

4 trends that will disrupt the status quo of corporate travel

 By Oz Desai

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The only constant in life is change. This was true in ancient Egypt when Heraclitus coined the phrase, and it is definitely true today. 2020 marks the start of a brand-new decade, with exciting opportunities to grow and innovate.

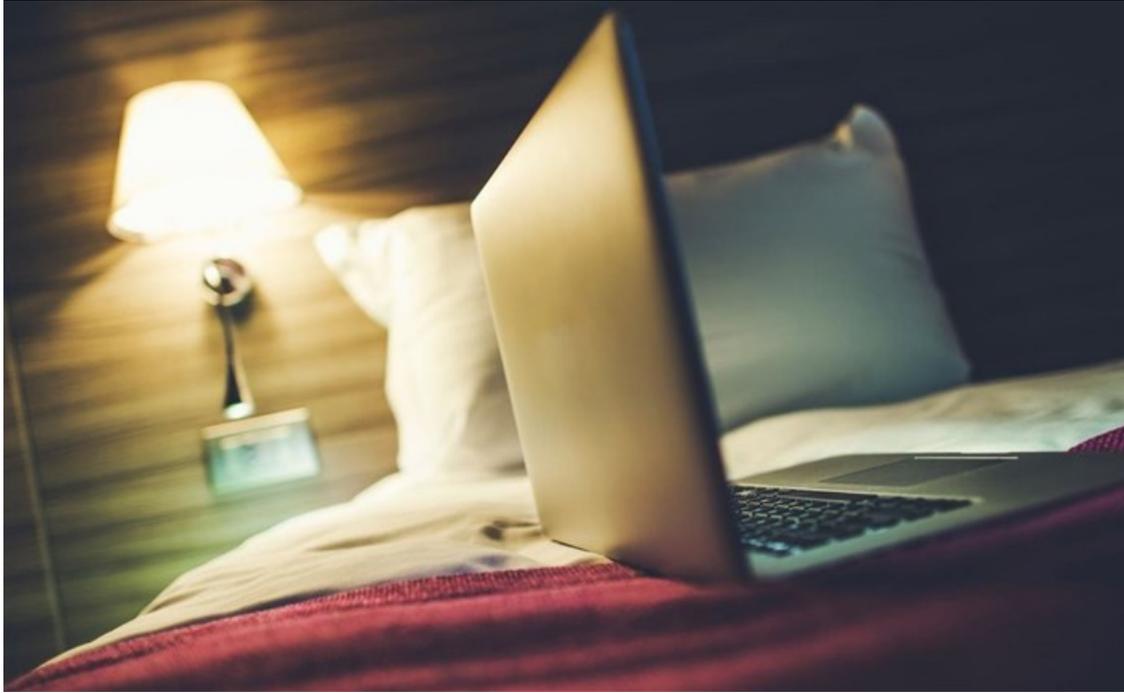


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From technological innovation to personalisation and the sharing economy, here is what we can expect to disrupt the status quo of corporate travel in South Africa in the next ten years.

1. Travel & Tech companies collide

The travel industry is heading for a completely new world, as technology companies make steady inroads into the travel industry. Kayak, TripActions, Google and Amazon are all tech goliaths who are keen to dominate the online travel arena.

We can expect more traveller-centric technology to flood the South African market. A lot more money is likely to be invested in corporate technology in the decade to come, as more tech companies attempt to break into the corporate travel market.

South African companies are already among the top three regional investors in artificial intelligence (AI), with 46% of companies piloting AI technologies, and South Africa's overall investment in AI in the last 10 years totalling US\$1.6bn. This is according to a report conducted by Microsoft.

Instead of seeing the entrance of tech companies onto the travel stage as a threat, we can view it as an opportunity. Any competition in the market is positive as it undoubtedly leads to improved consumer experiences. Already today, the fierce tech competition in the market has led to improved travel platforms for business travellers. Tech-focussed companies bring innovation, but legacy travel companies bring years of travel experience.

2. Personalisation: The focus is on the traveller

One of the main advantages of the 'technolisation' of the travel industry, is that it allows travel companies to drive personalisation for travellers in unprecedented ways.

More data has been created in the past two years than ever before. In fact, this year, it is estimated that about 1.7 megabytes per second of new information is being generated for every human being on the planet, using 50 billion connected devices. This means that our accumulated digital universe of data has grown to approximately 44 trillion gigabytes.

For most travel managers, data and technology are tools that allow them to reduce costs and ensure travellers' well-being. They use data and technology to enhance the travel experience through a better understanding of an individual's needs.

The corporate travel industry is witnessing a significant drive to improve user experiences through technology and data. The industry is aiming to respond to the preferences of modern business travellers with more personalised products and a seamless, end-to-end service.

3. Climate change cannot, and will not, be ignored

Climate change is by far the stand-out risk facing the world over the next decade. This is according to the World Economic Forum's Global Risks Report, which identifies the top threats by likelihood and extent of impact and names failure to mitigate and adapt to climate change as the key concern for the years to come. This is starkly illustrated by the devastating fires still ravaging parts of Australia.

Although the 2019 'flight shaming' movement made waves around the world, cutting out air travel altogether isn't a feasible solution. However, we are likely to see a move towards more environmentally conscious business travel.

In the next decade, it is unlikely we'll see a decline in business travel. Travel will remain an important part of growing any business in the decade to come, as face-to-face interaction still trumps digital meetings when it comes to relationship building. However, we will definitely see a move towards more environmentally-friendly and eco-conscious travel.

A few simple measures can go a long way to mitigate the impact of travel on the environment. Travellers can choose an airline that offers a carbon offset scheme or opt for a non-stop flight without layovers to avoid an extra take-off. Travellers can also choose to fly economy class, pack light and make use of apps like Corporate Traveller's Sam, for example, which allows you to travel paper-free by using digital tools and technology for tickets, hotel confirmations and itineraries.

4. The sharing economy loses momentum in terms of business travel

During the last decade, the sharing economy simply exploded. Travellers shared rides in cars and booked private rooms in other people's homes while away on business.

However, the sharing economy brings a certain number of challenges for business travel in South Africa. Globally, we see that the sharing economy is increasingly incorporated into the travel policies of more progressive companies. However,

whereas certain trends are prevalent in the global corporate market, these trends don't always fit in the reality of our market. The South African market is highly focussed on risk and security, with duty of care being critically important. South African companies want to have the peace-of-mind that staying at recognised and verified guesthouses or hotels brings.

Imagine arriving at your accommodation and finding the Wi-Fi doesn't work as promised, so you can't send off those urgent e-mails. Or you might be longing to take a lovely shower at the end of a long day of conferencing but there's no water coming out of the taps. TMCs have relationships in place with key hotel groups, which allows them to step in immediately if problematic situations arise. With the sharing economy, there's no such recourse.

The next decade will be a time of reality checks and rebalanced priorities. It will be an era of innovation and disruption, with the customer as the ultimate winner.

ABOUT OZ DESAI

With a proven track record in business management and finance, Oz Desai heads up Flight Centre Travel Group's dynamic Corporate Traveller brand in South Africa. Having worked in a retail travel, management and finance environment within the Flight Centre group, Desai's first-hand experience brings great depth to the role of positioning Corporate Traveller as the preferred provider of travel solutions to corporate South Africa.

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