

connect

CWT's business travel magazine | UK & Ireland | Winter 2019

2020 & the TPF

A look ahead to 2020
with our Travel Price Forecast

AI and travel

Artificial intelligence is here
and it's changing travel

Apps that help you save time

Make sure new technology
doesn't get in the way

GOOD VALUE NY

**Why New York doesn't always have to be
so expensive for business travellers**

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Welcome to the final issue of Connect for 2019!

As we turn our attention to what lies ahead in 2020, there seems to be one thing we can be certain of: we have an exciting 12 months to look forward to. This is reflected in our six-page feature article on the CWT Travel Price Forecast, our annual look-ahead at the upcoming year.

The Forecast discusses how our industry might deal with what one can only describe as deep-seated “uncertainty”. This, of course, is a reflection of issues affecting the globe, whether as a result of climate challenges or from economic disputes between the likes of the US and China – plus the ongoing uncertainty about Britain’s future relationship with the EU. The forecast offers some sage advice, which will be particularly pertinent to travel managers planning the year ahead.

As well as delving into the sometimes murky world of hotel ratings, plus providing some tips on staying fresh when at a conference, we recommend some of the best apps to help you save time. And our big destination feature for this issue looks at getting a good return on investment when visiting New York for business.

And don't miss our four-page article on artificial intelligence – it's a fascinating, must-read piece. Finally, we end this issue of Connect and say goodbye to 2019 by visiting some fabulous Christmas markets.

Have a wonderful end to 2019, and we wish you all the best for 2020.

Philip Wooster
Vice President
Western Europe Sales



“The forecast offers some sage advice, which will be particularly pertinent to travel managers ...”

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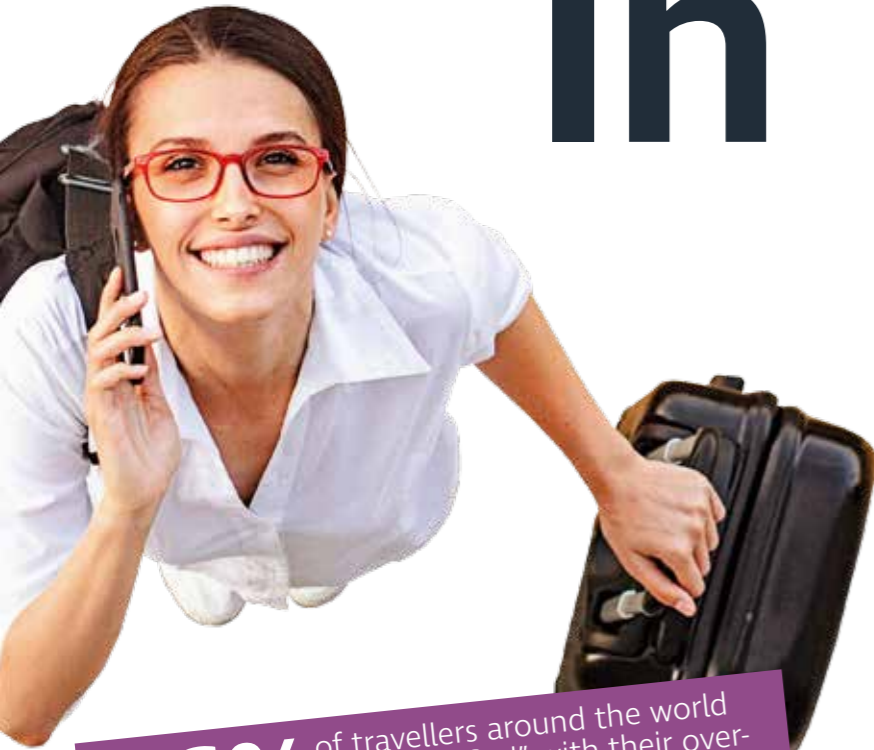


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Five of the best, from Prague to Strasbourg



In brief



86% of travellers around the world were "satisfied" with their overall business travel experience

Satisfied business travellers

The majority of business travellers (54%) have experienced a "mishap" while on the road in the past year, with 52% affected by a delayed flight and 40% by a cancelled flight. Despite this disruption to their journeys, 86% of travellers around the world were "satisfied" with their overall business travel experience, according to the new GBTA Business Traveler Sentiment Index, in partnership with RoomIt by CWT. Being able to book convenient hotels and having access to consistent Wi-Fi were the most important factors for travellers on business trips. The biggest potential stress points were forgetting their smartphone or laptop charger.

Paris tests drone train

French rail operator SNCF has successfully tested a remotely controlled train in the Paris suburbs for the first time. The so-called "drone" train is seen as a key step towards being able to operate autonomous or driverless trains in the future. During the test, the train was remotely operated on a four-kilometre journey in the French capital. SNCF has been working on the project for 18 months and further tests are planned in autumn 2019. Over the next four years, SNCF plans to create two prototype autonomous trains for both passenger and freight services.



Sowing the seeds of an eco future

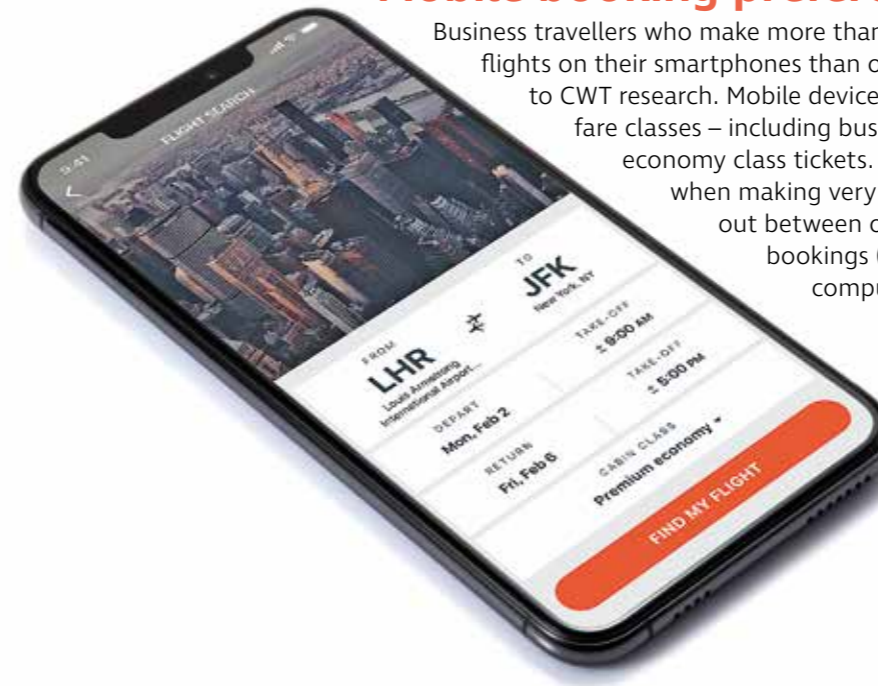
Dubai International Airport has installed 15,000 solar panels in a bid to reduce annual CO2 emissions at its Terminal 2 by 3,243 metric tonnes. This reduction in carbon emissions is equivalent to growing more than 53,000 tree seedlings for 10 years or driving 688 passenger vehicles for one year. The solar panel installation is the largest project of its type in the Middle East, while the airport's other environmental initiatives include energy-efficient fittings, optimised cooling systems and using energy-efficient LED bulbs.



Photos: iStock (3), KLM, SNCF/screenshot

Mobile booking preferences

Business travellers who make more than five trips per year are 13% more likely to book flights on their smartphones than other less frequent corporate travellers, according to CWT research. Mobile devices are also used more often when booking higher fare classes – including business, premium economy and first-class seats – than economy class tickets. Travellers are more inclined to use mobile devices when making very late bookings, with 62% of mobile bookings carried out between one and seven days before the flight. The majority of bookings (73.5%) are still made in the office, regardless of via a computer or mobile device.



Frequent business travellers **13%** more likely to book flights on smartphone



Flying V saves fuel

The revolutionary 'Flying V' aircraft, which is being backed financially by Dutch airline KLM, made some initial test flights in autumn 2019. The developers of the plane, which can carry up to 314 passengers, said it would be around 20% more fuel-efficient than Airbus' latest A350 aircraft. The design of the Flying V prototype integrates passenger cabins, cargo areas and fuel tanks under the wings, which creates the aircraft's distinctive V-shaped.

How to manage travel in an uncertain 2020

The sixth annual Global Travel Forecast can be summarised in a single word: uncertainty. Connect talked to Richard Johnson from CWT Solutions Group on how travel buyers can focus on controlling the controllable to weather the storm.

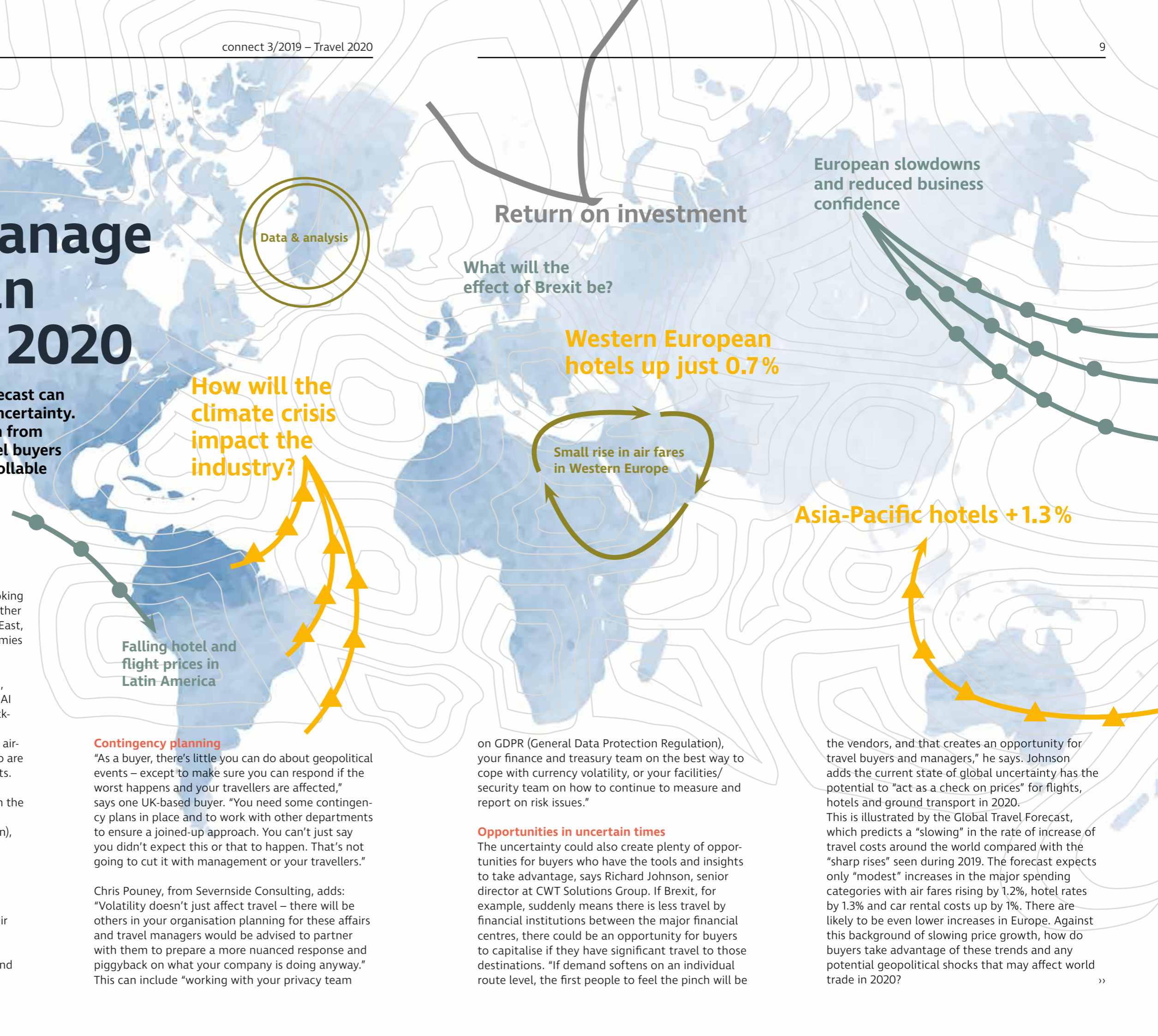
TEXT: Rob Gill

If there's one word on everybody's lips when looking ahead to 2020, it has to be "uncertainty" – whether it's escalating trade wars, tension in the Middle East, the endless drama of Brexit, or weakening economies in some major trading nations.

Then there are significant industry developments, such as the onset of new technologies, including AI (artificial intelligence), machine learning and blockchain – coupled with fundamental shifts in the business models of key travel suppliers, including airlines, hotels and ground transport operators, who are changing the way they work with corporate clients.

These are the overriding themes that run through the sixth annual Global Travel Forecast, published by CWT and GBTA (Global Business Travel Association), which looks at the factors set to shape business travel in 2020.

So, what's a travel buyer to do in these circumstances? Perhaps counterintuitively, now is the perfect opportunity for buyers to re-examine their travel programmes and policies to see if they are fit for purpose. Can they withstand the potential shocks and further uncertainty that may be around the corner?



Data & analysis

Return on investment

What will the effect of Brexit be?

European slowdowns and reduced business confidence

How will the climate crisis impact the industry?

Western European hotels up just 0.7%

Small rise in air fares in Western Europe

Asia-Pacific hotels + 1.3%

Falling hotel and flight prices in Latin America

Contingency planning

"As a buyer, there's little you can do about geopolitical events – except to make sure you can respond if the worst happens and your travellers are affected," says one UK-based buyer. "You need some contingency plans in place and to work with other departments to ensure a joined-up approach. You can't just say you didn't expect this or that to happen. That's not going to cut it with management or your travellers."

Chris Pouney, from Severnside Consulting, adds: "Volatility doesn't just affect travel – there will be others in your organisation planning for these affairs and travel managers would be advised to partner with them to prepare a more nuanced response and piggyback on what your company is doing anyway." This can include "working with your privacy team

on GDPR (General Data Protection Regulation), your finance and treasury team on the best way to cope with currency volatility, or your facilities/security team on how to continue to measure and report on risk issues."

Opportunities in uncertain times

The uncertainty could also create plenty of opportunities for buyers who have the tools and insights to take advantage, says Richard Johnson, senior director at CWT Solutions Group. If Brexit, for example, suddenly means there is less travel by financial institutions between the major financial centres, there could be an opportunity for buyers to capitalise if they have significant travel to those destinations. "If demand softens on an individual route level, the first people to feel the pinch will be

the vendors, and that creates an opportunity for travel buyers and managers," he says. Johnson adds the current state of global uncertainty has the potential to "act as a check on prices" for flights, hotels and ground transport in 2020.

This is illustrated by the Global Travel Forecast, which predicts a "slowing" in the rate of increase of travel costs around the world compared with the "sharp rises" seen during 2019. The forecast expects only "modest" increases in the major spending categories with air fares rising by 1.2%, hotel rates by 1.3% and car rental costs up by 1%. There are likely to be even lower increases in Europe. Against this background of slowing price growth, how do buyers take advantage of these trends and any potential geopolitical shocks that may affect world trade in 2020?

The whole picture

Knowing your travel programme inside out is a key factor in being prepared for any global crisis, and this is thankfully much easier now due to the way data can be collected and quickly analysed to create meaningful insights. This can help organisations to both improve the efficiency of their travel programme and to offer a better service to the travellers by being able to quickly locate them in an emergency and provide assistance if necessary.

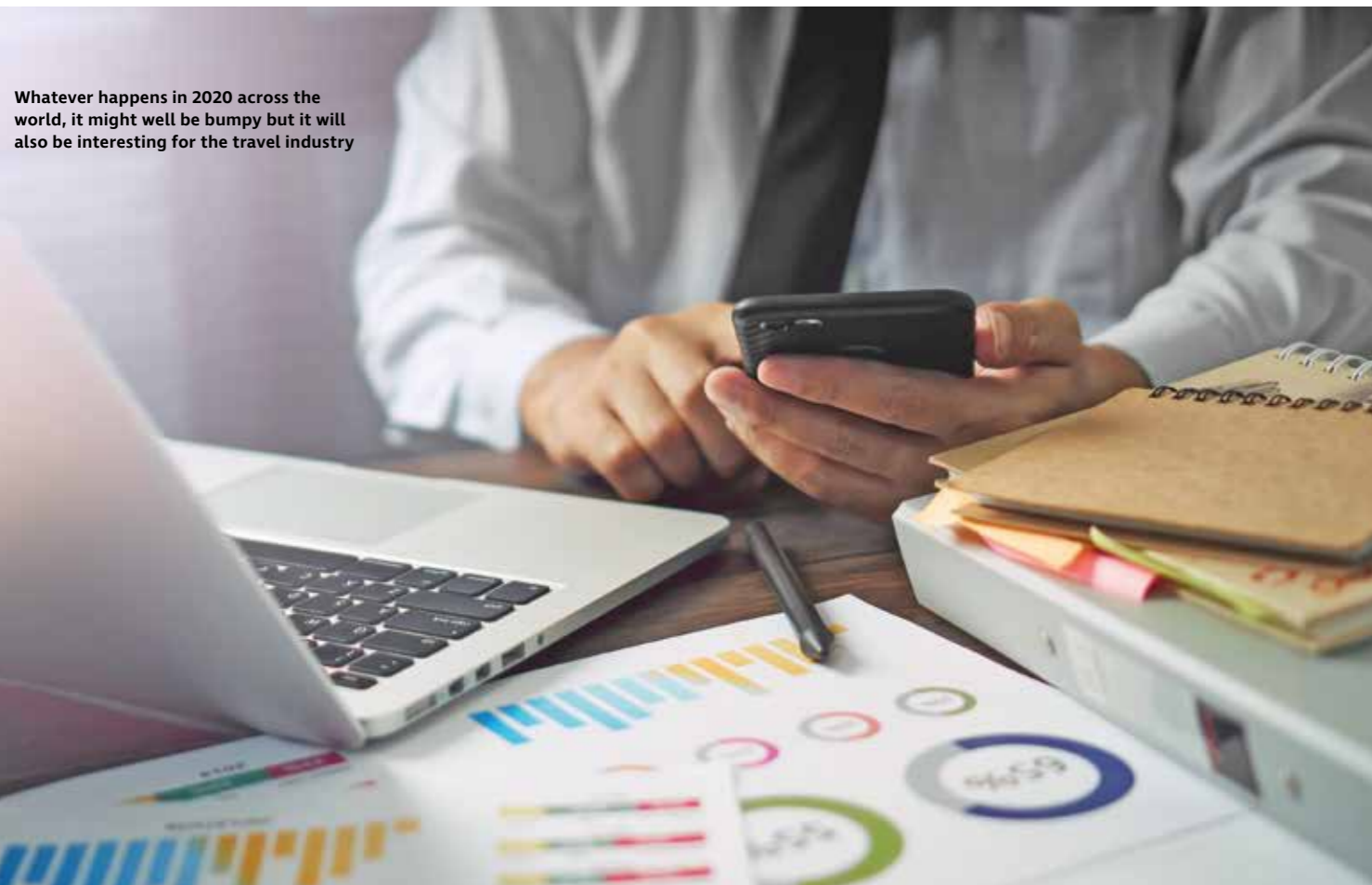
“It’s critical buyers have the whole picture view of their travel programme,” says Johnson. “This means you need consistent, consolidated data, which is captured through the right booking channels or multiple channels. And it is absolutely critical to underpin this by a robust travel policy. It’s important that buyers provide guidelines on how to follow the rules. “You can influence through travel policy guidelines and that takes away the excuse of ignorance,” he says.

By arming themselves with this key data on travel patterns, volumes and spending, buyers can also negotiate better deals with suppliers who may experience falls in demand for their aircraft seats or hotel rooms. “Whatever happens, trains and planes are still going to operate, hotels will still be open and people are going to need to travel for business. So, this creates interesting opportunities,” adds Johnson.

Return on investment

The current uncertainty also gives buyers a chance to

Whatever happens in 2020 across the world, it might well be bumpy but it will also be interesting for the travel industry

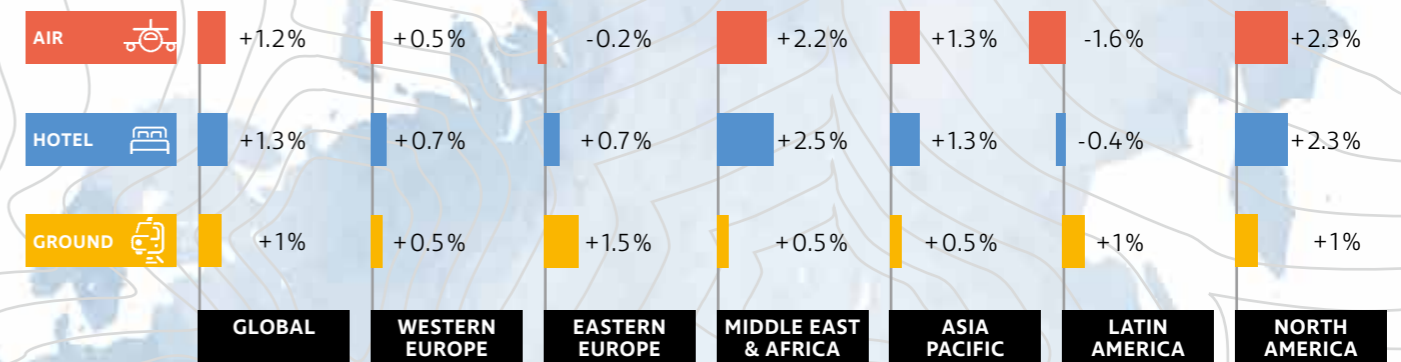


Managing travel in uncertain times

It’s rarely entirely straightforward managing complex travel. Therefore, in challenging times it’s extra important to get your strategy right. Here are our tips:

- Communicate to travellers any updates on geopolitical events that might affect their travel plans, including practical information, such as sudden changes in passport or other entry requirements.
- Stress the importance of booking through corporate channels so travellers can be located and assisted in a crisis.
- Capture the total cost of each trip from end-to-end, and use this data to identify ways of offsetting any price increases. This can also be used to aid negotiations with suppliers.
- Advanced booking should continue to be recommended – particularly for flights, hotels and trains – to secure the best rates and fares, despite the current volatility. Booking online will also keep costs down.
- Ensure you have an accurate view and understanding of your programme so you can react quickly to any sudden challenges or changes in market conditions.
- Make sure you are offering travellers the choice they want for air, hotels and ground transport, including options such as ride-hailing and “sharing economy” accommodation providers (Airbnb and so on), so they are more likely to use preferred tools.
- Ensure you are in position to benefit from new supplier strategies, such as hotels moving towards chain-wide discounts and dynamic prices, and airlines distributing some fares through new NDC (New Distribution Capability) platforms.
- Record and track employee satisfaction levels for all elements of the travel experience so you can identify and deal with any service issues with suppliers.

2020 Travel price predictions (year-on-year changes)



show their value to organisations by using data-driven insights to illustrate how travel can produce a positive return on investment (ROI) for the business, even during a time when there may be a temptation to cut travel budgets.

“Having the data takes out the guesswork,” says Johnson. “Travel is seen as a cost centre but it should be seen as a revenue generator or a profit centre – it’s an enabler. Although the industry has not previously been able to make this case about ROI in a compelling way, we can do that now with the data.” This means looking at ROI and the whole cost of travel – it’s not just about the price of an airline ticket, it’s the end-to-end journey and also the human impact. You can’t quantify that without the data.

Johnson agrees, saying, “There is now more of an appreciation of how a travel programme can improve ROI. You have to think about how employees can operate productively while travelling on business.” Having a more generous travel policy is also increasingly being seen as a “differentiator” for recruiting and retaining the “brightest and best” employees, particularly when other key considerations such as job role and salary are similar. Do organisations really want to tighten policies because of some short-term turbulence and risk losing valuable employees to rivals?

Benchmarking

One key way the Global Travel Forecast can help the buying process is by allowing clients to benchmark the kind of increases they are likely to see in their key travel regions, destinations and categories in 2020.

In Western Europe, for example, there are only expected to be increases of less than 1% in airfares, hotel rates and ground transport prices. Moreover, the continent faces “economic headwinds and tumbling business confidence” in its largest economy, Germany – plus there are the potential fallouts from labour disputes, climate change protests, trade wars, rising oil prices and terrorism.

Benchmarking against your peers is also important in these volatile times, according to Severnside Consulting’s Chris Pouney. “Benchmark against other buyers - particularly in your sector,” he advises. “Industry bodies provide excellent vehicles for coming together with other buyers across sectors. Do you know your counterpart buyers at your direct sector peers? It’s normally OK to discuss generic approaches with fellow travel buyers.”

Whatever happens, 2020 is set to be an interesting – and maybe fairly bumpy – ride for anybody managing travel. Nevertheless, there are still ways to be prepared and even opportunities to take advantage of this most uncertain of global outlooks. ■



Prepare for next year and download the Global Travel Price Forecast 2020



The hotel ratings dilemma

Choosing the best hotel for your business travel needs often comes down to a quick read of a ratings website. But it pays to be cautious.

TEXT: Vicky Sussens

It's a familiar scenario on our screens and makes for great viewing: a team of TV journalists head anonymously to hotels to investigate a suspicious mixture of five-star and one-star ratings. And it turns out the five stars were from bought reviews, and the low ratings were pretty accurate. "Super clean" turned out to have mouldy bathrooms and sweat-soaked pillows. It can be a sobering watch. Paid reviewers sound authentic, and they write reviews for all the big-name online sites.

Reviews are vital for business travel: 53% of travellers will not book a hotel unless it has a review, according to travel researcher Phocuswright. But if you can't rely on ratings, how can you as a travel manager or individual business traveller get the best ROI from a chosen hotel? After all, a comfortable stay in a central, safe location with all the conveniences business travellers need can be essential for a successful business trip.

Paid reviews

You can, of course, check hotel ratings for anomalies. For example: what is the balance of one to five stars? How specific is the review or is it filled with generalisations that might indicate the reviewer was never there? Be cautious about reviews with superlatives.

Don't forget, paid reviewers write positive ratings for their clients as well as negative ones about their clients' competitors. Indeed, paid reviews are big business and travel managers need to be streetwise when selecting hotels. Be sceptical of reviews filled with technical details that read more like PR than an authentic travel experience. Repetitions of the same text in various reviews can also be a sign of firms incentivising customers to write positive reviews.

Rely on your peers

To help clients make the best hotel accommodation choices RoomIt by CWT offers its own proprietary ho-

tel review website. This site, which is only available to CWT clients, allows business travellers to share hotel ratings and reviews with peers within a secure site. RoomIt has already collected millions of reviews from business travellers, so your travellers do not have to worry about seeing paid reviews or those specific to leisure travel. Instead they will only see reliable and relevant reviews.

The biggest ROI, however, is that it gives travel managers a single source of travel feedback and hotel ratings. This means they can manage their corporate hotel programme better, have a powerful tool to negotiate with suppliers, get direct traveller feedback about the security of the hotels in their programme and also build up extensive knowledge of what exactly business travellers need in a hotel. ■

To keep in mind when choosing a hotel

- Does the location suit the business trip needs?
- How secure is the hotel in terms of fire safety, terrorism threats, crime, petty theft from staff and occurrence of natural disasters?
- How accessible is public transport?
- Does the hotel offer fitness facilities, fitness gear rentals or other fitness services?
- Is there 24-hour access to a café or convenience store for travellers arriving late or leaving early, or who don't want the expense of room service?
- Does the hotel have a dedicated, private, highly secure Internet service?
- Does the hotel specialise in serving the special needs of business travellers?



There are diverse opportunities to eat out across New York, from modern, relaxed restaurants to street vendors

Looking for good value in New York

Pricey and crowded are easy brickbats to throw at New York. But by choosing accommodation outside central Manhattan it doesn't have to be that way.

TEXT: Jonah Haskell

It's hardly a revelation to suggest New York City has a reputation for being pricey. So, when this year's ECA International report named the Big Apple as the most expensive destination in the world for business travellers, few of them batted an eyelid.

ECA International provides data on salaries, costs of living, tax and other criteria for people and companies working internationally. According to its report, spending a day in New York on business will cost a typical business traveller almost USD800 on average, beating second-place Geneva by more than USD80 a day. A global hub for finance, banking, education, health services and communications, New York's Midtown Manhattan neighbourhood is the biggest central business district on Earth, and it hosts the headquarters of some of the world's largest companies. And, of course, Lower Manhattan is home to the world's biggest stock exchange, Wall Street.

Too many people, too few rooms

New York City is one of the most visited destinations worldwide. In 2018, it set a city record by welcoming 65.2 million visitors, including 13.6 million international travellers – of those, 1.24 million came from Great Britain and 1.1 million from China. But therein lies the problem. NYC & Company, the city's official tourism organization, recently announced that in May 2019 there were around 120,000 hotel rooms within the five New York boroughs. Meaning, there are just too many people for too few rooms. The result? High hotel prices, the bane of every travel manager's life. Almost wherever you go for business, accommodation is often the largest single cost of any given trip. In already expensive New York, it can come out to over 60% of the total. According to ECA International, the average price for a four-star hotel room in the city is a whopping USD512 a night. For comparison, it would cost about USD379 a night on average for a similar hotel in Geneva, USD326 in central London, USD280 in Hong Kong and just USD189 in Berlin.

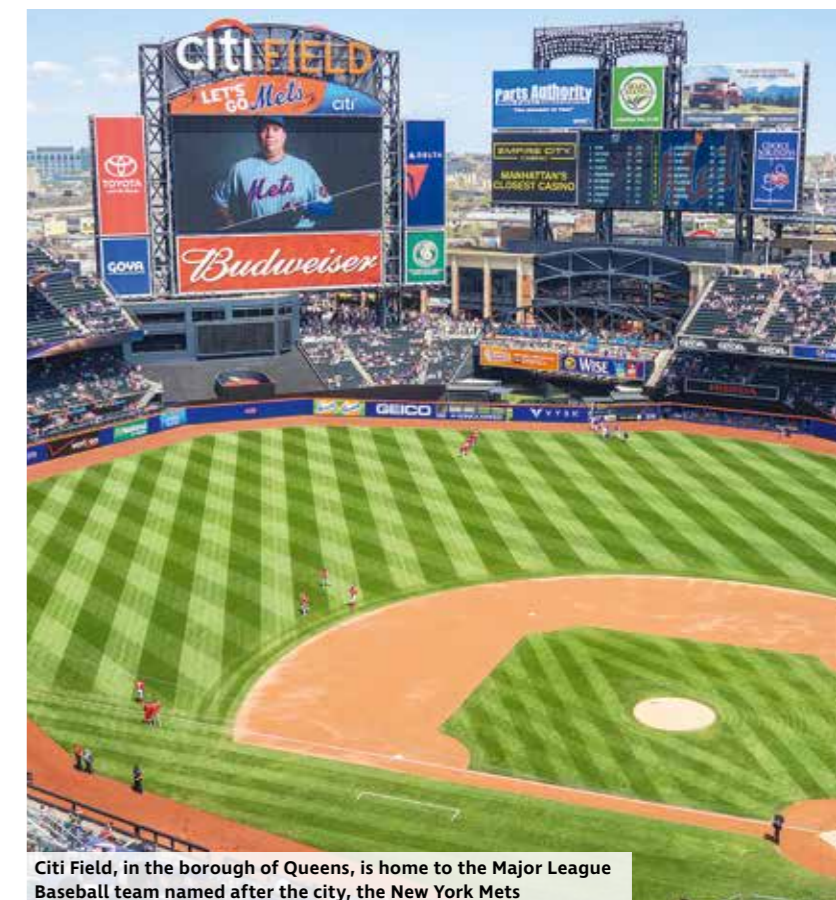
The question on the lips of every business person who takes on a New York visit is this: does a trip to this US metropolis really need to be so expensive? Can a visit be enjoyable, memorable and also provide a return on investment? Can it feel like you're not busting a sensible budget?

"... too many people for too few rooms. The result? High hotel prices, the bane of every travel manager's life."

Head to the outer boroughs

In short, yes: hotels outside the Lower and Upper Manhattan neighbourhoods where business travellers traditionally stay are a good option for avoiding pricey accommodation, and they'll bring a smile to any travel manager's face. If you don't want to venture off the island, consider the Lower East Side, a lively neighbourhood with plenty of business-friendly hotels. This area is also well located, along the East River and conveniently sandwiched between the Financial District and Midtown.

Brooklyn, which has grown massively as a business and tech hub since the financial crisis, from around 2009, is also a good alternative. A June 2018 report from the Office of the New York State Comptroller found that the number of businesses in Brooklyn had increased by 32% since then, "faster than in the four other boroughs", including Manhattan. That's "almost double the citywide rate". Well-known companies, such as Vice Media and Etsy, have their headquarters in the borough. »



Citi Field, in the borough of Queens, is home to the Major League Baseball team named after the city, the New York Mets



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Downtown Brooklyn is the third largest central business district in the city and it's located just across the East River from the Financial District, meaning it is closer to Wall Street than Midtown is. The Brooklyn Tech Triangle, centred on Downtown Brooklyn, the Brooklyn Navy Yard and the DUMBO (Down Under the Manhattan Bridge Overpass) neighbourhood, is home to over 1,300 technology companies. Meanwhile many other start-ups and established brands have made the borough their home, from little known podcast producer Gimlet Media to Kickstarter.

Cultural experience

Booking accommodation in Brooklyn or Queens, for example, doesn't mean you forsake the possibility for a cultural experience or a visit to a great restaurant. The NBA's Brooklyn Nets, for example, and NHL's New York Islanders play at the Barclays Center in downtown Brooklyn. And Citi Field in Queens is home of Major League Baseball's New York Mets.

Brooklyn has a flourishing independent music and art scene, along with a growing "off-Broadway" theatre presence. Similarly, the Williamsburg and DUMBO neighbourhoods are popular nightlife spots. You can check out the famous Figureworks »



5 NY tips that are good for your wallet



1 Federal Reserve Bank: one of 12 across the country, visitors can go on a free tour to see rare coins and learn some history about the bank.

2 New York Public Library: peace and tranquillity is the minimum you'll get – or alternatively take a free tour of this stately building.

3 The High Line: This abandoned freight railway elevated above the city measures almost 1.5 miles in length and since its renovation in 2009 millions have walked along it. The walkway has greenery and plants either side, and from this former industrial area visitors get great views of the Hudson River, the New York cityscape and lots of street art works and murals along the way.

4 Flushing Meadows-Corona Park: Located in Queens, not far from LaGuardia Airport, this is the fourth biggest park in NYC and played host to the 1939 and 1964 World's Fairs. Nowadays, it's home to Citi Field, where the New York Mets play and the Billie Jean King National Tennis Center, which hosts the US Open every August. It also contains the Queens Zoo and the Queens Museum of Art, which is free, plus expanses of parkland.

5 Chelsea: though a number of NY museums offer free entry one day or evening a month, there are also a number of fabulous galleries that are always free. Head to Chelsea for some of the best, such as the Petzel Gallery, David Zwirner, Elizabeth Dee and the big name Gagosian.

art gallery here, see a play at the Brick Theater or catch an indie rock show at venues like The Knitting Factory and Baby's All Right. Whether it's hotels, music or art exhibitions, you are much more likely to skip the crowds and high prices of Manhattan, as well.

The outer boroughs also have large immigrant populations, meaning there is a wide array of wonderful, high-class cuisines from all over the world available in many outer boroughs. Gran Electrica in DUMBO is known for its regional Mexican dishes, Sage in East Williamsburg serves excellent Thai food accompanied by live jazz, and Sottocasa offers some of the best pizza in the city from its Downtown Brooklyn location. If you are looking for more traditional American fare, Marlow & Sons in Williamsburg emphasizes farm-fresh ingredients on its daily updated menu.

Doesn't have to cost an arm and a leg

Ultimately, there is little prospect of the cost of a business trip to New York dropping drastically any time soon – to even London standards, never mind the likes of Berlin and other European levels. But with a bit of foresight, preparation and canny thinking, a business trip to the city doesn't have to cost an arm and a leg, or the nerves of a conscientious travel manager.

The city's business and social scene has for a decade been expanding out of Manhattan to the outer boroughs with very good success. Make the effort to explore accommodation in these areas, expand your horizons and search for nearby quality restaurants, art galleries, music and sports venues, and other cultural activities. And with that, a business traveller opens up a range of options to explore a different, wallet-saving side of New York, providing an intelligent return on a company's business travel investment. ■



Opened in 2004, Marlow & Sons is now a much-loved part of the dining scene in Williamsburg, serving small snacks to substantial meals



Visitors don't have to remain in the usual Manhattan locations to enjoy their time in New York



Getting around

Taxis and rideshare apps can be expensive, and prices are going up after in February 2019 the state government instituted a congestion surcharge of USD2.75 a car on all car services in most of Manhattan. Standstill traffic is still common despite this, especially in Midtown, and it can make taking a car unreliable depending on the time of day.

To a degree, the most convenient and economical method of transport in the city is **the subway**. It costs just USD2.75 to enter the system at any station, and once in, you can travel to any other station in the city without additional charge. The subway covers nearly all of New York, with millions of people using it to commute into the city centre each day. This is a good way to get into Manhattan if you are staying in Brooklyn or Queens, it cuts costs and it's quick, with most lines taking less than 20 minutes to get across the river.

Nevertheless, you need to take into account that the aged subway system, which began operation in 1904, is starting to crack under the strain of nearly 5.5 million riders on an average weekday. Trains and stations are often grossly overcrowded during rush hours, and issues with the century-old signalling system can cause delays. Money from the aforementioned congestion pricing is meant to go towards repairs and updates, though this will clearly take time to have a substantial impact. It is, therefore, smart to build in a bit of extra time for at least short delays when taking the subway.

Biking is also an option if you are up for it, as Citi Bike racks located every few blocks around the city allow visitors to rent a bike fairly cheaply and easily. A 24-hour pass costs USD12 and allows cyclists an unlimited number of rides of up to 30 minutes, and any bike can be left at any Citi Bike rack, regardless of where you got it from. There is also a three-day pass available for USD24. Bike lanes are common in the city, but they can be clogged with traffic and dangerous during rush hour, and as with any city whether you use a bike can depend on the weather.

Photos: Alamy (3), iStock (6), Shutterstock



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Apps that save you time

Even with all of the advantages of new technology, it can sometimes be a distraction. With these apps, however, you can get more organised and save time.

TEXT: Paul Wheatley

1




Swiftkey

What is it? Keyboard that learns and corrects

The emergence of artificial intelligence has enabled a host of innovations, with Swiftkey a particularly useful one for mobile users who aren't particularly adept at typing. Developed by TouchType, which Microsoft bought for a reputed USD250 million in 2016, this keyboard app learns from your previous writing to correct and predict your next word. "Tired of tapping" and "Say goodbye to typos" are Swiftkey watchwords for millions of users.

Costs: free (in-app purchases)

2




Toggl

What is it? Keeps track on your time

You the know the scenario: you have a list of things that need to be done but before you know it half the day is gone and you're not sure where the time has disappeared to. With a single click, Toggl times your tasks, including website visits, reminds you if you've forgotten to start it, can be integrated into your calendar and reports back to you so you can see how you've spent your precious time.

Costs: free (in-app purchases)

5



Evernote

What is it? Takes your notes with you

Evernote is now something of a veteran app but it continues to be one of the most popular, and best, of its kind available. Users create notes, excerpts, photos and voice memos, all of which can synced across devices. Evernote has evolved and managing projects, meetings and deadlines are now part of its core functions.

Costs: free (in-app purchases)

3



Freedom

What is it? Stops distractions distracting you

For busy workers, there can sometimes be hardly enough hours in a working day to get everything done. In an age of social media, it's just one distraction on top of another. Which is where Freedom steps in – but how? Freedom simply blocks all those social media, shopping sites and apps that you find hard to ignore, helping you stay focused on your work.

Costs: free (in-app purchases)

4




myCWT

What is it? Puts travellers in control

Available in English, French, Italian, German and Spanish, myCWT takes the strain out of searching for hotels and flights, as well as the whole booking process, saving users a lot of effort and time. Users get updates and alerts whenever there's a travel itinerary change, meaning they focus on what they should be doing rather than worrying about their travel plans.

Costs: free (strictly for CWT customers)

6



Trello

What is it? Aids better organisation

Trello is a project management app that is a boon to anyone wanting help to better organise themselves. It uses boards, lists and cards to help prioritise your activities. It is a platform to collaborate with colleagues, allowing them to comment, share links, files and photos, set priorities and organise activities.

Costs: free (in-app purchases)

Photos: Sergey Nivens/Stock

AI – a new intelligence in the making

Right now, it takes quite a bit of human intelligence to make sense of what artificial intelligence or AI actually is. But the buzz is palpable, with many people talking about how it's going to revolutionise business travel.

TEXT: Nick Easen

“There’s a lot of hype in artificial intelligence at the moment but there are some golden nuggets,” explains Jan Latenstein, Vice President Multinational Sales & Program Management EMEA at CWT. That’s because this catch-all term has the potential to bring a new level of intelligence to the managed travel scene. When machines can increasingly think for themselves, upgrading processes with a degree of intellect, it will become a total gamechanger. This is why CWT and others are investing in it.

“The concept is much simpler than people think,” explains Latenstein. Basically, AI can make decisions that simulate the human brain by learning. That’s a big difference from a lot of algorithms we currently use, which are just complex instructions that tell a computer what to do.”

AI took off a few years ago, and now it’s coming into its own as companies bed down the technology and realise where it can really shine. In the process, AI’s popularity is ascending, as applications become more

useable and affordable. In fact, 70% of companies look set to adopt at least one type of AI technology by 2030, according to the McKinsey Global Institute.

And over time it could be a significant disruptor, with the technology rapidly advancing in other sectors, from leisure travel to manufacturing. “AI is already being used across the economy and society, and will become more powerful and effective,” states Julian David, CEO of TechUK. “AI doesn’t exist in a vacuum. It’s a powerful tool that can be used for good.”

Time to augment our intelligence

Exposure to artificial intelligence is changing business travellers’ expectations, too. Right now, in the travel management space the focus of AI is on helping people make better, more informed decisions on what, why and how to book corporate trips. This certainly has implications for any ROI (return on investment) when it comes to travel programmes. “It’s about creating the best experience you can get and in the process adding value,” says Latenstein. “AI is not a threat to people’s jobs. Our travel counsellors are very happy using it. It’s about developing a sweet spot that blends automated tasks, human, as well as augmented, interactions together using artificial intelligence,” he says.

Then there’s Reece, an intelligent chatbot and messaging app from CWT that learns from what you ask it via text – it also knows when to refer you to a human counsellor. It’s a hybrid system optimising a counsellor’s time in the process. This underlines the benefits of blending AI with human intervention to create a bespoke service, which benefits the customer, as well as delivering cost savings.

This comes at a time when digital communication is the preferred medium. A recent survey from CWT found that 69% of business travellers now prefer to book their flights digitally, via an app or a browser, rather than via human interactions. »

AI in the travel industry

Artificial intelligence is also being used elsewhere in the travel industry: KLM is developing Care-E, a robot that carries your luggage and guides you to the gate using artificial intelligence. Frankfurt Airport is using it to predict aircraft arrivals and Singapore’s Changi Airport uses AI to recognise and monitor security incidents. Marriott partnered with Samsung to use embedded AI in hotel rooms – for instance ask the virtual assistant for a wake-up call or start the shower at your desired temperature.



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The AI engine can present options for customers based on various criteria, such as past queries, bookings and selections

AI is getting more personal

Travel counsellors at CWT are also now using AI to augment their activity, predicting what customers will ask when they get in touch so that queries can be assisted in a smarter way. The AI engine can present options for customers based on various criteria, such as past queries, bookings and selections.

focused on fully understanding traveller preferences and behaviour in a bid to offer relevant services, in real time.

AI makes it easier to provide a tailored experience for travellers, including better customer support. For example, Reece is able to answer the more simple questions within seconds, so travellers save time and CWT counsellors can really focus on the more extensive travel requests. It also frees up counsellors' time so they can add value rather than do routine jobs, such as search and book flights, hotels or ground transportation, some of which can be automated. "Advances in artificial intelligence certainly make it possible to displace those doing repetitive tasks," explains »

"AI also creates a positive feedback loop. The more information it collects, the smarter it becomes and the more it is able to offer clients," says Latenstein. "Our mantra is focused on 'simplifying corporate travel.' AI does this, because it gives people more personalised options." The level of personalisation through AI is less about upgrades and ancillary services, and more

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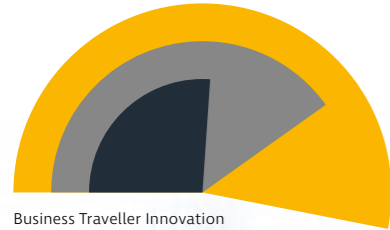


A great way to fly



Smartphone booking

% of travellers who prefer to book travel on their smartphones



Business Traveller Innovation
CWT Artemis study, 2019

Human vs machine

CWT research shows that:

69% of business travellers prefer to book their flights digitally rather than have human interactions

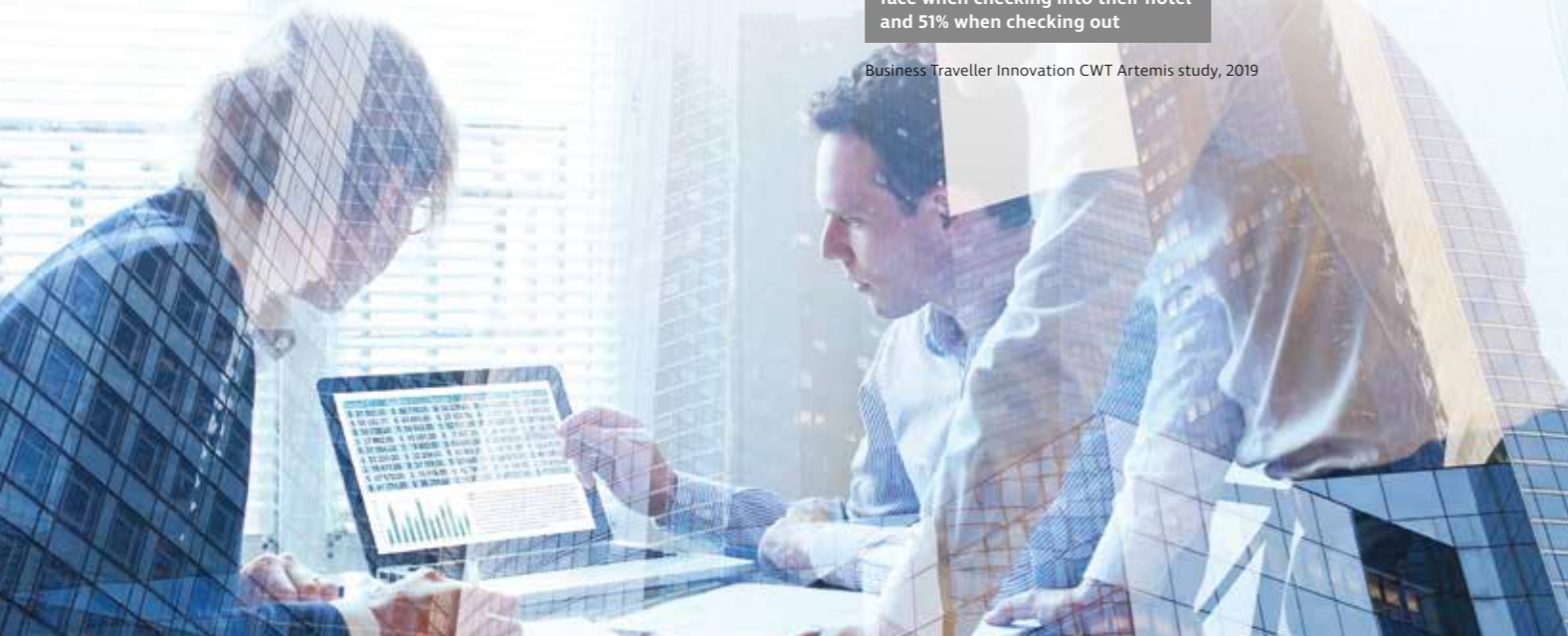
68% prefer digitally checking-in for flights

78% prefer to book hotel reservations digitally

71% prefer to book ground transportation digitally

46% of travellers prefer speaking to a person face-to-face when checking into their hotel and 51% when checking out

Business Traveller Innovation CWT Artemis study, 2019



Darrell West, Founding Director of the Center for Technology Innovation at The Brookings Institution.

Relying on data

The most important element in the development of AI is data, and you need a big enough data lake (Big Data) to test and develop AI effectively. This is where large travel management companies have an advantage over disruptive startups: CWT alone processes 330 million transactions a year.

“This data should eventually allow us to have a 360-degree holistic view of the customer,” Latenstein says. “We’re starting to pull it all together. AI is really powerful when you can apply it to the whole customer journey. There are still challenges to integrate all the back-office systems. Data silos still exist.”

“We are now looking at data beyond the travel industry, including HR and payment information, and tying that to travel data in order to make sense of it all. AI

can help. For instance, is there a correlation between long-standing road warriors and sick leave? If there is, we can drive a new understanding of business ROI and travel policy. It’s all about taking it to the next level and making sense of travel spend.”

AnswerIQ, for instance, allows travel managers to search vast swathes of their own travel data, a bit like Google does. AI is used to adapt and improve search capabilities, and it learns with more searching, meaning searches become more intuitive and personalised over time.”

So, what’s on the horizon? Predictive analytics is where it’s at when it comes to artificial intelligence and using AI on real time information to make predictions on crucial travel plans. It’s being used to track fares and fare forecasting with predictive price analyses. Some startups are using it to forecast flight delays. “It’s all about unlocking new opportunities,” explains Latenstein. “This is just the beginning.” ■

Photos: iStock (2), Shutterstock



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Strasbourg

Five xmas market cities

Christmas markets are nowadays as much a part of winter as Father Christmas and snowmen. And whether its Prague or Strasbourg, everyone has a favourite. Here are five of the most interesting to visit this year.

TEXT: Paul Wheatley

1570 vintage

Tradition plays a major role in many of the best Christmas markets, and there are few across the world older than Strasbourg's. With origins that date back to 1570, this is proudly proclaimed as the "oldest Christmas market in France". Centred in Strasbourg's Place Broglie and Cathedral Square, the "Christkindelsmärik" area includes an ice rink and more than 300 stalls enticing visitors for traditional Christmas ornaments, food and mulled wines.

Highlight: The Off Market is labelled the city's "alternative Christmas market", which focuses on sustainability, organic food, vintage furniture and original art.
noel.strasbourg.eu/en

Good King Wenceslas

With its story about heading out into freezing snow, the English hymn starting "Good King Wenceslas looked out, On the feast of Stephen" invariably evokes special Christmas and winter feelings. Prague's Wenceslas Square Christmas market does the same – people huddled together in warm woollen hats, sipping mulled wine, eating spicy gingerbread and Hungarian flatbreads, walking from stall to stall, checking out ornaments, ceramics and jewellery, all with the fantastic backdrop of the National Museum and the Opera House.

Highlight: Head up to Prague Castle for its own Christmas market and great views of the cityscape.
czechtourism.com/e/christmas-markets-prague

Prague



Christmas Barcelona style

Barcelona is perhaps not the first place that springs to mind when you are considering which Christmas market to head for this year. In actual fact, the city's Fira de Santa Llúcia has been going in one form or another since 1786, in celebration of Saint Lucy on 13 December. Located next to the cathedral, the market begins at the end of November. Nowadays it's one of many Christmas markets in the city and wider region, accompanied by various events, with local food and drink specialities.

Highlights: Gaudí's Basílica de la Sagrada Família is the spectacular location of one of the city's (smaller) Christmas fairs.

barcelonaturisme.com



Barcelona

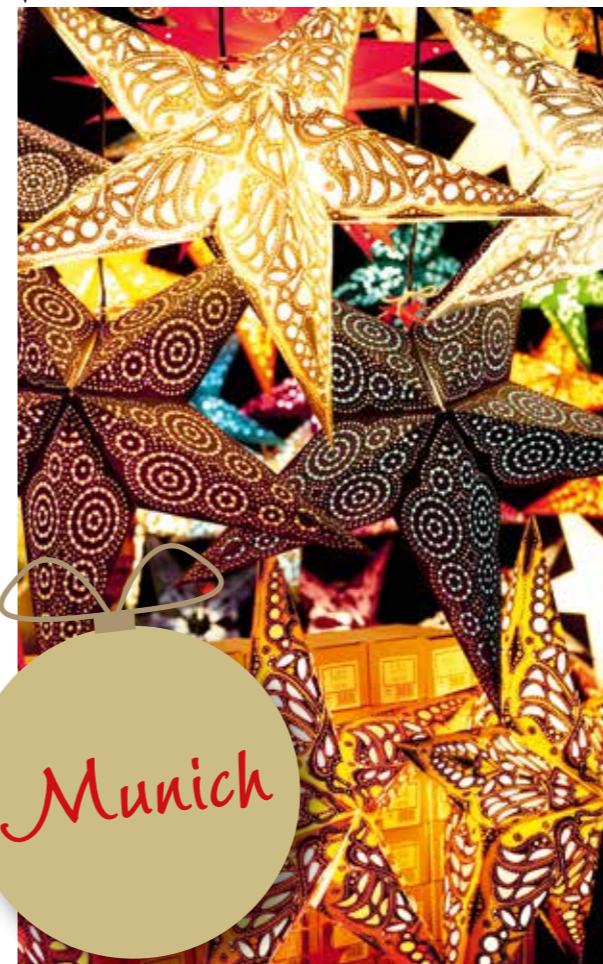
Munich art market

People come from across the world to experience Munich's city centre Christmas market for good reason – it's outstanding. But those in the know also head across to the cosy Schwabinger Weihnachtsmarkt, founded in 1976 and packed with creative types and their art creations. There's everything from beautiful handmade jewellery to outsized sculptures – not forgetting the excellent mulled wine and food offerings.

Highlights: Free of charge, the Art Marquee is filled with larger works of art by around 20 local and guest artists, and nearby there's also a "sculpture path", showcasing open-air art.

schwabingerweihnachtsmarkt.de/en

Photos: iStock (2), Alamy (2), theBfcm



Munich



Birmingham

A German-Birmingham Christmas

For many people, if it's Christmas markets, it has to be Germany. And the British city of Birmingham agrees, which is why every year it hosts its very own German tribute act in the form of the Frankfurt Christmas Market Birmingham. Said to be the largest of its type outside Germany and Austria, it has everything from roasted almonds to Bratwurst (sausages) and hand-made leatherwork to delicate glass baubles.

Highlight: Enjoy a glass of German Glühwein (mulled wine) and a piece of Stollen, a traditional German Christmas cake.

thebfc.com





Refresh yourself

With a busy schedule and lots of travelling, it's easy to lose your mojo at a conference. But do the right things and you can keep fresh and stay focused while you're there.

TEXT: Vicki Sussens

How can you maximise networking at a conference? How can you get the most value from sessions? Don't overdo it and look after yourself. If you feel good, build in 'me-time', and plan well – you'll take in more, be more open to others, and arrive home filled with inspiration. Here's how:

Prepare well

Choose sessions with audience participation, workshops or group discussions. The more interaction and the more views presented, the more you will be engaged. Focus on getting the maximum benefit from one or two quality events rather than going into overdrive, and then being too tired to take anything in.

Take notes

Notes will help you listen more actively, remind you later of ideas you want to follow up on. And you can draw on the notes for networking. "What did you think of ..." is a good opening line!

Pace yourself

You may have arrived with a hectic work schedule behind you. Build in me-time. What about a few minutes of yoga or meditation in your room? Or a quick workout in the hotel gym? Even just walking around the block can help freshen the mind. Or, if you are sitting out a session, what about going jogging? (Some hotels rent out jogging gear.) Exercise and a change of scenery will help you

digest what you've learned – and refresh you for the next presentations.

Eat well

This does not mean eat what you see, hoping to revert back to good habits back home. Have a protein-rich breakfast to ward off hunger pangs. Take healthy snacks to eat between meals to feed your nerves and keep blood sugar levels constant. Cut down on alcohol. Always have water to drink.

Feel good all-round

Have you got the right wardrobe? Do you know the dress code? Is there anything you should, or absolutely should not, wear? Choose elegant, but comfortable shoes. Look good. It does wonders both for self-confidence and networking.

Stay "Out of Office"







Before you leave, finish whatever work is current and delegate what you cannot finish. State in your "out-of-office" message that your emails won't be read or saved. Set a fixed time period for your work colleagues to contact you, and stick to it.

Network efficiently

Schedule at least two hard-core networking sessions. It could be a lunch or coffee break or an after-hours event. Then make sure you do the job thoroughly. But don't make networking a frantic, collecting-business-cards rush. Remember, less is more!

Photos: iStock

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