

Consumerisation of travel: Millennials changing the face of business travel

Millennials will soon become the largest group of travel customers, driving the evolution of the industry with a demand for cutting-edge digital solutions and a thirst for more 'bleisure'.



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According to a recent study by Travelport, UK-based millennial business travellers consume 18 different categories of apps and nearly twice as many as baby boomers. Boosting the trend in bleisure travel, 62% of millennial business travellers also regularly extend their business trips by a few days for leisure purposes.

As the stats show, the days of folded maps, travellers cheques and guidebooks are long gone, says Otto de Vries, CEO of the Association of Southern African Travel Agents (ASATA). “Millennial business travellers are so digitally-savvy and constantly connected, travel experts need to stay ahead of the curve in what they offer, from the booking process to the journey itself. The good news is that industry leaders are keeping up with the rapidly evolving needs of this market, and interestingly, there is still a strong need for a more personalised and tailored travel experience within this market.

“This marriage of human interaction and digital connectivity is exactly where travel experts are finding their niche and equipping travellers with the right bleisure solutions, expert advice and efficient processes to match their expectations,” he added.

De Vries offered his insights into how millennial business travellers differ in their approach to travel and how the industry has evolved to accommodate this group of consumers.

Apps vs maps

The total number of mobile app downloads in 2017 numbered around 197 billion, according to Statista. From Uber to Google Maps, these digital tools equip travellers with on-the-go services that ensure smooth travel. Business travellers no longer have to fiddle with paper maps and pens, when they can use a mobile app like Visit a City. Well-liked by leisure travellers, this mobile app is very clear about the distance between two destinations and how to get from point A to B. It's also free and works offline.

Tech mixed with talk

These days, business travellers are doubling up on travel management company advice and everyday consumer apps to help them get things done efficiently, not only before they book, but also while on their trip. They want technology that is cool, current, and anticipates their needs, but they also want to save time by getting an expert to help sift through the options for them and help get them where they need to go. According to Travelport, 42% of Britain's millennial business travellers admit that a common pain point is being unable to get advice from human consultants during instant booking processes.

It's all mobile

Walk-ins and reservations made by telephone using a printed brochure are pretty much a thing of the past. The majority of millennial business travellers still book online through their desktop or laptop (51%), or a corporate booking tool (42%). One quarter says they book business travel online through their smartphone (27%) - a number expected to grow. This shift has prompted industry leaders to not only invest in apps but to get their sites mobile ready, taking user experience into consideration, improving the look, feel and most importantly, the navigation of their online products, to ensure a smooth booking process.

Instant and automated

The adequacy and availability of digital trip management is a major expectation for millennial travellers, especially those embarking on business trips. They need to be able to access their booking information at all times across their digital devices. Apps like Trip It can curate travel documents into a master itinerary that can be easily accessed online, but millennials need more. They need instant travel updates, reminders, booking confirmations, boarding passes sent to them automatically to their fingertips.

The bleisure trend

Millennial business travellers are driving the trend of combining business trips with leisure, by extending their business trips by a few days so they can experience local attractions.

Companies are slowly starting to realise the value of bleisure trips to recruit and retain millennial talent, while travel experts answer this trend by increasing their bleisure offerings, accommodating business travel budgets and pushing this through MICE travel, says de Vries.

“By enhancing business travel through leisure options like sightseeing opportunities, special events and activities, companies can foster loyalty among the millennial generation and destinations can encourage travellers to extend their stay,” he concludes.

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