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THE 2022 OUTLOOK

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Return of the red-eye

The long-awaited reopening of the US to many UK and European citizens is heralded as "the start of a new era for travel"

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

'Cautious optimism' probably best captures the mood of the business travel industry right now. Writing these words on the eve of the momentous 'reopening' of the US – which includes access for fully vaccinated citizens of the UK and 26 Schengen nations – it's easy to be swept up by the euphoria of the occasion.

There's no doubting it's a watershed moment for beleaguered airlines, travel management companies, corporates itching to get back to business and European economies in general, but the "road to recovery is a long one from this point in time", as one travel manager recently told me.

Nevertheless, the numbers speak for themselves: TripActions reported a 213 per cent month on month increase in bookings from the EU to US destinations and FCM noted a 92 per cent jump in UK-US bookings over the same timeframe. Data from Cirium shows there will be 21 per cent more flights between the UK and US in November than in October – although capacity will still be down 49 per cent on November 2019 – while Delta Air Lines recorded a 450 per cent increase in international point of sale bookings following the reopening announcement. "This is the start of a new era for travel," said Ed Bastian, the carrier's chief executive.

Those words apply in more ways than one, for business travel management is grinding through the gears with a new triumvirate of considerations in place: trip necessity, or purpose, will be scrutinised like never before; traveller duty of care and wellbeing – and therefore trip quality – will be top of mind; and corporates and suppliers alike will be focused on new environmental, social and corporate governance (ESG) policies.

> "We hope to see a shared recovery for the travel industry rather than companies acting only in their own interest

All those topics, and many more, feature in The 2022 Outlook (p13-19) in which a diverse line-up of contributors share their hopes and expectations for the year ahead.

Concerns around rising costs and pricing volatility are aired more than most corporates would like, and some Q3 results will have done little to allay those fears.

Some global hotel groups noted that average daily rates are closing in on pre-pandemic levels, while several car rental companies reported record earnings – in no small part due to vehicle shortages and rising rental rates. Meanwhile, the Lufthansa Group was back in the black for Q3 while the IAG group – which includes British Airways and Iberia – halved its losses but still expects to make a €3 billion loss in 2021.

The industry needs healthy suppliers but as the Business Travel Association's Clive Wratten notes in his contribution to the 2022 Outlook: "One challenge will be the behaviour up and down the supply chain. We hope to see a shared recovery rather than companies acting only in their own interest."

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

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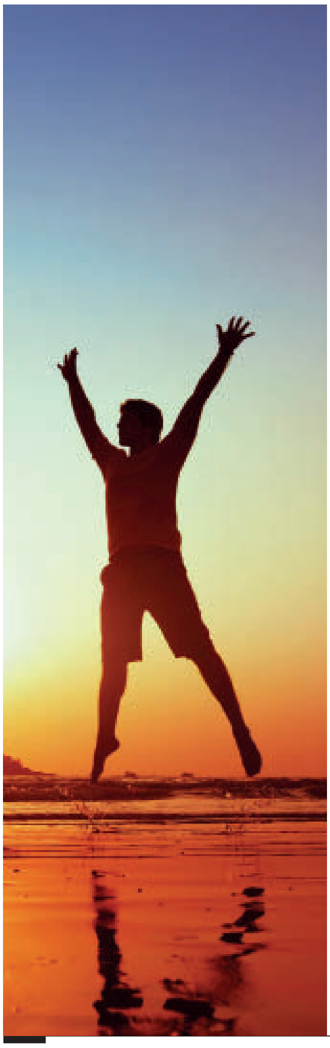
Regulars



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Business travel spend to grow 34% in 2022

Global business travel spend is expected to reach two-thirds of pre-pandemic levels by the end of 2022, with the Middle East and Asia-Pacific spearheading the recovery, according to a new report from the World Travel & Tourism Council and McKinsey & Company.

The report, *Adapting to Endemic Covid-19: The Outlook for Business Travel*, anticipates an increase in business travel spend of 26 per cent in 2021 and a further rise of 34 per cent in 2022, following a 61 per cent collapse in 2020.

In the Middle East, business travel spend is expected to increase 49 per cent this year – stronger than leisure travel spend at 36 per cent – followed by a 32 per cent rise in 2022. Spend in Asia-Pacific is set to grow 32 per cent this year and by 41 per cent next year.

Recovery in Europe is expected to be slower, with 36 per cent growth this year and 28 per cent in 2022, while the figures for Africa are 36 per cent this year and 23 per cent next, and for the Americas 14 per cent growth this year and 35 per cent in 2022.

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- 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

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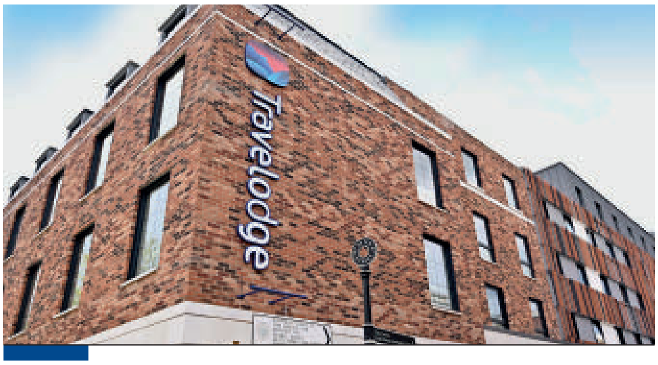


TRAVELODGE RELAUNCHES CORPORATE PROGRAMME

Budget hotel group Travelodge has formally launched a new loyalty programme for its corporate customers.

Called Travelodge Business, the programme incorporates a booking portal featuring customers' preferred locations, the ability to add multiple bookers and guests, detailed reporting and downloadable VAT invoices.

Members also receive five per cent off flexible room rates, account support, interest-free payment terms, no credit card fees, multiple card users and pre-paid food and drink options.

The free-to-join Travelodge Business scheme replaces the group's previous corporate programme, Travelodge Business Membership, and includes a Travelodge Business PLUS component for its larger customers which is open to companies spending more than £50,000 with Travelodge per year.

BA to operate biggest schedule since start of pandemic

British Airways A380s are returning to the skies in November as the airline prepares to operate its biggest flight schedule since March 2020. The carrier will initially fly the A380 on short-haul routes to allow for crew service familiarisation followed by operating to Miami and Los Angeles in the US, as well as Dubai in December.

The airline is set to fly to 23 US airports this winter with up to 246 flights a week. In addition to restarting services, BA will also increase frequencies to New York, initially to five a day followed by eight in December. It will also operate double-daily services to Boston, Chicago, Los Angeles, San Francisco, Washington, Dallas, Miami and Toronto, as well as daily flights to Philadelphia, Phoenix, Seattle, Atlanta, Denver, Houston and Vancouver. It is also restarting services to Austin, Orlando, Tampa, San Diego, Las Vegas and Baltimore.

Elsewhere, BA says it will be increasing year-round flights to European cities with 48 weekly services to Amsterdam, 33 to Geneva, 35 to Dublin, 28 to Milan and 21 each to Berlin, Paris and Rome.

Amex GBT completes acquisition of Egencia

American Express Global Business Travel has completed the acquisition of Egencia from the Expedia Group. As part of the deal, Expedia has become a shareholder in GBT and secured a 'long-term agreement' to provide accommodation content to GBT.

The deal, first announced in May, cements Amex GBT's position as the world's largest travel management company. According to a statement from GBT, it will accelerate investment in the Egencia brand, people and technology.

Mark Hollyhead, Egencia president, will continue to lead the Egencia business and will report directly to GBT chief executive Paul Abbott and join GBT's executive leadership team.

New TMC and aircraft charter specialist Equinox Travel to serve music and entertainment clients

Equinox Travel, a new TMC specialising in travel services for clients in the music and entertainment business, has commenced operations.

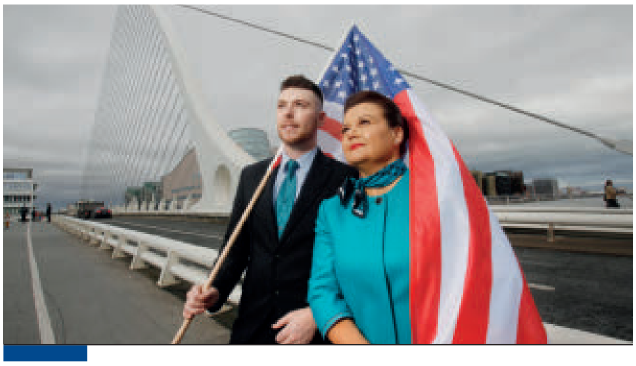
The travel management company, founded by former The Appointment Group (TAG) and ET Travel directors Ian Patterson and Glen Duckworth, is complemented by the simultaneous launch of private jet provider Equinox Charter.

London-based Equinox says it specialises in delivering high-touch "bespoke travel solutions and managing complex itineraries" for bands and solo artists, agents, tour managers and film production companies, as well as professional sportspersons, athletes, sports agents and corporate and luxury leisure travel.

Its services include hotel bookings, serviced apartment and private accommodation rentals, car hire and chauffeur services, ferry and rail transport management, alongside commercial airline bookings.

Private aircraft charter requirements will be handled by Equinox Charter which is led by Elliot Bottomley.

Equinox CEO Ian Patterson says: "We understand the demands and nuances of live touring and film production, from last-minute schedule changes to complex logistical challenges. This is why we're committed to delivering the bespoke, personal, high-touch travel management solutions our clients not only demand, but also deserve."



AER LINGUS NETWORK REBUILDING BEGINS

Aer Lingus plans to rebuild its network to a total of 71 routes, including 16 transatlantic routes, for its summer 2022 schedule, the carrier announced.

The airline is restarting direct services from Dublin to New York Newark on 14 November and to Orlando on 27 November.

In its summer 2022 schedule, it will fly to nine additional destinations from Dublin: Boston, Chicago, Los Angeles, New York JFK, Philadelphia, San Francisco, Seattle, Toronto and Washington, D.C. It also will fly to JFK and Orlando from Manchester and to Boston and JFK from Shannon, Ireland.

Aer Lingus' service to Europe will "ramp up" between now and next summer and has far confirmed 44 routes to Europe.

TravelPerk brings sustainability consultancy onboard

TravelPerk is to acquire the UK-based corporate travel sustainability consultancy firm Susterra. The acquisition continues a spending spree which has seen the travel management platform buy Click Travel in the UK and NexTravel in the US.

Susterra, founded by environmental scientist James Dent, uses data analytics technology to offer companies a holistic view of their entire business travel-related environmental impact, covering flights, hotels, car hire, and rail travel. The acquisition follows TravelPerk's $160 million Series D funding round earlier this year, which brought the investment to $294 million. The platform is backed by investors such as DST, Kinnevik, Target Global, Felix Capital, Greyhound Capital, Spark Capital, Heartcore, LocalGlobe, Amplo and 14W.

Guest appearances

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The impact of climate change will top travel risks in 2022 *Covid-19 also among five key risks as businesses restart travel* ▪ By Emanuele Scansani, director of partnerships & strategic relations, Riskline

The future of travel is people-powered *Human service trumps AI amid new travel complexities* ▪ By Jason Oshiokpekhai, managing director, Global Travel Collection

Why now is the time to improve your travel programme *It's easier to change the engine when the car's parked* ▪ By Steve Reynolds, chief executive officer, Tripbam

BEAT BOX

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

Green ambitions are starting to become a reality

BY *MOLLY DYSON*
News editor, BTN Europe

"ELECTRIC vehicles are now mainstream." So says Mark Fields, the interim CEO of Hertz, which recently announced a mammoth order for 100,000 electric cars from Tesla – the largest order of its kind. Along with Hertz's announcement, Sixt revealed that it had added hybrid and electric vehicles to the booking options for its Ride service in cities across Europe and the UK.

The companies moves are the latest in a huge shift in the ground transportation sector towards becoming more sustainable as global travel recovers from the pandemic. Businesses are looking to build back greener, meaning that where they do commit to work trips they'll be looking for more environmentally friendly options, whether that's on the ground or in the air.

So much of the sustainability focus has been placed on the aviation industry, but with electric cars becoming more widely available – and more affordable – and charging infrastructure growing by the day, it's encouraging to see big names such as Hertz and Sixt making such big investments in the technology. And their strategies are timely; the UK government has confirmed it will ban the sale of new petrol and diesel cars from 2030, while the EU is poised to do the same in 2035. The major thing standing in the way now is the global shortage of semiconductor chips, which is hitting manufacturing levels.

Higher fuel prices will mean higher airfares... eventually

BY *MICHAEL B. BAKER*
Executive editor, transportation

WHEN reporting third quarter results in recent weeks, airlines showed some optimism, with strong leisure demand and a rebound, albeit a slow recovery, of business travel demand. Some even reported their first profitable quarter since the pandemic began.

Rising fuel costs, however, have emerged as the biggest dark cloud to that recovery. Fuel prices began a sharp increase in late August, and while that began to level off in late October, they remain more than double what they were this time last year, according to the International Air Transport Association's jet fuel price monitor.

Airlines have had a heavy focus on cost controls amid the Covid-19 pandemic, but the rising fuel costs are going to offset much of that. Compounding that is the fact many airlines have abandoned hedging strategies due to last year's collapse in fuel prices, which leaves them more exposed to rising fuel costs than usual.

With higher fuel prices and increased operations, IATA in October projected that airlines' costs next year will be down only 15 per cent compared with 2019 levels, after they achieved cost reductions of 34 per cent from 2019 levels this year. All this should translate to higher fares, but as airlines are still trying to stimulate demand, we likely won't see increases right away. One airline executive recently told me that summer 2022 is the most likely time to start seeing a notable increase in airfares.

Strong leisure demand continues to prop up average daily rates

BY *DONNA M. AIROLDI*
Senior accommodation & meetings editor

THIRD-quarter hotel earnings reports have painted a similar picture: leisure travel remains the revenue driver even as corporate transient and group business continue to recover. Most noted by industry CEOs has been rate integrity, with average daily rates now nearly back to 2019 levels.

Rate recovery means options to roll over rates for corporate programmes have dwindled. In the spring, some hotel companies were eager for corporate clients to retain 2020 rates for a second year. Demand then returned faster than anticipated, causing rates to rise, and those companies have since "drawn a harder line in the sand in terms of the roll over," according to an industry consultant.

Further, even though rates have been volatile, they're settling down. As for a 2022 outlook, Tripbam CEO Steve Reynolds said during a webinar for the company's third-quarter report that he could make an argument for a static programme as well as for a dynamic one. "It depends on the market," he said. But overall, the company believes 2022 rates will increase.

For groups, multiple hotel companies reported rates in excess of 2019 levels for 2022 bookings. There's also compression for quarters two to four. Hilton's CEO even said there was a "lack of desire on our part to commit too much space when we know that there'll be a lot of pricing power."

It looks like the window for a buyer's market didn't last very long.

LOUD & CLEAR

Paul Tuohy is chief executive of Campaign for Better Transport

Why UK APD cut sends the wrong environmental message

“In his recent Budget, the UK Chancellor announced that Air Passenger Duty on domestic flights would be cut by half. With the UK having hosted the COP26 climate conference, the Chancellor’s zeal for getting as many people as possible on to polluting short-haul flights seemed jaw-droppingly tone deaf.

Price is a key factor when choosing which transport mode to use, including for business travellers who are often obliged by their employer or client to justify their choice on price grounds. If flying is the cheapest option, then fly they must.

The Chancellor’s announcement will lead people to fly who would otherwise have caught the train, which is a big problem for one simple reason: domestic flights produce seven times more harmful greenhouse gas emissions than the equivalent train journey.

Campaign for Better Transport is calling for a ban on all domestic flights where the equivalent train journey can be completed in under five hours. This would mean an end to flights from London to Edinburgh, for instance, and from Birmingham to Glasgow, with people offered cheaper train tickets instead.”

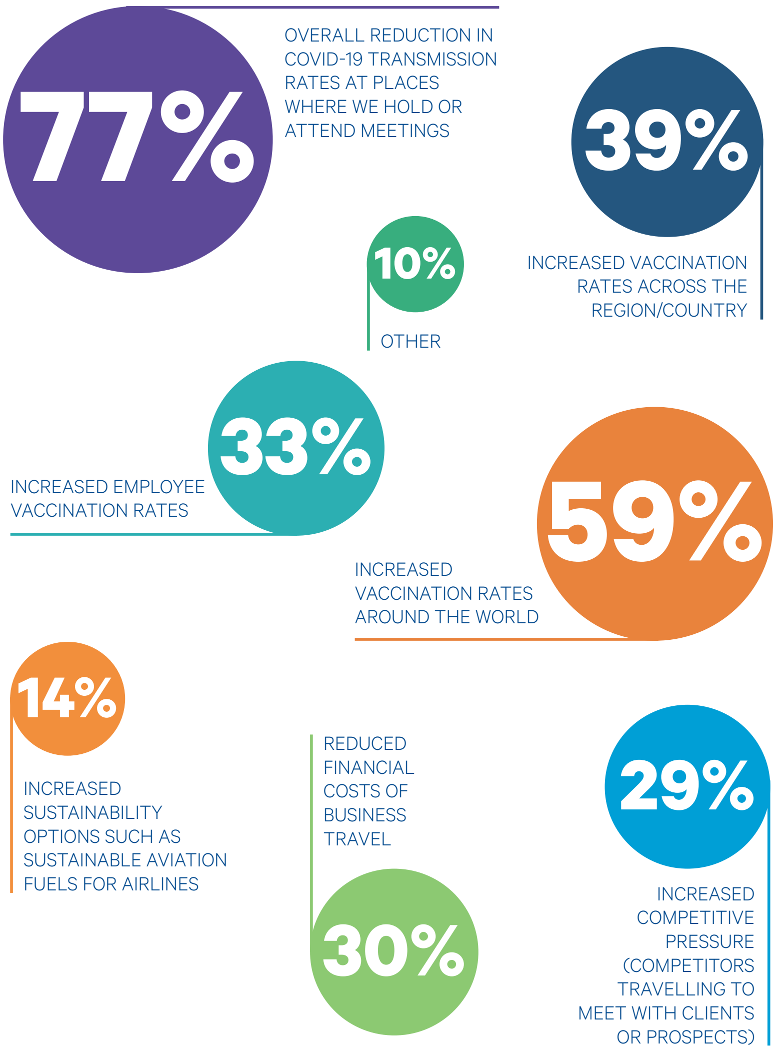
UP AND AWAY

With the reopening of travel between Europe and the US, the recovery of business travel seems to be well under way and optimism is growing, but what are the drivers?

REDUCTION IN CASES IS KEY

A survey of GBTA buyer members conducted in October found most believe declining numbers of Covid-19 cases and increased vaccination rates will accelerate business travel activity at their company

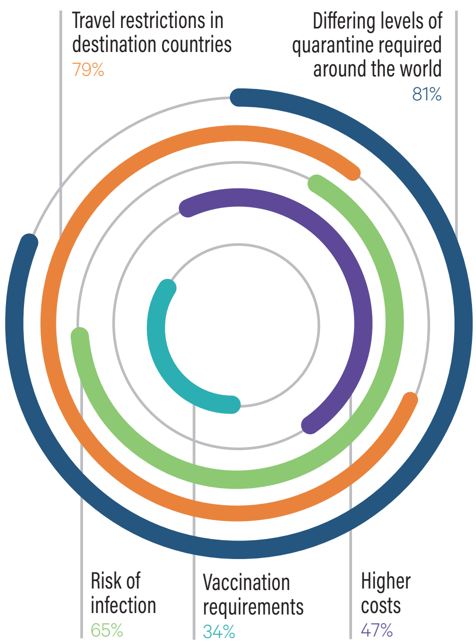
What do you think will accelerate the rate of business travel at your company?



Source: GBTA poll conducted among 503 buyer and supplier members from 4-13 October

CHARITIES REMAIN CAUTIOUS

While two-thirds of companies in the charity, academic and not-for-profit sectors have resumed business travel, some have admitted they are still nervous about the safety of certain countries and ever-changing regulations around Covid-19

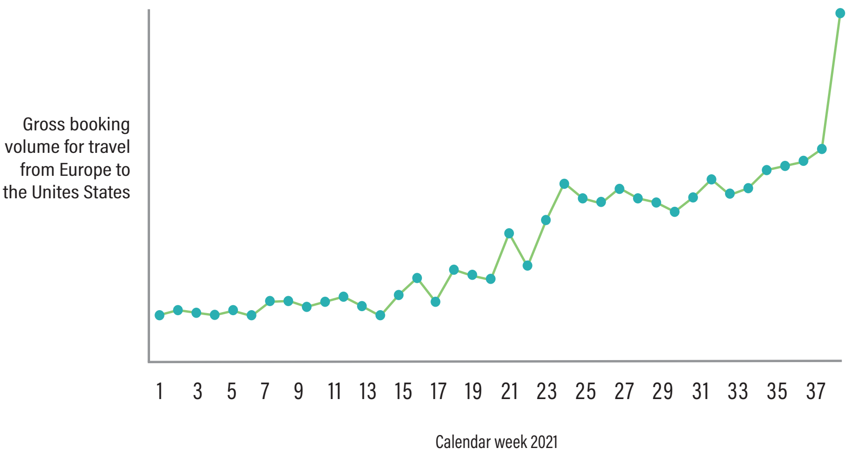


As a result of the remaining uncertainties, 90 per cent of companies have had a 'rethink' about their travel strategy, with budgets being reduced for two-thirds and 71 per cent reducing the number of employees allowed to travel

Source: Diversity Travel survey of 900 companies

US REOPENING PROMPTS BOOKING SURGE

When the US announced plans to reopen its borders to foreign travellers, there was a surge in bookings between the UK/Europe and the US



Source: Data provided by mid-office travel tech specialist MIDOCO. Data incorporates its European user base, with a strong emphasis on travel booking activity in Germany

DOMESTIC DRIVES CHANGE

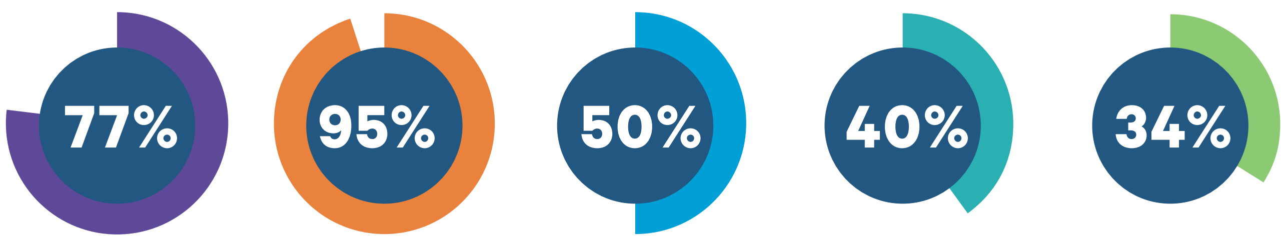
UK domestic bookings are leading the charge when it comes to the market's business travel recovery, with September levels reaching 53 per cent of pre-pandemic volumes, but international bookings still lagging behind at 21 per cent

Source: Travelogix and Business Travel Association data September 2021

TRAVELLERS READY AND WILLING

According to a survey commissioned by Amadeus, business travellers are not only ready to get back on the road but are willing to share their personal data for the use of digital health certificates in order to make work trips happen

Travellers surveyed said they...



ARE EAGER TO TRAVEL

ARE WILLING TO SHARE HEALTH DATA

WILL BE TRAVELLING FOR BUSINESS ON A FLIGHT IN THE NEXT YEAR

WILL BE TRAVELLING TO EUROPE IN THE NEXT YEAR

WILL BE MAKING TWO OR MORE TRIPS TO EUROPE IN THE NEXT YEAR

Source: Censuswide poll of 9,074 respondents who have travelled abroad in the past 18 months across the UK, Spain, Germany, Russia, France, India, the US and UAE

HERE WE GO…

Will 2022 be known as the year business travel bounced back? *BTN Europe* charts the hopes and expectations of a range of industry experts

Will 2022 be the year that business travel bounced back? All the signs point to meaningful recovery, with vaccination programmes – and now booster jabs – helping to unlock international travel, but the jury is resolutely out on the extent and nature of corporate travel's rebound.

Among recent forecasts is a report from the World Travel & Tourism Council in collaboration with McKinsey & Company, *Adapting to Endemic Covid-19: The Outlook for Business Travel*, published in November this year. On the back of an expected increase in 2021 global business travel spend of 26 per cent, the report anticipates a further rise of 34 per cent in 2022. That would put global business travel spend in 2022 at two-thirds of that seen pre-pandemic in 2019.

"Even though these figures are encouraging, the travel and tourism sector as a whole will likely have a bumpy road to recovery. Although lockdowns and restrictions have begun easing in certain parts of the world, it is expected that the effects of Covid-19 will persist, as the World Health Organization predicts that Covid-19 will likely become endemic. This means that the sector may have to adapt and adjust to continuing ebbs and flows of endemic Covid-19," the report notes.

"In these volatile times it is difficult to make forecasts with any certainty, but by examining what industry experts have experienced, recovery will likely vary by travel segment, business sector, and country. But the good news is that people are eager to resume travelling."

In the Middle East, business travel spend is expected to increase 49 per cent this year – stronger than leisure travel spend at 36 per cent – followed by a 32 per cent rise in 2022. Spend in Asia-Pacific is set to grow 32 per cent this

year and by 41 per cent next year. Recovery in Europe is expected to be slower, with 36 per cent growth this year and 28 per cent in 2022, while the figures for Africa are 36 per cent this year and 23 per cent next, and for the Americas 14 per cent growth this year and 35 per cent in 2022.

CHANGING ATTITUDES

One thing most agree on is that attitudes to business travel have changed, perhaps irrevocably, and a source of debate throughout the pandemic has been when, and indeed if, business travel activity will return to pre-pandemic volumes. If the focus on the quality of travel programmes seen in 2018-19 was dubbed business travel 2.0, are we now witnessing the dawn of business travel 3.0? A time when the triumvirate of ESG goals, necessity and traveller wellbeing become the key criteria in the 'should I stay or should I go' decision-making progress?

Fewer but longer business trips of higher quality – and therefore more costly – have been mooted by several contributors to the 2022 Outlook, while sustainability has become and will remain embedded in all corporate activity. The importance of virtual meetings and hybrid events in reducing our environmental impact are also highlighted in the pages that follow.

Among key concerns, meanwhile, are staff shortages at suppliers and TMCs, rising costs, and pricing volatility as supply and demand tango their way toward some kind of equilibrium. Several ground transport providers have reported impressive results in recent weeks due in no small part to vehicle shortages and rising rates.

REVISITING THE 2021 OUTLOOK

Predicting business travel's path in 2022 is difficult, but doing so for 2021 was even harder. When last year's edition of the Outlook was compiled back in November 2020, vaccination programmes had not even commenced. Not surprisingly, TMCs' predictions of business travel recovery in 2021 ranged widely, from 30 per cent of 2019 levels up to 80 per cent. Of the TMCs that have talked about 2021 results, a number have recently reported monthly revenues close to or exceeding 50 per cent of pre-Covid levels.

Meanwhile, a Credit Suisse report published in October 2020, *Beyond the pandemic: Sizing corporate travel recovery prospects*, predicted a 65 per cent decline in international business travel in 2021 versus 2019 – perhaps closer to the mark given the prevalence of tough entry requirements for most countries globally. The same report predicted business travel volumes will return to within 10 to 20 per cent of pre-Covid levels by 2024, while a more recent report from the GBTA and Rockport Analytics published in February 2021 predicts annual global business travel spend will recover to its pre-Covid high (US$1.43 trillion in 2019) in 2024. More recently still, Virgin Atlantic said in September it expects its corporate travel volumes to return to pre-Covid levels in 2024.

Mark Cuschieri
Global head of travel UBS, and vice president, GBTA

HEEDING CAUTION

Travel is clearly experiencing a recovery. However, the industry remains highly susceptible to the virus trajectory, vaccination efforts, and governmental responses, meaning the level of sentiment is not similar around the world. Whilst we certainly see the uptick, business travel is more likely to occur in areas with higher vaccination rates.

Planning for the future of business travel and demand is extremely difficulty simply due to the headwinds of uncertainty and inconsistency. There are real concerns about the fluctuations in cost and availability across the supply chain and this on its own may drag out recovery. Some will forecast a strong recovery in the first half of 2022, which will vary by industry sector, but I think it will continue to be a slow, gradual and a measured approach.

Quite rightly we will also see strong emphasis on ESG across the industry. The pandemic has presented the opportunity to reconsider business travel habits and to develop even more sustainable travel policy guidelines and practices. Our commitment is to continue to put sustainability at the heart of our business travel programme.

Peter Grover
Managing director EMEA, Tripbam

RATE ROLLOVERS OUT OF REACH

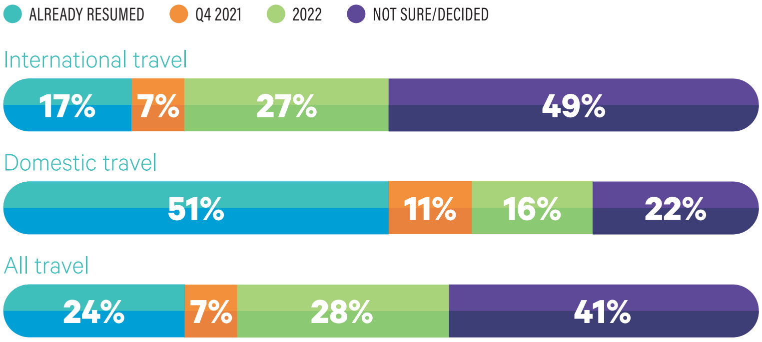
The return of groups and meetings and leisure travel combined with low hotel supply growth will drive rates above 2019 levels in key markets next year.

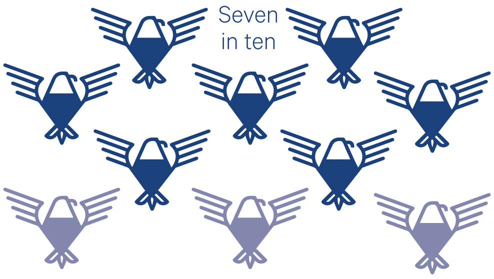
Uncertainty led some buyers to roll over negotiated static rates last year, but with publicly available rates often beating corporate rates, this led to overpaying for those buyers. The expected rate increases for 2022 may seem like an ideal opportunity to rollover static negotiated agreements once more to save money, but buyers are finding the option to do so is no longer available from hoteliers. Instead, buyers will have better luck securing dynamic discounts with last room availability. Some larger programmes will be able to get a dual rate load, but whether they can actually implement it will be another story.

Cancellation rates and length of stay are back to where they were pre-pandemic but will likely both increase again in 2022. Corporate bookings are still trending towards lower star-rated properties, but that should change as non-essential workers begin to travel again. Corporate hotel volumes will be at 50 per cent of 2019 levels through Q1 2022, and we expect to see 60 to 80 per cent of 2019 volumes return by year-end 2022. Volume is expected to be reduced by 20 per cent long term as corporates embrace reduced travel budgets, sustainability initiatives and remote work capabilities.

ATTITUDES TO TRAVEL

Taking off: when corporates expect to resume business travel





The proportion of industry personnel who expect international business travel to the US to greatly or moderately increase over the next six months as a result of the opening up of US borders

Source: GBTA poll of more than 500 buyer and supplier members conducted 4-13 October 2021

Thomas Emanuel
Director, STR

DIVERSE REBOUND

With most regions slowly trending towards pre-pandemic travel levels, performance recovery is on the minds of most in the hotel industry at this point in the cycle. While the future is brighter, the recovery timeline will not be linear. According to our latest forecast along with our partner Tourism Economics, European RevPAR is projected to return to pre-crisis levels of performance by 2024.

In Europe, specifically, hotel performance has been closely tied to the pandemic timeline. As projected at the beginning of 2021, leisure markets have continued to drive performance for countries across the continent as consumers swapped international breaks for staycation destinations. But with vaccination rates improving in the region and around the globe, we expect travel confidence to continue to grow at the same time that restrictions on international travel ease and that will create more demand volume from multiple customer segments over the next year and beyond.

Lotten Fowler
General manager, Swedish Business Travel Association

TRAVELLING THE RIGHT WAY

We will start traveling again in 2022, but as we do it will be important to do it 'the correct way': considering the environment, costs, employee wellbeing, trip purpose etc. Finding the right balance between travel and virtual will take time and require attention.

The larger international Nordic corporates talk about travel budgets for 2022 of around 40 to 60 per cent of 2019 volumes. Expectations are that travel will not go back to what it was – digital meetings are here to stay, day trips will not be accepted as a norm and the trips that do take place might cost more.

The grounding of travel was used by many corporates to implement, upgrade and adjust their internal processes, so as travel now slowly resumes there will be an opportunity to communicate around expectations and behaviours and to hopefully adjust to new processes along the way.

Meetings and events have in many cases not been managed as tightly as transient travel, which is another thing many travel managers will be looking at now – Teams and Zoom have driven new ways of working.

Chris Pouney
Independent consultant

PRICES UP, VOLUMES DOWN

I'm expecting prices to rise across the board in 2022. Shortages of new vehicles is going to drive car rental prices up, while airlines and hotels, who have clearly struggled in the stop-start world of Covid, are nevertheless past masters at deploying yield management algorithms to protect revenue. Meanwhile, people will take fewer but longer trips, visiting multiple cities and clients in one go.

Sustainability will finally move beyond just lip service. Whilst there is interesting dialogue on how business class can be considered more environmentally friendly than economy, the (incorrect) public perception of executives quaffing champagne in the front of the plane is still a concern for companies, most of whom are desperate to project an image of prudence, with the environment at the heart of decision making.

That said, buyers will need to deploy robust demand management. For example, with (pre-Covid) fare structures allowing for significantly cheaper premium class flights when staying for longer, there could be an opportunity to achieve multiple objectives: reduce the number of flights and enhance the employee experience.

Debbie Male
Head of Europe sales, IHG Hotels & Resorts

TRAVELLING SMARTER

Different markets continue to recover at a different pace and the ongoing impact of Covid, vaccination levels and government regulations will mean 2022 is still a tough year to predict. Having said that, during the second half of 2021 we've seen consistent improvement in corporate bookings levels and we ultimately believe corporate travel will continue to recover.

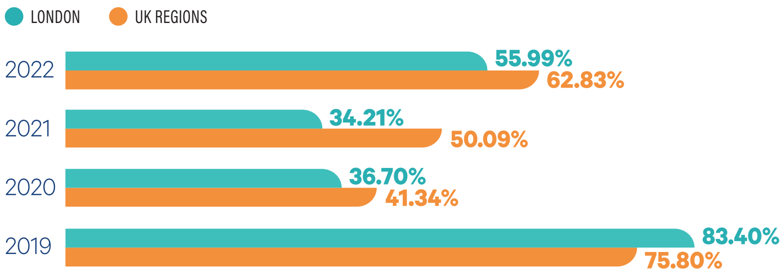
We expect to continue to see higher levels of domestic and regional business travel recovery to be evident before international. In 2019, 51 per cent of business travel was regional/domestic travel and in 2021 that's increased to 78 per cent. We are seeing promising signs with new international travel corridors opening up which means we expect to see those international levels come back up in 2022 – but it'll take some time to get back to pre-pandemic levels.

I believe 2022 will be the year where we see people travel smarter, with fewer trips due to the red tape associated with travel or due to corporate restrictions, and instead people will look to combine multiple meetings into one trip, instead of making single day trips which were the norm pre-pandemic.

There is also an ongoing desire for a contactless, automated, and flexible travel experience. Sustainability is also a key focus area for corporate clients and as people start returning to travel, they are looking to their travel providers to deliver on that.

HOTEL TRENDS

Predicted 2022 hotel occupancy – and historic results



Predicted 2022 average daily rates

	2022	2021	2020	2019
LONDON	£112.26	£84.84	£95.13	£153.07
UK REGIONS	£67.05	£61.59	£61.58	£76.68

Source: PwC UK Hotels Forecast 2021-2022

Emma Gregory,
Director, Urbanberry Recruitment

RESTAFFING THE INDUSTRY

We're confident we'll see a variety of roles within TMCs opening up fairly rapidly as we move into 2022. There's often talk of a predicted candidate shortage and whilst to some extent we have lost people from the industry, the issue will be that TMCs need to be open minded to alternative experience and adjust their expectations and remuneration packages to encourage people to move from their existing roles or lifestyle.

There are plenty of highly capable, talented people who would be an asset to any business, but they'll be presented with a choice of employer as things get busier. Flexibility, benefits, stability and support all feature highly in candidates' needs and companies who aren't able to offer this will lose out to those who can.

In terms of corporates, they are certainly looking at streamlining their travel processes and we've already seen an uptake in travel co-ordinator roles being created within organisations. There's a need for a more strategic approach to travel and after many companies had their dedicated TMC travel teams scaled back or removed, there's a definite rise in the search for a TMC who can offer that once more.

Calum Hawley
Global travel manager, Endeavour Mining

PRICING UPS AND DOWNS

Pricing volatility is going to exist for the next six to 12 months until we get to a point where supply and demand are in equilibrium. At the moment, we're seeing terrible volatility as demand outstrips supply at different points. I could book a flight today and it could be £400 – tomorrow it could be £1,200. Airlines would be fools to put three flights on half empty when they can fill one flight.

I'd like to think we'll be able to fly better in 2022 with more airline schedules returning and countries opening up. Sustainability is the buzzword for 99 per cent of businesses right now and we're no different. I'm conscious that currently we have some people having to make three, four or sometimes even five connections and that's having an effect on sustainability – it's very small in the grand scheme of things but it all counts.

John Grant
Chief analyst, OAG

STRONG SUMMER BECKONS

The recovery is finally underway but we have a long way to go before we reach the levels of airline capacity seen in 2019 when some 5.7 billion scheduled seats were operated. We may finish 2021 with 3.7 billion and with a fair wind could see around 5.1 billion by the end of 2022 but that assumes no bumps in the road to recovery.

North America and Europe are well on that road, but other markets are struggling to reopen, and we do not expect some markets in South East Asia to fully reopen before the second quarter of 2022 at the very earliest.

The pace of recovery is certainly accelerating and with the pent-up demand that exists we expect the summer 2022 season to be very strong, especially in Europe and across the Atlantic so airfares are likely to be higher than pre-pandemic levels over the June to September period. We also anticipate that the demand for the premium economy cabin on many airlines will be very strong as every travel segment will seek that additional bit of space and social distancing, especially on longer haul sectors.

If we can get through Q1 of 2022 with no major Covid outbreaks or new variants appearing around the world then we will have turned the corner, and everyone will agree it's about time too.

Matt Gatenby
Senior partner and head of litigation, Travlaw

THE LEGAL VIEW

The last couple of years were no better when viewed through a legal prism than they were through any other. Next year promises to be more positive, of course, but there are still going to be issues to work through.

Interest and implementation of the new ISO31030 travel risk management standard continues apace with companies, travellers, TMCs and suppliers all looking at whether to, and indeed how to, roll it out.

With no other expected governmental or regulatory changes of note on the horizon, expect the legal issues to instead come from within the industry. Both corporates and TMCs saw the benefits of well-drafted agreements when the proverbial hit the fan as a result of Covid-19 so expect a demand for and renewed focus on clear, well-written contracting across the board.

Disputes between companies have been largely placed on the back burner throughout Covid-19 but there is an expectation that these may come back once there is more of a firm financial footing to consider serious litigation. Overall, whilst most business travel providers quite rightly want to get back to the 'good stuff' we will see the continued effect of Covid-19 for some time to come.

Steve Jones
Chairman, The Meetings Industry Association

Christoph Carnier
President, VDR (German travel management association)

Matthew Tringham
Chief strategy and product officer, Skytra

HYBRID EVENTS HERE TO STAY

As travel corridors reopen across Europe, we can expect to see a slow reintegration of larger, multinational events where delegates can more conveniently travel between countries than in recent times. However, our research suggests that we're not expecting to see the larger events attracting international audiences to return to pre-Covid levels until at least 2023.

As the reintroduction of physical meetings and events becomes increasingly well-received by delegates, virtual event capabilities will continue to be utilised, but more so to provide wider and larger event accessibility, serving as a means for convenient international attendances without the need for lengthy delegate and/or speaker travel.

Finally, as the UK business meetings and events sector begins to get back on its feet, we cannot ignore its well-documented labour shortage, where the average organisation serving the sector has experienced a 57 per cent reduction in its workforce.

With alternative industries often appearing more lucrative, the issue has been compounded by the challenges presented by Brexit, and organisations will need to ensure that they have strong staffing strategies in place to facilitate any incremental increases in business expected over the next 12 months.

REMOTE POSSIBILITIES

It has become clear since 2020 that there will be a 'back to business' but that it won't be 'business as usual.' The economic recovery will be defined by new opportunities to shape the future, and this will also be seen and experienced in corporate mobility.

The backlog of business and private travel will initially trigger a boom, while the period after that will be managed even more deliberately than in the past – and this will be based on new models of working that are already on their way.

Face-to-face meetings will not be replaced by online meetings anytime soon. It will be all about situation-dependent alternatives. Mobility managers will contribute their experience and thus a new quality to the working world; our ways of working and the willingness to use new tools has changed and developed rapidly. Work-travel-life balance can take on entirely new forms. We will probably see more digital nomads, and sometimes see 100 per cent remote working set ups with occasional and therefore exceptional team-building events.

In addition to huge cost savings on superfluous mobility, greenhouse gases can also be reduced in the medium term. All in all, as a consequence of this crisis we are better prepared than ever for a socially, economically and environmentally more sustainable, humane and mobile future.

CAPACITY COMING BACK

While prices have been volatile and unpredictable, travelling in Europe and North America – or between them – has, on the whole, been very good value during Covid in most market segments. Indeed, it looks like travel will remain relatively cheap through Q4 2021 and into Q1 of 2022.

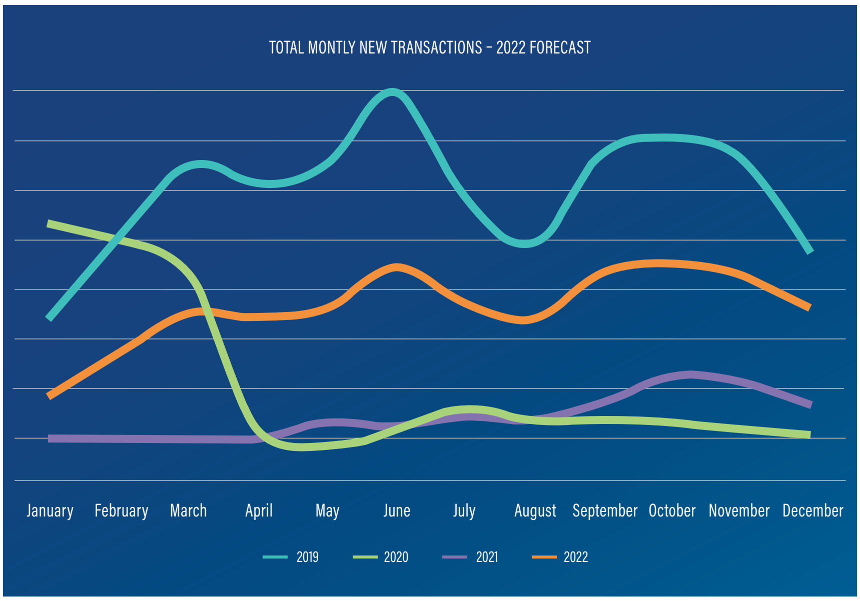
In Europe we are seeing volumes pick up through Q4, suggesting a recovery to 66 per cent of 2019 levels. Q4 travel is also good value compared to 2019, with economy class travel currently 19 per cent cheaper and business class down seven per cent. Looking into Q1 2022, pricing is actually broadly similar to where we were back in 2019 for Q1 2020.

The transatlantic market, meanwhile, has of course been even more impacted by the crisis. Q3 2021 volumes were down 74 per cent on 2019 but the reopening of US borders does seem to have made a difference, with Q4 of 2021 on track to recover to 40 per cent of 2019 levels.

For the moment, the transatlantic market in Q1 2022 is at 50 per cent of the level we would have expected before Covid. Travel on these routes has been, and remains, heavily discounted – with up to 30 per cent reductions in economy class – but prices for Q1 2022 are looking to be similar to those in 2019, although business fares are still discounted 12 per cent for the same period.

FORECASTING 2022 TRANSACTIONS

Making any kind of forecast regarding forward business travel volumes is fraught with difficulty, but Travelogix has nevertheless crunched the numbers and predicts bookings in 2022 will return to nearly 61 per cent of 2019 activity.Its forecast draws on 2022 Q1 bookings to date, historic booking patterns, seasonality trends in the three years up to and including 2019, and factored in new trip duration trends and recovery trends witnessed in other markets



Coming back: In 2022, business travel transactions are predicted to reach 60.84% of 2019 levels

Improvement: Business travel transactions in 2022 are predicted to increase 61.14% on 2020 volumes

Sophie Hulgard
SVP sales Northern Europe, Accor

SMEs UNDERPIN RECOVERY

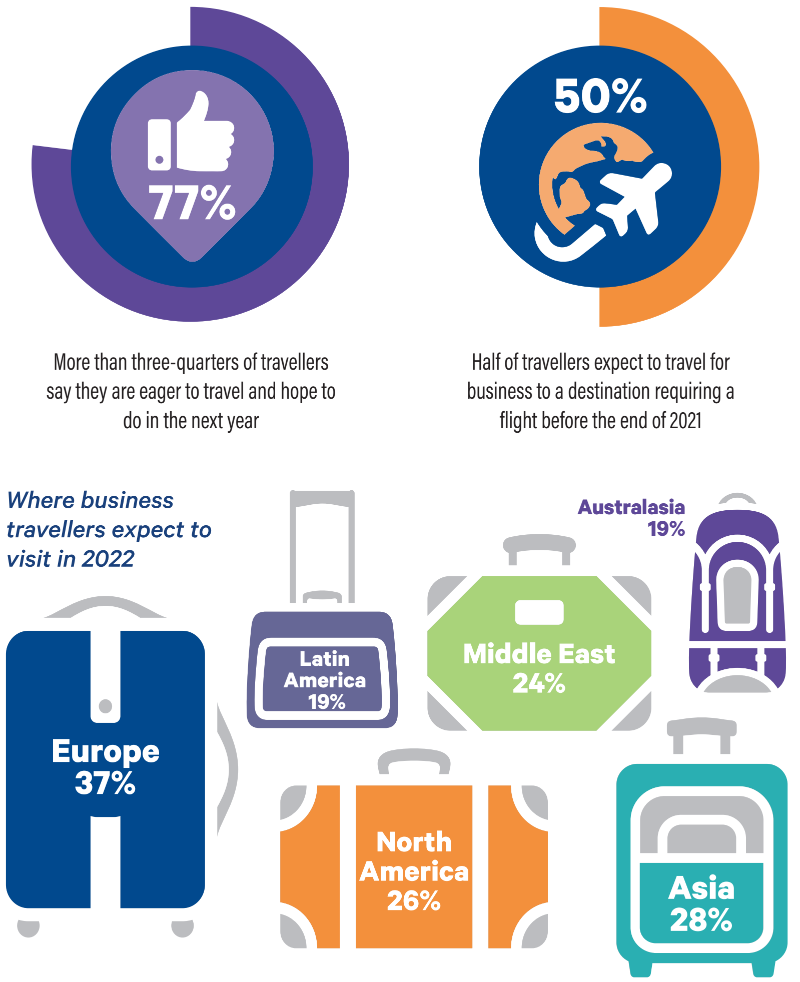
Recovery is now well underway and we are seeing corporate clients reshape their travel policies and procedures, which will be reflected in their new 2022 travel programmes.

We expect that domestic business travel, which in 2019 represented approximately 40 per cent of Accor's activity, will be over time impacted only lightly – with no more than five to ten per cent loss – as much of this travel comes from small and medium companies that need to be face-to-face to close a deal, see clients and undertake other business requirements.

We are also experiencing increased demand for large group events such as seminars, sporting events and congresses from as early as H2 2022.

We expect the trend towards remote meetings to remain a lasting legacy even after the pandemic, and our research shows that 70 per cent of meeting planners see hybrid solutions as an important add-on in the future. However, digital tools will not replace the importance of in-person business meetings, especially for sales and business deals.

REBUILDING TRAVEL



Source: Amadeus' Rebuild Travel Survey, October 2021

Ciarán Delaney
CEO and founder, Hubli

GREEN MEETINGS

The future of work has arrived and is set to have a significant impact on business travel and meetings. Meetings are smaller and more regional, group offsites will be vital to build relationships, and sustainability is now more important than price when deciding where to meet.

Our own booking data has already shown a significant shift in behaviour away from international to regional meetings which now account for 78 per cent of our bookings. The average number of attendees has also dropped from 83 to 18 attendees with 41 per cent of meetings including virtual technology to facilitate hybrid participation. We see the hybrid requirement continuing into 2022, however attendee numbers should increase depending on pandemic recovery.

The pandemic has shown us less commuting and travel are key sustainability drivers, with many organisations setting carbon neutral targets. We're seeing more users remove paper, plastic and meats from meetings, and we are now expanding the system to allow planners to rank potential meeting cities based on carbon emissions. Picking the lowest carbon location for meetings and off-sites will help companies drive significant emissions savings.

Paula Cullen
Associate for growth and sustainability, Black Box Partnerships

ALL EYES ON SUSTAINABILITY

I believe two 'Rs' will shape the travel landscape in 2022 and beyond – regulation and reputation. The Task Force on Climate-Related Financial Disclosures (TCFD) was created in 2015 by the Financial Stability Board (FSB) to develop consistent climate-related financial risk disclosures for use by companies, banks, and investors in providing information to stakeholders. And in June 2021, the G7 backed mandatory climate reporting and ratified the TCFD reporting framework. In its simplest terms, future access to finance and investment will be regulated by robust climate reporting and actions taken to mitigate climate risk.

Equally, there has been a sea change in media narrative towards the sustainability agenda and the changing demographic of our frequent travellers will have significant impact – the timelines of 2030 and 2050 feel very real to a traveller in their mid-twenties. They want to do the right thing and when presented with more sustainable options they will most certainly adopt them. Our corporate reputations and ability to attract new talent will depend upon our approach and endeavours to prevent climate change.

This presents enormous opportunities in our industry and completely reinforces the concept of 'managed' travel. Total trip value will become the critical measurement; understanding the carbon impact from door to door and balancing this against the trip agenda and business outcomes will become the norm.

As travel becomes more complex, not only due to the ongoing existence of Covid-19 but equally due to Brexit, the value of TMC expertise and travel data is going to grow significantly.

Tom Maynard
Head of corporate sales UK and Europe, Virgin Atlantic

TRANSATLANTIC COMPETITION

The North Atlantic is still an incredibly competitive landscape and we have to remain competitive. We've got new entrants in the market who are challenging us all both from a product and pricing perspective so I'm not expecting huge increases in pricing over the next six to 12 months. We also want to encourage demand – we don't want to stifle it by pricing ourselves out of business.

We may see the effects from the cutting of internal meetings side of things in 2022, and instead of travelling quarterly to meet with colleagues it might be twice yearly in person.

But when you go for client-facing travel you might actually go for longer – you might consolidate three trips into one and stay a week instead. We haven't seen that in the data yet – we're still seeing out Monday or Tuesday and back Thursday – but that model may change as we start seeing a ramp-up and that volume come back.

Clive Wratten
CEO, Business Travel Association

ON THE RIGHT TRACK

BTA figures from the fourth week of September show the strongest week-on-week recovery for domestic and international figures combined since May 2021. And domestic business travel bookings are now at more than 53 per cent of pre-pandemic levels.

We are therefore hopeful the business travel sector will continue to recover in 2022 and beyond but, undoubtedly, challenges remain. Uncertainty is the real enemy of our sector – the industry needs a consistent, stable approach to international travel. Without this, managing businesses and providing outstanding service is nigh on impossible.

A major obstacle for TMCs going forward will be attracting new or returning talent, alongside staff retention. A further challenge will be the behaviour up and down the supply chain. We hope to see a shared recovery rather than companies acting only in their own interest to the detriment of their suppliers.

By next summer, we anticipate overall travel revenue to rise to approximately 70 per cent of 2019 levels. We predict domestic business travel will be stronger, with levels up to 80 per cent of 2019 by the end of the year.

David Kilduff
Senior vice president of sales, HQ and consultant, Advito

ELECTRIC EXPECTATIONS

We predict that 2022 will be a wild ride. Travel is picking up slowly but surely, which brings us a dilemma – vehicle shortages and rising fuel prices. The chip shortage affects vehicle availability will continue through 2022, which drives higher prices for suppliers, and fewer cars means price increases. We have seen this before, and what should happen and what does actually happen depends on who wants market share.

Meanwhile, client requirements and expectations are changing to include the promotion, inclusion and support of electric vehicles (EVs) and other sustainable transport modes within their programmes.

However, the infrastructure, like charging stations with strong charging capabilities for EVs, is still not mature, and battery technology remains a concern for corporates. Then there is the higher cost per day and, for suppliers, the uncertainty that corporate clients will spend the extra money to be sustainable. It is a huge investment for suppliers without a guarantee that they will see an ROI. How quickly will governments speed up their support of EV technology and required infrastructure? One thing is for sure, EVs are coming and will play an integral part in the future of ground transport and car rental.

Frits de Kok
Interim MD of FCM UK and global CMO

LOOKING TO LONG-HAUL

We are encouraged by the recent lift in business travel bookings and are optimistic that 2022 will be a year of recovery for the industry – however, it will not be without some issues. With geographically dispersed operations and a remote and likely reduced workforce, it is critical that TMCs have the tools and the infrastructure to support clients.

Since UK travel restrictions have eased, European and domestic flights from London for British-based corporate travellers have surged in popularity. Internationally, Paris and Frankfurt emerged as the most popular destinations in the third quarter of 2021, closely followed by Glasgow, Edinburgh, and Aberdeen.

While current data and customer feedback point towards continued uplift in the year ahead, it is still too early to predict when we will return to pre-pandemic levels. However, all the signs point to longer haul business travel returning significantly next year.

Since the US government's announcement in September, FCM witnessed a surge in interest for US destinations such as New York – our number one international destination – and we expect further positive rebound in the coming months.

> "Uncertainty is the enemy of our sector. The industry needs a consistent, stable approach to international travel"

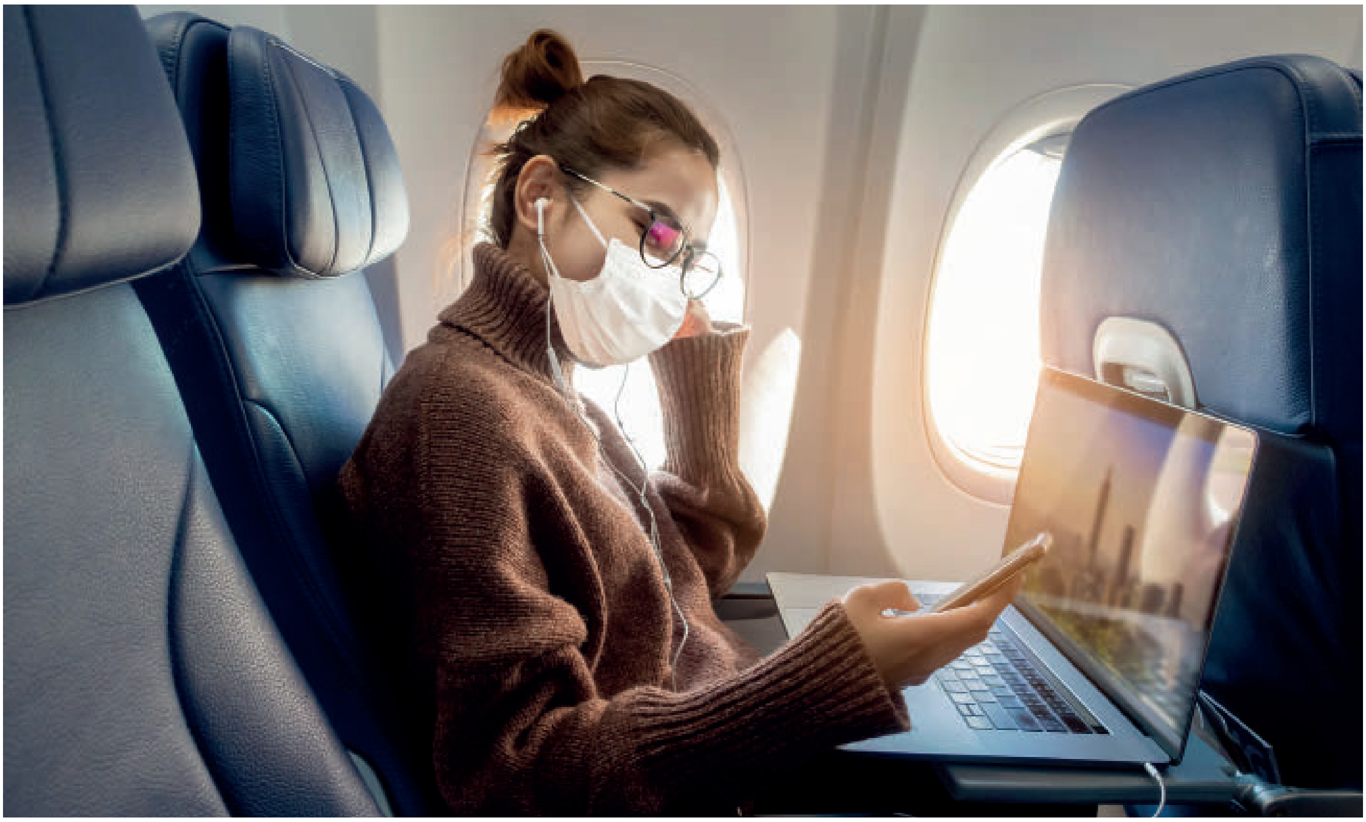
Scott Davies
CEO, Institute of Travel Management

THE KNOWN AND THE UNKNOWN

As we look towards a more promising year in 2022, forecasting the future has never seemed trickier. I'm reminded of the terminology coined by the late US Secretary of Defense Donald Rumsfeld. So what are our 'known knowns'? I would suggest that: a) we know we badly need and want to travel again for work and pleasure; b) the infrastructure and networks we previously took for granted may struggle at times to cope with the initial stages of increased demand; and c) sustainability will be the single most important theme for travel, and indeed everything else in our lives, permanently.

The 'known unknowns' certainly include the path the pandemic may take in future and the implications thereof, although we all know there are things we can do to try to minimise the worst of these scenarios.

As for the 'unknown unknowns', these are far beyond my mental capacity, so let's never take any part of our amazing industry and community for granted again. Re-acquainting in person and feeling the passion and energy we collectively bring in recent weeks has been a joy.



INJECTION THEORY

No jab, no business travel? It's a policy implemented by some corporates in the US but European organisations are largely taking a different view. **Andy Hoskins** reports

As vaccination rates continue to grow, being fully protected against Covid-19 is increasingly proving a key that opens doors – be it international borders, events or cafes – that otherwise remain closed, or at least difficult to breach, for the unvaccinated.

Corporate policies regarding vaccination as a condition of employment and, in this arena, as a prerequisite for business travel, have not surprisingly come under the spotlight, with the issue coming to the fore as a result of a leaked memo sent to staff of JP Morgan Chase & Co. In it, the bank said it would not permit business travel for US employees who are unvaccinated or have not disclosed their vaccination status. Like many employers, it has urged employees to get their jabs but has not mandated it.

The bank is not alone. An October survey by the GBTA of more than 500 business travel professionals found 40 per cent of respondents' organisations require employees to be fully vaccinated in order to travel for business and/or meet clients or customers face-to-face.

"Safety and duty of care continue to be of utmost importance to our members, who overwhelmingly support vaccine programmes as well as smart travel policies to ensure a safe return to business travel, meetings and events," said GBTA chief executive Suzanne Neufang.

However there was a marked contrast between respondents on opposite sides of the Atlantic, with notably more organisations in North America than in Europe likely to implement such a policy. On the other hand, the same survey found European business travel professionals are more likely to support government policies that require vaccination for a range of travel-related activities than their North American counterparts are.

"Whilst a number of firms in the US, including airlines, have come out with strong positions around vaccines, employers getting involved in the detail of employees' medical records is an uncomfortable topic for most European companies," said independent consultant Chris Pouney.

"In Europe, rather than clear mandates and company positions, companies are needing to create softer influence models, including self – and likely voluntary – attestation of health and status by employees, for example," he adds.

So why the contrast? Contrasting attitudes to data privacy and employment law are among the explanations. "In the UK, vaccination remains a personal choice. Nobody can be compelled – by their employers, the government or anyone else – to have the vaccine. Nonetheless, employers will be exploring the steps they can take to improve vaccination rates among staff," says Joseph Lappin, partner and head of the employment department at London-based law firm Stewarts.

"Insisting that all staff are vaccinated on health and safety grounds is risky. Despite the push by the government to encourage vaccination, it is unlikely that many employers will go down this route. We believe this could give rise to complaints – and possibly litigation – by employees against their employers."

However, employers may consider carrying out a risk assessment and decide that the damage caused by an outbreak of Covid-19 among staff could be crippling to their business, especially if an outbreak would lead to a temporary closure or inability to meet customer demand, says Lappin, enabling employers to instruct staff to be vaccinated.

ASSESSING THE RISK

Employers can approach business travel in the same way and assess trips on a case-by-case basis. "My instinct is that some employers may insist, having carried out a risk assessment, that travel to certain destinations with rising or high Covid infection rates should be reserved for those who are fully vaccinated," says Lappin.

"An employer might consider that the risks of an unvaccinated individual travelling for business purposes to a high-risk location is too high. This means those who are not vaccinated may miss out."

There are however additional considerations. Although an employer may refuse foreign travel, for example, by someone with a serious health condition visiting a destination with a high infection rate, "employers should tread carefully because if a health condition amounts to a disability then excluding a member of staff from a business trip may amount to disability discrimination," Lappin explains.

The second point he raises is the EU and UK's data protection laws, with GDPR regulations applying to all employers in the EU and UK.

"Although vaccination data needs more protection because it is sensitive, employers should normally be entitled to ask their staff if they have received the Covid-19 jab," says Lappin. "Collecting this data is likely to be necessary to comply with an employer's health and safety obligations and to draw up a vaccine strategy. Unless employees are working from home full-time and will never attend the workplace where they will come into close contact with colleagues, customers and clients, employers should be entitled to understand what their risk level is."

> "If you're a regular business traveller and you're not vaccinated it's going to make travel very difficult

EDUCATION AGENDA

If blanket vaccination-related travel policies are difficult to implement, what are corporates doing instead? As Pouney says, many are vocally recommending employees get jabbed and relying on voluntary disclosure of vaccination status.

An EMEA-based travel manager for a US-headquartered company told *BTN Europe* they had implemented an informal pre-trip approvals process but had no particular vaccination-related policies.

"As an organisation we've not got a policy around vaccination, but we of course strongly encourage it. We're not saying you have to have a vaccine but rather that you have to abide by the airline regulations or destination entry requirements," they explain.

The buyer, who wished to remain anonymous, added: "What we wouldn't do is send anyone to a country where they'd have to quarantine on arrival and that is impacted largely by which vaccine or how many shots they've had. That's our global policy; not just in Europe."

Their organisation does not require employees to disclose their vaccination status, but the travel manager "absolutely" believes the majority of regular travellers are vaccinated against Covid-19. "Apart from the obvious health reasons for getting jabbed, if you're a regular business traveller and you're not vaccinated it's going to make travel very difficult."

Another buyer, with global responsibility for their organisation's travel needs, shares a similar view. "The majority of our employees who are travelling have done it for years and, realistically, being vaccinated going forward is the only way they'll have an element of freedom to travel. Most of them didn't need any persuasion [to get vaccinated] and, like most people, travel would not have been their primary motive."

Nevertheless, the organisation does have an internal policy around vaccination in some locations – not specifically for travel activity, but for all employees. “Broadly speaking we as a business would struggle to operate unless people are vaccinated. There is great emphasis within the business to get people vaccinated and we’re doing quite well.”

Employment law specialist Lappin says employers are well within their rights to run education campaigns for their staff highlighting the benefits and risks of getting vaccinated but offers a word of caution: “If an employee feels that they are coming under unreasonable pressure to get vaccinated against their wishes, they could resign on the grounds that their employer has breached trust and confidence between them and claim constructive unfair dismissal,” he explains.

SUPPLIER PREFERENCES

Policies and attitudes to vaccination are not just internal – there is evidence that corporates might favour travel suppliers taking a harder line on vaccination among both employees and customers.

In the aforementioned GBTA poll, asked whether they were more likely to contract with suppliers who require guests and/or passengers to prove they are vaccinated, 38 per cent of buyers said yes, 38 per cent answered no, and the remaining 23 per cent were undecided.

One travel manager told *BTN Europe* that making vaccination-related supplier decisions “just wouldn’t work in our regulated procurement environment”. They added: “Personally speaking, I don’t think it would affect my choice of airline as a traveller.”

In the US, many airlines are being directed down a path in which employees must be vaccinated as a condition of employment, with President Biden issuing an executive order requiring federal employees and contractors, which includes airline workers, to be protected against Covid-19. Companies with more than 100 employees must also require workers to be vaccinated or implement weekly testing regimes.

In mid-October, Delta’s ‘compliance rate’ among employees was reportedly up to 85 per cent after it had initially held out against the mandate, while United’s has passed 96 per cent.

North of the border, the Canadian government has gone one step further by requiring all passengers flying within the country to have had at least their first shot of a Covid-19 vaccine.

In Europe, Air Baltic announced in October the introduction of mandatory Covid-19 vaccination for all staff by November 15. It took the decision to “ensure undisrupted operations as an increasing number of countries require proof of vaccination for air crews”. A number of other European airlines are requiring vaccination among all cabin crew and frontline staff, including Lufthansa, Swiss and Wizz Air.

“Corporates understandably want the best possible travelling environments for their employees so it is not hard to see a situation where there is direction at source for TMCs to look to suppliers with proven policies and a track record in place,” says Matt Gatenby, senior partner and head of litigation at Travlaw. “TMCs similarly will want to provide the best service to their clients so objectives will align. Whether that desire filters through to a situation where there is a demand for suppliers with, for instance, a hard line on vaccination for their own employees as well as travellers remains to be seen. Making that kind of requirement a contractual one is not out of the question, but does raise a lot of legal issues to consider along the way.”

TRANSATLANTIC CONTRASTS

A recent survey by the Global Business Travel Association identified contrasting attitudes to vaccination-related travel policies among European and North American business travel professionals.

Only 24 per cent of European respondents said their company requires employees to be fully vaccinated in order to travel or meet clients compared to 38 per cent in North America.

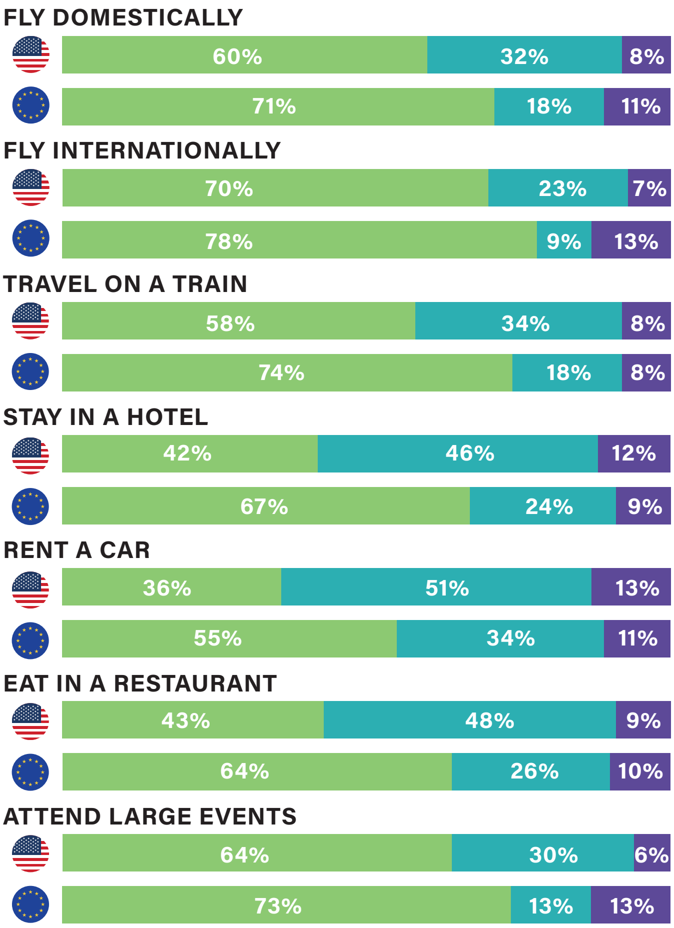
The figures contrasted sharply with those indicating support for government policies that require proof of full vaccination for a number of travel-related policies, with Europeans more in favour of such actions than their North American counterparts in all areas. For example, 78 per cent of European travel professionals, compared to 70 per cent of North American respondents, would support a government mandate that required passengers flying internationally to be fully vaccinated.

The biggest difference in attitudes came in relation to hotel stays, where 67 per cent of European participants would support full vaccination as a requirement to stay compared to 42 per cent in North America.

While European business travel professionals are apparently more in favour of policies that require vaccination, it’s also clear that it’s actually North American corporates that are more likely to implement vaccination-related policies for staff returning to offices, travelling on business and meeting with clients.

Support among business travel professionals for government policies that would require proof of full vaccination to do the following:

Yes
No
Don’t know



Source: GBTA poll, October 2021

STAY OR GO?

Business trips are being scrutinised like never before, but the decision whether to stay or go may not be as obvious as you think, writes **Amon Cohen**

The Clash lead guitarist Mick Jones probably didn't have post-viral, sustainability-conscious corporate travel in mind when he penned the four-chord classic *Should I Stay Or Should I Go?* nearly four decades ago. Nevertheless, establishing some principles to help employees answer the question posed in the song's title has arguably become the dominant quest in travel management 2021-style.

For the past couple of years, Stay has muscled itself firmly on top in the perpetual Stay/Go arm-wrestle. Growing awareness of environmental cost was already combining with financial cost as an inhibitor of travel, and then came Covid. While the virus continues to make every trip more hazardous and complicated than pre-pandemic, guidance for travellers is essential, Business Travel Show Europe's pre-event conference was told last month by Caroline Strachan, managing partner of the consultancy Festive Road.

"In the absence of rules, people will make up their own," Strachan warned. "You have to create a framework. But don't turn it into a 20-page checklist to make yourself feel better as a travel manager."

Yet the underlying case for Go persists, otherwise companies would never invest, in some cases, nine-figure sums annually in their employees criss-crossing the globe. What is the correct balance? The following day at the show itself, BP global category manager for travel and meetings Richard Eades participated in a panel discussion on whether travel management is morphing into interaction management. Eades revealed his team is working on tools to help travellers determine "should this activity be travel, should it be hybrid or should it be virtual? That's the process we're creating at the moment so people can make informed decisions, and bring sustainability into the transactional area instead of reporting after you've held the meeting."

In the same session, Scott Gillespie, managing director of the consultancy tClara, stated six principles to help businesses decide whether a trip is justifiable:

- Travel must lead to more value than it costs.
- Business trips don't create value; meetings do. Focus first on making the meeting successful.

- Meeting success, traveller wellbeing and sustainability must take priority over cost and savings.
- Justifiable travel is best done with travellers and suppliers committed to improving travel's sustainability.
- Travel budgets are best used for higher-value trips. So redesign travel programmes and budgets around this premise.
- Senior management must learn to recognise the signs of too little and too much travel.

Gillespie was very keen to stress that while his principles can inform Stay/Go decision making, no one can "assess the expected value of the trip. It's a long walk under a hot sun," he said. "It can't be done. It's a fool's errand. It always comes down to management judgment.

"What we do need," he continued,"is a more rigorous and objective approach to weighing the obvious inputs into making that decision, so: why are we travelling? Have we met these people before? How much opportunity is there to create value? Those are the inputs managers will want to take on board before making that decision."

THE INTERNAL TRAVEL DEBATE

Gillespie delivered a second verbal broadside at another assumption sometimes articulated about business travel: that one large swathe of interactions, namely internal meetings, does not need to happen face to face and therefore travel to meet colleagues is often unjustifiable.

"It is an incredibly foolish premise to believe that only client travel should be justified over internal travel," Gillespie declared. "If you believe that, then your organisation should absolutely sell off all its office spaces. The only reason we have office spaces is that we believe there is value in having people work close together. It's like saying 'we can't justify a trip that's designed to create innovation or foster leadership or trust or teamwork or accountability.' It's beyond silly.

"I really hope travel managers can do a better job of advocating for travel for internal purposes because it clearly has value and often times will outweigh the trivial trip to [a customer] where there is very little revenue opportunity."

Conversely, Institute of Travel Management chief executive officer Scott Davies believes the unsought "zero travel" experiment imposed by the pandemic has established that certain interactions essential to business cannot be achieved virtually. These are: networking and building relationships; any kind of selling or development where there is a need to understand people and their challenges; the launch of new internal strategies; and strengthening company culture.

It is at this point that Go's arm starts to lift off the table and move back into some sort of equilibrium with Stay. Louise Kilgannon, a consultant with Festive Road, recommends companies ask themselves how "not travelling for 18 months has affected results. If you can't travel, what are the business impacts? Having dialogue with stakeholders across the business is really important. Perhaps what you will find is that you can cut travel in some areas but need to increase it in others."

"

I really hope travel managers can do a better job of advocating for travel for internal purposes because it clearly has value

It was to this end that earlier this year Festive Road launched its Purposeful Travel Model. The model is a framework for travel managers to develop the conversations with senior management and budget holders advocated by Gillespie for making balanced judgements on travelling or otherwise.

"You're not going to get a magic formula of 'this is what we get if we dial down'," says Kilgannon. But you can go to the leadership to say which interactions are a reasonable use of travel and which can be done by Zoom."

The good news for travel managers is that, whether called Justifiable or Purposeful Travel, initiating this kind of dialogue can potentially enhance their value even if their business is travelling less than pre-pandemic. "You are positioning yourself as a strategic adviser who can engage with internal stakeholders," says Kilgannon.

Gillespie made precisely the same point at BTS Europe. "So much of this is a great opportunity for travel managers to initiate deeper, more meaningful conversations with senior management," he said.

Perhaps a 40-year-old brilliant-but-dumb punk anthem is smarter than first it looks.

TOUGH CALLS

TMC staff shortages and added travel complexity are leading to service delays, writes **Amon Cohen**

One topic dominated conversations between UK-based travel buyers at BTN Group's Business Travel Show Europe in London on 30 September and 1 October. As businesses emerge from post-Covid hibernation to resume travelling, there aren't enough travel management company staff to serve their needs.

BTN Europe interviewed three travel managers – Peter, Paul and Mary (not their real names to spare their TMCs' blushes) – about the problem and all three told a similar story. "Delays in phone calls and e-mails being answered have been an issue since travel ramped up at the start of September," says Peter.

Paul's company uses two TMCs and is experiencing difficulties with both. "It is common for our travellers to have wait times of up to 40 minutes to speak to someone," he says. And even when someone does eventually answer, service is a lower standard than pre-pandemic.

"Our dedicated team has disappeared," Paul adds. "We now get somebody or anybody answering the phone when we call, so they don't know us, or, if they do, we have changed our policy anyway."

The problem extends beyond reservations consultants. "My account manager has left the industry after being furloughed," says Mary. "Our new one was given to me. There was no conversation about it. She is very green. I can mould her into what I want but I would always prefer someone more experienced. However, that's not going to happen at the moment."

TMCs are not alone. Staff shortages are affecting other aspects of UK business travel, including a well-documented post-Brexit exodus of EU citizens working in hospitality. Another travel and meetings manager told *BTN Europe* his company is struggling to stage meetings successfully because of understaffed hotels in the UK.

The same point was made during a Business Travel Show Europe panel session by Jason Long, senior vice president of strategic accounts for hotel portal HRS. "Some hotels are limiting capacity as a result of it," Long said. "You may find rates will rise faster in the UK because of staffing issues. We're already seeing evidence of that."

In the TMC world, a unique set of demand and supply trends have converged to produce what Paul describes as "the perfect storm". On the demand side, bookings are rising sharply after the UK government finally relaxed some of its most draconian border controls. But it's not just reservation numbers that are increasing. So too is the amount of TMC work required per reservation because travel has become so much more complicated.

At Business Travel Show Europe, one travel manager speaker revealed the average number of calls his travellers make to their TMC to arrange a trip has shot up from three pre-pandemic to 14 today. That aligns closely with figures supplied by Clive Wratten, chief executive of the Business Travel Association: his members report an increase from four calls per booking to 14 to 20.

Clients are also shunning online bookings, which require far less TMC intervention. "Our online adoption rate has moved from the high 90s to 60-70 per cent because travel is more complicated," says Paul. "We've not switched air back on on our online booking tool because it can't distinguish between domestic and international flights."

Paul's company wants all international flights to be booked offline for now not only because of Covid complexities but also, he said, "new visa and work permit restrictions" imposed on post-Brexit travel to the EU.

Travellers are also opting for human assistance for reassurance. Paul's travellers have had bad experiences of booking hotels online only to find the hotel closed when arriving for check-in. "It's making our people nervous about booking online," he says.

On the supply side, TMCs have been reducing staff numbers, either permanently or through the UK government's furlough scheme. Lynne Griffiths, CEO of specialist business travel recruitment company Sirius Talent Solutions, says reductions have ranged from 15 per cent at best to 70 per cent at worst.

A large but unknown number of furloughed staff returned to their TMCs as the scheme wound down which should help relieve the problem, but a lot didn't come back. "Many of those on furlough considered their options and moved outside travel because they wanted job security," says Peter. Griffiths adds that TMC staff are also quitting because "job opportunities are opening up in other sectors".

As for travellers being served by consultants unfamiliar with their account, Griffiths says a major determinant is the fee model agreed between TMC and client. Management fees guarantee the TMC some income even when the client is not travelling. Transaction fees don't. "If you are on a management fee, that protects staff to some extent and clients have not lost as many of the team," says Griffiths. "If you are on a transaction fee and you have not had any transactions, then the TMC cannot afford to retain those staff."

When will this perfect storm abate? The consensus is that the problem will right itself eventually but in months rather than weeks. In the short term, according to Paul, clients will need to show patience rather than penalising breaches of service level agreements. "We've not been enforcing it because we realise the situation they're in," he says. "If every organisation started to enforce its SLA, the TMCs would suffer even more. But it will get to the point where we will be fed up if they don't do something."

> "
> **With a shortage of talent, salaries will increase and that in turn could mean fee inflation for TMCs' clients**

Griffiths says some TMCs anticipated an uptick in demand in September and started bringing back staff from furlough two to three months previously for retraining. Meanwhile, Peter's TMC is dealing with the immediate crisis by patching calls and e-mails to under-utilised consultants in Australia, who work through their night to serve UK customers.

There are also steps corporate clients can take, including shifting back to booking online where appropriate and urging travellers to avoid booking at the last minute. Wratten says travellers can also help if they carry out some basic research about border control requirements before ringing their TMC for confirmation. "Look it up and ask 'Have I got it right?' rather than 'What do I do?' he says.

Longer term, the key question is whether enough former TMC personnel can be persuaded to return and young people persuaded to enter the sector.

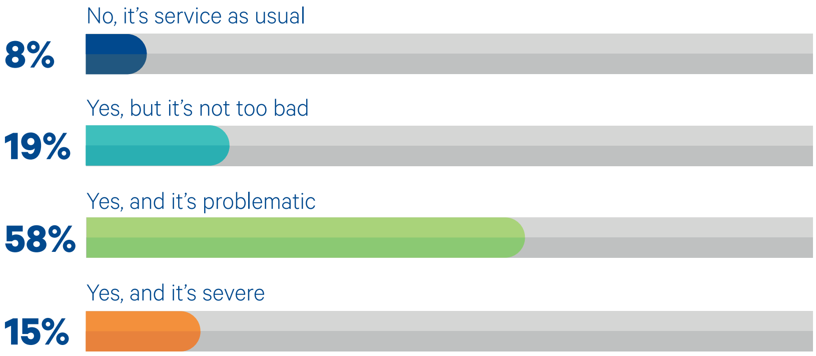
Mary is optimistic about the former. "People always try to leave travel but usually they come back," she says. "It's in their blood. Give it six months and they will come back." She is less convinced about the latter, however, and calls for more apprenticeships, which she says are more commonplace in leisure travel, although Wratten says TMCs were stepping up apprentice schemes before Covid hit.

The other burning question is the effect on cost. "Travel consultants, especially experienced ones, are going to be in demand," says Griffiths. "There will be a shortage, especially as there was a problem with consultants retiring anyway. With a shortage of talent, salaries will increase. We are already seeing that with middle management positions, and we expect more of that. There could be fee inflation for corporate clients as a result," she explains.

Wratten agrees. "Fees may have to be increased," he says. "We're seeing inflation in salaries across the economy. It will be necessary to get the talent in."

BTN Europe asked readers:

IS YOUR ORGANISATION EXPERIENCING DELAYS GETTING THROUGH TO YOUR TMC?



Source: BTN Europe online poll, September-October 2021

FIGHTING FIT

Growing consideration for travellers' wellbeing is not just corporate self-preservation, writes **Catherine Chetwynd**, who examines the latest trends in promoting physical and mental wellbeing

Where duty of care was once merely a legal requirement and largely about protecting the employer rather than looking after the travelling employee, there has been an increasing move towards concern for the traveller's physical and mental health; their wellbeing. This has led to more flexible travel policies and is not just corporate self-preservation – it is recognition that employees are human beings and the human factor needs nurturing.

Since Covid-19 hit the world like a grenade, turning previous norms on their head, duty of care and wellbeing have become inseparable. In fact, at a Heineken webinar, the organisation admitted that pre-lockdown it was going into an RFP for a TMC following a defined route where duty of care was important but not first priority. But the pandemic put it right at the top, and TripActions won the bid. Traveller welfare has become a recruit and retain matter.

"Travel buyers are putting a much greater focus on duty of care and employee wellbeing, both physical and mental, following the pandemic," says VP marketing for TripActions Simon Buckley. "We are seeing a shift from the legal obligation of 'duty of care' to the more human obligation of 'duty to care' as companies strive to protect not only travellers, but property, finance, reputation and even the success of the organisation. Easy access to real-time visibility of the traveller is crucial, not only to track them but proactively to prevent adverse events from occurring and to minimise risk," she says.

This raises an interesting point – that travel and HR have become more closely intertwined, partly because of the above, and partly because travel managers are now responsible for bringing remotely working teams together to ensure they collaborate and to maintain company culture; chats at the coffee machine have never been so significant.

Increased communication between departments is borne out by a GBTA poll in September, in which 71 per cent of respondents said they were collaborating more closely with departments such as HR, finance and risk management. Other salient points were high priority on duty of care (70 per cent) and developing new approaches to corporate travel guidelines (69 per cent).

In addition to the legal ramifications attached to duty of care, there are strong commercial imperatives for looking after the physical and mental health of travellers. A UK government-sponsored Thriving at Work Report (2017) stated that every £1 spent on supporting mental health in the workplace can return up to £5 because the workforce is more productive and there is less mental health-related absence.

"There are multiple surveys pre- and post-Covid-19 showing the impact on absenteeism, retention, productivity and physical effects of work-related stress on those with poor coping strategies and lack of wellbeing awareness," says Claire Beharrell of Kura Human Factors.

Ideally, this marriage of duty of care and wellbeing should be both proactive and reactive. "It should incorporate preventative measures such as education and promotion of self-awareness among staff," she says.

"A fully functional peer support programme should be proactive by reaching out to those who have been in stressful situations and by providing training on wellbeing and resilience to all. It should be reactive by ensuring that the programme can be accessed with ease and responds rapidly."

Organisations are also increasingly appointing wellbeing directors, and the first International Standard on Mental Health and Psychosocial Rick Factors in the workplace was published recently – ISO 45003. Awareness of the risks attached to neglecting staff is rising.

The focus is on both mental and physical health. Employees may be stretched because they are taking on additional work or learning new skills to multitask because companies have laid people off. "Weakened mental and/or physical health can lead to low awareness while travelling, which equates to being more vulnerable to crime, stress and exhaustion, or any unfavourable situation," says company-chair risk committee for GBTA Europe, Jorge Mesa.

In response to this, corporations are revising travel policies. As a result, many travellers are no longer expected to fly to several European cities in a fortnight, returning to the UK between each one to save on accommodation costs. And similarly, where long-haul trips were often via another point and in economy class, total trip duration plays a major role and travellers are able to fly direct and in greater comfort.

"Organisations are also establishing rules about driving after long-haul flights and building in days to rest after a long trip to allow recovery from jetlag," says Mesa. As a result, many companies are not expecting their travel budgets to contract, even though they anticipate that business travel will look different; travellers will be away from their families longer and organisations will look after them better.

"Working from home policies and travel management policies are gaining in importance and play a critical

> "I travelled on business for 20 years and they never asked me how I felt about the trip; it was all about the organisation's investment and not about me

role in employee satisfaction, retention and talent acquisition," he says.

Mental health problems may be more widely recognised and discussed both inside and outside the workplace but if there were any doubt as to the necessity of that, 70 million work days are lost each year due to mental health problems in the UK (pre-Covid-19), including one in seven directly caused by a person's work or working conditions, according to the Sainsbury Centre for Mental Health; this amounts to £15.1 billion in reduced productivity alone.

Even post-trip surveys are slowly getting a retelling. Once they were all about the company and whether the chosen airline or hotel had reached their service level agreements. "I travelled on business for 20 years and they never asked me how I felt about the trip; it was all about the organisation's investment and not about me," says owner of Simpila Mental Health, Matthew Holman.

"Companies realised they could not sustain such artificially high productivity without causing burn-out. During lockdown, people walked or were laid off and now organisations are having trouble replacing them; their biggest challenge is reputation. As a result, they are tweaking their travel policies," he says.

"Corporates should have a clearer focus on their expectation of people when they travel – we want you to rest and relax, make healthier choices. They are having to do more customisation," says Holman. Duty of care and wellbeing are no longer disparate issues; they are necessarily joined at the hip.

BIG BROTHER BOTHER?

Tracking travellers can be a contentious issue, but there is growing acceptance about why it's a necessary tool to improve duty of care and mitigate potential risks to employees, writes **Rob Gill**

Being able to locate a particular traveller at any point in their business trips is at the heart of tracking and is a cornerstone of duty of care, particularly when travelling to a location hit by a major incident, such as a terrorist attack, natural disaster or disease outbreak.

The first line of defence for any organisation is encouraging travellers to book using approved corporate tools – this means tracking should be relatively straightforward by using the itinerary booked through a TMC or other approved booking platform. If they book outside these platforms, it can be far more difficult and time-consuming to pin down their location and itinerary quickly.

"Booking via the approved channels is key as it provides greater visibility: in times of emergency or travel disruption, it's important to be able to locate and contact a traveller to ensure their safety, assist with rebooking, or warn them of certain risks or developments," says Sasha Kalb, vice president of risk, compliance and ESG (environment, social and governance), at American Express Global Business Travel (GBT).

Matthew Judge, group managing director of Anvil Group, agrees about the importance of being able to track travellers through their itineraries.

"Travel itinerary tracking is proactive and ensures you meet your duty of care obligations, as opposed to other forms of tracking," says Judge. "Live GPS or phone tracking is purely reactive and, alone, doesn't afford the fulfilment of your duty of care, as you only know where your traveller is now, rather than where they're going."

Once located, travellers can be contacted quickly through a message – typically sent through a corporate travel or security app – which allows them to quickly reply or be asked to "check in" to confirm they are fine or, if necessary, request further assistance.

ADVANCED TRACKING

The next deeper stage of tracking revolves around monitoring individuals' locations by smartphone or another dedicated GPS device. But this approach might be deemed unnecessary and possibly intrusive, particularly in destinations generally considered to be lower risk.

James Wood, head of security solutions at International SOS, says: "The specific level of tracking and how closely an employer keeps an eye on employees depends on the level of risk the employee faces in a given travel location. In our experience, employees are usually grateful for a high-level of security and tracking when working in extreme environments and dangerous locations.

"With hybrid working patterns becoming the norm, a technology-enabled approach to supporting employees has become a key differentiator for organisations when it comes to attracting and retaining talent."

PRIVACY & ETHICAL IMPLICATIONS

The idea of being tracked using a GPS device is not always seen as a positive by travellers, who might think it's a way of snooping on them while they are travelling and could potentially be used against them in some way.

"The question of privacy and ethics in GPS tracking comes down to a corporate's attitude to duty of care," says Chris Job, director of risk management services at Healix. "How much mitigation of the risk is enough for an organisation, and how far do they want to go to inform, prepare and protect travellers?

"There is a grey area on the use of physical GPS tracking when travellers on a business trip extend their stay into a long weekend or holiday, but these sorts of issues can be ironed out before tracking takes place."

Privacy laws in many countries can also dictate how organisations use GPS tracking, with employees often having to formally agree to this form of tracking before it can be implemented.

"The introduction of digital health passes in some areas recently has put the spotlight back on data privacy and cybersecurity," says American Express GBT's Sasha Kalb. "There is a careful balance to be struck between an employer's need to track travel and an individual's right to privacy. In most jurisdictions, before an employer can make use of tracking tools, privacy law dictates that employees must individually consent to being tracked by their employers."

Shelley Mathews, general manager, sales, at CTM, adds that most organisations deem GPS or 'always on' tracking as an invasion of travellers' privacy, except in more extreme circumstances. "Specific situations may call for it, such as journalists entering a conflict zone, or energy, resource and marine travellers travelling to remote locations," she explains.

"If you make the decision to implement it, we recommend it's vital to focus on this being the best way for the company to keep travellers safe in the event of an incident or evacuate them, if necessary."

> "There is a careful balance to be struck between an employer's need to track travel and an individual's right to privacy

CHECKING IN

An alternative to the potentially vexing issue of physical GPS tracking is simply asking travellers to 'check in' electronically to let their organisations know that everything is ok – this can be particularly important in more high-risk destinations or in the aftermath of a major incident.

"Employees are accustomed to checking in via social platforms, such as Facebook, so it is more acceptable to ask travellers to check in with their organisation should an incident occur," says David Zimmer, global head of travel experience and optimisation at CWT.

Anvil's Matthew Judge stresses that the form of tracking used "should be proportionate and appropriate to the level of risk" faced by travellers.

"Check-ins may often be more appropriate than live tracking, but there will obviously be occasions where live tracking may be required," he says. "If a traveller is heading to an area with a high risk of kidnap, assault, mugging etc, then live tracking may be appropriate. If not, then checking in at various journey stages will often suffice."

CHANGING ATTITUDES

One impact of the pandemic has been to raise duty of care as a larger issue with travellers themselves, but has this affected how they view tracking?

Security incidents in major European cities and a series of natural disasters had already been changing attitudes before Covid struck, says International SOS's James Wood.

"The acceptance of tracking as a core component of duty of care has been accelerated through these events, where employees looked to their employers as a primary support function," he adds.

CTM's Shelley Mathews says employees now have a "heightened appreciation" of the risks of travel as they begin hitting the road again.

"It's a good time to revisit what role tracking plays in business travel in your programme if you haven't already," she argues. "We're all more aware of issues around data security, so you should expect to be able to confidently answer when a traveller asks you who has access to that data and what safeguards protect it."

As with many areas of life, explaining clearly why you need to track travellers is likely to be the best way to win them over – after all, it's for their protection and safety.

DANGEROUS TERRITORY

Travelling in high-risk destinations requires more stringent protocols and preparation and comprehensive on-trip support, writes **Gary Noakes**

It wasn't long ago all travel was deemed high risk, but as we emerge from the pandemic, corporate travellers will once again head to destinations others normally don't – or won't – set foot in.

The gates close on leisure travel when the FCDO advice against "all but essential travel" invalidates regular insurance policies, but corporate travellers do not have that backstop when there's a job to be done regardless. That's when advice may be needed from outside specialists.

Travellers to risky locations are typically engaged in infrastructure, construction, energy, oil and investment banking, the latter seeking opportunities in emerging markets. However, the pandemic means almost any destination carries the risk of being stranded and finding medical facilities overwhelmed.

"It doesn't follow that a high-risk country is typically a war-torn country or a horrific environment," says Matthew Judge, managing director of consultancy Anvil Group.

Duty of care in high-risk locations has had an added impetus since September, when the ISO 31030 travel risk management guidance came into force. This provides clear advice about prevention, mitigation strategies and hazard identification. "The standard becomes the baseline for most legal cases. It lays down how it should be managed," Judge warns.

"Organisations need to be much more proactive in their risk management," he continues. "There's now a strong balance between proactive and reactive; traditionally, most organisations were very reactive. That simply doesn't cut it anymore."

Extra pre-trip precautions are now needed, for example checks to screen any condition that may be exacerbated in somewhere health care may not be good standard. Recent years have also seen race, religion and sexual orientation become part of the thinking. "You need to consider cultural differences and provide relevant advice without discrimination," says Judge.

Other factors can include an employee's status and whether that makes them a kidnap risk and if key dates during a trip will be a trigger for any unrest.

Peter Cooper, Collinson's global security director, adds that ISO 31030 and the pandemic mean travel risk management has come to the fore. "It should be a boardroom agenda," he says.

Cooper also urges a holistic approach: "It depends on the situation on the ground. Some [places] are clearly more risky, but there's also the individual, their profile and how it fits the destination and the purpose of the trip."

Keeping track of staff may mean a daily call or text, perhaps using a satellite

phone or tracker if they are out of mobile range. A visit to the hotel from a ground agent may be authorised or, in extreme cases, a close protection team needed.

Sometimes, seemingly innocuous tasks abroad can have serious consequences. Cooper recounts the tale of a US executive sent to France to close a factory. "They had to send in effectively an extraction team because he was held hostage," he says.

Covid means any trip now potentially poses risks. "It's changed the dynamic and people should be aware of that," says Cooper. "There will be stress on medical facilities and the socio-economic picture could have changed if people have lost jobs. Some places people thought weren't risky now are."

He advises the use of a checklist for staff detailing what to do in an emergency – particularly considering many will not have travelled for several years – and adds post-trip care is equally important. "Record near misses and identify what could have been done better. That's when you'll find out whether it affected their mental wellbeing and if they need more support."

> "The pandemic means the socio-economic picture could have changed and some places people thought weren't risky now are

Crisis management firms are happy to add their input, but the final decision to travel rests with the corporate, some of whom will have internal security teams. "It's up to an organisation. It's never our role to say 'go' or 'don't'," says Erika Weisbrod, an ex-US Defense Department analyst, now security director, operations, security consulting at International SOS.

Her company works with corporates' security and HR teams. "We like to see it as a partnership. Some have robust security teams, some don't. Most organisations look at more than one source and create their own travel policy based on our input and government advisories."

She is another who believes the pandemic has changed corporates' attitude to travel. "Before, if it was low-risk, you did not have to get approval. Now, many are putting in another level of approval as we are in this return to travel phase. A lot of organisations are starting with a clean slate," says Weisbrod.

She continues: "I think there will be closer attention to where people are going and why; everyone was burnt a bit during February and March 2020 because people got stuck."

Weisbrod adds that Europe was always seen as a low-risk destination but Covid changed this, with mobility between countries as well as Covid rates now key factors.

Despite their image, crisis experts are keen to point out most of their work is mundane. Most visits abroad are trouble-free and do not involve terrorism, war, or other worst-case scenarios.

"I'm very pleased to say we've managed a number of major incidents, but most are people falling ill or losing their passport – security issues are an awful lot rarer," Judge says.

Crisis management teams still have a role to play in these incidences, he says."You're normally on your own in a foreign hospital, feeling vulnerable." Sometimes the ending is not a happy one. "One of the hardest things is repatriation of a body. They can be challenging. It's where emotions are at their highest."

There are, though, the occasional gung-ho episodes. Collinson was involved in the Afghanistan evacuation, helping "a large corporate client" bring staff to the UK and Covid test them before repatriation to their own country. "We did 700 PCR tests in six hours," Cooper recalls.

Weisbrod tells how the pandemic provided an evacuation challenge during a coup in Chad in April, when airspace and borders were closed. This hampered removal of clients within the 72-hour Covid test window, although the mission was accomplished.

"This is what we do," she says, but adds: "I think that's where we're successful; we don't have to do that many massive evacuations. Our goal is to prevent them in the first place."

Five lessons I learned at BTS Europe

An industry reunited and operating in a very different environment

BY *AMON COHEN*

I don't know about you but a month has passed and I remain on a high from Business Travel Show Europe. It was so thrilling to mix with fellow corporate travel professionals again after our long Covid-enforced separation. I had promised myself not to burst into tears when greeting old friends, and I managed it – but only just.

A show of hands during one conference session revealed this was the first time many had seen anyone else in the industry since BTS Europe in 2020. It increasingly looks like the 2020 and 2021 versions of the show have proven unwitting bookends of the Covid crisis so far as business travel is concerned. Trips halted abruptly the week after BTS Europe in February 2020, while last month finally saw bookings return in significant numbers.

After 19 months away from each other, therefore, BTS Europe 2021 provided the first real chance to assess what the new post-Covid travel management world looks like. Here are the five big lessons I took away from the show.

There's NO substitute for being there in person …

… which is why, I believe, corporate travel won't entirely disappear any time soon. I am Exhibit A for the argument that business people make connections and pick up new leads and ideas so much more effectively when they get face to face. Only by chatting and listening to show visitors did I understand there was a big story to be told about TMC staff shortages (see pages 26-27). I also have the honour of producing BTS Europe's conference programme. Only by being there was I able to tap up several potential new speakers for next year's show. Business travel helps me do my job better, and the same goes for your company's people too.

Business travel is being hit by employee shortages

The number one topic I heard being discussed, just ahead of sustainability, was that critical dearth of TMC staff. But I heard and saw plenty of evidence that the manpower crisis goes wider. Various people talked about hotel staff shortages too, leading to poorer quality meetings and rate inflation. A TV monitor for one of the conference rooms failed to be delivered because of, we were told, driver shortages. Even the pub some of us repaired to after the second day had tables completely covered in beer glasses because no staff were there to clear away the empties.

Hybrid is hard

I wrote an analysis recently for *BTN Europe* in which various experts warned that staging a hybrid conference essentially means putting on two conferences. Boy, were they right. Without washing too much dirty linen in public, we learned a lot from our first hybrid BTS Europe conference programme that we will improve next year. I found working with both live and virtual speakers is like keeping your eye on two balls at once, and requires significant additional planning and resources.

Buyers are wary of greenwashing

Many buyers work for companies that are now serious about reducing their travel-related carbon emissions to meet ambitious sustainability targets. There's one certain way to achieve this: travel less – in other words a demand-led solution. Buyers are rather less convinced about supply-side solutions, as became abundantly clear in a pre-show conference session where an overwhelming majority voted in favour of one travel manager's proposition that "There's no such thing as Sustainable Aviation Fuel." Suppliers need to be aware BS detectors are turned up to 11 when they address corporate clients about their sustainability initiatives.

Neckties are so last century

I shuffled along to BTS Europe dressed the same way I have for business events for the last 34 years: in a suit and tie. I might as well have been in a top hat and frock coat, as all but a handful of other men there were wearing open-necked shirts or even (gasp) t-shirts. One male exec who did turn up in a tie was ticked off for looking like a dinosaur by his marketing team and ordered to remove the offending item before they allowed him on stage.

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