Survey Results

Pre- and Post-COVID Travel Preferences

Prepared by Linda Canina & Nicole McQuiddy-Davis

RESULTS AT A GLANCE

COVID-19 has disrupted travel and the hospitality industry like no other historical event. As travel slowly resumes in the US under strict government guidelines, our survey results suggest that travel-related businesses like hotels are now serving a more cautious guest who appreciates mask wearing, social distancing, and increased cleaning. Respondents' preference for virtual business meetings and using their personal car for future leisure travel increased, while respondents' preference for staying in urban properties for future leisure and business travel decreased. Beyond that, however, results show that travel preferences for price segments (e.g. luxury, midscale, upscale, etc.) and accommodation type (e.g. major brand hotels, alternative accommodations, independent hotels) remained relatively unchanged; that is, respondents who preferred staying in major brand hotels before COVID did not suddenly prefer alternative accommodations like Airbnb, and the reverse did not happen either. Somewhat unexpectedly, however, 95% of respondents indicated they were likely to travel in the next 3-12 months for leisure, business meetings, and professional conferences.

INTRODUCTION

This survey was prepared by the Center for Hospitality Research for the purpose of comparing travel preferences pre- and post-COVID-19. We asked respondents to report on their past travel behaviors, as well as their future travel intentions, for business and leisure travel.

The survey was distributed to the Centers and Institutes' newsletter subscribers and School of Hotel Adminsitration alumni through an email campaign and social media. Respondents were encouraged to share the survey with their colleagues and networks as well.

Responses were collected in Qualtrics, a survey software, from June 24 to July 17, 2020. Respondents were allowed to skip any question. Therefore, some questions have more responses than others. In total, there were 897 individual survey respondents.

Prior to the pandemic, most respondents were frequent travelers with 35% taking 1-3 and 40% taking 4-6 leisure trips per year. Business travelers are well-represented as well, with 30% of respondents taking 1-3 and 33% of respondents taking 10 or more business trips per year.

DEMOGRAPHICS

Of the 897 respondents, more than half (58%) most recently worked in the hospitality industry. Of the respondents who reported their geographic location, the majority were based in North America (76%), followed by Asia (9%) and Western Europe (8%), and the remaining respondents were scattered across the globe as shown in Exhibit 1. Respondents varied in age as shown in Exhibit 2, and nearly three quarters of respondents (74%) reported household incomes of $100,000 or more.

Exhibit 1: Respondents' geographic location (N=603)

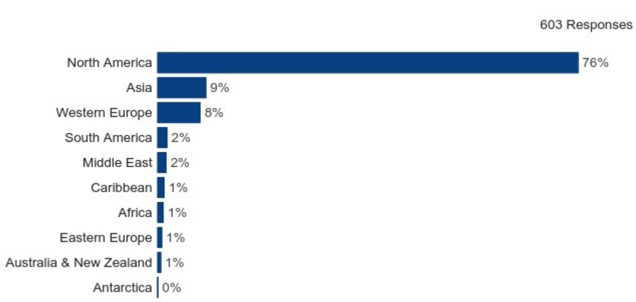
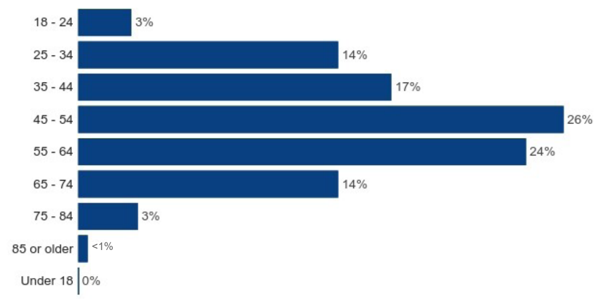


Exhibit 2: Respondents' age (N=603)

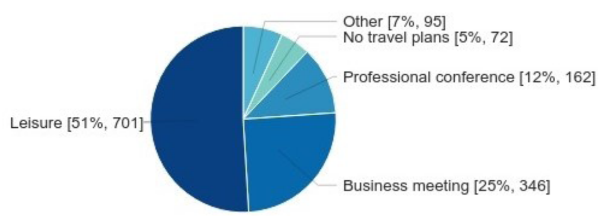


PURPOSE OF FUTURE TRAVEL

We asked respondents for what purposes they would travel in the next 3-12 months, 51% of respondents indicated that they would be traveling for leisure, 25% would be traveling for business, 12% would be traveling for professional conferences, 7% would be traveling for other reasons (classified by respondents as family visits, moving, or job relocations, mainly), and 5% would not be traveling at all, as shown in Exhibit 3.

Exhibit 3: purpose of future travel (N=864)

In the next 3-12 months, for what purpose(s) are you likely to travel? Select all that apply.

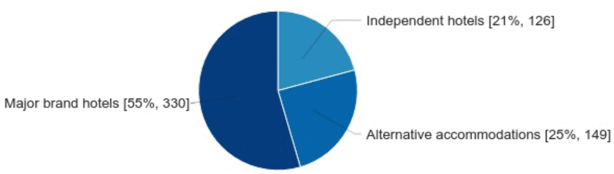


LODGING ACCOMMODATIONS: LEISURE TRAVEL

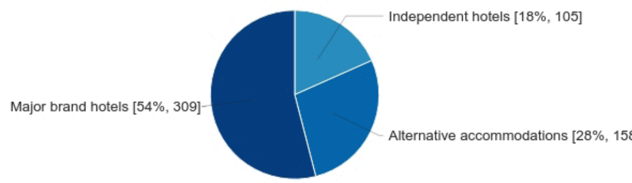
Respondents were asked what type of lodging accommodation they most frequently booked before the pandemic, and what type of lodging accommodation they would most likely book in the next 3-12 months. Overall, respondents indicated they were slightly more likely to book an alternative accommodation like Airbnb and slightly less likely to book a room at a major brand or independent hotel, as shown in Exhibit 4. Breaking responses out by household income and age did not reveal any significant shifts in preferences for particular income levels or age groups.

Exhibit 4: Comparing past (left, N=605) and future (right, N=572) preferences for leisure travel lodging accommodations

Before the pandemic, what type of lodging accommodation did you most frequently book for leisure travel?



If you were to travel in the next 3-12 months, what type of lodging accommodation would you be most likely to book for leisure travel?

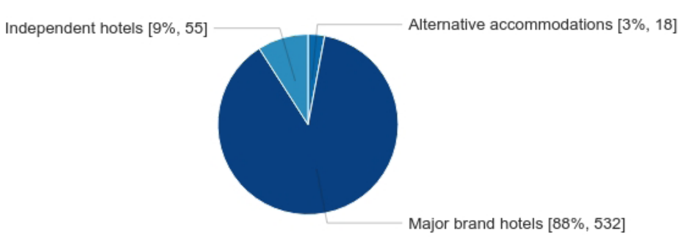


LODGING ACCOMMODATIONS: BUSINESS TRAVEL

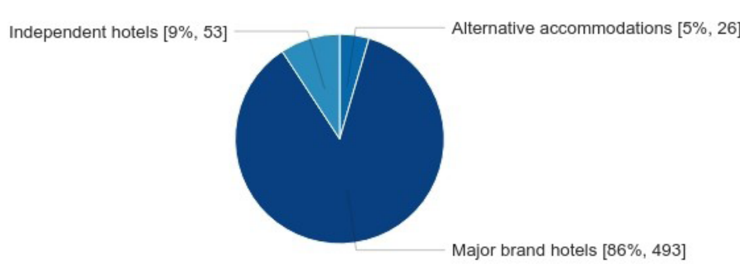
88% of respondents traveling for business indicated that they most frequently booked major brand hotels, 9% most frequently booked independent hotels, and 3% most frequently booked alternative accommodations before the pandemic. In the next 3-12 months, however, 86% of respondents indicated they would book a major brand hotel, and 5% indicated they would book an alternative accommodation. The percentage of respondents booking an independent hotel remained unchanged, as shown in Exhibit 5. Breaking responses out by household income did not reveal any significant shifts for any particular income level.

Exhibit 5: Comparing past (left, N=605) and future (right, N=572) preferences for business travel lodging accommodations

Before the pandemic, what type of lodging accommodation did you most frequently book for business travel?



If you were to travel in the next 3-12 months, what type of lodging accommodation would you be most likely to book for business travel?

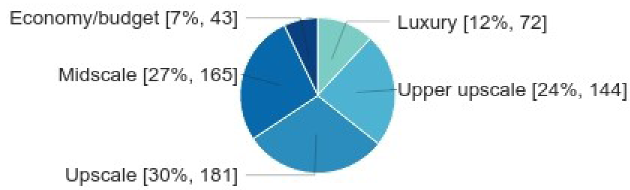


PRICE SEGMENT: LEISURE TRAVEL & BUSINESS TRAVEL

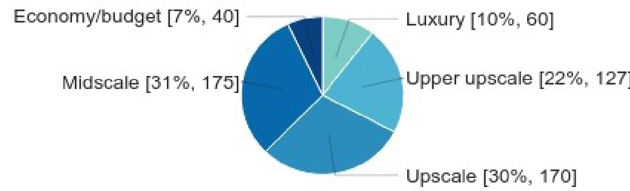
There was a slight decrease in respondents' preference for booking in the luxury and upper upscale price segments, and a slight increase in respondents' preference for booking in the midscale segment for future leisure and business travel, as shown in Exhibits 6 and 7.

Exhibt 6: Comparing past (left, N=605) and future (right, N=572) preferences for leisure travel price segments

Before the pandemic, in which price segment did you most frequently book for leisure travel?

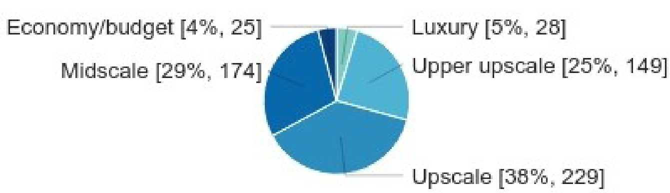


If you were to travel in next 3-12 months, in which price segment would you be most likely to book for leisure travel?

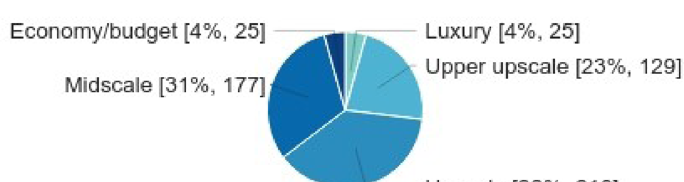


Exhibt 7: Comparing past (left, N=605) and future (right, N=572) preferences for business travel price segments

Before the pandemic, in which price segment did you most frequently book for business travel?



If you were to travel in next 3-12 months, in which price segment would you be most likely to book for business travel?

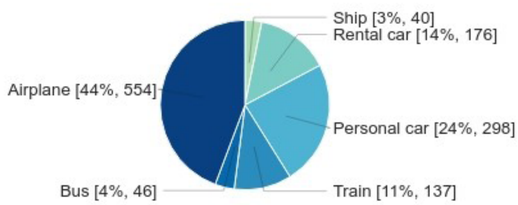


TRANSPORTATION: LEISURE TRAVEL & BUSINESS TRAVEL

Respondents' preference for traveling by personal car increased by 17% for leisure travel and 10% for business travel, while preference for traveling by airplane, bus, train, ship and rental car decreased slighty for leisure and business travel, as shown in Exhibits 8 and 9.

Exhibt 8: Comparing past (left, N=605) and future (right, N=572) preferences for leisure travel transportation

Before the pandemic, which form(s) of transportation did you most frequently use to get to your travel destination for leisure travel? (select all that apply)



If you were to travel in the next 3-12 months, which form(s) of transportation would you be most likely to use to get to your travel destination for leisure travel? (select all that apply)

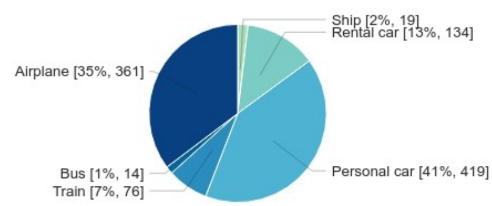
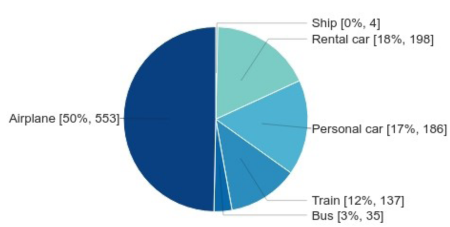
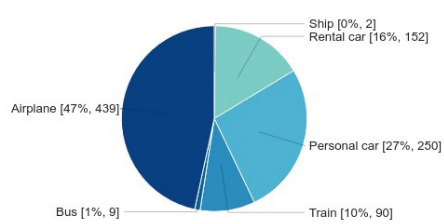


Exhibit 9: Comparing past (left, N=605) and future (right, N=572) preferences for business travel transportation

Before the pandemic, which form(s) of transportation did you most frequently use to get to your travel destination for business travel? (select all that apply)



If you were to travel in the next 3-12 months, which form(s) of transportation would you be most likely to use to get to your travel destination for business travel? (select all that apply)

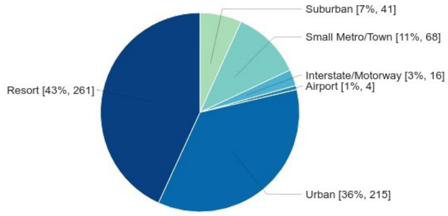


PROPERTY LOCATION: LEISURE TRAVEL & BUSINESS TRAVEL

For both business and leisure travel, respondents' preference for staying at urban properties decreased, while preference for staying at resort, suburban, small metro/town properties increased slightly as shown in Exhibits 10 and 11.

Exhibit 10: Comparing past (left, N=605) and future (right, N=572) preferences for leisure travel property location

Before the pandemic, at what type of property location did you most frequently stay for leisure travel?



If you were to travel in the next 3-12 months, at what type of property location would you be most likely to stay for leisure travel?

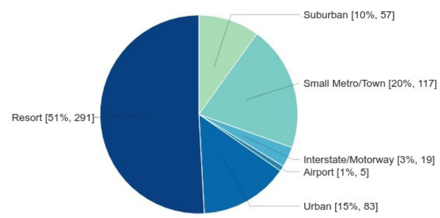
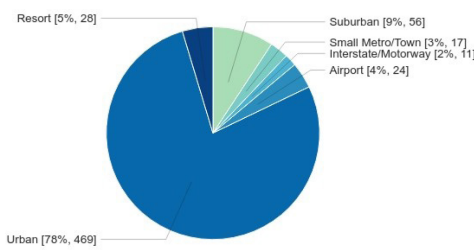
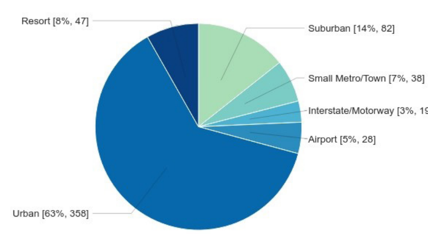


Exhibit 11: Comparing past (left, N=605) and future (right, N=572) preferences for business travel property location

Before the pandemic, at what type of property location did you most frequently stay for business travel?



If you were to travel in the next 3-12 months, at what type of property location would you be most likely to stay for business travel?

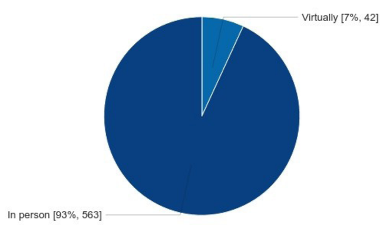


IN-PERSON OR VIRTUAL MEETINGS?

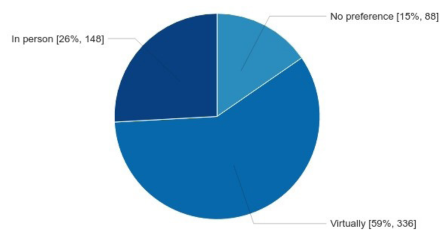
Before the pandemic, 93% of respondents indicated that they attended distant business meetings in person. In the next 3-12 months, however, 59% of respondents indicated that they are more likely to attend distant business meetings virtually, as shown in Exhibit 12.

Exhibit 12: Comparing past (left, N=605) and future (right, N=572) preferences for distant business meetings

Before the pandemic, did you more frequently attend distant business meetings in person or virtually?



Suppose you are invited to a business meeting in a distant location in the next 3-12 months. Are you more likely to attend the meeting in-person or virtually?



CONDITIONS FOR COMFORT

Respondents were asked to list the conditions under which they would feel comfortable staying in a hotel or alternative accommodation, using public transportation, and attending a business meeting or professional conference. The three most common responses in order of frequency for each scenario are shown in the table in Exhibit 13. While respondents noted the importance of cleanliness in all scenarios, it was top priority for lodging accommodations. Masks followed by distance were at the top for public transportation, and distance followed by masks were important for business meetings and professional conferences. For the latter, a vaccine was also an important comfort factor.

Exhibit 13: Most common responses when listing conditions for comfort

Scenario	Most common responses (in order of frequency)
Hotel	clean, mask, protocol
Alternative accommodation	clean, none, standard
Public transportation	mask, distance, clean
Business meeting	distance, mask, clean
Professional conference	distance, mask, vaccine

SAMPLE BIAS

High-income, industry travelers are overrepresented in this sample with more than half of respondents' most recent job having been in hospitality. This is not a limitation, however. Rather, respondents' high likelihood for future travel of all kinds, may serve as a signal to the average traveler that people in the industry, who may be perceived as a more well-informed traveler, are confident in the measures and cleaning protocols that the travel industry are implementing to prevent the spread of the virus. In other words, the average traveler may view an industry person's willingness to travel as an indication that future travel will be safe.

CONCLUSION

Respondents' preference for virtual business meetings and using their personal car for future leisure travel increased, while respondents' preference for staying in urban properties for future leisure and business travel decreased. Beyond that, however, results show that travel preferences for price segments (e.g. luxury, midscale, upscale, etc.) and accommodation type (e.g. major brand hotels, alternative accommodations, independent hotels) remained relatively unchanged.

Changing preferences seem closely tied to the guidance provided by the CDC (i.e. if travel is necessary, wear a mask, physically distance oneself from others, and practice frequent handwashing). Unsurpisingly, respondents now prefer transportation (personal car), lodging properties (less urban), and meeting modes (virtual) that completely eliminate or decrease their risk of exposure to the coronavirus.

Perhaps the most promising takeaway from this survey is that the majority of respondents (95%) expect to travel now and in the near future, and if respondents' preferred travel companies can provide clean environments, mask-wearing, and physical distance, they'll positively contribute to their guests' comfort levels until a vaccine is available.

ABOUT THE AUTHORS

Linda Canina is a professor of finance in the Finance, Accounting, and Real Estate group at the Cornell School of Hotel Administration (SHA). She currently serves as the director of the Center for Hospitality Research and the co-director of the Pillsbury Institute for Hospitality Entrepreneurship.

Linda's research interests include asset valuation, corporate finance, and strategic management. She frequently publishes in the Academy of Management Journal, the Journal of Finance, Review of Financial Studies, Financial Management Journal, the Journal of Hospitality and Tourism Research, International Journal of Hospitality Management, Journal of Hospitality Finance, and the Cornell Hospitality Quarterly. She holds a PhD from New York University.

Nicole McQuiddy-Davis is the assistant program manager for the Center for Hospitality Research. Nicole is responsible for the day to day management and operations of the center, which includes event planning, marketing, publications, and support of research activities. She has worked at the School of Hotel Administration for four years in various academic and research support roles. She has a BA in Criminology, Law, and Society from the University of California, Irvine, where she was a member of the Social Ecology Honors Program.

CHR Advisory Board

Pablo Alonso
Chief Executive Officer
HotStats

Scott Berman '84
Principal & US Hospitality Industry Leader
PwC

Vivek Bhogaraju MMH '06
GM, Lodging Revenue Performance Solutions
Expedia Group

Patrick Bosworth
Co-Founder, Advisor
Duetto

Joy Butler
Senior Vice President and Global Business Unit Owner (Lodging)
FreedomPay

Ian-Michael Farkas
Vice President, Strategic Accounts
Local Measure

Chuck Floyd, P '15 and '18
Global President of Operations
Hyatt

Eliot Hamlisch
Executive Vice President, Loyalty & Revenue Optimization
Wyndham Hotels & Resorts

Tim Hentschel '01
Chief Executive Officer
HotelPlanner.com

Steve Hood
Senior Vice President of Research
STR

Taimur Khan MENG '93
Vice President, GM Travel, Transportation, Hospitality Solutions Team
Salesforce

Balaji Krishnamurthy
Chief Executive Officer
Pure Wellness

Mark Lomanno
CHR Advisory Board Chair
Partner & Senior Advisor
Kalibri Labs

Kelly McGuire MMH '01, PhD '07
Manging Principal, Hospitality
ZS

Dan O'Sullivan
Vice President of Sales, EMEA
Translations.com

Michael Partridge '92
Vice President of Sales & Revenue Analysis
Marriott International

Dilip Petigara
Chief Executive Officer
AccessPoint Financial

Jess Petitt '05
Vice President, Analytics
Hilton

Michele Sarkisian
Partner
Avenger Capital

Stacy Silver
President
Silver Hospitality Group

Dan Skodol, MMH '04
Vice President of Data Science & Analytics
Cendyn

Cecil Staton
President & Chief Executive Officer
AAHOA

Scott Taber '85
Senior Vice President, Rooms
Four Seasons Hotels and Resorts

Adam Weissenberg '85
Vice Chairman and Chief Global Officer Audit & Assurance, Asia Pacific Leader - US Global Office
Deloitte & Touche LLP

Rick Werber '82
Senior Vice President, Engineering & Sustainability
Host Hotels & Resorts

Michelle Woodley '89
President
Preferred Hotels & Resorts

Cornell Hospitality Report
Vol. 20, No. 5 (September 2020)

Cornell Hospitality Reports are produced for the benefit of the hospitality and service industries by The Center for Hospitality Research at Cornell University

The Center for Hospitality Research
School of Hotel Adminstration
Cornell SC Johnson College of Business
Cornell University
Statler Hall
Ithaca, NY 14853

607-254-3383
chr.cornell.edu