

# BUSINESS TRAVEL REQUIRES NEW BREED OF INTERNATIONAL TRAVEL AGENTS



The Internet has ushered in an era of do-it-yourself travel booking where business travelers make their own flight and hotel arrangements to important industry conferences and client events. Many are now convinced that only they can find the best deals and travel management for themselves. Do we really need travel agents?

Before answering that question, it's important to realize that more than 416 million passengers flew domestically and 75 million passengers traveled to international destinations from the U.S. in 2010, according to data from IATA PaxIS.

Okay, perhaps the Internet has given many business travelers a sense of confidence over their travel plans because the odds are that disruptions will only be minor. But self-service is the last thing that comes to mind when major disruptions happen to itineraries. And that's when travelers are reminded that customer support has diminished in just a few short years.

Many are stranded, waiting for automated updates from airlines, crowding in airports, or listening to hold music for hours. When they should be focused on the business impact of their trips, business travelers are focused on advanced travel logistics. And the reality is that it really takes people who know how to respond immediately.

## **Unpredictable Factors Impact Travel**

To say that natural disasters wreak havoc on international travel is an understatement, often lasting for weeks if not months: earthquakes, tsunamis, hurricanes, volcanic eruptions, pandemic outbreaks, blizzards, wildfires and other situations that seem to happen when least expected.

Strikes by airline employees can also become the proverbial 800 pound gorilla that can keep planes grounded. And we shouldn't overlook strikes by their suppliers. During Christmas week last year, travelers slept at Charles de Gaulle airport as they waited for a supply of de-icer from the U.S. This, because employees of the French supplier of de-icer were on strike.

The fluctuating cost of travel is another factoring impacting business travel, baffling industry experts and seasoned travelers alike. Fuel prices, ancillary fees and destination taxes create unpredictable ripples. And it seems that the strength or weakness of the U.S. dollar hasn't hit the radar yet, but it should because that contributes significantly to the cost of travel.

## **Solution: Find the Best Travel Agents**

Even though technology for corporate travel booking has been embraced with domestic travel, many small and mid-sized organizations choose to keep a separate travel agency to manage their international needs. That's because they know travel disruptions not only impact the individuals traveling, but they also disrupt business priorities and contribute losses to the bottom line.

The best travel advisors - specialists at the top travel agencies - consider budgets, schedules and preferences. They understand the importance of achieving savings while booking to ensure

productivity. They maintain relationships with airlines and hotels, and share their personal travel expertise. They are part of distinguished networks. They offer perks and amenities that you couldn't get on your own.

Good travel agents are also ready to address those unexpected and critical travel situations when they happen because travel emergencies are an expected part of the job. They know the travel reservation systems inside and out. When disruptions happen, they pound away on the keyboards and/or reach out to their airline and hotel contacts on behalf of clients. And their clients are often the first to receive alternate travel solutions.

To be sure, this doesn't change the everyday travel nuisances caused by weather, security and airline delays. But for those who travel internationally, and many executives and managers do, travel management should be handled by the best class of travel agents.

**By Rob Hard**

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