

The New Realities of Business Travel

Travel & Safety Guidance
for Travel Managers



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Though every country is confronting the coronavirus pandemic in its own way, most of those that went into lockdowns in March are entering a new phase. It's clear that this next phase, while generally moving in the direction of opening up and resuming economic activity wherever possible, will take many forms. It will also be gradual in most places, and unpredictable. There will likely be stops and starts and frequent changes.

Nevertheless, barring any overwhelming new waves of infections, the general direction of the world is to allow more movement and to get back to work. Even as restrictions are eased, however, this will be an especially challenging time for the business traveler looking to get on the road again.

How countries around the world handle the shift back to business is still up in the air. They have been acting separately to protect their citizens--but to get back to business, some coordination among countries is beginning to occur. The goal is to streamline guidelines and rules for border crossings as the majority of people emerge in one form or another from lockdown, so that it's clear what those travelling can, and cannot, expect to do.





The good news is that it's not an all-or-nothing scenario. For organizations that can be quick on their feet and flexible, it should now be possible to begin to head back out into the world, little by little. Many flight routes remain canceled, trains and public transport networks are operating at reduced capacity, and businesses are closed. The key to getting back to business effectively will be understanding the rules and restrictions to contend with, how to best plan and execute a trip, and what's currently available as far as ways to move around and remain effective and productive away from home.

It will also be vital to know that wherever they go, business travelers can safely return home in a dynamic situation full of unknowns. For this reason the initial stages will likely involve more domestic (and regional) trips than international. And likely more trips by ground transport than by air. And as that slowly changes to allow for more ambitious trips to destinations further afield, the appropriately prepared organization should be able to make gradual shifts alongside.

Airports

The Airport Experience

The airport may be the most changed part of the travel process, as authorities move to put together standardized checks and other procedures to make sure travelers don't infect workers and others while moving through the airport. Industry experts expect this may include a series of checkpoints: [kiosks or personnel](#) that scan for temperature and other vital signs, [baggage sanitising](#) before security, and even disinfection stations for passengers (as is being [tested right now](#) in Hong Kong). Automated boarding and immigration using facial scans, which were already gaining in popularity, may see quicker adoption as a way to reduce interpersonal contact at the airport.

Needless to say the biggest way this will be felt, especially as passenger numbers begin to grow again, is in longer waits at every stage of the journey. For now, with fewer people traveling than airports were designed to handle, the added pain shouldn't be too great. And the hope will be that local authorities and governments can find a way to minimize disruption and ensure safety while keeping people and goods moving, using a good mix of smart technology and common sense.





Preparing for a trip by staying abreast of developments

Entry and exit requirements as well as guidelines for moving through the airport are changing constantly, so the best way to prepare is to stay on top of those requirements for every destination and be ready for them prior to setting out. Travel managers can provide an invaluable service by helping travelling employees to stay on top of these things.

To start with, travelers should expect temperature scans at multiple points along the journey. These may be carried out by airports as well as individual airlines. Similar checks have been in place for years at a number of Asian airports, and the good news is they do not generally slow down movement through the airport.

We may also soon see that some form of health certification or so-called immunity passport will be required for the international traveler. Some places may make entry contingent upon a negative COVID-19 test result, which could happen before boarding a flight (Emirates has been trialing this in Dubai), or after arrival (Iceland has recently announced they will welcome visitors from this summer and test everyone on arrival. Those who test negative can avoid quarantine.)

Clearly the most important thing will be to avoid travel if any symptoms are present, both for the good of fellow travelers and for being able to count on completing the trip. Being found to have a high temperature or other symptom, even without a positive test, could delay a trip in a significant way.

We can expect some of these measures to become more standardized in the coming months, though that process will likely be gradual. For example just as with the international yellow fever vaccination certificate now in use, odds are good we'll see an international standard for proof of negative and/or immune status to COVID-19. In the meantime, this is a space to watch closely.



Flying

April was likely a low point for the commercial aviation industry in which many airlines saw [90 percent of flights cut](#), or in some cases all planes grounded. Flights are now being added back and it would take some fairly bad news on the virus front for some of them to be pulled again. The pressure will be on for travel restrictions to be loosened so that the airlines can stop bleeding cash, so odds are flight schedules will progressively look more full over the summer.

Initial attempts at social distancing onboard flights, notably by blocking the middle seat, are largely ineffective as they don't actually result in enough distance – and are more aimed at winning back consumer confidence than anything else. As planes fill up (which they need to in order to turn a profit) expect that to go away but a number of other policies to come into effect that will change the flying experience:

Cleaning The good news is that the coronavirus pandemic has ensured that aircraft are now cleaner than ever. The same will be true of most airports, though whereas in the past many airlines may have skipped out on deep cleaning their planes more than once in a while due to costs, they all know that's not going to fly anymore. And many carriers have been vocal about their specific efforts in this regard, attaching brands to their cleaning processes (for instance Air Canada's [CleanCare+](#)) and producing promotional videos about everything they're doing (see low cost airline [Wizz Air's effort here](#)). This may result in delays if an aircraft needs to be turned around quickly, but should largely represent a positive development.

- **Onboard service and amenities** The other side of airlines' war against germs is that passengers on flights for at least the next few months can expect much less in the way of onboard service. Inflight magazines will be removed, and food and drink service will be curtailed. There will also be a boom in touchless payment systems, and don't expect airline staff to grab your passport and boarding pass anymore. The idea is to minimize the number of points of contact between passengers and crew, and from passenger to passenger as well. Travelers should consider bringing their own entertainment and snacks.
- **Etiquette** It's increasingly evident that masks do help to reduce transmission, and many airlines are now requiring masks be worn throughout the flight. Expect that to become standard onboard all flights and in indoor spaces throughout the travel process. Aircraft cabin air is actually much cleaner than is commonly thought (air filters are effective at filtering out even viruses) but of course it is an enclosed indoor space shared with potentially a few hundred other people, so the risk of transmission is there to some extent. Many passengers will be on edge in any case, so courtesy, etiquette, and the wearing of masks, will go a long way to keep things civilized.

Rail

As air travel changes significantly and the process becomes more cumbersome, rail travel may emerge a clear winner, particularly along the east coast of the U.S. Rail in Europe already had momentum behind it going into this crisis on environmental grounds but also as a more convenient way to get places, and that reputation will surely continue to grow.

Not only is rail ideally suited to the shorter trips business travelers are likely to take in the beginning, but trains also potentially offer a more relaxed alternative to air travel.

One reason is that space is at such a premium on an airplane, whereas on a train offering a little bit of extra room on intercity trains is entirely possible without doubling fares. And with regular stops and a non-pressurized cabin there will be an element of psychological comfort, an improvement over being shut in an airplane until the crew decides you can deplane.

Local train services, commuter rail and urban transport of all kinds will be a more difficult question, as these are more difficult to keep from getting full, and most people won't relish being in a packed underground train for the foreseeable future. Smart policies, plenty of service, and innovative steps taken to facilitate cycle and walking trips can help.

In any case, governments will have an added incentive to invest in rail, bring forward timelines for new services and more, and that's great news for the business traveler, especially in Europe. As a result rail may very well be the mode of choice for business travelers throughout the rest of this year where it's available.



Hotels

Hotels are desperate to lure travelers back, and at least when it comes to the major chains, business travelers should find they're taking a number of positive steps. Assuming travel is possible and the flights are there to carry you, the stay in another city should be the easiest part of the journey. And as with airplane journeys, the upside is that hotel rooms will never be more clean than they are now.

Take [Hilton's CleanStay](#) initiative, which assures guests of a thorough cleaning throughout, as well as more opportunities for automated, contactless check-in. All the major hotel chains will be doing the same. For smaller hotels, best to check what their policies are if you're concerned. The odds are good that they're doing something.

Home-sharing services such as Airbnb are likely to suffer in the coming months as there's no feasible way to ensure cleaning practices at thousands of independently owned properties is up to scratch. However, for the owners (and booking platforms) that can find ways to reassure guests, there is no doubt appeal there too – skipping public areas like hotel lobbies and having a private kitchen instead of having to receive room service or venture out for food.

Some hotels have begun offering their many empty rooms up as offices for daytime use for a reasonable fee. This may very well be useful for someone who needs a quiet space for the day in lieu of a room overnight, or even for employees whose offices remain closed but who need a space to work away from home as lockdown rules shift.



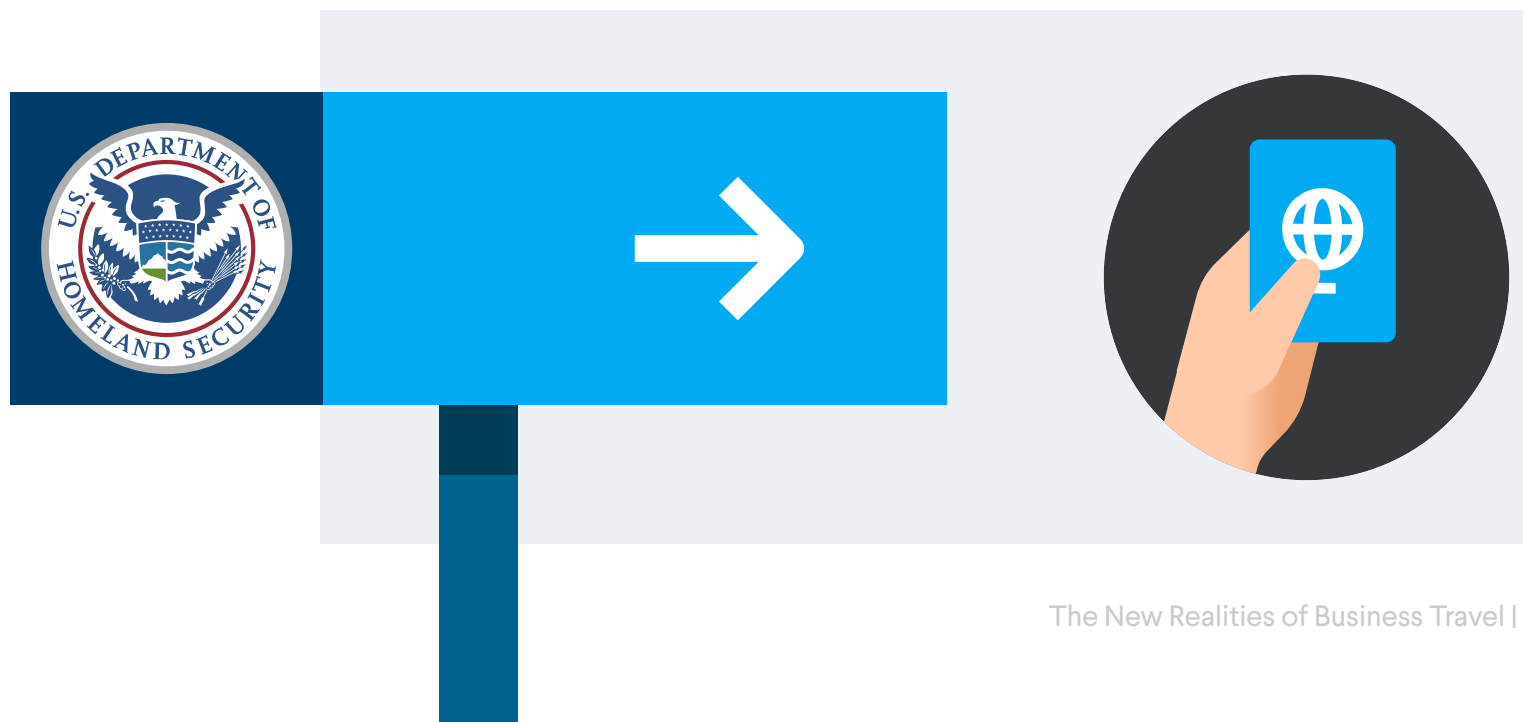
Borders & immigration

Official restrictions across international borders (and even in some cases within the same country) will be the first consideration and potentially the most changeable in coming months. Most airlines want to add flights and welcome people back. The same cannot be said of all countries and cities. Even as business owners may be ready to accept certain risks and get back to work, it may not be possible to enter certain countries at all. In other cases, a lengthy quarantine may be required on arrival.

The headline is that domestic travel will be much more possible and less complex in the near-term, but more distant journeys needn't necessarily be ruled out. Here are the main things to watch for as they develop:

- **National border policies:** These are changing constantly as the pandemic takes different courses in different countries, and may be more complex than they first appear. Some are more conservative than others. For example, Norway's borders are effectively closed to non-residents, but a foreign journalist on assignment may enter – provided they quarantine on arrival.
- **Regional restrictions within countries:** Even as the national immigration service may allow a traveler in, there may be further restrictions to contend with. For instance, travel in and out of the area surrounding Helsinki was recently restricted because it had the largest cluster of infections – so even domestic travel can have its challenges.

- **Quarantine requirements:** Many places that are now emerging from lockdown with a lowered rate of infection are planning to require quarantines, usually of 14 days, for anyone entering, in some cases including residents and citizens. For example, the UK has announced a 14-day quarantine for incoming travelers, including UK citizens returning – however, those arriving from France won't be subject to the requirement. More details will likely emerge in the coming weeks, and plans may also change. France, for its part, does not require anyone from the Schengen zone or the UK to enter quarantine, though anyone from outside must do so.
- **Travel bubbles:** Another hot topic right now is the concept of “travel bubbles” in which countries that feel they have COVID-19 cases under control can join up with others in a similar situation to allow relatively free movement across each other's borders. The most high profile example of this so far is between Australia and New Zealand. We may see this begin to happen more and more within Europe between countries that have similar levels of infection.



The benefits of nimble travel management.

Travel may look very different and change in unexpected ways in the coming months, but we can anticipate things to a certain degree. Business travel will become more complicated in many ways as things get back up and running, and some of the changes may turn out to be permanent. This will likely mean a mix of good (cleaner airplanes) and bad (longer wait lines).

For companies whose work requires employee travel, however, it may be vital to get back out on the road as soon as restrictions ease and it is deemed safe for employees to go and get back. And in these coming months a nimble approach to travel management will be especially important.

If nothing else, it is clear the situation will be highly dynamic for a while, with every state in the U.S.--and every country in the world--facing its own challenges. Certain places may need to add back restrictions at different points in their battle with the virus. For that reason, being agile and on top of the [latest information](#), and able to manage travel in a dynamic way with the latest technology at hand, could make the difference between an organization that is successful in the coming months, and one that is not. With any luck, the most draconian of restrictions to travel will be very much temporary, and this will all only become easier as we move forward.



Resource: [Business Travel Recovery Center](#)

- **Check COVID-19 reproduction numbers between countries or U.S. states**
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