Navigating the new business travel landscape

Business travel drives growth

With the working world transformed for many into one of virtual meetings and remote working, you'd be forgiven for assuming that business travel is less of a priority for organisations. But, far from it.

85% 📈

of businesses say it plays a key role in increasing their revenue and profitability.

77% 😷

agree that their business suffered because of the travel restrictions put in place during the Covid-19 pandemic.

With business travel firmly seen as an essential growth driver;

42% ✈️

are looking to increase the amount of business travel they undertake.

68% £

plan to ramp up their business travel spending by 50% or more compared to current levels.

The increased investment comes as a result of growth plans; three in five (60%) businesses are planning domestic trips to aid expansion into new UK regions, while over a third (35%) want to enter new international markets.

Businesses clearly haven't lost sight of the competitive edge that travel can bring. But that's not to say that it will look the same as before – many businesses are working differently, and their travel strategies reflect this; almost three quarters (73%) are now using business trips to connect remote teams.

Travel might be back, but the environment businesses are operating in continues to evolve at pace - they are facing into a challenging economic outlook, shifting working patterns and an ever-growing focus on sustainability. What does all this mean for business travel in the UK? Our research reveals three key themes currently shaping the sector.

Methodology

The continued rise of 'bleisure'

A greater focus on wellbeing has led to the rise of 'bleisure' – a combination of business travel and leisure.

42%

of business travellers state they prefer when they can blend business travel with leisure time

35%

of business travellers are adding some element of leisure to most of their work trips.

Enabling employees achieve this, where appropriate, can help give travellers a work-life balance boost – ultimately making travel for work more attractive.

Companies are responding positively to this, finding new ways to help employees enjoy 'bleisure'. For instance, one third (35%) of business travellers can choose their own flight times to allow for 'bleisure', and one in three (31%) can bring their partner or a family member to accompany them on work trips for little or no extra cost.

Yet despite increased attention on this area:

62%

of travellers still think there is more their employer can do to make trips easy, productive, and fuss-free.

74%

agree that perks such as flying business class and getting access to lounges would allow them to be more productive on their trips.

Both businesses and business travellers recognise the post-pandemic shift of business travel as a more sustainable and enjoyable experience. However, some businesses need to put the right measures in place to ensure they are meeting employee demands and seeing the return of their heightened investments in their pursuit of long-term business growth.

Sustainability disconnect between businesses and travellers

As global governments, corporations and citizens all look to play their part in tackling the climate crisis, questions over how to make business travel more sustainable remain. Our research finds that:

28% 🍃

of businesses believe their employees are concerned about the impact of business travel on the environment.

71% 🌐

of business travellers say that while they enjoy travel, they worry about its environmental impact.

Given this apparent disconnect, there is a need for businesses to recognise the concerns and desires of their employees, with over three quarters (78%) of business travellers saying they are more conscious of their carbon footprint when travelling than previously.

But when it comes to how to make business travel more environmentally friendly, there's no clear consensus on the next steps. Over half (56%) of business travellers believe that it's ultimately up to their employer to make business travel more sustainable. However, one third (31%) of businesses admit that although they'd like their business travel programme to be 'greener', they aren't sure how to go about it.

With business travellers wanting to do more to make their trips more sustainable, and a significant chunk of businesses unsure on how best to achieve this, there's clearly an ongoing challenge and scope for further progress on this important issue.

Traveller wellbeing in sharper focus

Perhaps one of the most lasting effects of the pandemic and resultant lockdowns has been businesses recognising the importance of employee wellbeing and taking more steps to support this.

79%

businesses say they have put a greater focus on employees' wellbeing when travelling over the last two years.

This includes additional and dedicated resources to support the wellbeing of travellers whilst they are on business trips. In recent times, we've seen corporate strategies evolve in this area to include expert traveller support on demand, along with improved choices of accommodation and facilities.

With business travel often involving time away from family, long hours, unsociable flight times and juggling work demands around travel plans, over half (55%) of business travellers say that their overall wellbeing suffers when they travel too frequently. They also emphasise just how important this issue is to them, with:

71%

stating they would leave their role if they thought their wellbeing when travelling wasn't being supported.

The heightened focus on wellbeing isn't going to fade anytime soon. If anything, the focus will become sharper as businesses increase their volume of trips and employee expectations continue to grow. Businesses who haven't yet considered this aspect of their travel strategies should look at what measures they need to put in place to ensure their employees feel supported – ultimately enabling them to best support the businesses' overall goals.

Backing Business Travel

American Express can support businesses with their Travel & Entertainment needs, regardless of their size or structure. Our Corporate Card solutions can help drive consistent standards, maximise control and deliver efficiency, utilising billing options that fit specific business needs.

To help corporate clients better understand their impact and take action to manage their carbon footprint, American Express has developed an expanded Carbon Footprint Dashboard for global Corporate clients to help track estimated carbon emissions associated with certain categories of their employees' spend - including air travel, ground transportation, hotel stays, restaurants and retail - letting them better understand behaviours so they can find opportunities to manage carbon emissions.

For small business owners, our range of Business Cards offer a suite of travel-related benefits, including access to more than 1,400 airport lounges worldwide, comprehensive worldwide travel insurance, hotel benefits and expense management tools.

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