

THREATS TO BUSINESS TRAVELERS: WEATHER, PANDEMICS, RISKS TO HEALTH



Business travel comprises a major component of the travel and tourism industry. In a down economy, business travel is even more important than in past years. Unfortunately, business travel is not always easy. Often called "road warriors" these often weary men and women deal with long days and nights, exhaustion, poor service, and travel hassles.

One of the growing concerns regarding business travel is the question of the business traveler's safety and security. Today's business traveler must deal with much more than merely lost luggage. In a world of terrorism and violence business travelers around the world must know how to protect themselves from such new issues as express kidnappings, room invasions, stolen goods, and acts of terrorism committed against international business hotels.

To gain a sense of how the business community is dealing with these new and ever-changing challenges in the Spring of 2009 The Association of Corporate Travel Executives (ACTE) requested that two Arizona State University professors Timothy J. Tyrrell, and Cassia Spohn along with Lori Pennington-Gray, of the University of Florida, and Dr. Peter Tarlow of Tourism & More conduct a preliminary survey of its members.

Tourism Tidbits provides a busy travel professional with a glimpse into how corporate travelers view travel security. Tourism Tidbits wishes to emphasize that readers should see these findings are merely preliminary and should be aware that additional research will need to be done.

Corporate travel executives do travel

These trips are to both developed and less developed countries and the data seem to say those travel executives go where the business is located. However, with an average stay of under 3 days, tourism professionals may be able to infer that business executives do their work and then return home. It does not appear from these data that travel executives spend a great deal of time mixing business with leisure. This finding contradicts what many travel professionals believe. The reason for this disparity may be that this survey reflects executive travel while other business travelers may wish to combine travel.

Middle and Midrange luxury hotels seem to be the hotels of preference

The respondents were asked to indicate the type of hotel that they used while on travel (hotel tier). The largest percentage (37.5%) indicated "Mid-priced hotels with breakfasts provided. The second-largest percentage indicated that they use an "upscale" (35.0%) hotel. The third-largest percentage indicated that they use an "upper scaled hotel" (17.5%). No one indicated that he or she used an economy or "luxury" hotel. The importance of this finding is that communities seeking additional business travelers may desire to match hotel tiers with their business marketing campaigns.

Travel safety and security are now on the corporate travel radar screen

A major part of the survey dealt with the issue of corporate travel safety and security. Of those who chose to respond to questions concerning risk and safety, twenty respondents reported a risk incident. It should be noted, however, that the companies with the largest number of trips chose not to respond to this question. The average number of trips per firm for the firms responding to this question was 9,043 trips compared to the overall survey average of 25,639. The greatest number of incidents has to do with weather-related problems (2184) followed by cultural barriers (495) health emergencies (441) and property crimes (160). There were 15 incidents of terrorism incidents

reported and 2 incidents of violent crime reported. The fact that weather-related incidents (which the tourism industry may translate as "frustration experiences" far outnumbers any other form of incident ought to say two things to travel professionals: (1) there is a great need to develop weather delay plans, early hotel check-outs with no place to turn to in case of flight cancellations may have a negative impact on the local tourism industry image. Although only two incidents of violent crime were reported, these may easily turn into high media profile cases with a resulting loss of revenue.

Travel safety precautions are implanted irregularly

Seventeen of the respondents indicated their company's stage of adoption and implementation of nine travel safety and security practices. There appears to be a difference between what a company has considered doing to protect its traveling executives, what policies it actually has adopted and if this adopted policy is practiced. Thus, Some 35% of the companies surveyed indicated that they had considered some form of travel security policy and procedures, but only 11% of these companies had adopted such a plan into their policy, but 52% claim to practice travel security.

Some 31% of the responding companies indicated that they had hired an external contractor to ensure their employees' safety, had security personnel at place of business destination, and/or had hired an external contractor for evacuation services. However, once again, what has been considered is often not been adopted. It should be noted that this survey touched on travel to a myriad of developed and developing world locations and that the amount of security may be connected to perceived security threats. It may be of note that one of the least expensive items, a medical supply kit, was considered by 42.9% of the companies, but only 35.7% of these same companies report actually supplying them.

The implications of this study for tourism and travel professionals yield important data

While this research is only in its preliminary stages, it does yield important data for both travel and tourism professionals. The data seem to indicate that safety concerns such as risks to health, potential pandemics, and weather problems are the greatest threat to business travelers. Currently, business travelers may be protecting themselves sufficiently to escape major crimes and/or maybe staying in places that provide good tourism security. The business market is one that will constitute an ever-increasing percentage of the travel market, especially when leisure travel may be curtailed or reduced due to economic considerations.

As such, travel and tourism professionals who want to gain a greater share of the business travel market need to find new and innovative ways to assure both the business-person's safety and security and reduce many of the hassles of travel. Those communities with creative business travel policies, customer-friendly security and schedules, and viable alternatives during poor weather conditions increase their chances for greater market share and profits.

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