

Uncovering the Truth of Business Travel for Women

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“Female-friendly” is not about being treated differently; it is about being treated appropriately says Rheanna-Marie Hall

The best available hotels, the price comparison sites to juggle, and the airport transfer times to fit to a tight schedule; just some of the things to think about when booking that next business trip. But what about the needs of the female business traveller specifically?

Maiden Voyage – in conjunction with the Business Travel Magazine – commissioned the Women in Business Travel report to discover just that. Published in July 2016, the statistics gathered reflect the concerns and issues currently faced by businesswomen every time they travel. The first of its kind, the WIBT report reveals the true needs and expectations of the modern professional woman.

Of the businesswomen who were surveyed, all 205 respondents held senior positions as managers, company directors, business owners, and CEOs. And with assistants now travelling to either attend, or speak at, conferences themselves, they have the opportunity to consider first-hand the nature of what constitutes a female-friendly business trip.

The most difficult reading of the report is also arguably the most insightful. Research done by Maiden Voyage in 2015 found that 1 in 4 women have suffered a negative incident while travelling on business. The WIBT report delves deeper into what this statistic really means. Of the 205 senior businesswomen surveyed, almost one third (31%) have suffered sexual harassment. Other incidents encountered include a high rate of handbag theft (23%) and a comparatively small but significant number of sexual assault and drink spiking. Yet simultaneously 79% of female travellers claim they are under-prepared to deal with such incidents.



These are just a selection of the findings. Awareness becomes prevention, and the report is a clear indicator of where business travel can go wrong for women. Some things will not be in your power as an assistant to control; you can't of course change the way an airline does business. However for additional security and the general wellbeing of your female executive (or indeed for yourself) there are simple and thoughtful measures to incorporate into the next business trip, whether domestic or international, when you book.

Transport

Before booking a car, whether it is a rental, a taxi service, or a private transfer to and

from the airport, do some research into the provider. Key questions to ask are: does the car company have a good reputation with female travellers? For rental cars, is there a manned and well-lit collection and drop-off point? Alongside these practical considerations, the report found that staff attitudes towards female travellers and an understanding of safety concerns were also in respondents' top five priorities.

There are security measures an assistant can actively implement during the booking process. If it is a transfer from an airport you need, agree a password with the driver. This can then be handed straight to your boss as part of the booking detail. It is far too easy for someone

to pose as a driver; all they need is a car and a board with a name on it.

Rail was the most popular mode of transport, with 83% of travellers taking the train for business conducted within the UK. Avoid booking travel that arrives late at night, especially where station security and lighting at the destination are unknown or disreputable. Car-parks, facilities, and safety made the top three for respondents' negative experiences of train travel.

Accommodation

The hotel stay can dramatically alter the quality of a business trip. A restful night in a safe and comfortable environment can mean better performance in a meeting the next morning. Whether the final destination is domestic or international, after travelling with a specific business aim in mind, it is important that the objectives of the trip are met. Having to lean a suitcase up against the room door because the lock appears to be weak, is not going to help!

A hotel which provides the simplest level of security, a double locking door, can prevent the most basic of incidents: unwanted entry. Whether it's the result of an innocent mistake such as a double-booking, or a pre-meditated intrusion with the end goal being theft or assault, two independent locks offer the security – and peace of mind – that a wedged suitcase will never bring.

Location was top of the list when it came to respondents' hotel priorities. Don't take for granted that a modern new build with all the right facilities will be female-friendly and secure. Proximity to major transport links may involve the compromise of an undesirable journey, one which takes you or your executive around the perimeter of the train station and underneath the length of a poorly lit underpass before you can even catch sight of the hotel lobby.

The report highlighted a consensus for better in-room facilities, discretion, and understanding. Women wanted a more general awareness and appreciation of them as a female

traveller, empathetic to their needs. Questions to be asked of potential accommodation are the basic security provisions, location, and facilities.

Attention to the needs and expectations of female business travellers are not all about security and safety, though they do play a large part. With regard to accommodation, cleanliness, good quality toiletries and bathroom facilities, and healthy dining options all rank as making a difference to a woman's experience of a hotel stay. Don't take these details as a given, but proactively go the extra mile when researching. Checking the most recent guest reviews is a simple but effective test for quality in these areas, and TripAdvisor offers users the option to select reviews written only by business travellers.

Destination

When booking a business trip, be it for yourself or your female executive, transport and accommodation are vital; but what about preparation for the destination itself?

64% of female business travellers say there are destinations they would not travel to, such as the Middle East (UAE and Saudi Arabia) and South America (Brazil). Here the need for gender-specific consideration towards business travel becomes apparent. The survey records that if the respondents were men, then their answer would be different. If they were men, they probably would travel to these places.

In a world of increasing globalisation and business expansion overseas, it is likely that at some point in their career women will be called on to travel for business to such locations. The UAE, for one, is rapidly becoming a global centre for business. The best assistance to offer is research of the destination, and undertaking any necessary preparation. Some countries, like the UAE and Saudi Arabia, have legal and cultural restrictions which apply specifically to women, from 'appropriate' clothing to a ban on women driving. A research brief can go a long way to adequately prepare the female business traveller.

Of course, this does not only apply to international destinations. Domestic business travel, particularly travel which incorporates major cities, also needs a degree of preparation. A large and unfamiliar city can be daunting at the best of times, and this is only compounded by the pressure of striving to meet a business objective. Most likely there will be little chance to explore the city at leisure and become acquainted – however briefly – with its workings; and yet a businesswoman will still be expected to navigate her way around. Research of the destination, whether for purposes of cultural immersion, safety, or practicality, should be a staple of the booking process for any business trip.

Ultimately, both businesswomen and their businesses benefit from a gender-specific approach to female travel. Consider the impact of a negative incident such as harassment, potentially leading to stress for the woman and poor performance, or an accidental cultural faux pas – as simple as bare shoulders – which leads to the loss of a major deal. 70% of the 205 women surveyed believe that travel suppliers should try harder to address the needs of female business travellers. Assistants booking travel for their female executives, or indeed for themselves, have the opportunity to begin to address the needs and expectations outlined by the report, as far as they are able.

The Women in Business Travel report set out to uncover the truth of business travel for women, and determine what they wanted to see improve. Its success is in its definition of what makes business travel female-friendly. Female-friendly is not about 'special treatment', but a personalised approach. Female-friendly is not about being treated differently; it is about being treated appropriately.

about the author



Rheanna-Marie Hall is the editor of Maiden Voyage. Before joining Maiden Voyage, Rheanna graduated from Oxford University with a degree in English Language and Literature, and gained journalism and editorial experience with companies and brands such as the London 2012 Olympics, Closer Magazine, and The Writer. Now she oversees all of Maiden Voyage's content - from feature blogs to marketing packs - writing, editing, and publishing respectively.

Maiden Voyage is a unique global online community and network for female business travellers, offering safety advice, city guides, and female-friendly hotel recommendations.

To request a copy of the Women in Business Travel report please email wibtreport@maiden-voyage.com

