

How TMCs are addressing concerns faced by women in corporate travel

Women remain the fastest growing segment of business travellers (interestingly, women are also leading the boom in solo, wellness and adventure travel). What's more, women make over 80% of all travel decisions. According to Oz Desai, general manager FCBT, successful travel management companies (TMCs) recognise the decision-making power of women, address their needs and are focused on delivering new and innovative solutions for female business travellers.



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"The debate around whether female business travellers should be treated any differently to their male counterparts is well and truly over," says Desai. "With a greater understanding that women travellers have different vulnerabilities, stresses and mental load. It should not be about treating women differently, rather treating female business travellers appropriately, and focusing on their safety, wellbeing and peace of mind."

Astrid Loury, International SOS regional security information analyst, puts it best:

"The business case is that when companies have to send someone abroad, they send the relevant expert, regardless of gender. However, if that person is female, then it must be acknowledged that she might be more vulnerable than her male colleague. This recognition could save corporates the unforeseen cost of a wasted business trip – or worse."

Here are 5 concerns faced by women in corporate travel today:

1. Safety

The vast majority (71%) of female business travellers believe they face greater risks than their male counterparts. This is according to a 2018 online survey conducted by AIG Travel and Global Business Travel Association (GBTA) of women who travelled on four or more business trips within the past year.

Similarly, a report by Maiden Voyage, a UK-based firm focused on corporate travel safety, shows that almost a third (31.4%) of female business travellers have suffered sexual harassment while travelling.

In fact, sexual harassment accounts for over half (51.2%) of all incidents encountered by female business travellers. Handbag theft (23.02%) is the second most frequently encountered incident, followed by drink spiking (3.97%) and sexual assault (3.17%).

For Christie Odendaal, FCBT head of key account management, safety and duty of care should be front and centre for any TMC:

"The greatest responsibility of a travel agent is to bring their clients home safely. This means flagging areas of travel risk, understanding how to mitigate those risks and offering 24/7 support."

TMCs are able to:

- **Provide information.** Different countries have different risks, and travel experts are able to provide country-specific information and hyperlocal tips and advice, including areas to avoid and what to do after business hours.
- **Offer advice.** A good TMC will have vetted a number of different accommodation options and will consider everything from location and safety features (for example, double-locking doors) to well-lit corridors, safe parking options and in-house amenities (safe gyms, spas and shops).
- **Bring you home.** Business travellers encounter everything from flight cancellations to adverse weather events and terrorist attacks. Not only will your travel expert be able to change your plans quickly and efficiently, but they'll even liaise with your consulate in order to bring you home.

2. Health

Business travel is inherently stressful. And no wonder. It often places one in extremely stressful situations, be it airport waits, long-haul flights, navigating around unfamiliar cities – never mind the business meeting itself. All can have an impact on one's health and mental wellbeing.

Covid-19 has added another layer of stress. No one wants to fall ill on the road or pick up an infection when you're returning to families and children. And while working mothers understand the need to get back on the road, this is balanced by a very real fear of the risk Covid-19 poses to their own personal health and that of their family.

TMCs continue to step up by providing information around:

- Different airline regulations.
- Travel documents required.
- New travel policies (for example, health passports or compulsory vaccinations).
- Flexible cancellation policies (in case of illness).
- Recommended health and safety measures (for each step of the traveller journey).
- A destination's protocols and restrictions (for example, compulsory quarantine for inbound travellers).

Although these are still uncertain times, Odendaal believes TMCs are working hard to provide peace of mind.

3. Time

For women, time is perhaps the most valuable commodity they have. And if a 2017 paper published in the Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences Journal is to be believed, then the majority of "working adults experience greater happiness after spending money on a time-saving purchase than on a material purchase."

Good travel management means personalising the business travel experience for each traveller and addressing their particular needs, including saving them time. Time they could use more productively (at the office or at home) or time they could spend with children, families and friends.

Let your travel expert save you time by:

- Making all your travel arrangements, including shuttles and activities, so you can concentrate on more productive (and profitable) activities instead.
- Booking the best connections and making any last-minute changes or cancellations (without penalty).
- Vetting all suppliers, from accommodation establishments to transport options.
- Managing your travel awards programme.
- Putting convenient cost/expense management tools in place to relieve post-travel admin. This includes ensuring travel expenses are reconciled and reimbursed quickly and easily, so that travellers are not left stressed and out of pocket.
- Analysing your travel management programme to identify any areas of friction.

4. Connectivity

One of the biggest pain points for businesses travellers – men and women – is a lack of connectivity. Not only is it a productivity killer, says Desai, but travellers are likely to experience more stress when they feel disconnected from their families, children or support structures.

Women feel this keenly, and a travel expert will know to book accommodation with Wi-Fi and will be able to offer advice around roaming charges, all-inclusive packages, access to airport lounges (with connectivity) and more.

5. Balance

Women continue to strive for all important work-life balance. Travel managers (and TMCs) worth their salt support this by implementing new travel policies, or improving on existing policies, to ensure that they meet the needs of each traveller.

This might be as simple as giving each traveller a choice of when, how and how often to travel, which hotels or airlines to support (hint: ask them!) – and building in the option of bleisure travel.

Even better? More and more companies are offering flexible working between business trips and wellness programmes in order to ease the strain on female executives.