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Global Travel Managers Report

May 2023

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Global Travel Managers

Executive Summary

Against a backdrop of economic uncertainty and rising prices, travel managers are being asked to contain costs while continuing to respond to the needs and preferences of their business travelers. While employees remain eager to travel and view it as essential for their careers, they're also acutely aware of the many threats such travel can pose and feel a responsibility to ensure their travel aligns with the social and environmental considerations they value. Travel managers are also operating under growing pressure for transparency as they face evolving industry regulations and increasing demand from both internal and external sources to minimize the environmental impacts of their company's travel.

With 47% describing their jobs as more stressful now than last year, nearly all travel managers (99%) expect their jobs to be even more challenging in the next 12 months. **The overwhelming majority (98%) point to the need for updated data and analytics capabilities to help them execute their day-to-day responsibilities, tools that would make a major difference in easing their stress.**

Travel policy modifications may also help reduce travel managers' burdens if the changes are well-executed. **Nearly all travel managers (98%) anticipate company travel policy changes in the coming months, with the most common reasons for these anticipated changes being focused on the travelers they support.** Modifications designed to lower costs and better comply with sustainability goals are common as well, though, and may leave travel managers again trying to balance employees' need for flexibility with their company's need for cost-efficiency.

In partnership with Wakefield Research, SAP Concur surveyed 700 travel managers across 7 global markets, to gain insight into the current state of business travel and what the next year will bring for travel managers.

Lagging Data and Analytics Add to Difficulty and Stress

Travel managers are understandably stressed, largely due to conditions beyond their control. **For nearly half (47%), their role as travel manager is more stressful now than it was 12 months ago – a 10-point increase over the 37% who said this last year.** Another 18% say it's just as stressful as last year. The strains of the job are hitting certain regions hard, in particular the Asia-Pacific region (APAC). For nearly 3 in 5 travel managers in APAC (58%), their role is more stressful now than last year, compared to 45% of travel managers in the Americas and 41% of travel managers in Europe.

Stress of the Role Highest in APAC

47%

Their job is **more stressful** now than the previous year

APAC	Americas	Europe
58%	**45%**	**41%**
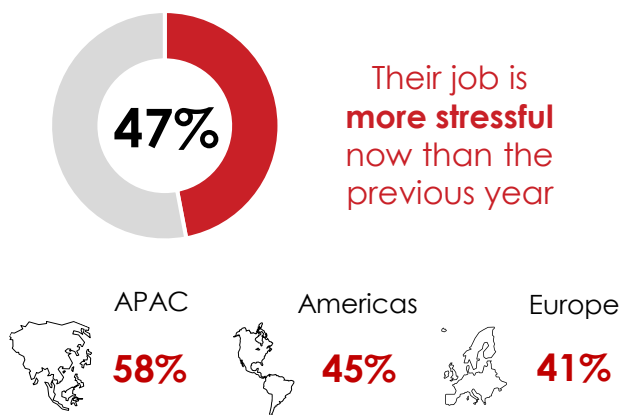
And it is expected to get worse, as nearly all travel managers (99%) believe their job will be more challenging in the next 12 months. Top among these challenges are inflationary impacts causing increased costs for the same amount of travel (41%), ensuring traveler safety in areas becoming increasingly hostile to marginalized groups (38%), ensuring traveler safety against illness or natural disasters (38%), and finding more environmentally sustainable travel options (37%).

Travel managers require timely and accurate data to address these challenges, while also dealing with pressure to provide data on ROI, emissions, and regulatory compliance. **Yet nearly all travel managers (98%) say lagging data and analytics at their company hinders their ability to perform the requirements of their job.** From ensuring traveler safety (39%) and reporting on the company's travel emissions (38%) to complying with regulations and industry standards (37%), setting budgets (37%) and updating travel policies (37%), lagging data and analytics is adding unnecessary and frustrating challenges to the role.

While a challenge, this could also be seen as an opportunity for companies and may be one area where companies can assert control and drastically improve the process for travel managers.

Health and Safety Threats Remain a Top Priority

Protecting the health and safety of travelers remains top of mind for employees, as nearly half of business travelers at companies with a formal corporate travel policy (48%) expect their company to allow them to make travel choices outside of company policy to ensure they feel safe when traveling in certain areas of the world.

Many travel managers anticipate changes to their company's policies on the horizon to address this. **More than 2 in 5 (42%) believe their company's travel policies will be updated this year to enable better tracking to ensure employee safety in certain parts of the world, making it the most common reason for anticipated travel policy changes.** Another 31% report their

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company's travel policies will change this year to better ensure employees from marginalized groups feel safe.

But it's not just travel policies; comprehensive data and rigorous analytics are also key. **Nearly 2 in 5 travel managers (39%) say lagging data and analytics is hindering their ability to ensure traveler safety.**

While travel managers most commonly view logistical concerns like last-minute delays (45%) and changes to supplier booking and selling procedures (38%) as top threats to their company's business travel, health and safety concerns are viewed as a top threat by 37% of travel managers as well. Strong, up-to-date tracking and data analytics should provide the overview and context travel managers need to help address these, and to best create and update travel policies to protect their companies' travelers.
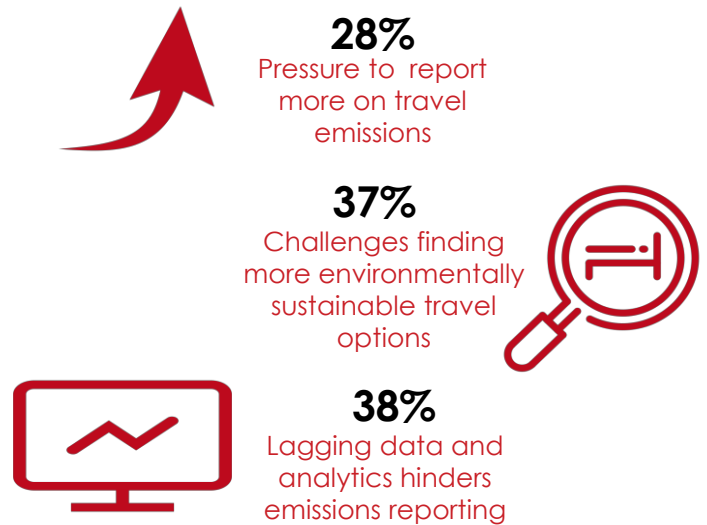
These challenges transcend regions. Nearly half of travel managers in APAC (47%) say health and safety concerns are a top threat to their company's business travel, as do 33% of travel managers in the Americas and 32% of travel managers in Europe. Many travel managers anticipate policy changes to enable better tracking for employee safety, including over half of travel managers in APAC (53%), 38% of those in the Americas and 37% of travel managers in Europe.

Environmental Responsibility: Important but Complicated

Businesses around the globe have made sustainability pledges and goals. Yet demonstrating their follow-through on these may be a considerable hurdle for companies and their travel managers – especially in the next year.

Nearly 2 in 5 travel managers (37%) anticipate their company's travel policies will change in the next 12 months to better comply with internal and external sustainability goals.

Un-sustainable Challenges

28%
Pressure to report more on travel emissions

37%
Challenges finding more environmentally sustainable travel options

38%
Lagging data and analytics hinders emissions reporting

More than a quarter of travel managers (28%) face growing pressure to increase reporting on the company's travel emissions, which they believe will make their job more challenging in the next 12 months. Likewise, nearly 2 in 5 (37%) anticipate that finding more environmentally sustainable travel options will make their job more difficult over the next year. Contributing to these challenges is a lack of the proper tools to accomplish these tasks. Nearly 2 in 5 travel managers (38%) say lagging data and analytics hinder their ability to report on the company's travel emissions.

Updated Policies Point to Flexibility, Direct Booking

Travel flexibility is important to business travelers – so important, in fact, that more than a quarter of business travelers (28%) are willing to decline a business trip that lacks the flexibility to make adjustments to the trip outside of company policy. In addition, more than 9 in 10 travelers at companies with a formal corporate travel

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policy (91%) expect to be allowed to make travel choices outside of company policy for reasons like ensuring they feel safe, supporting their work-life balance and enabling them to book sustainable travel options.

While nearly all travel managers (98%) expect their company's travel policies will change in the next 12 months, **38% believe this will happen specifically to accommodate travelers' needs for flexible options, such as booking directly with suppliers.** Indeed, with business travelers saying they more commonly book their business travel directly with an airline, hotel or car rental company (46%) than with their company's travel agency or travel department (43%), these changes will likely bring policy more in line with travelers' actual behaviors.

Travel Policy Changes Coming Soon

Better tracking to ensure employee safety

42%

Accommodate travelers' need for flexible options

38%

Reduce travel costs

37%

Increase cost visibility and traveler visibility

36%

While last-minute delays and cancellations by airlines have been identified as a top threat to their company's business travel, it's likely that managers can identify with their travelers' request for flexibility. Business travelers are currently more likely to use the airline's website or app (37%) to change or cancel a flight than to use their company's online booking tool (25%) and to call the airline directly (19%) than to call their travel agency (18%). Yet flexibility for employees in booking can collide with travel managers' efforts to ensure safety and rein in

costs**: for nearly a third of travel managers (31%), travelers booking directly is one of the biggest threats to their company's business travel.** This underscores the balancing act travel managers must maintain, as they identify and empathize with travelers' needs for flexibility while facing the reality of company travel policy and budget constraints.

Conclusion

The overwhelming majority of travel managers feel increasingly stressed and under siege. Business travelers demand flexibility, health and safety assurances, and environmentally sustainable options; at the same time, organizations are grappling with inflation, reduced budgets, increased regulation, and a call for greater accountability. How can travel managers walk this fine line without sacrificing the wellbeing of both business travelers and their organizations?

One overdue solution is the upgrade and overhaul of data analytics. With 98% saying lagging data and analytics are hindering their ability to get their jobs done efficiently and effectively, the urgent need for these tools may be one area where tightened budgets and across-the-board measures to rein in costs are at odds with future success. As business travelers crave travel flexibility and lean toward direct booking as one potential way to accomplish this, travel managers – and those updating corporate travel policy – must be equipped and prepared to meet, and if possible, predict, the challenges of everything from health and safety concerns to changes in supplier policy. Though the travel manager role will likely remain a difficult one in the year ahead, the right tools could make the job less stressful and far more effective.

Methodological Notes

The Concur Survey - Travel Managers was conducted by Wakefield Research (www.wakefieldresearch.com) between April 7th and April 28th, 2023, among 700 Travel Managers, defined as those who direct or administer travel programs for businesses, across 7 markets: France, Germany, Hong Kong, Mexico, SEA Countries (Malaysia and Singapore), UK, and US. Data has been weighted to facilitate tracking.

Results of any sample are subject to sampling variation. The magnitude of the variation is measurable and is affected by the number of interviews and the level of the percentages expressing the results. For the interviews conducted in this particular study, the chances are 95 in 100 that a survey result does not vary, plus or minus, by more than 3.7 percentage points from the result that would be obtained if interviews had been conducted with all persons in the universe represented by the sample.

The Concur Survey - Business Travelers was conducted by Wakefield Research (www.wakefieldresearch.com) between April 7th and April 28th, 2023, among 3,850 Business Travelers in 25 markets: US, Canada, Brazil, Mexico, LAC (Colombia, Chile, Peru, and Argentina), UK, France, Germany, ANZ region (Australia and New Zealand), SEA region (Singapore and Malaysia), China, Hong Kong, Taiwan, Japan, India, Korea, Italy, Spain, Dubai, Benelux (Belgium, Netherlands, and Luxembourg), South Africa, Sweden, Denmark, Norway, and Finland. Data has been weighted to facilitate tracking.

Results of any sample are subject to sampling variation. The magnitude of the variation is measurable and is affected by the number of interviews and the level of the percentages expressing the results. For the 3,850 interviews conducted in this study, the chances are 95 in 100 that a survey result does not vary, plus or minus, by more than 1.6 percentage points from the result that would be obtained if interviews had been conducted with all persons in the universe represented by the sample.

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Thank You

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