

The state of business travel:

Proactive hybrid solutions for 2025





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Introduction

After the rise of remote work in 2020, companies quickly rediscovered the value of face-to-face connections. Now, return-to-office mandates and corporate travel have rebounded, with global business travel spending projected to reach \$2 trillion USD by 2028 – up from \$1.43 trillion in 2019.¹

The return on investment (ROI) of corporate travel is measurable — it helps businesses secure new deals, strengthen relationships, and engage employees in meaningful ways. However, as companies resume travel, they face new challenges that can complicate the decision-making process. Increasing flight disruptions, economic shifts, and political uncertainties have made travel planning more complex. On top of that, stretched resources and competing priorities within businesses can make it difficult to make sure trips are both cost-effective and impactful.

Corporate travel plays such a crucial role, and businesses need smart strategies to maximize benefits. Without the right approach, companies risk overspending, delaying decisions, and missing opportunities that could drive growth and engagement. However, equipped with careful planning, the right tools, and a proactive mindset, organizations can turn these challenges into opportunities — ensuring every trip delivers real value.

This report explores the trends shaping business travel around the world and how businesses can tackle these challenges head-on. From navigating budget constraints to harnessing AI to balancing employee satisfaction with cost control, we'll show you how a proactive approach maximizes ROI and unlocks business travel's full potential. Whether you're making travel decisions or trying to stretch your budget further, this guide is designed to help you create a travel program that delivers real value for your business.



Tom Walley

Global Managing Director Corporate Traveler

¹ GBTA: <https://www.gbta.org/global-business-travel-industry-spending-expected-to-hit-record-1-48-trillion-in-2024/>

Business travel ROI

The return of in-person meetings changed the game for corporate travel. With **90%** of global companies expected to be back in the office this year², face-to-face interactions are seen as key to building relationships and closing deals.



Case in point: three in five buyers (**59%**) say their company's employees are attending more in-person meetings and conferences today than they did a year ago³, and in-person field sales teams performed better against their target sales goals than remote teams.⁴ This reflects just how effective in-person interactions are when it comes to building trust and rapport, ultimately, driving tangible business results.

Other key ways corporate travel delivers long-term ROI include:

- Client engagement
- Networking opportunities
- Team collaboration
- Market expansion
- Training and development
- Brand presence and reputation
- Employee engagement and retention

Travel as a strategic business driver

Corporate travel is no longer just a logistical need — it's seen as a strategic business move tied to increased success and ROI. Nearly half of companies (**49%**) cite productivity and ROI from travel as a top priority in the coming year, and **52%** expect their company's travel spending will increase in 2025.⁵

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² Resume Builder: <https://www.resumebuilder.com/90-of-companies-will-return-to-office-by-the-end-of-2024/>

³ Corporate Traveler & GBTA. (2024). Navigating the future of business travel: Key trends and insights for 2024.

⁴ Spotio: <https://spotio.com/blog/sales-statistics/>

⁵ Corporate Traveler & GBTA. (2024). Navigating the future of business travel: Key trends and insights for 2024.

United States

KEY STATS

\$19m

= the amount Corporate Traveler delivered in savings to customers in 2024.

\$1.31

= the ROI savings recognized for every \$1 spent.

These results highlight how strategic partnerships and tailored travel programs can help businesses tackle rising costs while ensuring their travel programs deliver real value.

In the U.S., the rising cost of travel has become the top challenge for businesses, making it harder to balance budgets and employee satisfaction. With tighter financial constraints, the demand for cost-efficient — yet high-quality — travel solutions has never been greater.

Regional considerations:

1. Controlling costs with strategic adjustments

Sixty-three per cent⁹ of U.S. travelers cite rising costs and difficulty in obtaining discounts as a key pain point with employee business travel. This challenge is even greater in high-cost destinations like London, Paris, and Dubai, as well as remote, hard-to-reach areas. In fact, **57%** of businesses say location is a key barrier when implementing budget-friendly travel options.

Hidden fees and ancillary charges, such as seat selection, baggage fees, Wi-Fi access, and late checkout fees add to the burden, and are reported by **40%** of businesses as a frequent issue.

These added budget considerations are certainly complicating the decision-making process – driving businesses to rethink their travel management strategies. For example, **52%** of respondents say tighter budgets have forced them to adopt stricter approval processes, while **43%** place a greater focus on data analytics to justify travel expenses. Companies are also enhancing risk management and compliance practices (**45%**) to protect both employees and budgets amid economic uncertainty.

2. Technology + AI

Leveraging travel management tech that is enhanced with innovations in generative AI can help improve online booking choices, expense reporting and filing, building and implementing a robust travel policy, and so much more. Several trends are emerging in the business travel landscape that are influenced by generative AI and it's important to find partners who are identifying solutions that can enhance the travel experience whilst maintaining excellent personal service levels.

3. Finding the balance between behavior and efficiency

Balancing cost control with the need for efficient travel is no easy feat. Employee behavior, such as last-minute bookings and upgrades, are cited by **45%** of companies as cost drivers, while **37%** say manual processes hinder efficiency.

Centralized tools can help cut costs and enhance the travel experience. Online booking platforms that allow employees to quickly compare options while staying within policy guidelines, automated expense management systems that simplify tracking and reporting, and real-time dashboards improve spending and compliance visibility. Streamlining pre-trip approvals and negotiated vendor agreements allows more time to secure the best rates and reduce unnecessary expenses.

⁹ Corporate Traveler & GBTA. (2024). Navigating the future of business travel: Key trends and insights for 2024.

Canada



The challenge travelers face today is that while capacity and demand are back, disruption has surpassed pre-pandemic levels. To tackle these hurdles, businesses must adopt robust, technology-driven solutions to enable self-service, minimize delays, and ensure smoother experiences for their employees.

John Morhous,
Chief Experience Officer
Flight Centre Travel Group

As corporate travel rebounds, Canadian business travelers have more opportunities than ever to drive growth through in-person meetings and networking. While rising costs and occasional disruptions present challenges, they also create opportunities to rethink travel strategies. With the right approach, such as leveraging smarter booking tools, optimizing budgets, and prioritizing traveler well-being, businesses can turn these hurdles into advantages. Innovation and efficiency will help companies strengthen ROI, boost productivity, and ensure their teams travel with confidence.

Regional considerations:

1. Travel disruptions

A recent YouGov study found that,⁸ **78%** of Canadian business travelers say travel negatively impacts their personal well-being—highlighting how frequent delays, cancellations, and long hours spent in airports are taking a toll. A staggering **70%** of Canadian business travelers have experienced travel disruptions, with **63%** citing flight delays and **32%** pointing to cancellations as their primary frustrations. These disruptions carry a significant financial impact, resulting in missed opportunities, wasted time, and increased costs as businesses scramble to adjust.

By adopting smarter travel solutions, businesses can enhance employee satisfaction, boost retention, and create a more seamless travel experience. The right approach reduces stress, protects productivity, and ensures teams stay engaged and focused while on the road.

2. Customer service woes

Adding to Canadian travelers' woes is the time spent navigating customer service. Fifty-nine per cent of business travelers report hold times of over an hour when contacting airlines, while **14%** have endured hold times exceeding four hours. Beyond the frustration, these delays prevent employees from focusing on higher-value work, costing companies time and money. The impact is even greater for the **33%** of Canadian businesses without proper travel protocols, leaving them vulnerable to costly inefficiencies, especially in emergencies.

3. Rising travel costs

Rising travel costs add to the strain, with **46%** of businesses citing escalating expenses as a major source of stress. Delays and inefficiencies only inflate costs further, cutting into ROI. With tighter budgets, it's critical for organizations to invest in travel management tools and services that can mitigate these risks and optimize costs over time. Tackling these challenges head-on not only delivers measurable ROI but also builds resilience in a rapidly shifting landscape.

⁸ Corporate Traveler & YouGov. (2024). A survey of Canadian business travelers.

Proactive hybrid solutions:

Choosing the right travel management company



In today's fast-paced and increasingly complex travel environment, many businesses struggle to make clear, timely decisions leading to missed opportunities, wasted resources, and rising costs that impact the bottom line. Whether it's underutilizing an existing travel partner or stretching internal resources too thin, these challenges signal the need for change.

Partnering with a business travel agency or TMC gives organizations full visibility into their travel programs, helping to track budgets and identify areas for improvement. A strong partnership can take the burden off internal teams, enabling them to focus on their organization's bigger goals while ensuring every travel dollar is well-spent.

The right travel partner goes beyond booking flights and hotels – they act as a strategic ally, tailoring solutions to meet your specific goals. A strong partner helps design, implement, and manage a travel program that blends people and the latest technology to fulfill your business needs.

By proactively managing costs and offering expert insights, they help businesses make informed choices, avoid unnecessary spending, and free up employees to focus on higher-value work instead of navigating travel logistics.



In the last five to six years, we've seen a major shift in the travel market, driven by technology. Traveler expectations and the costs associated with travel have both evolved significantly. That's why a blended approach is critical — combining real-time human interaction with mobile tools that can offer better technological support.

Joshua Roebig
Chief Operating Officer





Our booking fees have fallen and we're now capturing more travel spend and have greater overall visibility, allowing us to really pinpoint where there are further savings to be made.

Vicki Mann, EA @ New Era



Since bringing on [a TMC], we have reduced travel costs, provided better service to our employees, and are able to focus on our core operations.



Jaylene Kibala, Chief Financial Officer
at Arcan Construction

Balancing technology with human support

Effective travel management often requires a hybrid approach. While mobile booking tools, automated expense tracking, and other technologies can help employees quickly and easily manage their travel needs, there are moments when human expertise is irreplaceable — such as handling disruptions, rebooking during emergencies, or managing complex itineraries.

Maintaining the balance between real-time human interaction and the latest tech and AI advancements maximizes ROI by reducing downtime, preventing costly mistakes, and keeping travelers productive and satisfied during critical moments. This comprehensive approach ensures businesses get the most value from their travel investments as they adapt to ever-changing circumstances.

Measurable impact

The benefits of partnering with the right TMC go beyond convenience — they can lead to a measurable financial impact.

Not all TMCs are the same. Some cater specifically to SMEs offering dedicated service and tech solutions, while others focus on tech-driven, no-fee, and low-touch service models. A company that requires high-touch service wouldn't benefit as much from a tech-focused, no-fee travel solution. The key is finding a TMC that aligns with your business priorities, ensuring smarter, more strategic travel decisions. A scoring index with your dominant buying decisions is a great way to approach this.

Methodology

Over the past year, Corporate Traveler has gathered data-driven insights from a variety of reliable sources, combining our own data with global surveys, interviews, and industry reports. By looking at trends across some of the world's biggest travel markets, we've built a well-rounded picture of where corporate travel stands today. Our goal is simple: to share these insights with you, so you have the knowledge and confidence to navigate business travel successfully in 2025 and beyond.



Conclusion

As companies navigate the evolving landscape of modern business travel, it's important to remember that challenges also bring new opportunities. Corporate travel is no longer just about moving people from one place to another – it's about delivering ROI through stronger relationships, higher employee satisfaction, increased deal attraction, and more.

By investing in the right tools, expert partners, and tailored travel programs, businesses can make better decisions that aid the travel buying process. From negotiating better rates to minimizing downtime caused by delays, even the smallest choices can contribute to a more efficient, cost-effective travel program.

When business travel is managed thoughtfully and strategically, it becomes more than just an expense; it's a competitive advantage and a powerful tool for achieving long-term success.

Corporate Traveler has been providing travel management solutions globally for over 30 years. We offer our customers a unique service model that blends dedicated travel managers and user-friendly travel technology. We specialize in creating tailored solutions that meet the needs of startups and small to medium-sized enterprises, saving them time, money, and peace of mind. Our 24/7 support, exclusive deals, and personalized service make business travel simpler, faster, and more effective.

Get in touch



corporatetraveler.us

