



BUSINESS TRAVELER

QUANTITATIVE RESEARCH OVERVIEW

BACKGROUND

In March 2020, the COVID-19 outbreak began to shut down cities and states across the United States, causing most conferences, conventions and trade shows to postpone, convert from in-person to an online/virtual format, or cancel entirely. This drastic reduction in business travel has had a significant impact on destinations, meeting facilities and related industries across the country.

At the end of 2020 and the beginning of 2021, vaccines to combat COVID-19 began to be approved and deployed in the U.S., presenting a turning point against the virus. This development was one step toward the possibility of more conferences, conventions and trade shows taking place in-person later in the year.

As the leading destination for business travelers, Las Vegas welcomed more than 6.6 million convention and trade show attendees in 2019 and, for the past 26 years, was named the country's No. 1 trade show destination according to Trade Show News Network (TSNN) for hosting 48 of the largest shows held in the country.

To reinforce its industry-leading position, Las Vegas sought to best understand business travel sentiment among U.S. business travelers, specifically for the second half of 2021, as the COVID-19 vaccine becomes widely available. To do so, the Las Vegas Convention and Visitors Authority commissioned proprietary quantitative research to address the topic.

METHODOLOGY

A nationally representative sample of 510 business travelers was surveyed online Jan. 8–12, 2021. All respondents reside in the U.S.; are 21 years of age or older; and traveled for an in-person, overnight conference, convention or trade show in 2019 and/or 2020.

Respondents represent a mix of demographics – region, age, gender, ethnicity, household income, education, marital status and sexual orientation. The sample is representative of all U.S. geographic areas and includes individuals from a variety of industries, company sizes and event-attendance sizes.

The average survey length was 17 minutes, and the study's margin of error is +/- 4.3% at the 95% confidence level. The study was conducted by Heart+Mind Strategies, LLC, a national market research and brand strategy consultancy.

KEY FINDINGS

Attending conferences, conventions and trade shows, virtually, over the past year has not provided the experience that many business travelers desire. As a reminder, the research study defined business travelers as those who traveled for an in-person, overnight conference, convention or trade show in 2019 and/or 2020.

Over half (58%) of business travelers express the fact that they are “burned out” on virtual business meetings and events. After experiencing various restrictions during close to a year of the current pandemic, nearly all business

travelers (91%) indicate that they miss the face-to-face interaction of in-person business meetings and events. The virtual meeting experience is different. In fact, among those who attended conferences, conventions or trade shows virtually since March 2020, only 43% say they were satisfied with the experience.

When looking forward, even though many business travelers expect that conferences, conventions and trade shows will be offered in a virtual or hybrid format in 2021, a majority (77%) would prefer attending in person in the future.

Given the recent approval and deployment of COVID-19 vaccines, the survey explored business-traveler attitudes and expectations related to a scenario where a majority of the population has been vaccinated and U.S. destinations are open with full amenities starting in June 2021.

When considering the last half of 2021, a strong majority of business travelers (74%) believe that Las Vegas will be prepared to safely host in-person conferences, conventions and trade shows during that timeframe.

In fact, when comparing Las Vegas against other major U.S. business destinations, business travelers see Las Vegas as the destination best prepared to safely host in-person business conferences, conventions and trade shows in the last half of 2021. One-third (33%) selected Las Vegas compared to no more than 18% selecting other destinations included in the research.

It's important to improve confidence even further with in-person conferences, conventions and trade shows. Attendees want to be assured of the enforcement of health and safety behaviors and protocols throughout their entire travel experience. They also desire that their peers follow COVID-19 protocols, that there is testing with rapid results available, and that crowds are organized safely at their business events.

In addition to holding Las Vegas in a high regard for its preparedness in the last half of 2021, Las Vegas is also the preferred destination of business travelers when it comes to hosting a meeting, regardless of whether it would be held in an in person or hybrid format. One-third of business travelers indicated their preference for Las Vegas, while no other destination included in the study was selected by more than 17% of respondents.

The reason why business travelers prefer Las Vegas is related to how the destination delivers on a variety of business-oriented needs for attendees. **In a direct comparison against other destinations, Las Vegas holds a distinct competitive advantage in terms of being a destination that:**

- Has unique energy
- Provides a memorable experience
- Energizes you
- Awakens your senses
- Provides an experience you want to talk about with others
- Is where you want to go
- Offers an escape from COVID-19 work realities
- Leads to greater interaction and networking
- Stimulates new ideas
- Opens minds to new perspectives

There are opportunities for Las Vegas to further enhance business travelers' perceptions of the destination for in-person conferences, conventions and trade shows by highlighting recent developments and innovations that facilitate attendee safety.

For example, 85% of business travelers feel more confident in Las Vegas' readiness to host in-person conferences, conventions and trade shows when learning that the Las Vegas Convention Center was the first facility in Nevada to receive the Global Biorisk Advisory Council (GBAC) STAR facility accreditation by ISSA: The Worldwide Cleaning Industry Association, the world's leading trade association for the cleaning industry.

Other messages that resonated strongly include the recent Las Vegas Convention Center expansion, which has increased the venue's ability for social distancing and provided more outdoor space (85% more confident); the ability of Las Vegas venues to create "virtual bubbles" around business events as a result of having more hotel rooms and meeting space than any other U.S. city (84% more confident); and the Meet Smart, Vegas Smart initiative, which highlights extensive health protocols that have been implemented to keep attendees' safety at the forefront (83% more confident).

Each of these communications had a positive impact on instilling business traveler confidence.

“Bleisure” travel – a term describing when travelers extend their business stay for leisure before or after a conference, convention or trade show – is an important aspect of generating incremental room nights for destinations. Between 2018 and 2020, over half (57%) of business travelers reported extending a conference, convention or trade show stay with leisure. Of those, nearly half (46%) reported doing so in Las Vegas, while no other destination included in the study had bleisure travel take place by more than 27% of respondents.

Looking ahead to the last half of 2021, Las Vegas remains the preferred destination for a bleisure experience in a direct comparison with other major destinations. Over one-third (37%) selected Las Vegas compared to no more than 15% selecting any other destination included in the study.

CONCLUSION

Given the strong preference for in-person attendance, Las Vegas would be well-served to do everything it can to hold events in person in order to meet the desired experience of attendees as soon as feasible in the coming year.

Collaboration between the destination, airlines, airports, hotel properties, meeting planners and corporations will be critical in providing safe operations and instilling confidence among conference, convention and trade show attendees.

The research study confirms Las Vegas' position as a leading destination for business travelers. This audience expresses a clear preference for Las Vegas among U.S. destinations, and perceives Las Vegas as the destination best prepared to welcome back attendees to in-person conferences, conventions and trade shows.
