Business Travel 2025 Year in Review:

Top trends and insights from Corporate Traveler

CORPORATE TRAVELER™

2025 was a strong year for business travel — defined by steady growth, continued innovation, and adaptability across a changing global landscape.

Across the sector, companies continued to travel despite economic uncertainty, rising costs, and global disruption. The small-to-medium-sized enterprise market in particular continued to thrive, with companies transforming their business travel programs into catalysts for sustainable growth.

Our teams demonstrated exceptional resilience and a remarkable ability to navigate an increasingly complex travel environment, seamlessly blending innovation with real-time human support. During unexpected disruptions like the recent federal government shutdown, having a trusted travel management company that also serves as a risk partner proved critical. The support and safety of our customers is always paramount.

And amid ongoing economic volatility and rising geopolitical tensions, the need for in-person connection and collaboration became more important than ever this year. In a noticeable shift, we saw our clients beginning to travel with greater intention, prioritizing trips that strengthened relationships and delivered measurable business impact. To meet these changing needs, we enhanced the customer experience through advancements made within our Melon platform, ensuring we remain at the forefront of digital innovation.

As more companies continue to embrace business travel, this report offers a timely and comprehensive snapshot of the evolving landscape across the country — from where businesses traveled and how long they stayed, to how technology, automation, and human expertise combined to deliver stronger outcomes. The insights that follow are grounded in real booking data and traveler behavior, offering perspective to help inform planning in the year ahead.

**By John Van den Heuvel,
President, Corporate Traveler USA**

Methodology

This report is based on an analysis of booking data from Corporate Traveler's U.S. clients, covering travel booked between January 1, 2025 - December 1, 2025. The findings are complemented by qualitative insights gathered from Corporate Traveler's industry experts, product teams, and supply teams, highlighting key trends and patterns across 700,000+ trips booked. All data is anonymized to ensure customer privacy.

Executive summary:
2025 key trends in business travel

1. **Savings are soaring despite price surges.** Corporate Traveler customers saved $2 million more this year than in 2024, despite prices going up or staying the same. It all adds up to **$21 million** in savings!

2. **Business travel delivered stronger ROI in 2025.** Customers took over 700,000 trips and achieved an average **$1.51 return for every $1 spent**, up from $1.31 in 2024, reinforcing that well-managed travel continues to drive measurable business value.

3. **Travel became more intentional, efficient, and cost-conscious.** Trips were shorter (2.5 days on average), highly purpose-driven, and skewed toward midscale hotels near business hubs, reflecting a clear focus on productivity, time savings, and value.

4. **Technology and automation reclaimed time — without replacing people.** Modern business travelers increasingly demand end-to-end digital solutions that save time and reduce friction throughout their journey, so Travel Arrangers can focus their time on more complex travel.

5. **Travel patterns shifted toward secondary markets and smarter global expansion.** Rising costs and limited supply at hotels in major city centers are driving companies to book hotels in secondary cities or countries in close proximity to major city centers.

> The next sections explore how these trends translated into real-world business travel patterns in 2025 and how those insights can guide program planning in 2026.

> **What stood out most in 2025 wasn't a return to volume, but a shift toward intention. Companies traveled with clearer purpose, sharper cost discipline, and a stronger focus on outcomes — and when travel is managed well, the return is real.**
>
> John Van den Heuvel, President, Corporate Traveler USA

The 2025 top trends in business travel

Business travel remained strong in 2025, with Corporate Traveler customers taking more than **700,000 trips** throughout the year. Travel spanned a wide geographic range, from Adak Island, Alaska, to Apia, Samoa, reflecting the diverse needs of growing businesses. Along the way, customers achieved an average return of **$1.51 for every $1** spent on travel, up from $1.31 in 2024, underscoring the tangible value of well-managed travel programs.

Customers are making travel count

In 2025, business travel patterns reflected a continued focus on efficiency and purpose-driven trips. Group travel and internal meetings increased, while short trips remained common. Single-day travel accounted for **23.6%** of all trips, and the average trip length was 2.5 days. Monday was the most common travel day of the week at **33%**, followed by Tuesday at **19%**.

Accommodation choices reinforced this focus on value and convenience. Midscale properties were the most frequently booked category, offering a balance of cost control and loyalty benefits. SMEs continued to favor hotels located near business hubs, airports, and industrial zones to minimize transit time and simplify logistics.

Travel demand varied by industry. Business services and creative industries saw sharp increases in travel activity, while construction and aerospace experienced declines. Technology, pharmaceutical, and non-profit organizations also reduced travel as budget constraints tightened.
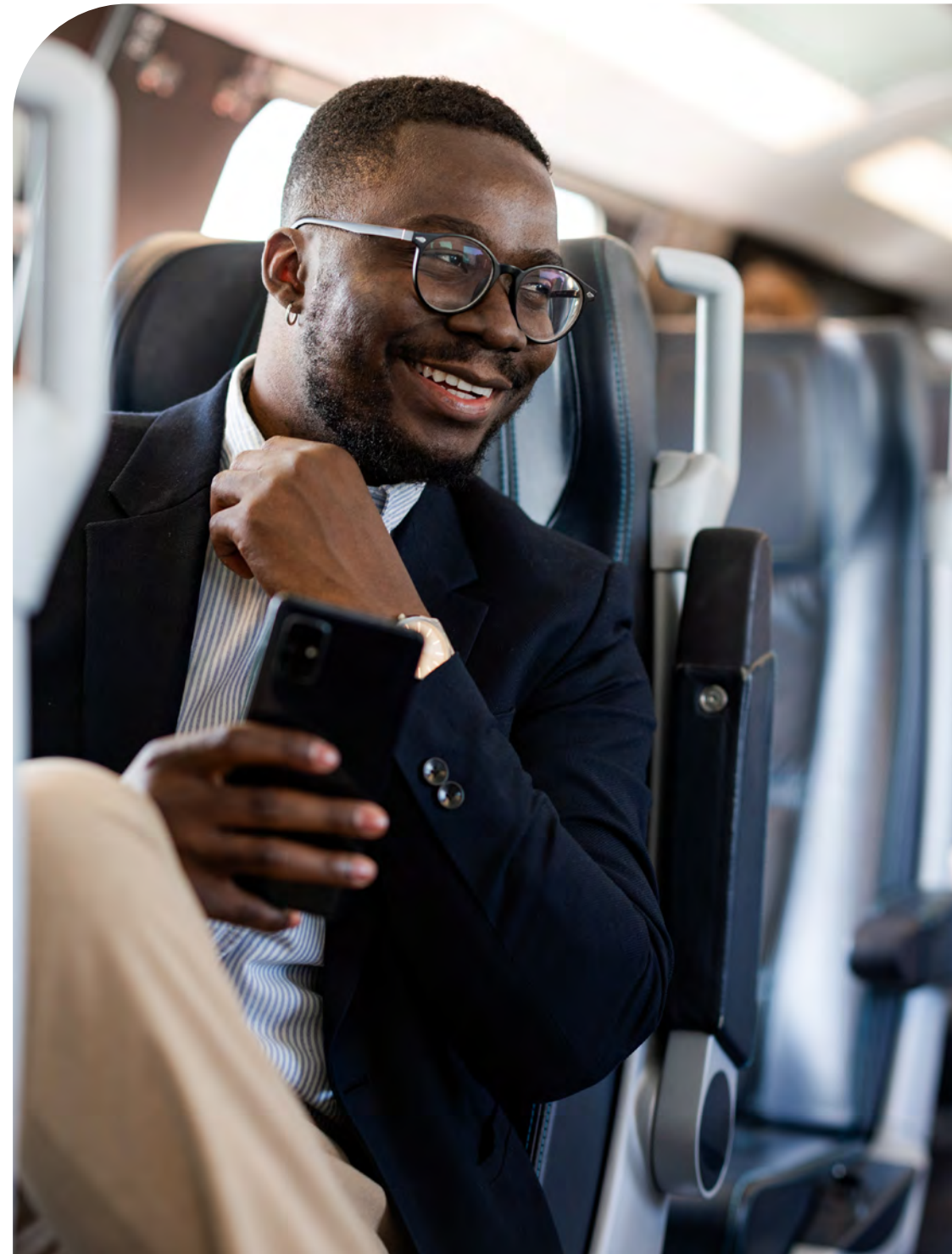
Very high growth:
Entertainment, Business Services, Event Management, and Creative

High growth:
Recruitment, Religious Organizations

Steady growth:
Energy, Education, Consumer Services, and Insurance

Balancing savings and travel spending

As organizations looked ahead to 2026, dynamic pricing continued to reshape how flights and hotels were purchased. Airlines and hotels increasingly relied on loyalty programs and personalization to drive direct bookings, while corporate buyers still required centralized visibility and control across trips. This tension remained a core challenge that travel management companies (TMCs) actively managed on behalf of their customers.

Hotel pricing reflects a similar push and pull. Rather than expanding capacity, many hotel brands focused on upgrading existing properties, while inflation and higher operating costs continued to pressure rates. Overall increases were more moderate than in prior years, with midscale and upper-midscale brands (like Hampton Inn, Courtyard, Fairfield) seeing smaller gains, while luxury segments experienced sharper price hikes.

Despite these pressures, Corporate Traveler helped customers achieve meaningful savings in 2025. Customers saved a total of **$13 million** on air travel, alongside significant savings on hotels (**$5.8 million**) and car rentals (**$2 million**). While hotel and train costs increased year over year, average prices for air tickets and car rentals declined compared with 2024.

- **Average air ticket price: $836 (-6%)**
- **Average hotel price: $229/night (+20.5%)**
- **Average train ticket price: $255 (+7%)**
- **Average daily car rental spend: $75/day (-4%)**

At the same time, missed savings increased year over year, prompting more customers to actively track missed opportunities. The most common drivers included preferred travel timing, shorter trip durations, cabin upgrades, limited booking lead time, and company-preferred airline requirements.

Smarter ways to save on travel costs

In 2025, Corporate Traveler helped customers save a total of $21 million on travel, an increase of 12% compared with the prior year. These savings were driven by a combination of travel agent-assisted expertise and strategic supplier partnerships.

Travel agent-assisted savings, like splitting the ticket into two one ways or selecting a codeshare for a fare benefit, allowed us to deliver **$8 million** in savings to customers over the year. These savings are thanks to the industry knowledge and tenured experience of our travel agents. Exclusive deals on rates and fares also made up **$9 million** saved.

Learning from each booking and customer is another way we get creative with savings. Our top customers optimize their travel programs in these key ways:

• **Data-driven decision-making:** Conducting regular spend analysis to identify savings opportunities, and benchmarking data to negotiate better rates with suppliers.

• **Strong travel policy & compliance:** Maintaining clear, accessible policies that balance cost control with traveler satisfaction. Smart policies implement approval workflows for out-of-policy bookings and regularly communicate policy updates and rationale.

• **Supplier consolidation & negotiation:** Negotiating volume-based discounts with 2-3 preferred hotels and airlines rather than spreading spend across many properties.

• **Technology optimization:** Exploring travel management integration with expense management tools and ERP Systems.

• **Strategic TMC partnerships:** Holding quarterly business reviews, collaborating on savings initiatives, and leveraging TMC expertise for market intelligence. There's so much we can do together!

INSIDER INSIGHT: One of our Travel Managers saved an education technology customer nearly $5,000 on an international multi-city trip, with strategic ticketing and timely fare monitoring. After securing an initial reduction of $506.62, an additional fare drop the next morning enabled a void and reissue that saved $4,250.70, bringing the total savings to **$4,757.32**. The traveler also benefited from our negotiated hotel rates at a Hyatt hotel, reducing lodging costs by **$169.14** compared with the standard rack rate. That's the expert efforts of our dedicated agents!

Maximize time-saving strategies for travel

Automated solutions played a meaningful role in reducing administrative burden across travel programs in 2025. Corporate Traveler helped customers save a total of 37,771 minutes over the year, equivalent to 79 business days reclaimed for higher-value work.

Air travel accounted for the majority of time saved, totaling **34,128** minutes in 2025. With frequent weather events, airline labor disruptions, government shutdowns, and other operational challenges, travel was especially unpredictable. Automated support and proactive intervention helped travelers avoid long call queues and delays, significantly reducing time spent resolving disruptions.

Across accommodations, the greatest time savings came from trip disruption support, meeting space coordination, and third-party hotel content management. Traveler issues that typically stalled at the property level, such as billing discrepancies or service complaints, were surfaced through automated tools and routed back to TMC teams. This enabled faster escalation to property or corporate contacts and, in some cases, informed decisions to shift or withhold hotel volume until issues were resolved.

Working with a TMC such as Corporate Traveler also provided travelers with practical time-saving benefits, including trip disruption support, complimentary seat selection, and guidance on maximizing airline credits. Trip disruption support alone saved customers **13,080** minutes, helping travelers rebook more quickly during delays, cancellations, or reroutes and reach key meetings with minimal interruption.

Air travel saved

34,128

minutes in 2025

Top destinations across the US and the Atlantic

The top five cities for business travel in 2025 were New York, London, Boston, San Francisco, and Los Angeles. This lineup closely mirrored last year's results, with Los Angeles joining the top five while Chicago dropped out.

All top five destinations recorded year-over-year growth. Trips increased to New York by **5.7%** and to San Francisco by **10.6%**. Travel to Washington, D.C. declined by **8%,** though it remained within the top ten destinations. Houston, TX fell out of the top ten and was replaced by Las Vegas, NV, which saw strong year-over-year growth of **21%.**

Domestic travel remained concentrated along major coastal corridors. San Francisco, Los Angeles, and John F. Kennedy airports continued to anchor the busiest U.S. routes for Corporate Traveler customers. The top five domestic routes in 2025 were:

1. **John F. Kennedy – Los Angeles** *(rising from 3rd last year)*
2. **Boston – San Francisco** *(rising from 5th last year)*
3. **John F. Kennedy – San Francisco** *(new)*
4. **Los Angeles – John F. Kennedy** *(dropping from 1st last year)*
5. **San Francisco – Newark** *(new)*

Hotel booking patterns largely aligned with air travel trends. The top U.S. cities for accommodations were New York, Boston, Chicago, San Francisco, and Houston, reflecting sustained demand in major business hubs even where flight volumes shifted.

Train travel remained heavily concentrated on the East Coast. All top five rail routes involved Penn Station in New York, with Washington, D.C., Route 128 in Massachusetts, Boston, and Philadelphia rounding out the most traveled rail corridors.

Top international cities in 2025

London continued to anchor international business travel in 2025. Heathrow once again topped the charts for international air travel and was the destination for all five of the busiest international air routes, with departures from John F. Kennedy, Boston, Newark, San Francisco, and Washington Dulles airports.

By total travel spend, the top five international cities for business travel were **London, Paris, Amsterdam, Dublin, and Athens.** The broader top ten remained heavily concentrated in Europe, with Nassau in the Bahamas as the only non-European destination.

1. London	5. Athens	9. Frankfurt
2. Paris	6. Venice	10. Zurich
3. Amsterdam	7. Nassau	
4. Dublin	8. Glasgow	

Several major international markets saw reduced travel volume in 2025. Toronto (-7.6%), Singapore (-16%), Hong Kong (+26.9%), and Tokyo (-14.4%) fell out of the top ten. While trips to Hong Kong increased year over year, growth in other destinations outpaced it.

Broader declines were driven by factors such as geopolitical uncertainty and softening international business demand. Significant decreases were observed in Shanghai (-76%), Seoul (-65%), Cape Town (-76%), Johannesburg (-54%), Tel Aviv (-54%), and Riyadh (-49%).

Hotel booking patterns differed slightly from air travel trends. The top international cities for accommodations were London, Toronto, Tokyo, Paris, and Vancouver, suggesting that while fewer trips were made to some markets, travelers stayed longer in destinations such as Toronto, Tokyo, and Vancouver.

Emerging international secondary markets

Emerging international business travel destinations in 2025 were geographically diverse, with growth spread across multiple regions rather than concentrated in a single market. The top five emerging outbound countries shifted notably compared with 2024, reflecting changing cost dynamics and evolving business demand.

Average daily rate movement from 2024 to 2025

Average daily rate (ADR) movement across these emerging markets varied significantly by country, highlighting differing pricing pressures and value opportunities:

1.	2.	3.	4.	5.
Brazil (+2%)	**Germany (-2.4%)**	**Netherlands (+3.8%)**	**UAE (-8.5%)**	**Mexico (+15.9%)**

Emerging city-level growth followed a similar global pattern. The cities with the strongest growth spanned Canada, Europe, and Mexico, indicating that businesses expanded travel into secondary markets where costs, access, or regional demand aligned with specific needs.

1. **Halifax, Canada**
2. **Rotterdam, Netherlands**
3. **Ciudad Juarez, Mexico**
4. **Southampton, UK**
5. **Tijuana, Mexico**
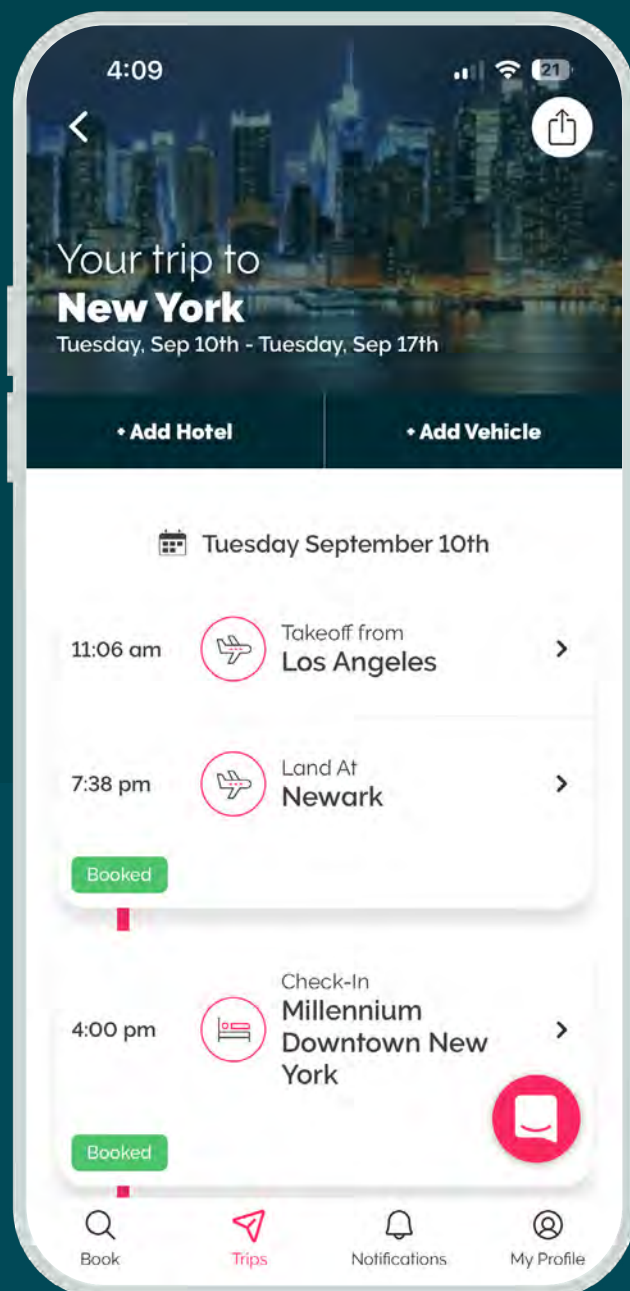
Melon platform embraces the future of travel technology

Automation continued to play a growing role in business travel in 2025, as executives, travel arrangers, and travelers increasingly expected faster self-service experiences. During the year, customers used Corporate Traveler's travel platform, Melon, to meaningfully enhance how their travel programs operated.

Self-service capabilities expanded significantly. Travelers were able to make changes to their own flight and hotel itineraries, reducing reliance on manual support for routine updates. "One of the most impactful enhancements in Melon has been self-service invoicing, a long-awaited and highly desired feature in the market. The addition of auto-invoicing, traveler-initiated changes, and the ability to apply credits have all been major difference-makers," says Tracy Loiacono, VP of Operations at Corporate Traveler USA.

Trip proposals were also integrated to simplify collaboration and decision-making. Travel arrangers can now build and share itineraries directly with travelers, who can review and confirm plans without screenshots or additional administrative steps. Features such as clear, professional email summaries reduced friction in group trip planning and enabled faster alignment without requiring travelers to log in.

Technology expectations rose across customer segments in 2025, including among organizations that relied fully on agent-assisted service. Demand increased for integrations with expense management and HR systems, reinforcing the need for automation alongside high-touch support. With travel managers completing an average of **781** transactions per month, or **39** transactions per day per person, automating simple tasks allowed teams to focus on more complex and high-impact travel needs.

Tracy Loiacono explains how this shift benefits both customers and agents:

"With recent Melon enhancements such as guest travel and trip proposals, we've empowered customers to self-serve for competitive pricing, make quick changes, and access their own receipts. This shift allows agents to focus on higher-value work, such as answering complex policy questions, managing intricate itineraries, and providing more strategic, consultative support."

Travel technology trends emerging in 2025 and beyond

As travel conditions became more complex and options continued to expand, businesses and travelers increasingly relied on technology to simplify decision-making and reduce friction. Six technology trends emerged in 2025 that reshaped how corporate travel programs operated and how travelers interacted with travel tools.
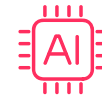
AI became a baseline expectation.

AI saturated digital experiences in 2025 and shifted from a differentiator to a standard capability. It addressed real traveler and arranger needs by automating repetitive tasks and rapidly processing large volumes of data. Melon aligned with this shift by delivering support and personalized insights through its upcoming virtual assistant feature.

Self-service became the default.

Travelers increasingly expected to change plans, resolve issues, and book across channels without human intervention. Demand grew for online booking, in-app itinerary changes, and expanded NDC content. While Melon's NDC rollout remained measured, the launch of American Airlines content and upcoming United Airlines content directly supported this trend.

Duty of care re-emerged as a top priority.

Geopolitical volatility, government shutdowns, major software outages, and frequent travel disruptions drove renewed demand for real-time safety and risk-management tools. Duty of care became a core requirement for corporate travel programs rather than an optional feature.

Integration became a baseline requirement.

Corporate buyers expected seamless interoperability across their technology ecosystems. HRIS, payments, expense management, and reconciliation tools increasingly needed to sync data automatically to support reporting, compliance, and efficiency.

Guest travel booking gained momentum.

New solutions emerged to address travel for non-profiled travelers, with a focus on autonomous booking, secure payment methods, and streamlined reimbursement workflows.

Planning and inspiration tools.

Consumers want tools that convert online content into actionable itineraries, whether the trip is business or personal. According to a study by Phocuswright, one in three US travelers have used generative AI for travel-related planning.

NDC & AI

NDC moved beyond early adoption and became an operational standard for airlines and travel programs. Corporate Traveler incorporated NDC directly into Melon, enabling faster search results, smoother servicing, and more personalized traveler experiences without adding complexity for users.

By combining NDC content with data and AI, travel programs gained the ability to anticipate traveler preferences, identify savings opportunities, and proactively manage disruptions. The outcome was greater choice, improved value, and a more seamless service experience, where the underlying technology supported the journey without becoming visible to the traveler.

Tracy Loiacono, VP of Operations at Corporate Traveler USA, highlights how NDC and expert service worked together:

> **By blending smarter technology with expert service, our operations teams are transforming how flights are sourced, booked, and serviced. Our agents are trained as travel merchandisers, curating the best fares and extras, not just processing tickets. Meanwhile, our close airline partnerships ensure access to the newest content and the most flexible options.**

With two-thirds of airlines now implementing NDC, it became a baseline expectation across the industry, with continued evolution expected as adoption deepened.

Integrating travel management with AI

AI most visibly influenced travel management in two areas: support automation and content summarization, particularly for hotel and review data. These capabilities helped travelers process information more quickly and resolve routine issues without waiting for human assistance.

At the same time, the rapid expansion of AI tools reinforced the importance of human service. Travelers consistently valued platforms that balanced automation with high-touch support, aligning closely with Corporate Traveler's people-plus-technology approach.

In a Corporate Traveler research study focused on AI chatbot usage, customers identified several key considerations:

- The need for access to human support and transparency around whether interactions involved AI or a person
- Hesitation around making or changing bookings directly through an AI interface
- Expectations that an AI virtual assistant would provide accurate responses or clearly escalate issues when needed

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You can't look at any product or website, travel or not, without seeing references to AI. It's the biggest technology advancement of our generation. The real value lies in implementation: automating tasks, lowering barriers through natural language support, and processing large volumes of data. That's exactly what we've done, starting with a virtual assistant to streamline support and perform routine tasks on behalf of our customers.

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Trevor Brink, Chief Product Officer at Corporate Traveler
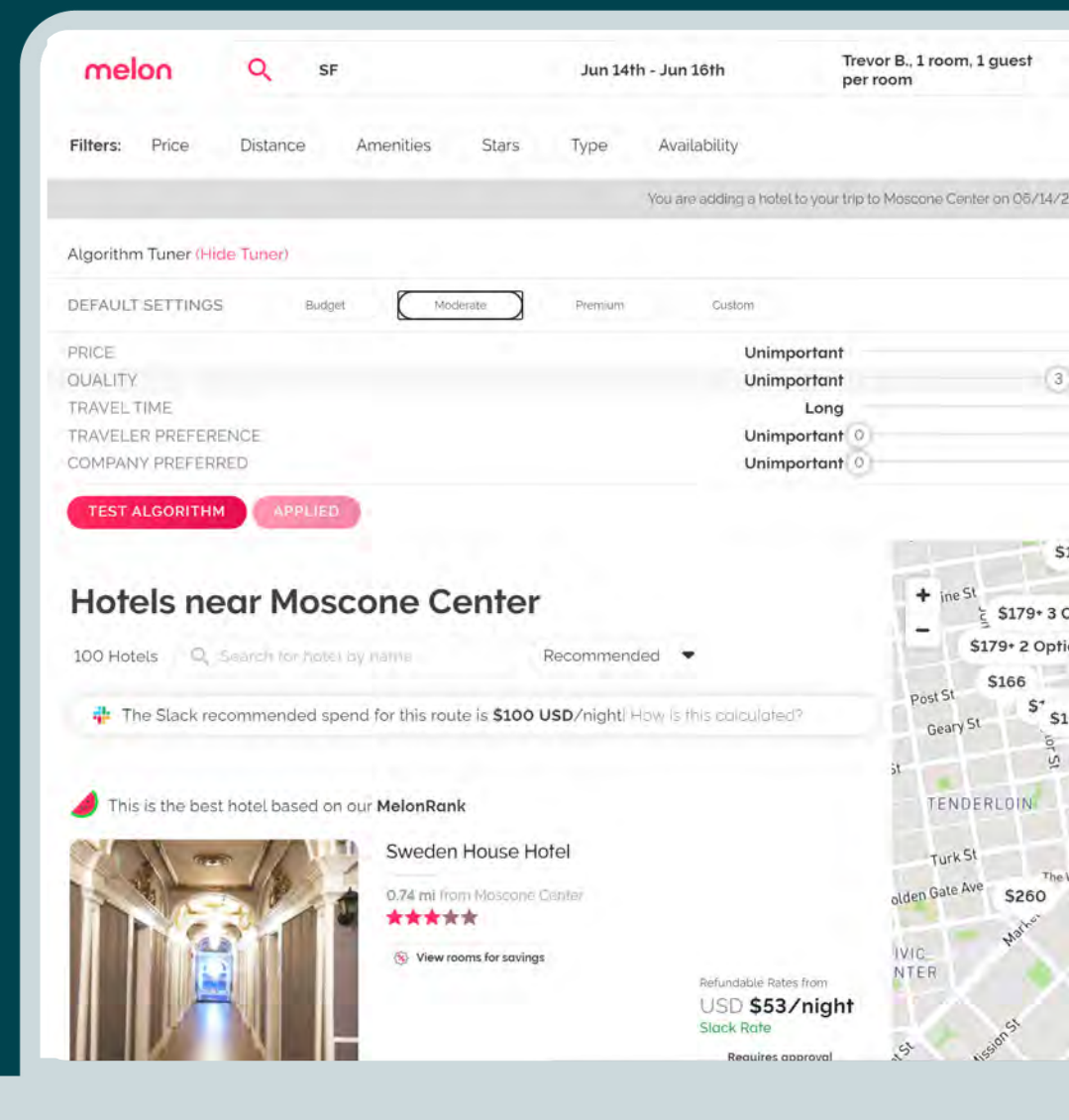
What's ahead for Melon users

Looking ahead to 2026, several new Melon releases are designed to further improve speed, accuracy, and autonomy for frequent travel arrangers. Early enhancements include Quick Rebook, a time-saving feature designed for Travel Arrangers who regularly book for multiple travelers on multi-passenger bookings, hotel bookings, helping teams manage changes and group travel with greater efficiency.

Additional innovations planned later in the year include:

• **Next-generation Travel Invites,** designed for small meetings and events, where Travel Arrangers can send guest travelers a one-time access link to Melon to book their own travel while adhering to a travel policy

• **Expanded payment and expense capabilities,** including invoice access, line-of-credit payments, and new integrations supporting both card and credit workflows

Together, these upgrades reflect growing demand for end-to-end travel management that connects seamlessly with financial systems. Businesses increasingly expect travel platforms to integrate with existing HRIS, payment, expense management, and reconciliation tools to support visibility, control, and operational efficiency across their programs.

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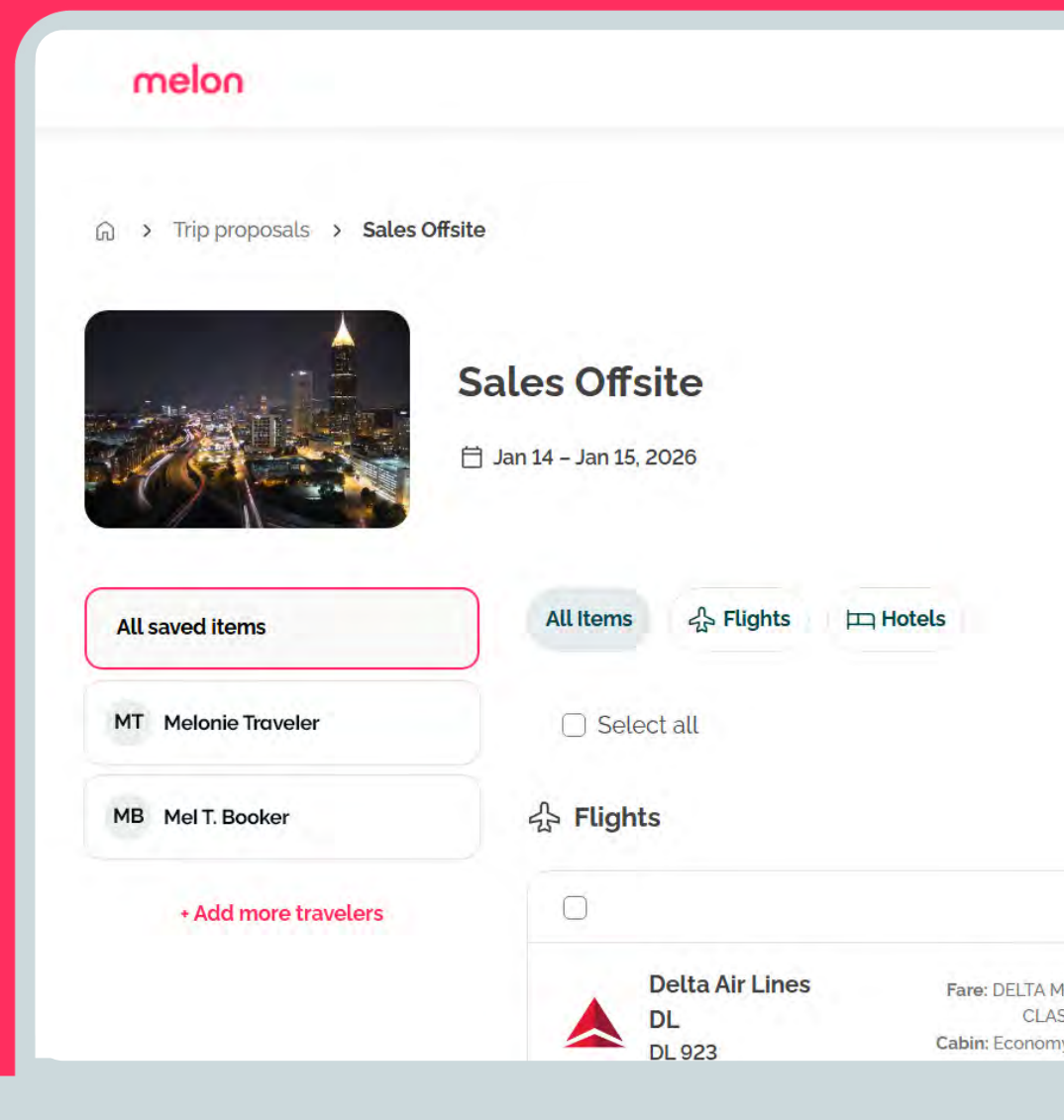
Onboarding enhancements

In previous years, onboarding conversations were heavily focused on technology and online booking tools (OBTs). In 2025, customers showed increased interest in balancing onboarding speed with customer service and long-term program success, alongside a strong OBT experience. There was also growing demand for trial periods that allowed clients to test services before fully committing.

In response, Corporate Traveler adapted its onboarding approach in several key ways:

- **Streamlined communication and follow-up:** Clients received clearer onboarding summary documentation and weekly post-launch check-ins, providing greater visibility into their travel programs. Regular touchpoints helped ensure a smooth and successful launch.

- **Faster platform readiness:** In 2025, the average time from sales handoff to onboarding completion was 7.3 business days, enabling clients to begin booking quickly. This speed was driven largely by expanded adoption for our recommended Melon set up, the standard platform configuration. Clients onboarded through Melon Recommended were fully set up and able to book within an average of 2.83 business days.

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Clients want a streamlined, fast setup, so we've focused on simplifying onboarding while retaining the vital customer service touches we know our clients appreciate. Today, our onboarding team can launch a standard Melon account in an average of two to three days, with a foundation that scales as policies, approvals, and reporting needs grow.

Gina Gallo, Assistant Team Leader, Onboarding & Optimization.

As self-service capabilities continued to grow in importance, the onboarding focus expanded beyond launch alone. Additional automation enabled teams to spend more time supporting clients after booking began, particularly around change management. While many customers aimed to reduce manual tasks such as expense integrations, organizations with complex travel needs continued to prioritize expert support and high-touch service.

Customer feedback reflected the impact of this approach:

> **Working with Corporate Traveler has been a breath of fresh air compared to other travel software companies. The onboarding experience was easy. I wasn't pushed and was able to roll out the program at our own pace.**
>
> Lucchese Inc

> **Spectacular team, easiest design, development, and rollout I've ever experienced.**
>
> Alumis

Shifting into 2026

As business travel moves into 2026, change and innovation are expected to continue, particularly across technology, traveler wellness, and adaptation to global events. Traveler expectations are evolving beyond basic amenities. In hotels, this includes demand for more comprehensive wellness offerings such as 24/7 access to fitness facilities and flexible check-in options to help manage jet lag.

Digital experiences are also becoming more deeply embedded across the travel journey. Virtual interactions are expanding across booking, security processes, and payment workflows. "Travelers now expect a fully digital hotel experience. They want to book online, have their loyalty information applied automatically, and use a mobile room key so they can skip the front desk," says Nick Kropelin, Vice President, Corporate Land Partnerships & Strategy – Americas, at Flight Centre Travel Group.

Air travel is expected to follow a similar path toward greater automation and self-service. Digital IDs, facial recognition, and self-service airport models are continuing to expand, with emerging technologies such as AI and biometrics reducing friction at check-in and boarding and helping to minimize wait times.

AI adoption is also accelerating within travel management, though approaches vary by provider. "Expect to see a slew of new AI-enabled entrants and new features from existing players. Most of our competitors will push users to self-serve at all costs. We're taking a different approach based on customer choice and escalating to a human when they're better suited for the job. It really brings our people + tech value proposition to life," explains Trevor Brink, Chief Product Officer at Corporate Traveler.

At Corporate Traveler, automation and AI are being applied to proactively support travel arrangers rather than replace human expertise. "In 2026, Corporate Traveler will use AI to make business travel faster, smarter, and more personal than ever. Our technology will work quietly behind the scenes, anticipating disruptions, predicting traveler preferences, and automating the busywork, so our people can focus on what really matters: exceptional service," says Tracy Loiacono, VP of Operations at Corporate Traveler.

As organizations prepare for 2026, these shifts make one thing clear: the future of business travel will be defined by higher expectations, smarter automation, and experienced support to navigate growing complexity.

Looking ahead

Throughout the year, we helped organizations strategically balance cost efficiency and traveler experience, by leveraging actionable, data-driven insights with customized travel strategies. The findings highlighted in the report are intended to provide a foundation for more informed travel decisions and a clear path to smarter, more flexible travel programs.

In 2025, we saw more companies approach business travel with a renewed sense of purpose. When travel is intentional, it continues to be a powerful driver of connection and business success. The growth across cities nationwide, especially in emerging secondary markets, underscores the enduring value business travel brings to organizations across industries.

As we reflect on the progress made in 2025, we remain energized by the opportunities ahead and look forward to partnering closely with our clients to help ensure the greatest return on their business travel programs in the years to come.

John Van den Heuvel
President, Corporate Traveler USA

Get in touch

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