyond that, they're buckling up onboard a plane.

From the UK, rail competes well against air on routes from London to Scotland, Paris and Brussels, but in mainland Europe there is much greater scope for shifting travellers from planes to trains. In fact, in France the government is keen to eliminate short-haul flights where rail alternatives taking less than 2.5 hours are available – Paris-Nantes and Lyon-Bordeaux, for example.

One company taking advantage of new booking tool functionality to hasten the switch from air to rail is sporting goods retailer Decathlon. "We very much favour rail travel over air. The main benefits for us is that, overall, the cost of rail travel is lower and, crucially, it is a more sustainable mode of transport," says Joséphine Thery, travel manager at Decathlon France.

In 2019, 44 per cent of travel bookings for Decathlon France were rail trips and the company expects that percentage to grow as its employees begin travelling again post-pandemic. Its most-booked route is from Lille, where it is headquartered, to Paris (including Paris Charles de Gaulle Airport) which accounted for 42 per cent of rail bookings in 2019. The journey is around 60 minutes and there is no air alternative.

On its second most-booked route, Lille-Lyon, which accounted for ten per cent of booked rail tickets in 2019, there are both rail travel options (with a journey time of around three hours) and flights (one hour, 20 minutes). It is here that the company has made a telling choice.

"Our current travel policy strongly encourages travellers choose train [travel] as the preferred mode of travel for all domestic trips. We have taken this a step further by restricting the Lille-Lyon route to only allow rail for business trips," says Thery.

The company's TMC, Egencia, introduced an Air-Rail Display in its online booking tool this summer, enabling users to see when a rail alternative is available for the flight route searched. Other TMCs including CTM and American Express Global Business Travel have also upgraded booking tool functionality to highlight more sustainable travel options in recent months.

"It [the Egencia update] will help our travellers compare the differences in terms of time, costs and, importantly, CO2 footprint when choosing between the two travel options [air and rail]. Having this on one single tool and page means individuals can capture this information quickly and accurately," says Thery.

Like many other companies, Decathlon France has found from its data that business travellers tend to turn to rail travel when the journey is four hours or less. Of its ten most-booked rail routes, only Lille-Nantes (3h30m to 4h) and Lille-Rennes (just over four hours) approach this traditional threshold. Could attitudes towards longer rail trips change in the future?

"It's a bit too early to tell, but our new more environmental travel policy will be communicated to all our travellers soon, so we'll have a better idea after that," says Thery.

WHAT WILL IT TAKE?

Unconscious bias, microaggressions and discrimination based on race have no place in society, but is the business travel industry doing its best to eliminate it? **Elizabeth West** reports



Speaking out about race issues hasn't always been the default position for business travellers – or business travel industry leaders. Indeed, it's not the default position even now. But more employees are looking for work environments that take diversity, equity and inclusion seriously. Business travel suppliers have made some strides in their awareness of these issues, and it's time for travel management to become a larger part of the conversation too.

If the experiences described on these pages by a diverse group of business travellers don't move a company's needle toward the right thing, there could be a listening problem.

In the UK, a report from professional services giant EY and the EY Foundation about young black people in the workplace found 24 per cent of those surveyed had experienced racism in the workplace – worse still, that figure rises to 55 per cent when including client, customer and supplier engagement. In addition, only 13 per cent believe their ethnicity does not present any barrier to entry in the workplace, and 26 per cent believe their ethnicity has been a key barrier to promotion. Meanwhile, 17 per cent of the 1,000-plus young black people surveyed by SavantaComRes in 2020 on behalf of EY said their employer has no policies in place to support black employees.

In the US, meanwhile, a study by startup and technology company recruitment specialist BuiltIn found 37 per cent of working-age adults in 2020 identified as minorities. The study estimated that by 2044,

groups traditionally seen as 'minorities' will reach majority status in the US population, a shift that will also impact diversity in the workplace. In other words, business travel populations are getting more diverse.

THE FALLOUT OF PREJUDICE

Consider Hansini Sharma's experience with her former employer (see panel opposite): she says her experience of business travel exclusion based on her appearance as a woman of colour, "stuck with her over time." When she moved on from that position, she's been sure to consider employers "that ask me the right questions," she said.

"When I think of my employer now, first of all, this would never happen. Second, they're the kind of company that asks the questions: 'Are you comfortable? Do you feel like you have what you need and the resources you need to make this trip successful? In your professional opinion, is this the best way to handle the situation?'" Those types of questions empower me to make the right decision for the business and for myself and for us all to be successful."

She said she eventually came to view the issue as one of opportunity. By blocking her from participating in a client trip, her former company took away an early career opportunity to prove herself.

"It's important for the person making this decision, especially if they're in a position of influence and power, to be honest with themselves about why they're doing something," she said, particularly if it takes on a pattern. "These small things adding up can impact the trajectory of someone's career."

It's one thing to put parameters around internal decision-making about travel. It's another to understand and mitigate potential behaviours when business travellers are in environments outside of the company's control.

Travel managers rely on their suppliers to deliver the right experiences to their travellers, but how can they monitor issues like Eric Weaver being questioned about his right as a first-class air passenger to the dedicated overhead bin space (see below)?

Or, in another example shared by Bizly's Kevin Iwamoto, the assumption by a hotel provider that because of his last name, he should receive a Japanese-language newspaper, rather than the English-language version – despite the fact that his hotel registration information and status as an elite traveller clearly outline that he is American?

Much of the DE&I conversation in managed travel has circled around supplier sourcing. Because the travel experience largely depends on these suppliers, travel managers are looking at how to ensure their suppliers internally support a culture of diversity while educating and training their frontline staff to look more deeply at people as individuals without making assumptions based on race or skin colour or last names – because judgments about “what a person is” inevitably will be mired in bias.

“Some people say I don't look black, and sometimes I am not perceived that way from appearance,” said Weaver. “People think I'm Latino at some point or other... but I have two African-American parents and four African-American grandparents.”

The complexity of unconscious bias described here – about skin tone, attire, speech cadence, accents and who-knows-what-else – creates a topsy-turvy environment of confusion and just one more minefield for business travellers of colour to navigate.

Weaver is not alone. “Similarly to Eric,” said Sharma, “people often tell me I ‘don't look Indian.’ I'm not entirely sure what they might think, but I've encountered that a lot on my travels.”

“

Corporate travel has not been the most forthright in talking about DE&I, particularly around issues of colour

FOSTERING DIVERSITY

A culture of honouring diversity – not just accepting it – could be the path forward. In a corporate environment, that may translate into recognising that companies that create diverse executive teams, and then actually value the input of those diverse members, perform better than those that don't.

According to a 2018 McKinsey report, diverse companies are 33 per cent more likely to have greater financial returns than their less diverse industry peers. And a 2018 BCG report found that companies with above average diversity at the management level generate revenues from new products 19 percentage points higher than companies with below average diversity.

Diversity culture at that level is more likely to cascade throughout the organisation, and more travel managers are looking at accessing partners that have embraced it.

ICF global travel manager Carmen Smith, who is black and has been deeply involved in her own company's diversity, equity and inclusion conversations, is eager to see change in the industry.

“Corporate travel has not been the most forthright in talking about DE&I, particularly around issues of colour,” she said. “When I look at other travel managers or go to certain conferences, there's not a lot of ‘me’ walking around. Why is that? Most people who travel have a very broad outlook; they are usually diverse in thought. When it comes to business travel, it seems to be the opposite. It seems to go in the vein of normal corporate behaviour and normal

SPEAKING OUT

“I'm sorry sir, that space is reserved for first-class passengers! Why was I told that when none of the other passengers were? There were lots of other first class passengers boarding at the same time. I can only presume it was because I am black.”
Universities Space Research Association chief human resources officer, Eric Weaver, speaking about an air travel experience while representing his organisation on business.

“The significant rise in Asian-American and Pacific Islander hate crimes really has concerned me and gives me more anxiety. Probably the most anxiety I've ever felt before, especially since a lot of these actions are mostly random, and they can take place anywhere and in public and in broad daylight. It's caused me to think twice about business travel arrangements where I never thought a lot about those things before. Sadly, it's kind of affected me in a mental capacity that I'm still trying to work through.”
Bizly chief strategy officer and third-generation

Japanese-American Kevin Iwamoto, who has decided to speak out about discriminatory behaviour, microaggressions and a lack of diversity in business travel.

“After I had travelled with the team to London, different parts of Europe and Mexico City... I had been working toward this meeting with the client for several weeks. I was the lead point on the account for all the deliverables [for a meeting in Colombia]... but about two weeks before the meeting, when everyone was booking travel, I was told I couldn't go. At first, I was confused. I thought I had done something wrong with my work. Digging in a little bit more, it turned out that it was too much of a risk for someone who looks like me to go on this trip.”
Acquis Consulting practice lead and Indian-American, Hansini Sharma, speaking about an experience at a different employer in which a decision to exclude her from a business trip, made without consulting her, was based solely on the colour of her skin.





corporate thought. And there are ceilings in place.

“So being a black female, I’ve always tried to be an ambassador. In any position I’m in, I’m transparent but want to have those honest conversations. I’ve not always been allowed to have those conversations, though, because I was perceived as the so-called ‘angry black woman’.”

Smith is hopeful those biased perceptions are changing and that companies and partners will be more receptive to the issues she brings to the table, whether about race and diversity or any number of critical issues. “I’m glad the industry is talking about this now; but for me, it’s been a lifetime.”

For travel managers, she said, listening and being receptive to the experience of travelling colleagues is the first step toward evolving their programmes. The second is to advocate for the required changes.

“ICF, like many organisations, has created employee community networks: black, women, Latino, LGBTQ,” she said. “One thing we can do is talk with these individual communities. We want to hear about their experiences as travellers, and what are some of the challenges. By talking to them, it gives a different perspective. It goes beyond just business travel issues like, ‘I missed my flight.’

“Rather, it digs into whether they have challenges in certain countries, or were they met with opposition with a certain supplier, or put in a motel in the worst part of town, or with no amenities within walking distance? Reaching out to these communities adds an extra layer of due diligence.” Doing so might also alter perspectives of how to keep travellers productive and supported while on the road, she added.

Sharma agreed with the idea of focusing on the supplier set – at least partially. However, policy and individual traveller empowerment, she said, also should come into play.

“We’ve talked about personalisation in travel for years. When

I think about issues that are coming to light now [but] have existed forever... it’s important for travel managers and businesses to think about who they want to be and how they want to personalise travel [in ways that] look beyond the dollar. What are your goals here, and how do we accomplish those by being true to a bottom line?” she said.

“Obviously that’s important, but what are the changes we can make now to help travellers make the choices they want to make to feel comfortable doing the work that they need to do? Is that a really strongly sourced programme? Maybe. But maybe it’s a no-source programme.

“Maybe it’s working with suppliers who give you the flexibility of all the things that are important to travel managers: insight into their data, compliance, things like that, but also offer the traveller the opportunity to choose what makes them feel most comfortable. The trick is for travel managers to understand trade-offs in a more strategic sense.”

Like Smith, Sharma advocated for expanding the perspective beyond just travel and that may need to happen before looking at the supply side for solutions, she said. “What are your financial goals? Operationally, what are your goals from an HR perspective? Your DE&I goals? If you’re not sharing the messaging in a way that resonates directly with your company ethos and code, then the suppliers can’t be held to that standard.”

DE&I isn’t the purview of travel management alone, but it must be included as part of the corporate strategy in working toward a more equal future. In the meantime, the role of advocating for equity and inclusion within a travel programme can’t be shouldered by our colleagues of colour alone. Because it’s not just our culturally privileged colleagues (read: white) that don’t want to talk about it – only 58 per cent of white employees think diversity levels are an issue within their organisations, according to Glassdoor. Often, our colleagues of colour don’t want to talk about it either, lest they be tagged as complainers, problem starters or, worse, not believed. The travel management practice needs to give people the space to come forward to promote proper duty of care for a more diverse workforce.

“Business trips have been filled with things that on the surface seem very minor, but when you aggregate them all, it really becomes a problem,” says Iwamoto. “Culturally, we are taught not to make waves and not to say anything, but I’ve been changing as I get older, and I’ve been running into more of those incidences. Like it or not, we have to speak up and things have to change.”

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Business trips have been filled with things that on the surface seem very minor, but when you aggregate them all, it really becomes a problem

DIFFERENT TREATMENT

BTN Europe spoke with a UK-based business travel professional with more than 30 years' experience in the industry who has been subjected to racist and homophobic behaviour both at home and abroad. Here he shares his experiences and insights

“You can experience a lot of microaggressions as a person of colour travelling for business. I've experienced it many times over the years. I'm not saying every time it's happened that the person is racist or prejudiced, but there have been assumptions made at times that I don't feel would have been made were I part of a different demographic.

I was looking for my seat in business class once and a member of cabin crew came over acting almost as if I shouldn't there and I'd made a mistake. I suppose they have people wandering in all the time, but still... If I was a white guy in a suit would he have treated me like that?

On another occasion when travelling in business class a member of cabin crew was being a bit over-familiar with me and it later transpired she thought I was crew upgraded for free. There was an assumption that the only way I could be in business class would be if I got there free on an upgrade.

Unfortunately there have been too many times when you get on to a flight and you just know you're being treated a bit differently – and it still happens. I was travelling a lot before the pandemic and in certain countries the way people react to people of colour is challenging”

SUPPORT FOR TRAVELLERS

“As an LGBTQ+ traveller or person of colour you have to give careful consideration to where you are travelling and how you present yourself while there. For example I would never travel to Russia or some countries in the Middle East as being LGBTQ+ there is not accepted or can be illegal. I really have to think about where I'm travelling... am I going to be safe? Is homosexuality legal? Will it be ok for me travel? Will I feel comfortable? These are things that the straight white male community don't have to think about – that they can take for granted.

My employer is very supportive of all our travellers. If someone has concerns about travelling to a particular destination we would contact the internal security team who would draft a report with sections of specific advice about what it means to be a certain demographic when you're travelling in that country. But of course some business travellers don't want to disclose their sexuality, so we have to ensure everyone has access to the right information and knows who to contact

for support. We also have that back-up support from our security management tool and we're working on making sure that information is really prominent.

We're looking at how we support our travellers and it's all part of duty of care and wellbeing... there's mental health, physical wellbeing, sexuality, race... do you have a disability? Are you a returning-to-work mother? All of those things can lead to challenges in some destinations.

I'm on the steering committee of an employee network for the wider company. We talk about religion, sexuality, culture... it's more than just BAME (black, Asian and minority ethnic) – it has a broad scope. We're actually moving away from the term BAME towards POC (people of colour) instead. We have an intranet site and we provide toolkits on certain subjects and we host a lot of events with guest speakers casting a spotlight on a particular subject – the events are our main outreach. Anyone in the company can join the network and the focus is on the value and appreciation of different cultures within the organisation.”

LIVING AND BREATHING DEI

“We've been talking about DEI in the business travel industry for many years but only now has it become one of the really hot topics. It shouldn't feel so new – it should be something we've all been living and breathing for years. It should have been part of our DNA as an industry for a long time now. I think certainly it has been boosted by Black Lives Matter but I think we've got a long way to go.

Only now are corporates including more questions about DEI and sustainability in their vendor RFPs... the [score] weighting for those topics is also bigger than it's ever been.

Unfortunately there's still a lot of lip service from some companies with regards DEI policies. There's always going to be a degree of box-ticking. 'Yes we believe in DEI, yes we do this, yes we make sure we recruit a certain percentage from a certain community...' but are many suppliers actually tracking that? Are they sub-contracting properly? Who's really following it all down the supply chain? The next phase is that when you do award a contract you go back and make those checks and see they're living and breathing their DEI policies.”



TURBULENT TRAVELS

LGBTQ+ business travellers share stories of anxiety and harassment. **Michael Baker** reports

As she was preparing for a long-term assignment in Algeria, Kristina Martinez received from her employer a one-page document on local laws and customs that was supposed to be informative but instead was jarring.

"The one-pager had, as the first bullet point, that homosexuality is illegal, and I was shocked that there was no further information," says Martinez, who has travelled around the world for nearly two decades while working in the oil and gas industry. "Imprisonment for homosexuality in Algeria is up to two years if convicted, and I remember thinking, 'Will the company's lawyer defend me? Is this safe for me?'"

Knowing the additional dangers the assignment presented to her as a lesbian, Martinez wrestled with the decision of whether to go or not. She knew it was a great opportunity that would look good on her résumé, and she also wondered whether turning it down would hurt her standing in the company or opportunities for future assignments abroad.

To supplement the limited information her employer had provided, she took it upon herself to reach out to other female travellers, including two out lesbians in her company who had worked in Algeria, who were able to answer her questions and give her the confidence to travel.

NAVIGATING THE MAP

Martinez was one of several LGBTQ+ travellers to share their experiences at a BTN Group virtual symposium last month, part of a wider series on diversity, equity and inclusion. As her example illustrated, some challenges faced specifically by LGBTQ+ travellers are literally about life and death. Consensual sexual activity between individuals of the same sex remains illegal in 69 countries, in some cases punishable by death, according to LGBTQ+ rights monitor Equaldex. One hundred and four countries offer no legal protection from discrimination to LGBTQ+ individuals at all, and many other countries offer an inconsistent patchwork of protections.

The recent suspected homophobic attack and beating to death of 24-year-old nursing assistant Samuel Luiz in A Coruña in Spain – a country where same-sex marriage has been legal since 2005 and that is considered one of the most LGBTQ+ friendly in the world – also was a sobering reminder that LGBTQ+ individuals still can face violence anywhere.

Emma Cusdin, who advocates for trans and nonbinary issues in the corporate world through the organisation Global Butterflies and is a frequent business traveller as people director with S&P Global, said she always goes through a mental checklist when travelling.



"Will I be safe? Will I be outed? Am I traveling to one of the jurisdictions around the world that criminalises me as a trans woman? How will I be accepted?" Cusdin said. "So, there's a lot of stress and angst for travelling."

Sometimes that comes down to not traveling at all. Cusdin said she has told her line manager that she will not travel to Dubai due to its strict anti-trans laws.

Martinez said she once turned down an assignment in Saudi Arabia. "It was a tricky thing for me," Martinez said. "I love to travel, and I love to see the world, and this would have been a great opportunity. I thought by saying 'no' that I had closed that door forever, but two weeks later, I got an opportunity to go to Australia. So it opened the door to another opportunity."

Cusdin said her current employer is understanding of her wishes not to travel to certain destinations, though she could not say the same for all her previous employers.

THE BURDEN OF RESEARCH

Travellers speaking at the symposium said they were appreciative of any company efforts to inform them more fully of potential risks posed to them as LGBTQ+ travellers.

Grant Caplan, president of Procurigence, said he was a fan of the GeoSure tool, which breaks down safety data to a neighbourhood level, including information specific to LGBTQ+ travellers. It proved useful during several recent trips to Istanbul, he said. "I think it's kind of cool that you can see the different types of grades that they get for the different types of threats that could be against you as a traveller," Caplan said.

Martinez's wife, Austin Ayers, is also a frequent business traveller, and her work with a financial services company requires mostly domestic US travel. She's also been working with her company on its own DE&I initiatives and would like to see destination-specific information provided. "Although my company's incredibly inclusive, the burden of the research for my safety does tend to fall on me," Ayers said.

Of course, many companies are probably not fully aware of their LGBTQ+ travelling populations, as those employees might not be out at work. About 95 per cent of LGBTQ+ travellers in an SAP Concur-sponsored survey last year of nearly 8,000 total business travellers indicated that they have hidden their sexual orientation while on a business trip. Martinez said during an assignment in West Papua, Indonesia, she "learned very quickly to jump back into the closet" when working onsite alongside 10,000 workers, among whom she was the only Western female.

"To say I was a minority would be a huge understatement," Martinez said. "To the credit of a few female co-workers back home, they recognised the situation that I'd be walking into and discussed my safety with a [cisgender] male coworker who was also going to site. He would be my constant companion and help divert any unwanted or harmful attention away from me."



Emilie Kopp, director of strategic partnerships for Deem, said that when travelling with her wife, both domestically and internationally, there are frequently moments when they are harassed or feel unsafe, and hiding their relationship is the natural reaction.

"It's just when you feel that people are noticing you, and then that's when you get goosebumps or that spidey-sense that, hey, it's not OK to be your authentic self right now," she said. "You are taking a part of your identity and choosing, and there's a mental burden that goes with that."

The travellers in general were supportive of having the option of identifying themselves as LGBTQ+ in company travel profiles, so their travel managers would have access to that information.

"For me as a traveller, having the opportunity on my travel profile to say I'm LGBTQ+ is helpful for you and for me, because then ultimately having information sent to me about LGBTQ+ issues and safety is really important," Cusdin said. "Even just saying that your policy is LGBTQ+ friendly and making a statement about it is a really good first step, because I've often seen travel policies that don't even say that."

For Ayers, providing that information in her profile is not currently an option, though she said she would be slightly uneasy about all suppliers having that information. "I'd be open to it, but it probably wouldn't be something that I'd be as open to as other people," she said.

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My company is incredibly inclusive but the burden of the research for my safety before travelling does tend to fall on me

STRESSFUL SITUATIONS

Challenges faced by LGBTQ+ business travellers are more than the overarching safety and security issues, symposium attendees agreed. The airport journey can be especially stressful for transgender travellers, Cusdin said. "How will I be received through passport control and

security?” Cusdin said. “What about the pat-down, and if I get patted down, how do I feel about that?”

In Cusdin’s case, the gender specified in her travel documents matches her actual gender, but that is not always the case for transgender travellers, which can cause additional stress at checkpoints, she said. What’s more, security processes around the world are not always set up with transgender and nonbinary travellers in mind.

Carlos Rios, a human resources professional, experienced this first-hand on a recent trip to visit family in the Dominican Republic. There, passport control was split into separate lines for male and female travellers, and Rios, who is nonbinary, had to make the decision to go to the ‘male’ line.

“I’m not trying to have a protracted conversation with a security officer in another country around my gender identity and how it does not align with what I was assigned at birth,” Rios said. “I had to make a choice that felt as safe as possible for me, but it still doesn’t feel right.”

This could be a growing issue in the business travel world as more Generation Z employees enter the workforce, Cusdin said, adding that younger people frequently “see gender as a spectrum.”

GENDER IDENTIFICATION

Many countries now allow citizens to choose either ‘male’ or ‘female’ gender association on their passports rather than having it assigned according to their birth certificate, and a nonbinary option is expected to be added soon in the US.

Even so, such declarations may not be recognised in some countries and it raises the question of how nonbinary individuals would choose to represent themselves should they need to travel to locations where non-conforming gender identification is criminalised.

Security checkpoints can be a stress point for LGBTQ+ travellers for other reasons too. Those who are using prescribed medications for HIV or HIV prevention can encounter problems as well, Caplan said. Despite decades of education and advances around HIV, some people still consider it a ‘gay disease’, and when security officials in some countries see the medication, it essentially outs the travellers, he said. There have even been instances of the medications being seized at borders, according to Caplan.

IT’S THE LITTLE THINGS

Microaggressions in business travel can add up, too, those taking part in the symposium said. Both Kopp as well as Ayers and Martinez said they have had uncomfortable conversations with well-meaning front desk employees at hotels who, when they are travelling as a couple, insist upon changing their pre-arranged king bed reservation into two queen beds, assuming they are doing a favour for two female friends traveling together. For Kopp, one trip in China with her wife required a conversation with



four members of staff in order to get the king-sized suite they reserved. Ayers said while it’s understandable that an employee would want to double-check room preferences, it sometimes is done in an indelicate manner, with the employee asking, “Are you sure you just want one king bed?”, for example. “It’s in the lobby of a hotel, and their voice carries, so there’s that embarrassment,” Ayers said.

For Cusdin, there’s also the constant possibility of being misgendered, such as being called “sir” by an airport ticket agent, taxi driver or hotel desk staff. As such, there’s one extra item she always makes sure to bring with her while traveling.

“I have a little saying as I’m going through the airport: I’ve packed my bag, but I’ve packed my Zen as well,” she said. “I just have to chill out and roll with things, and if I get misgendered, it’s not the end of the world, and I’m continuing my journey.”

Participants agreed that being able to discuss these issues with their companies was an important step in the right direction. Being a part of her company’s DE&I team and the related monthly meetings has been helpful for Ayers, as it fosters an environment where she would be comfortable raising issues that arise while travelling on business, she said.

“Making it more human and having my direct leader start bringing up challenging subjects has made me more open to sharing my experiences, more than it just being a policy,” Ayers said.

She encouraged businesses and managers to start talking about these issues more openly as a way to support LGBTQ+ individuals should they encounter problems while travelling on behalf of their employer. “I’m starting to see that,” she said, “and that’s exciting.”

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I’m not going to try and have a conversation with a security officer in another country around my gender identity and how it does not align with what I was assigned at birth



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HEALTHY QUESTIONS

Business travellers with physical and mental health challenges seek support and simplification. By

**Adam Perrotta and
Elizabeth West**



Navigating a crowded airport terminal to catch a connecting flight can be a stressful situation for any business traveller, but for Paul Corgel it can be especially challenging. Corgel, who is legally blind and has 90 per cent vision loss due to multiple ocular conditions, often resorts to taking pictures of departure boards and signage on his smartphone and then zooming in on the image in order to read them.

That's just one of the strategies and workarounds Corgel has developed to help him manage the challenges he faces while travelling regularly in his role as an emergency management specialist – a schedule that includes rapid-deployment disaster response trips requiring him to be at a particular location on just 48 hours' notice.

"I'll try to take a quick picture and zoom in on my phone so I know I'm heading in the right direction and I'm not spending a couple of hours running around an airport and ultimately winding up at the wrong gate and missing my flight," said Corgel.

He was one of several frequent business travellers with physical conditions or mental health challenges who recently shared their experiences and perspectives at a BTN Group virtual symposium

featuring a series of sessions exploring diversity, equity and inclusion in the corporate travel industry.

UNDERSTANDING THE WHOLE PERSON

The Covid-19 pandemic has caused employees and employers to take a step back and look at the bigger picture when it comes to understanding health matters, whether that means overt or covert health issues and disabilities, and how they factor into what the company is asking of those workers.

The old adage 'you have nothing if you don't have your health' may be hitting home with companies struggling to find employees to fill open positions in a tough recruitment market – or, for that matter, wanting to keep the valued workers they already have. Some have taken unprecedented measures to protect worker health, both in the workplace and remotely, and it's inevitable that the focus on health has extended to corporate travel far beyond the traditional 'duty of care' thresholds.

McIndoe Risk Advisory president Bruce McIndoe said the aperture is opening regarding what businesses need to consider about employees whether they are traveling, on assignment or choosing to work remotely in what may emerge as the age of the mobile workforce as corporations exit the pandemic into a

whole new paradigm for working environments.

“We need to start to look at the holistic person and not somebody that’s just getting a ticket on a commercial transport and we’re going to take care of them,” he said. Going forward, he added, companies will need to consider ethnicity, religion, disabilities and certain health conditions to engage with the employee holistically and enable them to work from anywhere, and from any time zone. “We’re going to be much smarter, holistically, around this incredibly important asset, which is a person. And how we look at them and how we support them mentally, physically [and in] all dimensions.”

COMPLICATING CONDITIONS

During the virtual event, Corgel described the many ways in which his visual impairment adds complexity to trips. In addition to the aforementioned tactic for reading airport signs, he must do significant pre-trip research to map out ground transport from the arrival airport and find a hotel with characteristics vital to him, like public transport and supermarkets within walking distance.

“I’m going to Denver fairly soon and have begun to do that research,” Corgel noted of an upcoming trip. “As of right now, I can tell you the exact number of blocks I have to travel to get from my hotel to the emergency operations centre where I’ll be working.”

For CLEAR VP of travel partnerships Caitlin Gomez a major pre-trip concern is ensuring she has an aisle seat and easy access to toilet facilities during flights. Gomez, who had her colon removed in 2017 after suffering from Crohn’s disease for more than a decade, began sharing her experiences as a frequent business traveller with a compromised immune system in a series of LinkedIn posts last year.

“Pre-pandemic, flying was really a challenge for me,” said Gomez, for whom the pressures of stressful long-distance trips bookending days crammed full of business meetings led to neglecting both her mental and physical health – a deleterious effect she didn’t fully realise until the onset of the Covid-19 pandemic brought that travel to an abrupt halt.

“I never really gave time to myself to recover or put my health into the mix of the travel schedule,” recalled Gomez. “I didn’t realise the toll that was taking on my health until we stopped travelling.”

Just as the pandemic served as a wake-up call to Gomez about her own health, she was optimistic that it has also increased awareness on the part of corporate travel departments and suppliers about the importance of giving travellers the necessary tools to maintain their own mental and physical wellbeing. “Health is no longer an afterthought, it needs to be in the forefront. Coming out of Covid, employers and partners will be more cognisant of that,” Gomez predicted.

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We’re going to be much smarter, holistically, around this incredibly important asset, which is a person, and how we support them in all dimensions

MENTAL HEALTH MATTERS

Alongside physical impairments and health issues, deteriorating mental health conditions have emerged as a major factor impacting the modern workforce and employers. The World Health Organization estimates that depression and anxiety lead to \$1 trillion lost globally in worker productivity. And that was the before the Covid-19 crisis. In the UK, a study by health insurance company Lime Group found more than half of workers surveyed felt they had to hide their anxieties at work and carry on as though nothing was bothering them. For women, that number rose to more than 60 per cent.

In 2011 Columbia University conducted a study that focused specifically on business traveller health and stress issues. The study linked business travel to work stress and work stress to increased rates of obesity and cardiovascular disease. It projected companies might incorporate stress management into their corporate travel programmes for frequent travellers as a strategy to combat resultant absenteeism.

And a 2012 initiative from CWT endeavoured to pinpoint the source of stress for business travellers with the intent of devising services and solutions that companies could implement to reduce them, including



travel policy changes to provide more on-the-road support rather than cost-cutting on travel that could result in productivity losses.

As business travel resumes in earnest in the wake of the Covid-19 crisis, it may be critical for companies to get specific about mental health issues that travellers may experience on the road and what company expectations are of business travellers struggling to cope with increased anxiety or depression.

VP strategic partnerships for Travel Insured International and frequent traveller Isaac Cymrot, who has dealt with anxiety and depression since he was a pre-teen, emphasised that it is critical for companies to treat mental health issues the same as physical health issues.

Cymrot described himself as “open” and “gregarious” and said he “loves interacting with people” and “getting up on stage”. But, he added, there are times when he’s not in a mental space to do that work – just like when others might not be in a physical state to do that work.

“Regardless of what your symptom is or the disability or however you want to classify it... you need to have that permission to call in sick,” he said. But given the intangible nature of mental health, employers need to be explicit that mental health is as important as physical health, and communicate that to business travellers. Without that permission, he said, the mental health issues can get compounded.

“There’s that added pressure that I can’t [be sick because] I’m travelling on somebody else’s money, and I have responsibilities. When you have anxiety and depression, I don’t know that I can put into words how crushing it is and how that situation actually just makes [your anxiety] exponentially worse,” he said.

SUPPLIER SUPPORT

Corgel praised travel suppliers who ask early in their online booking flow whether the user will need any special assistance and, if so, include follow-up questions regarding that traveller’s specific requirements.

“Getting that assistance up front, rather than me having to dig through the back end of a booking system or a reservation system to try and get that assistance as an additional step in the process,” eliminates significant time and stress from the travel process, Corgel said.

He urged other suppliers and online booking tool providers to offer similar capabilities for travellers to identify any special needs and save such information to their profiles so that they’re applied by default for all bookings.

Gomez echoed the potential of in-booking flagging tools to offer much-needed peace of mind to travellers with special needs, citing the ability to select a plane seat close to a bathroom and ensure bottled filtered water is provided in a hotel room as two functions that would be particularly helpful to her personally.

“These are things you don’t think about until you actually need them,” said Gomez, urging employers and suppliers to be mindful of what could go wrong for travellers with health or mental conditions and try to head off potential pitfalls.

Suppliers should strive to offer a seamless experience that enables travellers to devote their full energies to conducting business, she said. “Think about what you can do to expedite the travel process so that travellers can really focus on what they’re going to be traveling somewhere for, and not how they’re going to get there,” advised Gomez.

McIndoe sees a future where mental and physical health, different abilities and other aspects of the “whole person” could become part of the employee profile and factor into travel bookings from the get-go. This would allow travel management companies and suppliers to have access to detailed accommodation information based on physical and mental health issues that may affect the individual trip – and make those adjustments right upfront.

“Given where we are with privacy... all of this is predicated on an employee’s choice to disclose information,” said McIndoe, but the push to engage holistically with employees and deliver the right workplace solutions for them is now more than just a concept – more workplaces are looking at it as a necessity. Delivering on that concept in the managed travel space would be an industry-wide effort across travel programme administrators and suppliers if they choose to take it on.

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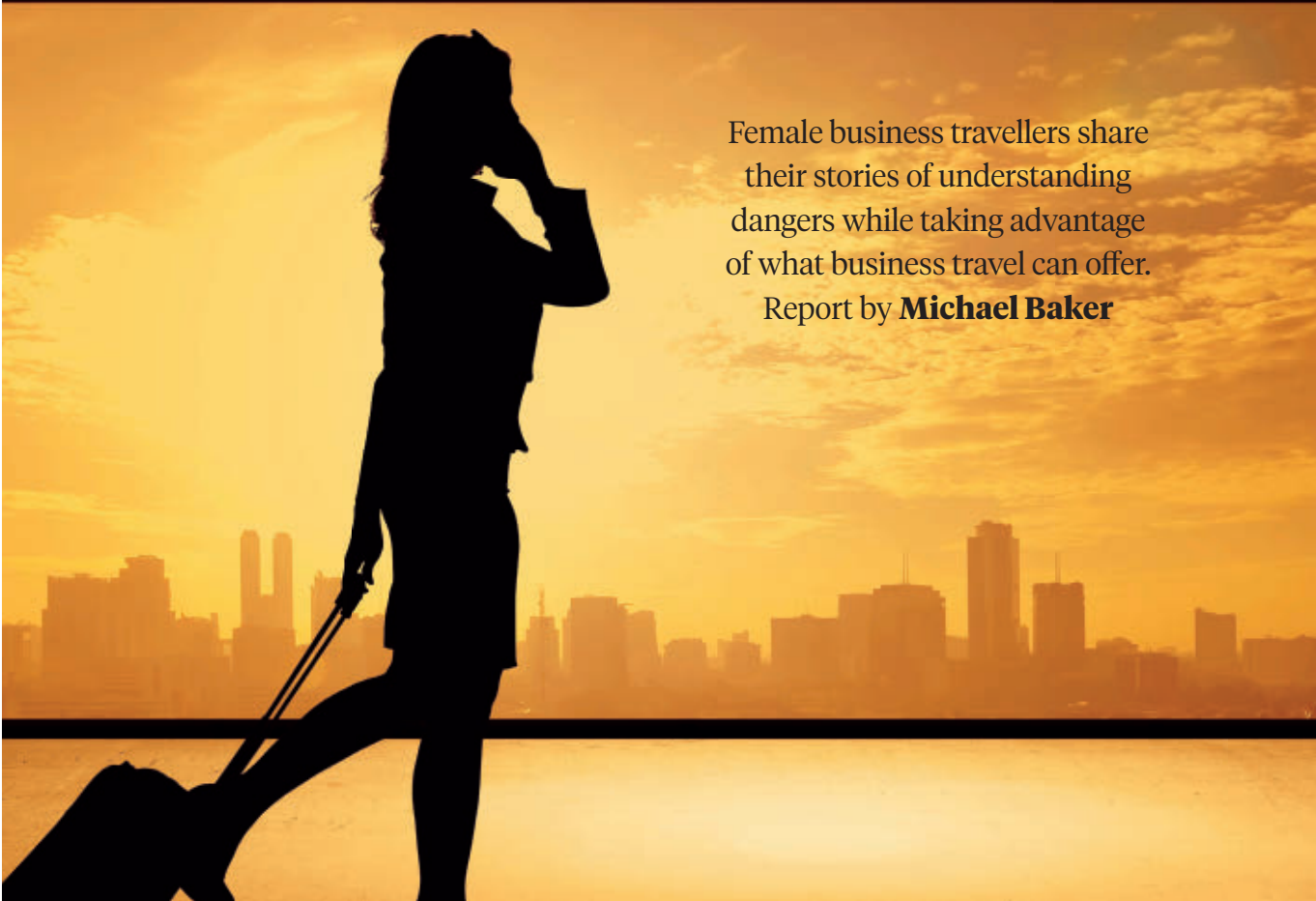


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TRANSPENNINE
EXPRESS

FEMALE REPRESENTATION



Female business travellers share their stories of understanding dangers while taking advantage of what business travel can offer.

Report by **Michael Baker**

Victoria Boldison, who founded health food, drink and supplement export service Bolst Global, knew doing business alone as a Western, non-Muslim woman in Saudi Arabia would be a challenge, though it was one she welcomed.

"You hear all the perceptions, that it's not something that female, solo travellers can do on their own, that they can't go to certain places or access key decision makers in certain types of business meetings," Boldison said during a recent BTN Group symposium focusing on women travellers' experiences on the road. "I took a chaperoned visit, and I realised that it wasn't quite what I imagined it would be."

Since that first visit, Boldison has done quite a bit of business in Saudi Arabia, letting her see firsthand some of the changes that have been happening of late, and she has generally felt safe. Still, she's had occasional uncomfortable moments that stick out, such as a conversation with a driver on the way to the airport that became increasingly personal.

"I was trapped there, and he was asking me personal questions and

for my social media handles, and I just wanted to get out of the car," she said. "There are experiences like that, where you just have to adapt."

Another UK-based female business traveller told *BTN Europe* how in a previous role she used to travel frequently to Paris but was moved from her regular hotel – "a good standard on a main boulevard" – to a mid-standard hotel on a quiet back street. "It was unmanned and opposite a late night takeaway. I didn't feel safe dressed up for work and walking around the area, particularly at night time," she said. "Ultimately it led to me refusing to travel and doing more on a virtual basis. It was one of several factors that influenced my decision to leave that job."

HARASSMENT FEARS LOOM LARGE

Other incidents have set off Boldison's warning alarm as well over her years on the road. There was a client she was traveling with in the Middle East who, during a trade show, was very insistent that she book a particular hotel, saying it was a preferred property. She wanted to stay in a different property, but he

still insisted on booking it himself rather than her preference to book it herself and be reimbursed. “I was uncomfortable, because he knew where I was and what time I was in the hotel,” Boldison said. “Did he know my room number, and if he knows where I am, could the hotel give him access? Nothing happened, but the worry was in the back of my mind.”

Boldison is hardly alone in having those types of fears. In a GBTA survey of about 500 women business travellers a few years ago, 83 per cent said that they had experienced at least one safety-related concern or incident over the previous year of traveling. The vast majority said safety concerns affected productivity and frequency of travel and their booking behaviours.

Concerns of sexual assault and harassment ranked near the top of concerns – reminders of the risks travellers can face even when they take precautions. New Jersey-based business traveller Cheri Marchionda has shared her story of being sexually assaulted while on a business trip in Iowa. She rejected the advances of a man at the hotel bar, but he later entered her room while she was sleeping by convincing the front desk to give him a key and a maintenance worker to open the door's safety latch. Once inside, he attacked and sexually assaulted her for several hours.

Kelly Kuhn, special advisor to CWT executive leadership, said stories like Marchionda's remain front-of-mind for women business travellers. “If we're not aware of it, we're simply not informed; it could have been any one of us,” Kuhn said. “There probably hasn't been a trip in all of these years where lewd comments haven't been made, or I haven't been cornered in a hallway. You feel lucky to have gotten through it, but... you cannot count on luck.”

Sexual harassment from colleagues and superiors on business trips often goes unreported, as women are afraid of repercussions or just think nothing will be done, Kuhn said. Business travel can magnify problems that could be more pervasive in a workplace.

Carolyn Pearson, CEO and founder of travel risk management and safety education provider Maiden Voyage, said she's had her own share of scary moments. One hotel stay, for example, was a short walk from the train station, and taxi drivers didn't want to make the trip because it was so short, but even during that two-minute walk she would have been “petrified,” she said. On the other extreme, however, were travel programmes to overstep in terms of precautions, it could preclude travellers excelling in opportunities like Boldison did in Saudi Arabia. “Everyone's risk appetite is different, and we've got to honour that,” Pearson said.

Concerns are not limited to unfamiliar countries or encounters with strangers. Colleagues and staff can just as easily be the source. This summer, the BBC reported that several women staying in quarantine hotels in the United Kingdom reported being harassed by security guards' lewd remarks and actions. In Australia, meanwhile, the mining industry is facing government scrutiny over numerous reports of sexual harassment of women staying at mining camps in Western Australia.

PRECAUTIONS AND RESEARCH

Much like the travellers speaking at BTN's symposium on LGBTQ+ business travel, those in the women's traveller symposium said they often take it upon themselves to do the research when visiting a new



location. When it comes to locations like Saudi Arabia that can be particularly challenging for women, talking to other women who have done business there can be one of the best sources of information.

Aisha Shaibu, founder of Moonlight Experiences, a tour company that focuses on LGBTQ+ nightlife and culture, said she does “loads and loads” of research before travel, to see potential issues that could affect her as a woman of colour and a member of the LGBTQ+ community.

“I look for friends or networks, like Facebook groups,” she said. “If it's somewhere I'm unsure about, I love connecting with locals. You can gain a lot from locals, and it really puts you at ease.”

That research has become even more important as travellers increasingly seek to blend business trips with a leisure visit, Kuhn said. While women often end up with the default option of an evening alone in the hotel with room service rather than go out alone, event participants said they still see business travel as a chance to explore the world.

Opportunities to network with colleagues are a welcome way to get out of that hotel room, she said. “This is where we can use the power of social media in a good way,” Kuhn said. “My five years living in Asia were the best in my career. I learned every day, but I did it with friends and colleagues.”

Ultimately, however, Shaibu said she'd like to see more spaces catering to women travellers so they can explore regardless of their work circumstances. “There aren't enough spaces that women actually own and can help dominate,” Shaibu said. “In an ideal world, we should feel safe enough to walk down the streets wherever we are.”

Besides her own research, Shaibu said she still always takes the extra step of making sure a loved one – her mother or her partner for example – are always fully aware of her itinerary. That further underscores the importance of a well-managed travel programme, Kuhn said.

“Not only do you want your mother and partner to know, you want all of that information within your travel programme,” she said. “It's why all this stuff we've been talking about the last 30 years is super important.”

BUYING INTO DIVERSITY

Sourcing diverse preferred suppliers for managed travel isn't a new idea. What is new, according to a number of travel buyers and suppliers, is the authenticity in the effort to make it happen, writes **Elizabeth West**

Rising awareness among business leaders of systemic racism and the personal, social and economic challenges faced by racial minorities and LGBTQ+, disabled and other marginalised communities has led companies to reassess their commitment to diversity in their sourcing practices – and that includes travel.

About 32 per cent of travel buyers surveyed in BTN's 2020 State of the Industry Report said race, equity and inclusion issues would shape the way they configured their programmes as the industry emerges from its pandemic-induced shutdown.

"We've fielded diversity questions in RFPs for years," Southwest Airlines senior director of B2B strategy and services Rob Brown said during a recent BTN Group diversity, equity and inclusion-focused virtual conference. But, he added, the most recent conversations have had a different tenor. "They aren't just checking a box. They are more sustainable and have the shelf-life to drive real change."

The Travel and Meetings Society, a group originally formed in the wake of the Covid-19 crisis to serve as a leadership organisation to guide buyers and suppliers back into business travel with new industry standards, established a diversity, equity and inclusion committee early on. The co-chair of the TAMS committee, Fidelity International director of global travel, meetings and ground transportation Carol Fergus, also serves on the more recently formed DE&I committee of the Global Business Travel Association.

In an interview late last year, Fergus identified diverse sourcing as a key lever in driving more diversity through the managed travel industry. "You have to ask suppliers the questions, look at recruitment and training programmes and look beyond the security manager and the front desk reception and the [server at the] café," she said.

"You have to look into offices and [at] the sales teams and executives. Don't tell me the company is diverse until I can see those levels of the company." Plus, she added, the onus is on travel buyers to expand the scope of their procurement efforts to include diverse companies when they can and to support the development of diverse candidates.

"We need to take the time to see those potential partners and figure out where they



fit into the mix," she said. "It's not about awarding business just because they fit a certain profile but rather it's about opening up the search to those who might not obviously be a fit but then vetting them on a level playing field given what they bring to the table."

DIVERSIFYING TRAVEL

According to a June 2020 Harvard Business Review report, diverse supply chains "broaden the pool of potential suppliers and promote competition in the supply base, which can improve product quality and drive down costs." The report also suggested that supply chain diversity offers businesses more agility, with diverse organisations ready to pivot quickly.

For business travel, however, much of what is delivered by partners goes beyond product and into



service, and how business travellers are treated while representing their organisations away from the office.

During the BTN Group's recent symposium series on DE&I in business travel, a number of businesses travellers who identify as black, Asian-American, LGBTQ+ or have physical or mental challenges discussed negative experiences – including a lack of physical access to products and services and concerns about their personal safety – while traveling on business.

The audience heard from black travellers who were questioned about sitting in their premium class airline seats, meeting attendees who were challenged to access buffet-style meals during all-day conferences, and LGBTQ+ travellers who were publicly embarrassed by hotel front desk employees. Sourcing diversity at the highest levels of an organisation and ensuring preferred

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It's not about awarding business to a supplier just because they fit a certain profile but rather it's about opening up the search to those who might not obviously be a fit

suppliers have a diversity strategy that cascades from the top all the way down to frontline workers can help mitigate product and service delivery issues and better support the travellers who drive business and revenue to their organisations.

Finding this in travel supplier partners is critical because the workforce, in general, is only getting more diverse. In 2020, 37 per cent of working-age adults identified as minorities, according to a study by startup and technology company recruitment specialist BuiltIn.

But the discussion of diversity in the workplace – and the need to shift the travel-buying mindset to contemplate these issues – needs to happen now if companies want to win the best employees and support them while on the road.

In a 2020 survey from Glassdoor, 76 per cent of job seekers said a diverse workforce is an important factor when evaluating companies and job offers. An LGBTQ+ employee posted on Facebook that he had long scrutinised employee handbooks and companies' financial support for political, social and religious organisations to understand how working for a particular employer would support his day-to-day wellbeing, since his local political and social environment did not feature strong advocacy for LGBTQ+ equality. Seventy-nine per cent of LGBTQ+ job seekers had similar strategies, according to Glassdoor. Eighty per cent of black and Hispanic job seekers said diverse workforces were an important factor when evaluating companies and job offers. These are people and dynamics that travel buyers need to consider when partnering with suppliers.

HOW TO DIVERSIFY

Shaka Senghor is the head of diversity, equality and inclusion for TMC platform TripActions. He talked to a BTN Group audience in June about the company's culture of diversity. "It's really a top-down approach. Having executive buy-in and lean-in is really important," he said. "To really do an effective job at DE&I and make sure that people are included and make sure that things are distributed equitably, you have to be proximate to your customers.

"You have to be proximate to the communities you serve and the communities you care about, as well as the issues. We provide services... travelling experiences. And it affects a broad swathe of diverse users, each of whom may feel differently or even vulnerable in travelling to new locations."

Senghor said one issue TripActions has recently considered was the requirement for business travellers to sometimes front their own money for a business trip. For some travellers, in some communities, that is a hardship that could hold them back from job advancement. It's a challenge that the global pandemic exacerbated in some communities, in particular, he said, and one that TripActions wants to help eliminate.

"The global pandemic really revealed a lot of things to us and one of those things was that as a global community, we're all in the same storm, but not all of us are in the same boat," he said.

These are the types of insights that diverse leadership and diverse suppliers can bring to the table, and the travel supplier community is taking note. In recent months, major suppliers like American Airlines, Delta Air Lines and JetBlue have named chief diversity officers or chief 'people' officers for their companies – a move that signals each company's commitment to this issue.

Ellen Moens, senior manager of administration at humanitarian organisation Care, said the existence of that type of senior role is one of the criteria she currently uses in RFPs to understand the intention behind diversity efforts within travel supplier candidates.

She also asks about employee training around diversity and inclusion, including employees with managerial responsibilities, and asks each supplier to share "demonstrable commitments to principles of diversity, inclusion and community involvement."

Southwest's Brown said a lot of the current conversation with corporate clients around diversity and inclusion centres on this kind of cultural alignment and intention between partners. "A company may have an initiative and a goal they would like to move forward with [and] they want to partner with an airline or maybe even other partners in the travel space that align with those objectives... because this is the way to make real change... and not just check a box."

Visa corporate travel manager Frankie Crisostomo considers the value of those types of questions and alignments when vetting suppliers, but also digs into the diversity of her suppliers' supply chains in what is considered a tier-two sourcing strategy. "We actively follow a tier-two initiative with the goal to increase opportunities for diverse suppliers," she said. "We ask our tier-two suppliers to provide metrics around who they work with in terms of diverse suppliers."

A number of travel suppliers have supplier diversity strategies. Avis Budget Group is among an elite group of companies on the Billion Dollar Roundtable which requires \$1 billion in annual spend with diverse suppliers to qualify as a candidate.

United Airlines senior supplier diversity business management lead Rona Fourte acknowledged the importance of this type of supplier vetting for corporate travel buyers. In terms of United's efforts, she said the airline has diversity language in all contracts with its own suppliers, but when critical suppliers don't meet those criteria, United takes the time to educate

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As a global community we're all in the same storm, but not all of us are in the same boat





them and push them toward more diversity practices – and that includes vetting the candidate's supply chain. “We walk the non-diverse suppliers through completion of a participation plan so we can access the flow-down criteria and how they're measuring their supply chain as well for DEI and inclusive practices,” she said.

GETTING MORE STRATEGIC

A tier-two strategy which recognises diversity in a partner supply chain is predicated on the universe of certified diverse suppliers, such as the accreditation offered by the National Centre for Diversity in the UK.

Anitra King, who directs global supplier performance and innovation – including diverse sourcing innovation – for Discovery also spoke at a recent DE&I conference hosted by the BTN Group. She emphasised the importance of certification as “a really important goal for diverse companies” and as a tool that provides context and authentication for diverse sourcing efforts out of the gate.

But, she said, the unique situation of diverse suppliers – often, they are smaller and have more limited resources – may limit the bandwidth needed to get that certification. As part of her innovation strategy for Discovery, King casts the sourcing net wider, allowing candidates to self-declare diversity even if they are not certified.

“We want to encourage companies to engage with us, because even if you don't have certification, Discovery might be able to help get that certification, whether it's a matter of finances or a matter of time or just understanding the process. It's not just what the supplier can do for us but

also what we can do for the supplier. We use the same approach for any category. We like to include diverse voices at the table... and open the door for different life experiences, business experiences and ideas.”

ETHICAL & OTHER CHALLENGES

Getting leadership buy-in is always critical to success. Travel buyers should look for diverse leadership within their own companies and go to them for advice on first steps or to access existing diversity and procurement structures that may not be known to them but could motivate senior executives to move toward incremental improvement.

It might not be easy, said PredictX vice president of customer success Maria Chevalier, who formerly managed travel for Johnson & Johnson, which has long held a seat on the Billion Dollar Roundtable.

“There's so much that needs to be done to help small businesses and diverse businesses get in the door. They cannot compete with large-cap companies on price,” she said. “But if you look at economic and job growth over the last several years, it came from these segments. So not only should we do this because it's the right thing to do... but also it is the heartbeat of driving economic growth.”

Chevalier warned about unethical practices from companies shooting for diversity metrics as a status symbol. She cited – but did not name – companies that tried to leverage all the travel spend through diversely owned TMCs as part of their spending with women- and minority-owned businesses, when only charges and fees imposed by such a TMC would qualify as diverse spend.

“There's a right way and a not-so-right way to achieve [recognition], so it starts with looking at company culture and priorities. If you look at their senior leadership team and they all look the same, I think you have the answer to your question right there,” she advised.

The diversity sourcing panel at the BTN Group DE&I event agreed, however, that times are changing when it comes to motivations around diverse spending.

“From my perspective being in or around diversity procurement for the last 25 years, the new spotlight on it feels much more authentic. It feels like organisations are finally getting the message and they want to create programmes for the right reasons,” said King.

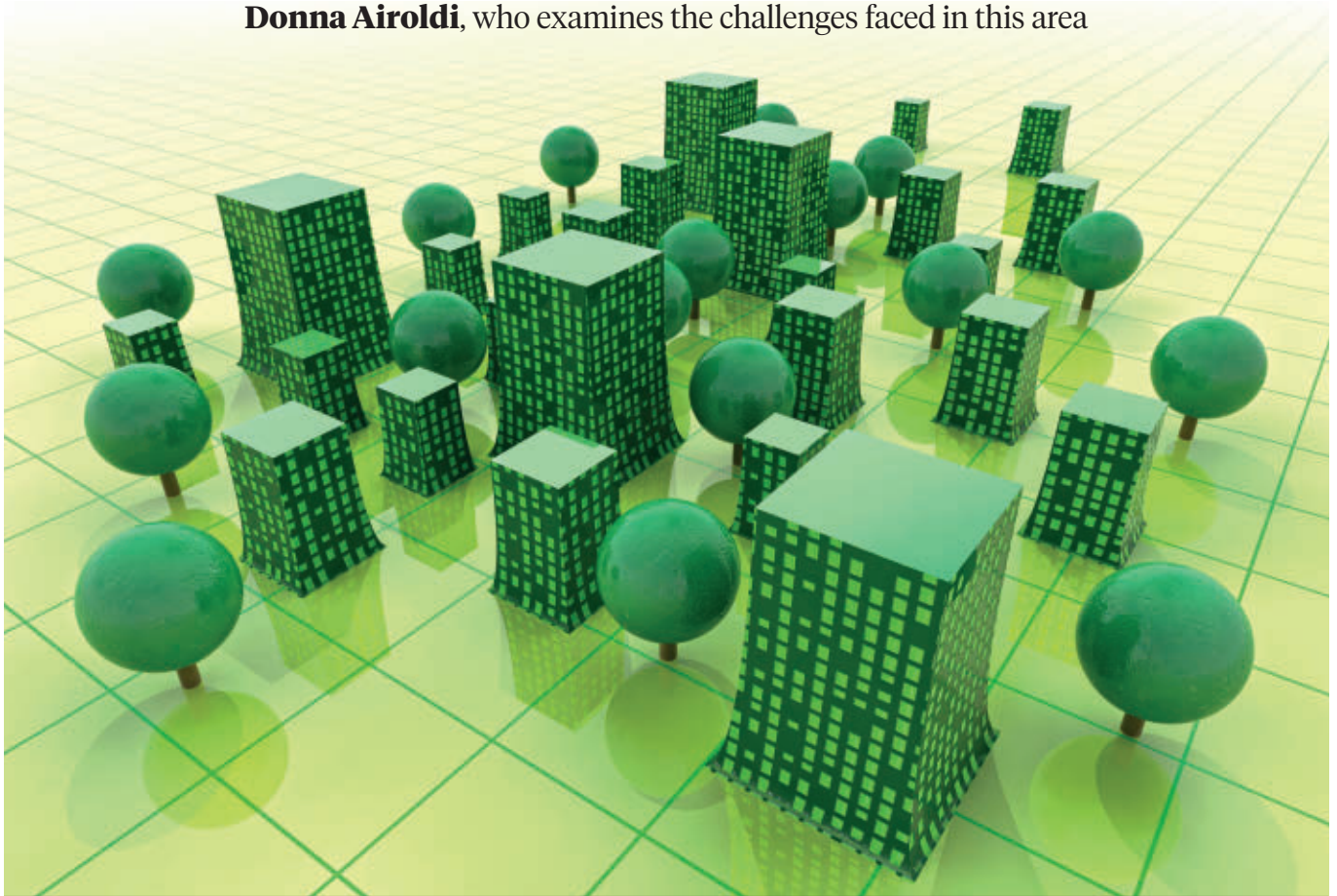
“For Discovery, diversity procurement was always part of our plan, but about a year ago, we got a really big boost [in terms of social awareness around these issues]. We said to ourselves, ‘Let's reimagine this programme.’ It's not just about collecting data points and spin numbers. It's not about certificates our executives might be hoping for. This is really about doing the work and making a difference.”

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Look at company culture and priorities. If you look at their senior leadership team and they all look the same, I think you have the answer to your question right there

HOTEL HEADACHES

Corporate demand for hotel sustainability data is growing, reports **Donna Airoidi**, who examines the challenges faced in this area



While many corporates' efforts to reduce their environmental impact focuses on air travel and overall policies, increasingly more are now turning to the tricky area of measuring, tracking and mitigating the carbon emissions associated with their accommodation programmes.

Multiple accommodation providers say that the number of corporate travel buyer requests for hotel sustainability information has soared in the past year. A few years ago, Marriott International had requests from around 20 customers for their carbon footprint with the hotel operator, says Marriott VP of sustainability and supplier diversity Denise Naguib. By 2020, it was at 100. "In the last year, during the pandemic when no one was travelling, that number has almost tripled," she says.

Hilton Worldwide and IHG Hotels & Resorts also reported an uptick in requests from corporates for sustainability information, and what is asked for depends on where their clients are on their own sustainability journeys. Questions range from what their carbon footprint is for stays

to how a hotel reduces its food waste to CSR practices including diversity, modern slavery and anti-human trafficking efforts.

Most queries still focus on the E aspect of ESG – environment, social and governance, says IHG VP of global corporate responsibility Catherine Dolton. "But we are starting to get that wider focus on the 'S' now as well." Some buyers also want to know how to incentivise their travellers to be greener. "A lot of corporations today aren't necessarily mandating their travellers stay with greener hotels, but they want to encourage that behaviour," Dolton said.

Marriott's Naguib agrees, adding that buyers have asked how to flag hotels that have certifications or carbon and water data in their booking tools. "Some are force-ranking those hotels to the top of the list, ahead of price," she said.

A LACK OF STANDARDS

Travel buyers we spoke with confirmed their sustainability needs vary, but one item rang clear: the biggest challenge is the lack of an industry standard on what a 'green' hotel really means. There are dozens of green hotel labels

around the globe, but all measure different elements of a hotel's operations.

Further, "it is hard to ask hotels to come up with metrics," says Hogan Lovell global travel manager David McDonald. "I'm not sure I would believe them. I don't think there would be impropriety, but we need an agnostic industry resource. An equivalent of ISO certifications... an independent body solely tasked with the measurement of the industry as a whole, and providing a ranking score."

In terms of making buying decisions, "it makes it difficult because there isn't a set of standards that we can work to that would enable us to differentiate one hotel from another," says PwC global business services and travel leader Mark Avery, whose company announced last year that, as a firm, they were moving to net zero greenhouse gas emissions by 2030.

To compensate for a lack of a standard, Avery first asks hotels if they participate in the Hotel Carbon Measurement Initiative, a free tool for hotels to calculate the carbon footprint per occupied room on a daily basis and on the area of meeting space on an hourly basis.

It was created in 2012 by the Sustainable Hospitality Alliance (formerly the International Tourism Partnership) and the World Travel & Tourism Council in collaboration with 23 leading global hospitality companies. Its counterpart is the Hotel Water Measurement Initiative, used to calculate water usage in a hotel. About 25,000 hotels globally use HCMI and about 18,000 use HWMI, according to the SHA website.

Avery covers the UK region for PwC. Like many other UK buyers, he uses the Department of Environment, Food and Rural Affairs hotel emission factors, but says they cover only about 30 markets. "We've chosen to estimate other territories based on the various factors of the countries they have put a multiplier on so we can capture and report our Scope 3 emissions," he explains. This involves looking at the DEFRA multipliers and associating the type of location, typical climate, the kind of facilities the hotel has, and then estimating a multiplier per room night per country.

In addition, Avery furnishes key providers with information on PwC's expectations and asks them to sign on to that level of provision and have science-based targets set. "We look for them to be on the journey toward a sustainable future and potentially net zero," said Avery. "In order to do that, they need to be measuring."

POTENTIAL SOLUTIONS

Corporate lodging platform HRS introduced its Green Stay Initiative in March which uses a proprietary formula for calculating a hotel's sustainability score based on its energy consumption, water use and waste disposal – three key measurable elements buyers look for. When the company started its project, it faced the same roadblock

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It's difficult because there isn't a set of standards that we can work to that would enable us to differentiate one hotel from another

– the lack of an industry standard. "We found that large hotel groups had sustainability programmes in place, but they were very different," says HRS chief product officer and Green Stay Initiative team leader Martin Biermann. "At most, they were following the greenhouse gas protocols from a scoping point of view and what needed to be measured."

HRS looked at approximately 200 bodies and found that each basically created its own set of criteria or action plans they recommended to hotels. The most prominent one was the Global Sustainability Tourism Council, which has a comprehensive set of action plans for businesses in the travel industry, Biermann said. HRS also integrated the HCMI and HWMI into its calculation, along with EarthCheck, Green Key and unnamed other sources.

Some hotel companies countered that there are industry standards, at least for a few sustainability measurements, and Hilton's 2020 ESG report indicates the industry is working with the World Wildlife Fund to develop a standardised waste measurement methodology.

The major hotel companies we spoke with all use the HCMI and HWMI tools to help provide an individual hotel's footprint, and it is a brand standard – for all properties, managed and franchised – to provide that information. Hyatt Hotels added in a statement that along with industry peers, it participated in coordinated benchmarking through the Cornell Hospitality Sustainability Benchmarking Index. But again, each company uses additional differing factors when giving an overall picture of a property's sustainability.

Aside from producing a carbon and water footprint using HCMI and HWMI, Naguib said Marriott also factors

THE DEVIL IS IN THE DETAIL

American Express Global Business Travel and meetings management and transient sourcing provider Cvent recently launched a set of 47 hotel sourcing questions around sustainability, diversity, equity and inclusion.

The new questions are supplemental to the Global Business Travel Association's RFP template and were released to hoteliers in late July so they could begin to fill in their responses. The questions are now available to buyers using Cvent Transient.

"Corporate social responsibility topics around sustainability and diversity we feel are a growing priority for many of our clients at GBT," said Nina Marcello, principal of Amex GBT's Global Business Consulting arm. She proposed the RFP initiative, which began in the spring. "We are being inundated with a deluge of questions about how we can support clients that need answers to these questions," she said.

Marcello explained that the current GBTA module doesn't fully capture the full spectrum of questions asked by clients. "This has resulted in a large amount of

custom questions and back and forth with hoteliers," she said, adding that questions on sustainability and DEI-related topics for many buyers were not at the current level of priority when the association created its current set of questions.

For example, some GBT clients have asked questions about the ability to support charging stations for electric vehicles, Marcello said, adding those are not in the current GBTA template. Carbon emissions is another topic covered. GBTA released an updated hotel RFP template in 2019, but the pandemic paused a 2020 update, according to a GBTA spokesperson.

"We tried to keep it simple," Marcello said. "There will still be some clients with very, very specific initiatives that they want to dive deep into and ask more of the hoteliers. I don't think we'll ever avoid that. But what we are managing for here is the norm, and trying to reduce the workload for the hoteliers, who are also seeing these types of questions. It really is an industry-wide initiative to save time."

in waste practices and “hundreds of data points”. The company also takes into consideration seven certifying bodies, including green building programmes and green hotel certifications that meet GSTC standards.

Hilton Worldwide has LightStay which measures the company’s environmental and social impact around the world, “from energy and water use to volunteer hours,” says Hilton VP of corporate responsibility Kate Mikesell. There’s also Hilton’s Meeting Impact Calculator which, based on information about a particular event, can determine the environmental footprint of that event.

Furthermore, “all of our hotels are certified with ISO quality management, environmental management and energy management standards,” Mikesell says, adding that Hilton’s LightStay also achieved GSTC status.

IHG, which earlier this year announced its 10-year Journey to Tomorrow sustainability plan, has a system called IHG Green Engage, which is also a brand standard for hotels to measure and monitor utility consumption, Dolton explains. She says the company has its own certification for four sustainability levels, which can vary based on geography. “More widely you have questionnaires like the Carbon Disclosure Project, and various methodologies for contrasting and comparing the sustainability of hotels. There is some standardisation out there, but I do think we are seeing a greater call from customers for something that is a bit more straightforward.”

These methods are the foundation for reporting to clients but don’t even begin to capture all that the companies do on the corporate level to achieve their own sustainability goals.

SOURCING IMPLICATIONS

Many of hotel companies’ sustainability requests come through the Global Business Travel Association request-for-proposal format, which includes 20 sustainability-

related questions. But the questions could do with an update as they don’t cover everything that buyers now look for. Following the introduction of dozens of CSR-related hotel sourcing questions by American Express Global Business Travel and Cvent in September (see panel p55), a GBTA spokesperson confirmed a 2020 update to its hotel RFP template had been stalled by the pandemic.

“Companies are really focused on more things like renewable energy,” Naguib says. “It is not one of the standardised questions, but now a lot of customers are asking about it.”

Still, regarding the GBTA questions, “[the hotels] have to self-certify,” McDonald says. “There is no one who says, ‘show me your certification.’ There is no single standard in calculating this – you have to take it on face value.”

Other buyers go directly to their national sales managers, while some come through corporate sustainability departments. What is clear is that travel buyers will increasingly ask for this information from their hotel partners, especially as more corporations are announcing their own sustainability goals.

When next sourcing hotels, “we will want documentation to prove that a property or chain has a sustainability programme, how they are measuring it, whether they have a net zero programme, and how that is being met,” says one buyer whose company has announced a net zero target.

Will the need to meet internal sustainability goals start influencing which hotels make it into corporate travel programmes? Marriott’s Naguib says she is starting to see some more mature programmes use their collected sustainability data for decision making, but buyers aren’t necessarily there, yet.

“The short answer is yes, but it will take some time,” Avery says. “At the moment it’s not appropriate to say we would not put a hotel in [our programme] just because it didn’t have sustainability information. Possibly, if there was something next door. But sometimes we are in locations where we don’t have a choice. You have to be realistic.”

For Toyota North America travel services manager Rebecca Jeffries, it will depend on her travellers. “If it’s something that 10 per cent to 15 per cent of my travellers have an interest in, it probably won’t make a huge difference in my sourcing,” she said. “But if 85 per cent of my travellers are interested in it, then yes it will.”

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Companies are really focused on more things like renewable energy. It is not one of the standardised RFP questions, but now a lot of customers are asking about it



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INTERNAL TRAVEL IN THE FIRING LINE

Arm targets internal travel reduction as key to reducing the organisation's environmental impact, writes **Andy Hoskins**

Like many companies that have set out plans to reduce their carbon footprint, UK-based Arm came closer to its goals in 2020 when business travel was more or less grounded. Last year was an anomaly, of course, and so the environmental journey begins in earnest in the post-pandemic world.

"After meeting our 2010 to 2020 carbon reduction targets we increased our level of ambition and committed to a science-based approach to cut our absolute emissions and achieve net zero carbon by 2030," says Toby Withnell, the organisation's director of global travel services.

Among its specific goals are the sourcing of 100 per cent renewable electricity, the overall reduction of energy use by 20 per cent, and the absolute reduction of emissions from its business travel by eight per cent by 2030.

"Business travel accounted for around 50 per cent of all CO₂e arising from our business in normal circumstances, so it's a key focus area for us. In a normal year of travel the projected target in FY2021 would have been a reduction of 40 per cent versus FY2019 to ensure we were on course to hit an eight per cent absolute reduction of travel emissions by 2030," says Withnell, who worked with the organisation's sustainability team to forge its strategy and identify the targets, policies and changes required to achieve its travel-related objectives.

ALIGNING THE EFFORT

The idea of setting departmental carbon-based travel budgets was floated early in the process and adopted for FY2021. These were based on working towards Arm's publicly announced goal of net zero carbon by 2030 and the annual reduction required to meet its target. The targets also factored in "headcount growth over the next 10 years, as we needed to ensure the targets reflected the business environment and growth plans," Withnell explains.

Arm took its carbon emissions for its 2019-20 financial year and set that as the benchmark. "It was more or less an average year although we had to pro rata the last quarter [January to March 2020] when travel tailed off due to the pandemic," says Withnell. "For our next financial year we are aiming to cut travel-related emissions by 40

Company: Arm
Business type: Software and computer processor manufacturer
Headquarters: Cambridge, UK
Key green travel goals: By 2030: Absolute reduction of emissions from business travel by eight per cent; Cut travel emissions by 40 per

cent in next financial year, including shifting internal meetings to virtual; Implement carbon budgets per departments and align them with T&E budget; Develop internal carbon reports and benchmarking processes; New employee and traveller education initiative

per cent [compared to 2019-20] which should be achievable while travel is recovering.

"There's been such a shift in opinions and understanding about the environmental impact of business travel recently that I am sure other companies will now look at implementing similar reduction targets."

He continues: "One key thing we have done is to align carbon budgets with T&E budgets to help promote the net zero agenda because it just doesn't make sense to have a carbon budget that is not related to a T&E budget."

PANDEMIC INTERVENTION CHANGES ATTITUDES

"And then Covid happened," says Withnell. "That made things easy last year [with regards to its targets], but it's also accelerated our drive towards being a more sustainable business."

Not only did the pandemic propel widespread adoption of virtual technology – and acceptance that it can replace certain business trips – but Withnell believes Arm's employees, and the wider populous, are now more acutely aware of their impact on the environment both as individuals and as employees.

While part of Arm's business travel in the past was client-facing, another portion of travel included internal events, collaboration and teambuilding for the global company, given it has offices around the world. It is the latter portion where Withnell expects to see the greatest reduction in business travel.

"Reducing internal meeting travel is going to deliver the bulk of our [emissions] savings. The pressure to travel will come from clients

but all companies have their own sustainability goals now,” said Withnell.

“We have people saying we should have done this years ago, but it’s only the pandemic that’s really made everyone aware they don’t need to fly around the world to meet in person for every quarterly meeting when some or all of those can take place virtually. People now see the benefits of the time saved and their improved wellbeing – it’s not just about the environmental gains we can achieve.”

INTEGRATING EMISSIONS VISIBILITY

The downturn in travel has enabled Arm to develop its internal reporting and stakeholder engagement around its travel sustainability goals. When travel returns, the organisation will publish CO2e dashboards across the business on a monthly basis so employees can “make sure we’re on track.”

The company’s intranet site has also been redesigned to include more detailed information on Arm’s travel sustainability targets and strategy.

“We have workshops and communications planned around the return of travel and how sustainability is built into this,” said Withnell. “Once travel is booked, emissions are logged and reporting is provided by our travel management company, and travel emissions are fed into our company carbon emissions reporting tool.”

Withnell conceded that information pertaining to accommodation emissions is “a weak spot. We need standardisation there. It’ll take time because it’s complex, but it’s key for us to get the complete picture of our impact from travel.”

Arm is currently focusing on carbon reduction, but in the longer term will “offset what we can’t reduce” through investment in accredited carbon sequestration. The company also has a long-standing partnership with global conservation charity Fauna & Flora International (FFI), supporting its technology for conservation programmes.

SUPPLIER TRANSPARENCY

Arm’s environmental commitment also extends to its travel supplier partnerships. “Firstly, it’s essential that we’re able to measure our emissions from our use of their services, and secondly we need to know about their own sustainability efforts,” says Withnell. “If one airline has a more sustainable fleet than another that is offering us similar rates, that would influence our preference. If you’re looking at halving travel volumes, rates could feasibly have less priority than in the past.”

Is Withnell confident Arm will meet its travel-related carbon reduction goals? “We have developed a communications plan to ensure employees understand the new goals, and have new guidance so they have the information they need to support them... and with monthly reporting across the company, we’ll have very good visibility of how we’re progressing. Most importantly, we are absolutely committed to meeting the goals.”





ON THE ROAD AGAIN

Will business travel recovery pick up speed as expected this autumn?
Amon Cohen seeks the views of four European travel associations

Following a football tournament this summer in which fans from 24 European nations frequently informed us football was “coming home” (or “coming Rome”, as eventually proved the case), travel managers across the continent are now wondering whether the same is about to prove true for business travel.

Europe has had its holiday season and, traditionally, the busiest time of the year for business travel immediately follows in September and October. But is the autumn proving the point at which the bookings graph shoots up again for the first time since coronavirus practically wiped out corporate travel 18 months previously?

Several TMCs reported consistent 20 per cent week-on-week increases in bookings in the first weeks of September, but *BTN Europe* canvassed the views of four different European travel management associations and what emerges is a tale of two Vs: vaccination and variants. The mood is slightly different in each country, but overall

the story is that recent optimism about vaccination finally opening the door to travel resumption (though never to the same levels as pre-Covid for environmental reasons) is now tempered by fear that contagious variants may delay the great return yet again.

THE VIEW FROM FRANCE

France has struggled with its vaccination rates, with President Macron doggedly doing his best to push them up. “As education was obviously not enough, the French government took strong measures to force the most reluctant to be vaccinated,” says Michel Dieleman, president of the Association of French Travel Management (AFTM).

They included the requirement, implemented in July, for anyone boarding a flight or inter-city train to show a health pass proving they have either been fully vaccinated or have tested negative.

France has higher vaccine scepticism than other Western European

countries but AFTM international director Claude Lelievre believes most business travellers have already received their jabs. "People who travel abroad often have to be vaccinated anyway," he says.

AFTM is confident business travel is on the cusp of a comeback and its best guess is that volumes will be around 50 per cent of what they were in 2019 this autumn, although it warns that figure could be significantly lower if Covid variants start to inflict damage.

Lelievre is less optimistic about the conference sector. "People are not ready to return for large face-to-face events," he says. "That will take some time to recover. For the time being, what we will see is travel that's absolutely necessary for doing business."

THE VIEW FROM GERMANY

German travel management association VDR is seeing distinct signs of an uptick in business travel activity even during the holiday season, said VDR president Christoph Carnier this summer, who is also head of procurement category for travel, fleet and events at the science and technology company Merck.VDR is also detecting a shift from air to rail and car rental for domestic trips.

Cross-border travel within the EU plus Switzerland, Norway, Iceland and Liechtenstein, is permitted on production of the EU Digital COVID Certificate. The certificate confirms that the holder has been vaccinated, had a recent negative test or has immunity after previously contracting the virus.

A recovery in travel to other European countries has thus far been slow, according to Carnier. Whether that will change further into the autumn is finely balanced. If the health situation does not deteriorate he expects that "individual trips will see a big increase. There is an appetite to meet in person again."

On the other hand, Carnier warns, "the Delta variant means there is another wave coming. The question is how hard will that wave hit us? How many people will need treatment in hospital? In the end, whether there are hospitalisations or not will be the deciding factor."

Like his AFTM counterparts, however, Carnier does "not expect big meetings for the rest of the year. People are reluctant to attend and are waiting for the situation to calm down."

THE VIEW FROM DENMARK

"There are definitely signs of opening up. It will be in the autumn." That is the positive view of Anne Mette Berg, general manager of the Danish Business Travel Association, who summarised the prevailing mood as one of "cautious optimism".

Denmark was one of the first countries back in April to introduce a digital pass, called the Coronapas, similar to the EU Digital COVID Certificate, which has

been used to gain admission to public spaces.

Restrictions on capacity for meetings was lifted in August and available meeting space in Denmark is hard to find for September to November. "There is a willingness to start travelling again. I think we have to live with the risk from now on," says Berg.

THE VIEW FROM SWITZERLAND

Association of Swiss Travel Management president Dominic Short was thrilled to attend his first post-coronavirus in-person conference in July. "It was super-busy and everyone was very happy to be there," says Short.

Meetings bookings are gradually recovering for Swiss venues, but so far, says Short, it has all been local business. Domestic travel has reopened fully but most trips are by engineers, builders and others travelling to work on location, he said, speaking to *BTN Europe* in the summer. "Big companies are still reluctant to move their people back into offices," says Short, an attitude which is holding back white-collar travel.

Short links the sluggish recovery to Switzerland's generous financial support for businesses, with the government paying 80 per cent of the wages of furloughed employees, and most employers topping up the remaining 20 per cent in the pay packet.

Although Switzerland lagged behind much of Europe with its vaccination programme, summer holidays sold very well. But there is no sign yet of improved bookings for business travel. "We're waiting to see what will happen to the holidaymakers," says Short. "If we come out of the summer without a massive pick-up in infections, then there will be a big upturn in business travel. But no one is terribly optimistic."

“
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to start travelling
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The novelty of international travel

Travel within the EU is a breeze but further afield is proving a challenge



BY JENNIFER BAKER



As someone who used to present at several events a week in the “Before Times”, I had become used to being asked to travel internationally at the drop of a hat. The pandemic, as we all know, changed all that. Suddenly, not only were we unable to travel abroad, but we were not even allowed to go to the office or in some cases leave our homes.

So it was with great enthusiasm that I signed up to my first foreign job since early 2020. The event, being organised by the European Commission, took place in Porto, Portugal, over two days. However, private travel in the preceding months had not reassured me.

Travel from the EU to the UK in particular is proving particularly difficult. So much so that I gave up on plans for a weekend trip after friends found themselves stranded in Calais, unable to proceed with their journey due to a let down by their PCR test provider.

Yet I need not have worried. Internal EU travel is a breeze for the fully vaccinated. No tricky PCR codes to worry about, no lengthy queues in airports to have your credentials checked. Just fill out the passenger locator form online and you're good to go.

The event in Porto was the first truly hybrid event I've seen attempted. While I've moderated dozens of events where some of

the speakers are in the studio and some are remote over the last 18 months, this was the first with a real, live, human audience... all wearing masks and socially distanced.

Some 150 people were present at the Alfândega Congress Center and roughly half the speakers were there in person as well. The vast majority of the audience followed online. As was expected for an event of its size and budget, everything

“

Travel from the EU to the UK is proving difficult, but internal EU travel is a breeze for the fully vaccinated

was conducted in a Covid-secure way.

In short, the news from the European Union when it comes to big budget events is pretty good. According to Deloitte, “the eventual scale and shape of these staples of corporate life are unclear, but they are returning, and an uptick in corporate travel will follow.”

According to its latest research: “Corporate travel is expected to pick up

significantly in the second half of 2021, but will still sit well below pre-pandemic levels. Total spend in Q4 2021 is projected to reach somewhere between 25 to 35 per cent of 2019 levels, although a third of companies say they will likely remain below 25 per cent of 2019 spend at the end of 2021.”

Despite this heartening news, conferences, trade shows and corporate hospitality events are likely to remain depressed where international travel remains complicated or expensive. Instead, businesses are expected to prioritise travel that supports existing client relationships.

It remains clear that expense will remain a huge issue as Covid-19 requirements push up costs and the UK could continue to find itself out in the cold due to added restrictions on travel. But in general I'm optimistic about the return of conference and event-driven travel within the EU. My only worry now is whether to look at the camera or the audience.

• *Jennifer Baker is a Brussels-based journalist reporting on European affairs, including transport, technology and politics*

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