The Definitive Guide to Modern Travel Management

How leading organizations are building smarter, more connected global travel programs

DIRECT® TRAVEL

The New Reality of Travel Management

Business travel has never been more complex or more important. Organizations are managing travel across more geographies, balancing rising costs, evolving duty of care responsibilities, sustainability goals, and growing expectations for visibility, compliance, and traveler experience.

At the same time, the role of travel management has fundamentally changed. Today's programs must do more than book trips. They must support business continuity, strengthen governance, manage risk, and provide the data leaders need to make informed decisions.

The external environment is only intensifying these demands. Compared to previous years, geopolitical uncertainty is reshaping business travel, with 76% of travel buyers reporting that global conflicts are having a moderate or significant impact on travel and meeting decisions.[1] As uncertainty becomes the norm rather than the exception, organizations must rethink how their travel programs are designed, managed, and supported.

7 in 10 buyers say that travel management becomes more important during periods of disruption, with responsibilities moving closer to leadership, risk management, and enterprise decision-making.[2]

Yet, most programs are not built for this new reality, relying on booking workflows and regional operating models that were not designed for the scale, connectivity, and real-time visibility needed for modern travel management. Closing that gap begins with understanding what modern travel management should deliver and how to build it.

This guide explores the forces reshaping business travel and outlines the core components of a modern travel management program. From policy and booking to payments, reporting, risk, and continuous improvement, it provides a practical framework for building a more connected, resilient, and effective travel program.

[1,2] GBTA Business Travel Outlook, April 2026

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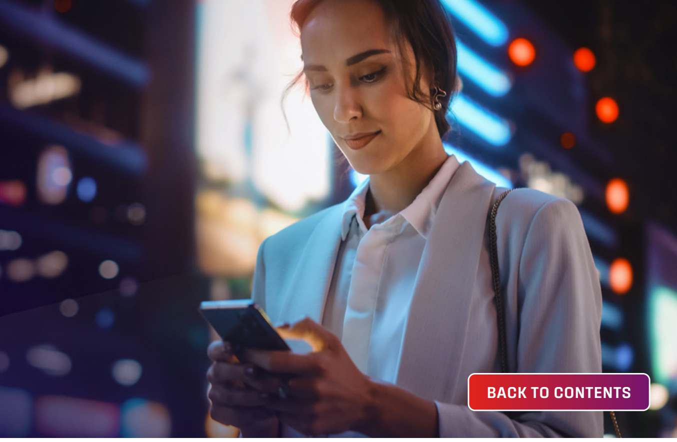
The Modern Travel Program Has Changed



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Not long ago, a well-managed program was largely defined by key metrics like cost per trip, preferred supplier usage, and policy compliance. The travel management function existed to facilitate bookings efficiently and keep spend within budget.

While these fundamentals still matter, the expectations have multiplied. The same program must provide real-time visibility into travelers' location and their spending. It must enforce policy consistently across regions, respond to disruptions quickly, and support duty-of-care obligations, all while delivering a traveler experience that keeps employees booking within the managed program.

The shift is visible in every dimension in which the travel program operates:

Traditional Model	Emerging Model
Booking-centric	Operationally-centric
Regional workflows	Connected global workflows
Status servicing	Continuous traveler servicing
Fragmented systems	Unified operational environments
Historical reporting	Real-time visibility
Transaction management	Journey orchestration

These shifts reflect the new reality of how corporate travel has changed. Business travelers are no longer a homogeneous group. They span geographies, seniority, trip types, and differing expectations, which is more complex than any single workflow was designed to accommodate.

Traveler expectations have also been permanently reset by consumer technology. Employees increasingly judge corporate travel programs against the digital experiences they use every day, from booking with Google Flights to receiving instant support through consumer apps. When managed programs don't match the standard, employees find a way around it. This ultimately erodes the visibility and compliance the program needs to function.

For organizations managing travel across multiple geographies, the challenge is not just operating in more places, but doing so with consistent standards. While maintaining the same quality of service, level of data visibility, and policy enforcement across markets with **different operating realities** can be difficult, striking the right balance between global consistency and local flexibility remains one of the most significant structural barriers in modern travel management.

Why Do Many Travel Programs Struggle?

The challenge is often rooted in how travel programs were built. Rather than being designed as a unified ecosystem, many have grown organically over time as new requirements, technologies, and suppliers were introduced. The result is a collection of capable components that may not always work together as seamlessly as modern travel programs require.

A booking tool that is adopted in one region. A disconnected loyalty program. An expense platform that is not integrated with either. Over time, this accumulation becomes the architecture, and it silently constrains everything that is built on top of it.

> **Only 12% of global/multinational travel managers have a consolidated view of their program from a single data source.[3]**

The fragmentation may manifest differently in different organizations, but its effects are the same.

- Data that should inform decisions is siloed and requires manual reconciliation, introducing errors and delays.
- Policies that should be applied consistently throughout the world are interpreted differently across regions, creating compliance gaps.
- Travelers who should receive a seamless experience instead encounter something that varies by market, booking type, or regional support team.
- Operational costs include inflated servicing overheads, slower disruption response, or weakened supplier leverage because vendor negotiation occurs in isolation instead of at enterprise scale.

These factors tend to remain invisible until something goes wrong. The program seems functional, trips are booked, and monthly reports get produced. What isn't accounted for is the extra effort that is consumed by workarounds, the excess spend from program leakage, or duty of care shortcomings that only become apparent once an incident occurs.

This is the danger of fragmentation, and why it is a structural issue that affects every dimension in which the travel program operates.

- Real-time visibility needs connected data
- Consistent global service requires aligned operational infrastructure
- Seamless duty of care requires reliable traveler tracking

None of these are possible with fragmented technology.

[3] Perfect Business Trip Report, May 2026

Modern Technology, Data, and AI

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For much of its history, travel management technology was designed to capture transactions rather than generate insight. Booking, expense, payment, and traveler data existed across separate systems, often becoming available only after a trip had ended and requiring significant manual effort to consolidate.

As a result, organizations were forced to make decisions using fragmented, outdated information. By the time leaders had a complete view of travel activity, the opportunity to respond, adjust, or intervene had often already passed.

That model is no longer sufficient. Modern travel programs must navigate volatile pricing, geopolitical disruption, complex global itineraries, and evolving duty of care obligations in real time. That requires technology that goes beyond recording transactions to providing the visibility, context, and decision support organizations need as travel unfolds.

The Problem with Fragmented Technology Stacks

Few organizations intentionally set out to build fragmented travel technology ecosystems. More often, today's tech stacks have evolved over time—adding a booking platform, integrating an expense solution, layering on reporting tools, and connecting regional systems as business needs changed. The result is a collection of technologies that were never designed to operate as a single, connected ecosystem.

For programs that use an online booking tool, only 68% say that data flows into a centralized analytics platform. 32% say their risk management data connects to a central system. 26% say third-party benchmarking data is integrated.[4]

The consequences of fragmented travel technology extend far beyond operational inefficiency. When booking, expense, reporting, and risk data exist in separate systems, organizations lose the visibility needed to manage their programs effectively. Policy compliance becomes harder to enforce at the point of booking, finance teams rely on incomplete reporting assembled through manual effort, and duty of care decisions are made without a complete view of traveler activity.

These siloed platforms lead to incomplete insights, less reliable recommendations, and diminished confidence in the decisions that travel programs depend on. Before organizations can fully benefit from AI and advanced technology, they must first solve the challenge of fragmented data.

> *AI is only as effective as the infrastructure and data underneath it. When travel programs operate across disconnected systems and workflows, it becomes much harder to deliver the intelligent, personalized experiences travelers increasingly expect.*
>
> \- **SARAH KUBERRY MARTINO**
> *Chief Product Officer, Direct Travel*

[4] The Perfect Trip Report, May 2026

What Connected Technology Actually Delivers

A connected travel program creates a fundamentally different operating environment. With data, workflows, and servicing connected across the ecosystem, travel managers can make decisions with greater confidence, respond faster to changes, and maintain consistency across regions.

Several important capabilities become possible:

- **Real-time visibility:** When booking, expense, and policy data flow together in a unified system, managers can view what is being spent, where and by whom, and compare it against the policy right at that moment, not at month-end. Real-time visibility improves the quality of decisions by enabling live compliance monitoring, dynamic budget management, and leakage identification.

55% of global buyers who report issues with reporting and benchmarking consistency say it is due to lack of real-time visibility.[5]

- **Connected traveler profiles:** When a traveler's loyalty programs, preferences, past trips data, and policy entitlements are accessible across every touchpoint, the experience is truly personalized. Consequently, that traveler is more likely to stick to the program.

52% of global buyers want hotel recommendations based on purchase history and 51% want attribute-based booking, something only possible when traveler data is connected and accessible.[6]

- **Policy enforcement:** Policy enforcement in a fragmented system is reactive; violations are caught after the fact. In a connected system, preferred suppliers are surfaced, guiding travelers to choose them, which makes the experience frictionless. Flagging exceptions in real-time also reduces the manual effort of policy enforcement.

Among buyers who found managing global programs challenging, 48% cited inconsistent policy enforcement across regions as one of the primary reasons.[7]

- **Clean, consolidated data for strategic decision-making:** Trustworthy data is the foundation for many aspects of a well-managed program: supplier negotiations backed by accurate data, sustainability reporting that can withstand assessment, and duty of care policies built on reliable location data.

> *Clean, trustworthy data is foundational to modern travel management. Without a unified view of the traveler and the program, organizations struggle to make fast, confident decisions.*
>
> -
>
> **SARAH KUBERRY MARTINO**
> *Chief Product Officer, Direct Travel*

[5] The Perfect Trip Report, May 2026
[6] The Perfect Trip Report, May 2026
[7] The Perfect Trip Report, May 2026

The Role of AI and Automation

Interest in AI among business travel professionals is no longer theoretical. Travel managers see clear value in AI-powered capabilities, with 92% interested in predictive travel spend forecasting, 89% in automated disruption management and rebooking, and 85% in AI-powered chatbots.[8] Across these use cases, confidence in AI remains high when it helps people make better decisions rather than as a replacement for human judgement.

That distinction matters. Travel managers are generally comfortable with AI serving in an advisory role, such as surfacing negotiated rates, identifying policy exceptions, or delivering duty of care alerts. Confidence declines, however, when AI is expected to make autonomous decisions on behalf of the travel program.

The reason is practical rather than philosophical. AI can only be as effective as the data, policies, and workflows that support it. In fragmented environments, incomplete or disconnected information limits the reliability of automated recommendations and erodes confidence in more advanced capabilities.

The most successful AI strategies therefore begin with connected systems and trusted data. As organizations modernize their travel technology ecosystem, AI becomes a powerful tool for improving visibility, accelerating decisions, and enhancing the traveler experience while keeping human oversight where judgment and expertise matter most.

What Direct Travel's Approach Looks Like

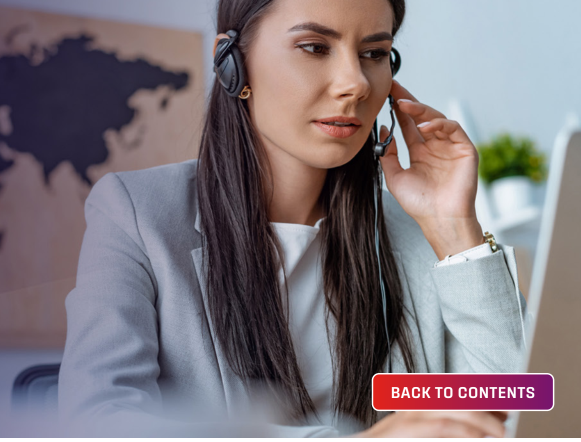
Direct Travel's approach to modern travel management is built around Avenir—a connected platform that brings booking, payment, policy, risk management, and reporting into a single operating environment. Rather than relying on disconnected systems and after-the-fact reporting, Avenir provides the real-time visibility and connected data organizations need to make better decisions throughout the travel lifecycle.

By connecting booking, payment, policy, risk management, and reporting on a single platform, Avenir creates a shared source of truth for every stakeholder. Its open architecture supports connected data today while providing the flexibility to incorporate new AI capabilities as they continue to evolve.

For travel managers, that means greater visibility, real-time insights, policy enforcement at the point of booking, and the ability to respond quickly as conditions change. Travelers benefit from a more personalized booking experience that recognizes preferences and loyalty programs without leaving the workflow. Finance teams gain access to connected, reliable data that supports supplier negotiations, forecasting, budgeting, and sustainability reporting.

[8] The Perfect Trip Report, May 2026

Why Human Service Still Matters the Most



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Technology is transforming how travel is planned and managed, but it cannot replace human expertise.

The strongest travel programs combine intuitive digital tools with experienced travel professionals who provide personalized guidance, solve complex problems, and deliver reliable support whenever it's needed. That combination of technology and service creates the confidence, continuity, and traveler experience that modern organizations expect.

What The Modern Business Traveler Expects

Today's business travelers have expectations shaped by the consumer technology they use every day. They expect to search, compare, and book travel in just a few clicks. They expect their preferences and loyalty programs to be recognized, their itineraries to be accessible in real time, and their travel experience to be intuitive from start to finish.

> **92% of travelers say it should be easier to book travel, and two in three prefer a self-service option.**

Those expectations don't end once a trip is booked. When flights are delayed, plans change, or unexpected disruptions occur, travelers expect fast, knowledgeable support from someone who understands their itinerary and can help resolve issues quickly.

- **Consumer-grade booking tools**
  Intuitive, fast interfaces that match the ease of consumer platforms
- **Immediate support**
  Fast access to help through whichever channel the traveler reaches for first
- **Consistent digital experiences**
  The same quality of interface and service regardless of region or trip type
- **Real-time trip visibility**
  Live updates on bookings, delays, and itinerary changes as they happen
- **Personalized recommendations**
  Past preferences, loyalty programs, and traveler profiles inform every search
- **Mobile-first access**
  Full trip management, updates, and support from any device, anywhere
- **Loyalty and rewards integration**
  Earn and redeem points seamlessly within the managed channel

When Disruption Puts Service to the Test

Day-to-day service builds familiarity, but the moments that define how travelers feel about the program and determine whether they stay in the program happen during a disruption. A canceled flight at midnight, a hotel with no record of booking, or an itinerary that needs to be completely rebuilt at a moment's notice due to a geopolitical conflict. In these situations, the managed program can either deliver on its promise or expose the gap between what it is designed to do and what it can actually do.

Agentic AI has already raised the stakes for what automation can do to assist. Systems can now rebook hotel rooms, find alternative flights without manual intervention, and proactively alert travelers before they even notice an issue.[9]

This can shorten response times and reduce operational load on service teams during high-volume disruption events. But when a situation requires nuance (such as a complex itinerary change under pressure, an anxious traveler who needs more than a confirmation number, or a supplier who won't adjust without direct interaction), a human layer is needed to close the gap.

> **More than a quarter of travel managers report actively considering switching TMCs due to service pain points.[10]**

Human Expertise and Technology Working Together

This distinction between what automation can do and what requires human intervention matters more than it might appear. A McKinsey study found that while 90% of travelers feel confident in AI for general information, trust declines sharply when it comes to resolving complex trip issues.[11]

Rather than highlighting a technology gap, this shift reinforces the complementary roles of automation and human expertise. As AI handles more routine tasks, experienced travel advisors become even more valuable where judgment, empathy, and complex problem-solving are required.

The most effective servicing model combines high-touch human interaction with self-serve capability. Automation assists with volume and speed, and advisors handle complexity and judgement. Neither works as effectively without the other.

> *Excellence isn't just about providing great customer service but creating the right balance of high-touch human and self-serve interactions. Reaching this goal requires a robust and talented team and the implementation of advanced technology.*
>
> - **DAVE BRESLIN**
> *Executive Vice President,*
> *Customer Experience, Direct Travel*

Consistent Global Support Builds Program Trust

For organizations operating in multiple markets, service consistency can be difficult to deliver. Among travel buyers who find managing global programs challenging, inconsistent travel support quality across regions is cited by 60%, making it the second-most-cited challenge overall, behind only fragmented reporting data.[12]

A traveler from Singapore and another from Frankfurt should receive the same quality of support, response time, depth of knowledge, and the same ability to resolve an issue without escalation or delay. When that equality is not present, it can erode the employee's confidence in their company's duty of care standards.

[9] Direct Travel 2026 Forecast
[10] Direct Travel Blog, How to Build a Travel Program That Puts Service First
[11] Skift and McKinsey and Company, Remapping Travel with Agentic AI, 2025
[12] The Perfect Trip Report, May 2026

Delivering consistent service across global markets requires more than expanding geographic coverage. It requires an operating model that connects teams across time zones, enables seamless continuity of service, and equips advisors to resolve complex travel needs with the speed and expertise travelers expect.

A capable TMC brings a personal touch backed by years of expertise, applied consistently, regardless of where in the world a traveler happens to be.

Travel buyers rated technology (54%) and servicing capability (46%) as almost equally important. But servicing remains a critical consideration, with more than one-quarter of buyers identifying it as the more important factor of the two when choosing a TMC.[13]

Ultimately, service can determine whether travelers stay in the managed channel, whether duty of care is genuinely covered, and whether the program delivers measurable business value.

What Direct Travel's Approach Looks Like

24/7 Support Without Handoffs

Travelers receive continuous support around the clock, with every advisor connected to the same itinerary and context — eliminating repeated explanations and unnecessary transfers.

Expertise When It Matters Most

Experienced travel advisors provide the judgment to navigate complex itineraries, supplier negotiations, and high-impact disruptions that automation alone cannot resolve.

Globally Coordinated Servicing Model

A globally coordinated service model delivers the same standards, responsiveness, and expertise across regions — creating a consistent traveler experience wherever business takes them.

Human Care, Supported by Modern Technology

AI and automation accelerate routine tasks and proactive communication, allowing advisors to focus on complex situations where human expertise delivers the greatest value.

[13] The Perfect Trip Report, May 2026

Building a More Cost-Resilient Travel Program

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Controlling travel costs requires a strategic approach to how organizations plan, manage, and optimize spend. Organizations that rely on blanket budget cuts often sacrifice traveler experience, supplier leverage, and long-term program performance. The strongest travel programs reduce waste, improve visibility, and make better decisions without compromising the value travel delivers.

Understanding Today's Cost Drivers

Travel budgets are under pressure from both external market forces and internal program inefficiencies. While organizations can't control every cost increase, they can build travel programs that respond more effectively.

- **Dynamic pricing:** Airlines and hotels increasingly rely on dynamic pricing, creating greater fare volatility and making travel costs less predictable.
- **Fuel costs:** Geopolitical events and economic uncertainty continue to influence airfare, surcharges, and supplier pricing around the world.
- **Inflation:** Rising operating costs and broader economic pressures continue to impact travel pricing across air, hotel, and ground transportation.
- **Policy leakage and hidden costs:** Out-of-channel bookings, unused ticket credits, and manual reconciliation quietly inflate program costs while reducing visibility and compliance.

Rather than reacting to these pressures with across-the-board budget cuts, leading organizations focus on strengthening the foundations of their travel program. Better visibility, connected data, policy compliance, and strategic supplier management create the resilience needed to control costs, even in an unpredictable market.

> *The travel industry must prepare for possible shifts in demand and pricing strategies, particularly on the global level. The key to success in uncertain times lies in agility and adaptability.*
>
> \- **BRIAN ROBERTSON**
> *President, Canada, Direct Travel*

Research backs this up. A study from GBTA and the American Society of Travel Advisors shows that companies with strategically managed travel programs outperform peers by up to 30% in revenue, and that every 1% increase in managed travel spend is associated with a 0.2% rise in revenue.[14]

[14] GBTA and ASTA, Business Travel ROI Study, 2025

Case in Point: Unused Ticket Management

Unused airline tickets represent one of the most common—and recoverable—sources of wasted travel spend. Without a process for tracking and applying ticket credits, organizations often allow their value to expire or go unused simply because they lack visibility at the point of booking.

Modern travel management platforms automatically surface available credits, apply them when new travel is booked, and help organizations maximize the value of every ticket purchased. At scale, recovering unused ticket value can translate into meaningful annual savings while reducing unnecessary travel spend.

Looking Beyond Cost Per Trip

For travel managers running global programs, the budget conversation rarely stops at the level of cost per trip. Well-managed programs require investment in infrastructure, technology, servicing, and supplier relationships. Making a strong case for these not only requires demonstrating their operational efficiencies but also risks that can arise in their absence.

The table below maps the most common areas where an undermanaged travel program creates financial exposure:

Risk Category	Business Impact of an Undermanaged Program
Policy Leakage	Out-of-channel bookings create invisible spend that inflates total travel cost, distorts reporting, and weakens supplier negotiations by fragmenting volume.
Duty of Care Liability	Failure to locate or support travelers during a crisis can expose the organization to legal liability and reputational consequences.
Supplier Concentration	Over-reliance on a limited set of supplier relationships without market flexibility creates pricing risk that compounds during disruption or capacity constraints.
Data and Reporting Risk	Programs that cannot produce accurate, timely spend data cannot make accurate sourcing decisions, satisfy audit requirements, or provide the forecasting visibility finance leaders need.
Sustainability Compliance	As ESG reporting obligations expand, inaccurate or unavailable travel emissions data creates disclosure risk for organizations with public sustainability commitments.
Traveler Productivity	Inefficient booking, service delays, and travel disruptions reduce employee productivity and increase the indirect cost of business travel.

What Direct Travel's Approach Looks Like

In today's pricing environment, effective cost management depends on more than negotiated rates. Organizations need real-time visibility, strategic supplier relationships, and the ability to adapt quickly as market conditions change.

Direct Travel helps organizations strengthen cost control through four core capabilities:

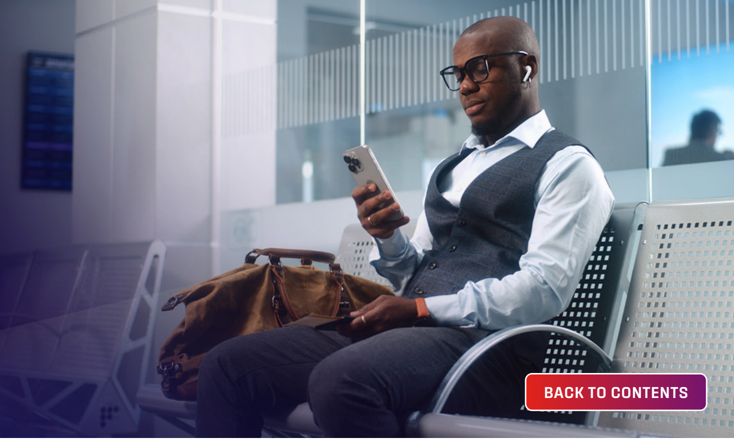
Maximize every travel dollar:
Automatically identify lower fares, apply unused ticket credits, and capture savings opportunities without adding manual effort.

Strengthen supplier performance:
Ongoing supplier management, rate monitoring, and strategic sourcing help organizations improve value as pricing and demand shifts.

See costs before they escalate:
Real-time reporting and alerts highlight policy exceptions, unusual booking activity, and emerging cost trends so action can be taken before spend increases.

Demonstrate business value:
Connected reporting helps finance and procurement leaders understand not only what was spent, but how the travel program reduces risk, improves compliance, and supports broader business objectives.

Duty of Care and Traveler Experience



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Duty of care has expanded well beyond emergency response. Today's travel programs must account for geopolitical instability, changing entry requirements, severe weather, and operational disruptions—all while ensuring travelers receive timely support wherever they are. Having a policy is no longer enough. Organizations need the visibility and operational infrastructure to act on it in real time.

79% of global buyers cite geopolitical conflict as a top travel-related risk, and 75% cite airline disruption and capacity constraints. Most are already responding operationally. The question is whether their programs are built to keep pace.

Visibility As the Starting Point

Effective duty of care begins with knowing where travelers are. For most programs, this is more difficult than it sounds. Bookings happen across multiple channels; some are managed, and others are not. As a result, traveler location data sits in disconnected systems, and the real-time picture that is necessary during a risk event does not exist.

Real-time traveler tracking is now a baseline requirement for any program operating across multiple markets. Without it, the rest of the duty of care framework, like alerts, escalation, and coordination, has no foundation to stand on.

Traveler Experience Drives Compliance

Traveler experience is one of the strongest drivers of policy compliance. When the approved booking path is simple, flexible, and clearly the safest option, travelers are far more likely to stay within the program, which improves visibility, compliance, and duty of care at the same time.

Travel managers can strengthen adoption by:

- **Communicating expectations early**, including travel policies, restrictions, and escalation procedures.
- **Making the compliant path the easiest path**, with intuitive booking options and visible access to support.
- **Reinforcing the purpose of the program**, positioning it as a resource that protects and empowers travelers (not simply a tool for controlling spend).

Turning Visibility into Action

Effective disruption management depends on three capabilities working together: real-time visibility into traveler activity, coordinated decision-making across the organization, and the ability to respond quickly as conditions change.

Here is what leading programs should do:

- **Consolidate traveler visibility** with real-time tracking across regions and booking channels.
- **Define clear escalation paths** so roles, responsibilities, and decision authority are established before disruptions occur.
- **Integrate alerts and two-way communication** to reach affected travelers quickly based on itinerary and risk exposure.
- **Coordinate with security and intelligence partners** for timely, verified information rather than relying on public news sources.
- **Validate reporting and tracking systems** so leaders can act with confidence when events unfold.
- **Test response plans regularly** to ensure emergency contacts, traveler communications, and rebooking processes are ready when needed.

Staying Ahead of Travel Restrictions

Evolving entry rules and border controls make regulatory awareness an operational requirement.

To stay ahead, travel managers need to consider:

- Maintaining up-to-date traveler documents, especially passports, visas, and citizenship details, and flag restricted travelers at the point of booking.
- Building additional oversight into international approvals, including checks for entry limitations, electronic authorizations, and documentation like REAL ID or recent European authorization systems.
- Defining the protocol for quickly pausing or rerouting travel when new restrictions are announced, in coordination with security and TMC partners.

Duty of care extends beyond physical safety. Modern travel programs should also consider traveler wellbeing by accounting for fatigue, mental health, realistic schedules, and recovery time when designing travel policies.

What Direct Travel's Approach Looks Like

Duty of care is only as strong as the servicing partner delivering it. Direct Travel's approach combines real-time risk intelligence, proactive traveler communication, and 24/7 human support with the global reach to respond wherever a traveler is operating. Moreover, Direct Travel's partnership with Crisis24 delivers global alerts along with the ability to monitor threats and critical world events. As the event unfolds, alerts are automatically sent with essential information about transportation, health, weather, security, and how to manage the situation on the ground. Managers can also utilize 2-way communication to stay in touch with employees who are abroad or traveling solo.

For travel managers, this means the difference between a duty of care policy that looks good on paper and one that actually functions when it needs to.

Sustainability as a Core Business Priority

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Sustainability has evolved from a reporting exercise into an operational priority. As pressure grows from clients, investors, employees, and regulators, organizations are expected to demonstrate measurable progress. As a result, sustainability is becoming embedded in how travel programs are designed, managed, and measured rather than treated as a separate initiative.

Many organizations are now moving from long-term sustainability commitments to measurable execution. Regulations such as CSRD, expanding disclosure requirements, and increasingly common sustainability questions in RFPs mean travel emissions data is becoming a business requirement—not simply a reporting exercise. Organizations that cannot accurately measure or demonstrate progress risk creating both compliance challenges and commercial disadvantages.

The Measurement Problem

One of the most common challenges organizations face when accounting for their sustainability efforts is visibility. For most programs, emissions data is fragmented across suppliers and booking channels. Because air travel represents the largest share of most programs' emissions, accurate reporting depends on consolidating data across booking channels, suppliers, aircraft types, routing, cabin class, and fuel efficiency. Many programs are not there yet.

Reliable sustainability reporting begins with reliable data. Organizations should treat emissions data with the same rigor as financial data.

Embedding Sustainability in the Travel Program

The greatest opportunities often come from decisions travel programs already make every day. Booking policy, supplier selection, approval workflows, and traveler guidance all create opportunities to encourage lower-impact choices without adding friction.

Progress doesn't require rebuilding your travel program. Prioritizing direct flights, promoting rail where practical, highlighting eco-certified hotels, and expanding lower-emission ground transportation can all be incorporated into existing policies. The goal is to make sustainable choices visible, practical, and easy for travelers to select.

For travel leaders, sustainability is increasingly a data challenge as much as an environmental one. Programs that can measure, report, and influence traveler behavior will be better positioned to meet evolving business and regulatory expectations.

Policy Design Matters

When sustainability is built into travel policy—from preferred suppliers and lower-emission travel options to emissions data at the point of booking—travelers are more likely to make lower-impact choices without adding friction to the booking experience.

> *Responsible travel starts with program design. The suppliers that organizations prioritize and the choices they make available to their travelers help shape both environmental outcomes and broader social impact.*

Social Impact

Responsible travel now extends beyond environmental impact. Organizations are increasingly expected to consider how travel supports local communities, supplier diversity, traveler well-being, and broader corporate values. These factors are becoming part of procurement decisions, client expectations, and employer brand.

Employee expectations are also changing. Younger workforces increasingly expect employers to demonstrate meaningful sustainability commitments, influencing how travel programs are evaluated alongside cost and convenience. Recent research shows that for Gen Z travelers especially, sustainability is strongly connected to identity and purpose, influencing their preferences for destinations, suppliers, and modes of transport.[15]

For travel managers, that means incorporating sustainability into decisions that already happen every day—supplier selection, travel policy, preferred hotels, approval workflows, and traveler communications. Sustainable travel becomes part of how the program operates rather than a separate initiative.

What Direct Travel's Approach Looks Like

Through Direct View Consulting, Direct Travel supports organizations at each stage of the sustainability journey. The goal is to treat sustainability as an integrated capability that aligns with the organization's broader ESG commitments.

Stage 1: **Measure**	Stage 2: **Strategize**	Stage 3: **Empower**
Establish a GHG emissions baseline across all travel spend. Consolidate air, hotel, ground, and rail data to understand your program's true environmental footprint before setting targets.	Build a roadmap for reduction. Evaluate supplier sustainability credentials, develop low-carbon travel policies, identify SAF opportunities, and design offset programs aligned with international standards.	Make sustainability visible at the point of booking. Surface emissions data, flag higher-impact routing choices, and give travelers the context to make lower-impact decisions without sacrificing convenience.

[15] Global Hotel Alliance and Skift, 2026 Travel Trends, 2025

Building a More Connected Global Program

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Many multinational organizations still operate as a collection of regional travel programs rather than a globally connected one. Different systems, policies, suppliers, and reporting structures make it difficult to deliver consistent traveler experiences, maintain visibility, and manage travel strategically across markets.

Fragmented content and distribution are rated as the top operational difficulty by global buyers, with 65% reporting it as a challenge, ahead of data consolidation, multi-currency complexity, and managing multiple TMC relationships.[16]

Centralization Trap and The Connected Global Program

The instinctive response to fragmentation is to standardize everything—centralizing policy, suppliers, technology, and decision-making. While this creates consistency, it can also introduce new problems. Preferred suppliers that perform well in one market underperform in another. Policy framework designed for one operational context may not work well with another. Travelers' satisfaction also declines when regional nuance is eliminated from the program to adopt a one-size-fits-all model.

> *The goal is not to eliminate regional flexibility. It is to build a globally coordinated travel program that can scale consistently across markets while remaining responsive to local needs and operational realities.*
>
> \-
>
> **CHRISTINE SIKES**
> *COO, Direct Travel*

The difference between standardization and coordination is where the strongest global programs separate themselves. Successful organizations establish consistent global standards while giving regional teams the flexibility to adapt those standards to local regulations, supplier markets, traveler expectations, and operating realities.

[16] The Perfect Trip Report, May 2026

The Gap Between Global Vision and Reality

What "Connected" Looks Like	What Makes Connection Difficult
One governance model with clear global and regional ownership	Most programs have evolved organically, and regional teams have autonomy and local relationships they are reluctant to let go
Consolidated supplier agreements that also accom-modate local markets	Global deals often sacrifice regional content or pre-ferred local suppliers, creating leakage
Booking platform that supports global policy and local content	Most OBTs optimize for either local flexibility or global consistency, rarely both
Connected, real-time reporting across all markets	Offline bookings and bookings from regional tools create gaps that make global reporting unreliable
Servicing model that maintains quality across time zones	Maintaining quality support for all travelers across multiple regions is difficult to execute

What Direct Travel's Approach Looks Like

For organizations operating globally, the TMC relationship is one of the most important factors available for closing the gap between regional fragmentation and global coordination. A TMC that brings genuine in-market expertise as well as a unified service infrastructure is what makes the difference between a program that functions globally and one that appears to.

Direct Travel combines global account management, regional expertise, and a unified technology platform so organizations can deliver consistent service worldwide without sacrificing local flexibility. Through Avenir and our expanded global footprint, clients gain connected reporting, standardized governance, and in-market support across every region they operate.

The Next Era of Managed Travel

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The challenges reshaping business travel are no longer temporary. Geopolitical uncertainty, rising costs, evolving traveler expectations, sustainability commitments, and rapid advances in technology have permanently changed what organizations expect from their travel programs.

Technology will continue to reshape how travel programs operate, but lasting success depends on the foundation beneath it. Connected data, consistent governance, global coordination, and experienced service give organizations the visibility, resilience, and confidence to make better decisions at every stage of the journey.

Travel management now plays a broader role across the business. It helps organizations control costs, support travelers, strengthen compliance, manage risk, and provide leadership with the insights needed to respond quickly as conditions change.

Organizations that invest in a connected travel program today will be better positioned to adapt, scale, and meet the demands of tomorrow.

Ready to build a more connected travel program?

Whether you're modernizing an existing program or evaluating a new travel management partner, Direct Travel can help you build a connected, globally coordinated travel program designed for today's business environment.

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