

# Frequent Flyer – Facts and Findings About the Future of Business Travel in 2020 and Beyond

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Expert analysis from Dr Cyril Sullivan, Director of the European Consumer Centre Ireland. This article has been written exclusively for IoD Ireland members.

'... your travel management plan going forward should normalise what before were, in fact, emergency procedures for travel health and safety', writes Dr. Cyril Sullivan, Director of the [European Consumer Centre Ireland](#), in this insightful blog on the business travel market.

Corporate travel, which normally accounts for over €1 trillion worth of annual spending globally, has been reduced by 80%-100% since the beginning of the Coronavirus pandemic. Uncertainty over the evolution of the pandemic itself and the ensuing travel crisis will become a fact of life for future business. Here, I look at how business travel will be affected by these developments, and how it can bounce back with the help of consumer protection legislation and a reasoned travel policy based on employee safety, cost management and travel policy compliance.

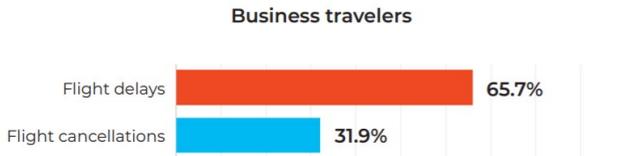
In the medium-to-long term, [epidemiologists speculate](#) that, as COVID-19 evolves differently in different parts of the world, lockdown measures will be turned on and off according to need, which means there will be [windows of opportunity](#) to travel that last only weeks or even days. At the time of writing, in Ireland, the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade is currently advising against all non-essential travel overseas. In terms of business travel, this necessary policy will make planning very difficult; in the short-to-medium term, much of the travel risk management model will depend on the Government's advisory on foreign outbound travel and the "green list" of countries. This begs the question, "How can we plan for this in terms of business development, travel, investment and continuity within certain markets?"

## Business Travel will Continue

Despite pandemic concerns and its economic impact, global business travel and international business development are not going to stop. The business and corporate communities agree that trips are likely to remain essential and continue to be big revenue drivers. The effects will also be positive on the travel industries, too, as business travellers account for the largest share of airline and hotel revenue. Indeed, recent polls in [North America](#), [Europe](#) and [Ireland](#), show that respondents are more likely than not to resume travel in the immediate-to-near future in 2020. One recent EMEA [survey](#) shows that 37% of participants expect to travel domestically within 1-3 months, and 32% may book international trips within 3-6 months. Moreover, [recent research](#) from 2019 shows that companies with a strong travel culture see tangible and significant competitive advantages in customer loyalty and retention, profitability, market share and employee satisfaction.

As business travel recovers and traveller confidence becomes ever more important, duty-of-care considerations will gain greater focus in corporate travel policies. At this point in time, many businesses will look to formalise operational shifts prompted by the pandemic, and turn temporary measures into [permanent strategies](#). For corporate travel managers to navigate this newly unpredictable world successfully, a strong travel policy will have to be both risk-averse and cost-saving. This may entail selecting transport and corporate hospitality providers more carefully, both based on sanitation records and a reasonable refund and reservation change policy. Furthermore, sourcing adequate travel and health insurance protection will ensure that the business doesn't lose money on unexpected medical expenses, extra accommodation and ad-hoc travel tickets, if foreign or domestic travel advice changes overnight.

**What are the most common problems you face when traveling for work?**



## The Impact of Travel Disruption

We've seen this issue escalating to unprecedented levels for all travellers recently. And yet the impact of travel disruption is nothing new. Even before the global pandemic crisis, the [main problems](#) reported by business travellers and corporate travel managers alike were flight delays and cancellations.

Having experienced the corrosive impact of the most recent pandemic, businesses of all sizes must find new ways to navigate the current and future financial and operational challenges whilst rapidly addressing the needs of their employees, customers and suppliers. Alongside resilience plans and available supports, some of the operational costs of doing business can be reduced by consumer legislation, which can be put to good use when dealing with disrupted travel issues, such as cancellation refunds, price changes and finding the right insurance cover for corporate travel.

What are the most common problems you or your employees face when traveling for work?



## Travel Management Plan

While cost management as well as short-notice, flexible options might have been the primary considerations for business travel to date, your travel management plan going forward should normalise what before were, in fact, emergency procedures for travel health and safety. One such essential factor is flexibility when it comes to travel bookings changes, cost and refunds management for lost or cancelled travel, and dealing with transport and hospitality providers more closely and frequently. This will mean ensuring your business deals with providers who offer both price and reservation flexibility and guaranteed refunds, and that your employees abide by airline and accommodation safety standards. It will also require that the travel manager deals efficiently with travel schedule alterations due to travel bans in a way that ensures minimal loss to travel budgets.

Open technology, data-gathering and information-sharing will become key in the process of navigating the post-pandemic world in terms of travel. Within the European Union, for example, efforts are made to help both leisure and business travellers to navigate the post-COVID travel landscape more easily. One of them is [Re-Open Europe](#), a safe travel and tourism platform which centralises up-to-date information in relation to border closures, travel restrictions, quarantine requirements and local tourism operators so that travellers can make the best possible travel arrangements in terms of personal health and safety, and minimal potential financial loss to businesses worldwide.

It is as true now as it ever was: *caveat emptor* – let the buyer beware.

*Credit for images 2A and 2B Source: The State of Business Travel 2020 (Skift/TripActions)*