



**Let's get started!
Business Travel in
2021 and beyond**



Twenty twenty-one will forever be remembered as a year of transition. The initial shock of the global pandemic and subsequent lockdown is behind us, vaccination programmes are rolling out around the world, and companies are beginning to navigate this new – and different – world.

Business travel's recovery has begun. However, predictably, international corporate travel is lagging behind domestic and regional travel as companies grapple with global uncertainty.

In South Africa, domestic business travel has already reached 30% of pre-COVID volumes with South African companies demonstrating an increasing appetite for corporate travel.

But although SMEs are getting back on the road (and proving to be bolder and more agile in their approach than their larger corporate counterparts), the travel landscape has changed which means your travel policy, approach to duty of care, negotiations with suppliers and communication with your travellers will need to, too.

The latest trends indicate that some ad hoc trips will be replaced by longer, more strategic trips (getting more bang for buck in terms of ROI); video calls and platforms that enable remote working will substitute some onsite meetings and conferences in the short term as businesses decide on what constitutes 'essential' travel; and that the economic impact of the pandemic will have a big role to play in a company's travel decisions.

But how do you transition to this new era of business travel? The good news is that with just a few considered and straightforward changes you'll be wheels up in no time.

Dusting off your travel policy? Keep it simple.

Traditionally, travel policies have been too complicated. Instead of clear and simple guidelines around travel, the travel policy is often an elaborate expense policy with a reference to travel. In a COVID-19 world, it is imperative to introduce a travel-specific policy.

Here are four things to keep in mind as you prepare to dust off your travel policy:

1 Flexibility trumps cost!

Oz Desai, GM Corporate Traveller, says that travel policies will need to look very different for the foreseeable future.

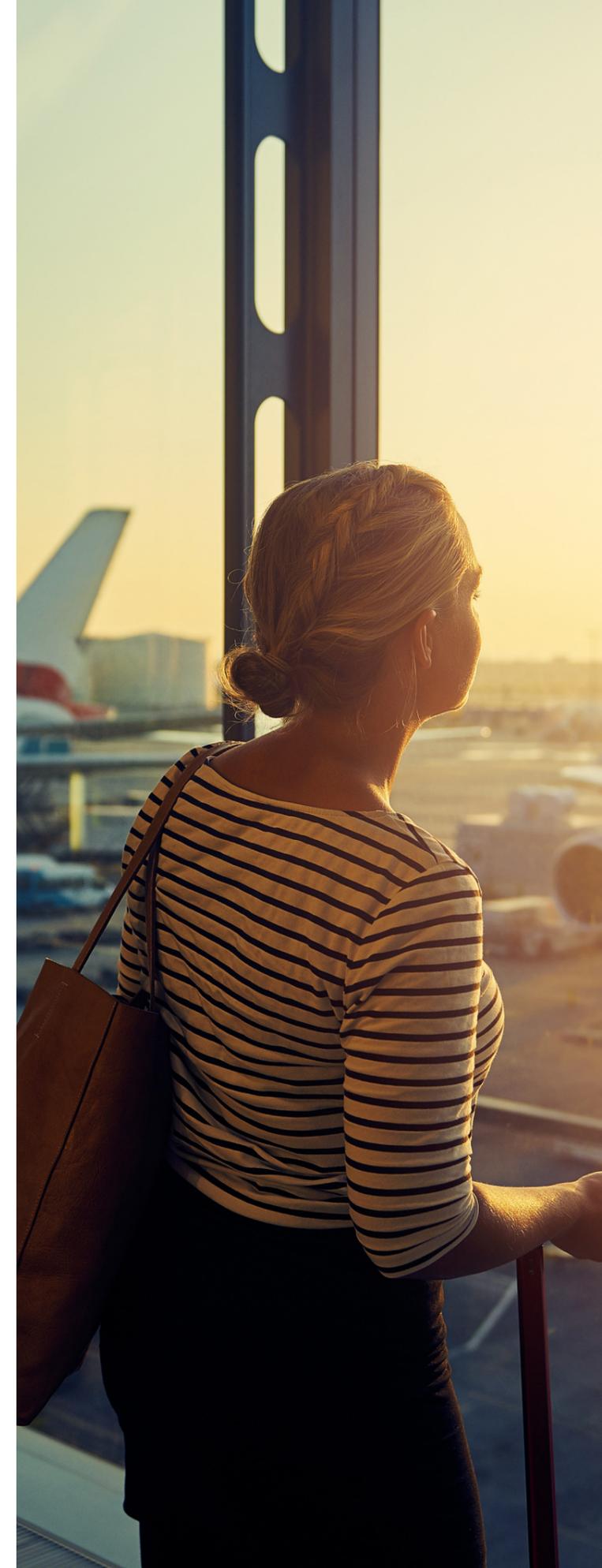
"In the past, standard corporate travel policies were based on securing the cheapest airfare, advance purchases (up to 21 days), sharing of cars, and even sharing of

accommodation. In other words, travel policies were driven around cost," says Desai.

The tried-and-trusted 21-day advance purchase is on the backburner for now. Instead, last-minute decisions have become the new trend. People are waiting until the last possible moment to confirm flights or meetings because they simply don't know what will happen next, be it the 'next wave' of infections, revised restrictions and protocols, or border closures. Although companies are wanting to travel, Desai says they remain understandably sceptical.

"Today you need to relax the restrictions in your travel policy to include flexible, refundable fares – and allow for last-minute travel. But importantly, you also need to prioritise your travellers' needs. This might mean booking serviced apartments with strict health protocols and fewer guests, reviewing transport suppliers, or prioritising same-day travel if individuals would prefer to get home."

"At the moment," says Desai, "It's not cost that counts. It's what works, what's available, what makes your travellers comfortable and confident to travel – and what's policy compliant."





2 Let's chat about essential travel

Essential travel has become a hot topic over the last year. What exactly is essential travel – and who decides?

As Desai explains, "For most multi-nationals in the mining or oil and gas industries, travel has had to continue. Teams are on rotation, and production and delivery of essential goods and services had to be maintained. But for SMEs, it may not be as cut and dried with most deeming client facing roles such as sales and account management as essential."

Organisations with a simple, one-step approval process (usually centred on cost alone) will need to relook and update their policy. With heightened scrutiny on the necessity of business travel, we expect questions like 'Is this trip necessary?', 'Can this trip be a virtual meeting instead?' and 'Are we doing our best to keep our travellers safe?'.

Ultimately, your travel policy may need multiple approval points to ensure that your travellers' needs, health and safety are prioritised above all else.

3 Keeping it safe

The burden of keeping travellers safe and healthy will be felt keenly by decision-makers and travel bookers for months to come.

For example, companies will need to ensure that they don't send teams of people to the same geographic location all at once. Previously this restriction may only have related to the executive level, while today it's applicable across the board, especially with emerging COVID hotspots and fears of a third wave.

Another consideration: what are your new company procedures or policies that employees need to follow pre, during and post trip? Do you require a negative PCR test pre-trip, or mandatory self-quarantine upon return? Do you have new policies around corporate entertainment and after-hours socialising? What steps are employees required to take to keep themselves safe and healthy on the road?

TMCs can help you update your travel policies to ensure safe, compliant and productive trips.

4 Keeping it real

"Press 4 if you're feeling insecure about your business trip." Let's face it: this is the last thing anyone wants to hear when feeling slightly apprehensive about their upcoming trip.

Your traveller's first business trip post-COVID may feel a little strange. That's when they will want to speak to a real human on the line to put their minds at ease. Corporate Traveller's strength has always been combining easy-to-use technology, with highly-personalised customer service.

According to Oz Desai, the only way to build traveller confidence is to communicate openly – and often – with travellers on the road. "From what to expect at the airport, to online check-in and real-time flight information, as well the latest COVID restrictions and requirements, Corporate Traveller has you covered."

Corporate Traveller's mobile app Sam keeps travellers updated with destination weather reports, flight times and changes, confirmation of departure gates and even where to collect their baggage. But more importantly, explains Desai, dedicated travel managers are on hand to provide information, advice and moral support anytime, anywhere.

Make sure your traveller profiles are up to date (including latest cell phone numbers, email addresses, next-of-kin information) and Sam will take care of the rest – ensuring your team is kept informed, reassured and ready to go.

Travel Procurement 101



Although hopelessly overused, the word 'unprecedented' perfectly sums up travel procurement in a COVID-19 world. With no accurate data on which to base travel decisions, travel in 2021 can't be compared to the lively 2019 travel year nor to the almost travel-free 2020 year – negotiations between travel buyers and suppliers now have to start with a clean slate.

A common thread throughout negotiations with any supplier is duty of care, which needs to be automatic and constantly communicated. Travel managers need to know, at any given time, where their travellers are and how to get them home. They require that suppliers adopt a flexible mindset that favours traveller safety at all times.

Hotel contracting reinvented

Travel managers and travel bookers in 2021 have an entirely new set of criteria to evaluate their choice of hotels. Although still important, hotel rates have taken a backseat to duty of care and traveller safety. Companies today are concerned about hygiene protocols, cleanliness, safety, improved meal offerings and contactless technologies. Many hotels have started providing regular communication and demonstrated evidence of their new standards in a bid to grow traveller confidence. Travel buyers also want to steer clear of quarantine hotels, and favour serviced apartments with fewer travellers where their employees have ample space to work and can prepare their own meals.

Despite the focus on traveller safety, rates are never completely off the table when procuring accommodation. The good news is that COVID has created a buyers' market for the first time in 10 years. Based on market research conducted by Corporate Traveller, global hotel rates in key cities are set to reduce by an average of 4.5% in 2021. Over 50% of hotels are offering a combination of fixed negotiated rates combined with a dynamic discount rate off Best Available Rate (BAR), enabling travellers to select the most favourable rate option.

A vastly different airline landscape

Airline engagements will look decidedly different in 2021 and beyond, as the aviation landscape has changed considerably since the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic.

Some airlines didn't operate at all last year, while others reduced their routes and schedules drastically. Still today, airlines need to constantly adjust their schedules in a bid to anticipate traveller demand and government changes to border closures. Unsurprisingly, the majority of travel buyers (56%) in the Corporate Traveller State of the Market Survey indicated that they are reviewing their airline supply strategy. The changes they are considering include pricing reviews, risk management reviews and route & capacity changes.

As with accommodation, the importance of pricing has lessened. Today, travel managers are looking for flexible and refundable flight tickets. In most cases, it is safe to say that the cheapest flight is not the best option.

It is still too early to know what changes airlines will adopt for corporates in a more flexible environment. In 2021 and beyond, it will become increasingly important for airlines to communicate their inventory plans

transparently with customers. Last-minute schedule changes can have far-reaching consequences for companies who need to rotate staff on mining sites. Transparency from airlines about planned schedule changes will allow TMCs to communicate with their clients and help them adjust their travel procurement.

Reduced car rental inventories

Car rental has also changed drastically since the onset of COVID-19. Despite social distancing requirements, a great number of companies require that their employees travel together in one vehicle. Ride-hailing options (for example, Uber) and transfers are also becoming a more and more popular option. The move away from car rental can be seen in a cost-saving light as flight prices continue to rise and companies look to make savings elsewhere.

Conclusion

Although business travel will recover, it will never look the same again. Business travel will become more seamless, more productive and will generate a much higher return on investment. In 2021, it will be imperative that TMCs, travel managers and suppliers work closely together to encourage travellers to take back to the skies once again. We need to create a stress-free and safe experience from the moment the traveller leaves home to the moment they return.