The Future Of Business Travel: Key Trends HR Leaders Must Prepare For In 2026

As global business travel accelerates into a new phase of maturity, 2026 is shaping up to be a defining year for corporate mobility. What was once a primarily logistical function - booking flights, hotels and expenses - is now a strategic pillar of workforce performance, talent attraction and retention, well-being, risk management and organisational culture.

For international HR leaders, business travel is no longer solely a procurement issue. It is a people issue. A safety issue. A productivity issue. And - increasingly - a brand issue.

From geopolitical volatility and climate responsibility to AI-driven travel management and employee well-being, the corporate travel ecosystem is being reshaped at speed. Organisations that fail to adapt will expose their people to unnecessary risk, operational friction and dissatisfaction. Those that lead will unlock safer travel, happier employees and measurable performance gains.

KEY BUSINESS TRAVEL TRENDS

1. Traveller Safety Is Becoming A Strategic Priority, Not A Compliance Exercise

Duty of care is moving beyond policy documents and insurance clauses. In 2026, organisations are expected to actively demonstrate how they protect employees before, during and after travel, even when they choose to blend business trips with mini breaks or family holidays.

Key shifts include:

- Real-time risk intelligence and location tracking
- Dynamic risk scoring for destinations
- Integrated emergency response protocols
- Proactive disruption management against strikes, natural disasters, extreme weather conditions and political unrest, for example.

The changing corporate travel landscape can present challenges including turbulent geopolitical situations and visa and entry requirements, as well as the impact of natural disasters and extreme weather conditions on itineraries. Effective travel programme and traveller risk management requires solid understanding of environmental and political destination risks and gives employees 24/7 support with the right processes and protocols in place.

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The focus on duty of care and risk management in corporate travel has never been sharper. Whether employees are travelling domestically or internationally, it is vital for HR managers to have a robust support network and strategy in place to manage disruptions, minimise risk and protect their greatest asset - their people - while also being charged with managing internal resourcing and operational changes.

2. Traveller Experience Is Now An Employer Brand Differentiator

Today's workforce places greater emphasis on work-life balance, well-being, purpose, employer transparency and aligned values (with review platforms like Glassdoor and social channels so easily accessible, brands simply cannot fudge their values; they must live them).

Employees enter the workforce with evolving expectations, and they move on quickly if/when those expectations aren't met. And - with hybrid and remote working now the norm - they need more intentional ways to connect with colleagues and the company culture.

Increasingly, business travel is being seen as a key element of the employee value proposition especially for high-mobility roles, global teams and leadership pipelines.

Many employees (especially younger people and those early in their careers) see business travel as an opportunity to grow, connect with colleagues and the company culture, find meaning in their roles, and a welcome opportunity to blur work life balance by extending work trips for leisure.

Business travel directly affects employee satisfaction, engagement and retention, and more and more companies are now recognising that business travel plays a quiet but influential role in attraction and retention.

Leading organisations are now designing travel programmes that prioritise:

- Autonomy, flexibility and simple support tech
- Personalised travel options – key for millennials and Gen Z
- Mobile first booking and seamless digital journeys – a basic expectation of younger employees
- Reduced cognitive load to improve well being and – indirectly – productivity

- Clarity to improve compliance and reduce leakage
- Support when things go wrong.

3. AI And Automation Is Reshaping Travel Management

Artificial intelligence is transforming corporate travel from an operational function into a predictive system.
Emerging capabilities include:

- Predictive disruption alerts
- Automated rebooking
- Personalised travel recommendations
- Risk-triggered routing changes
- Smart expense auditing.

For HR teams, this means:

- Less administrative burden
- Better traveller experiences
- Improved data visibility
- Stronger policy compliance.

AI will not replace human business travel managers, but it will fundamentally change how programmes are designed, governed, measured, communicated and optimised.

4. Sustainability Moves From Aspiration To Accountability

Sustainable travel is no longer about carbon offsets alone. In 2026, organisations are being judged on measurable impact. In Europe, for example, corporates may introduce a rail-first policy for domestic travel as opposed to taking very short flights.
Key developments include:

- Carbon budgeting for travel
- Sustainable supplier procurement
- Rail-first travel policies
- Data-driven emissions reporting
- ESG-aligned travel frameworks.

HR leaders now play a role in aligning mobility strategies with:

- Corporate ESG goals
- Investor expectations
- Talent attraction
- Brand reputation.

Travel policy is becoming climate policy.

5. Bleisure And Flexible Mobility Become Embedded Norms

Bleisure travel (the blending of business and leisure travel) is not new, but the line continues to blur. This is why the most forward-thinking business travel programmes support:

- Bleisure extensions, where possible and relevant
- Remote work mobility, again where possible, but employers are increasingly allowing staff the flexibility to work from 'anywhere' for certain periods each year
- Hybrid travel models
- Multi-location working.

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This creates new HR challenges around:

- Insurance
- Tax
- Visas
- Compliance
- Well-being
- Data protection and cyber security
- Risk mitigation.

But it also unlocks powerful benefits:

- Improved well-being, including employees feeling empowered and more valued
- Higher attraction and retention levels
- Global talent access
- Workforce resilience.

6. Data Becomes The Foundation Of Intelligent Travel Strategy

Modern business travel programmes are built on insight, and data – access to it and the ability to analyse it in useful ways – is king. Organisations are increasingly using travel data to:

- Identify - and prevent - burnout risk
- Track productivity impact
- Optimise travel spend and identify cost-cutting opportunities
- Improve safety outcomes
- Enhance policy design.

For HR leaders, travel data is a strategic workforce planning asset so it's crucial for HR to work closely with their business travel tech providers, whether that's through a TMC (travel management company), third party supplier or internally.

Designing a modern corporate travel programme is complex, especially if it's global and even if it's being managed through a TMC. Business Travel Show is your shortcut to innovation, connecting you with the information, suppliers, tech stacks and experts you need to create, refine or overhaul your policies.

They bring together the entire travel ecosystem in one place:

- Travel management companies
- Airlines
- Hotel groups
- Risk and security providers
- Travel technology platforms
- Expense management systems
- Sustainability specialists
- Mobility consultants.

Even better, Business Travel Show takes place all over the world so, wherever you are, there's one at hand to help you. In 2026, the global calendar offers three anchor events:

- **Business Travel Show Asia Pacific – 14-15 April**
- **Business Travel Show Europe –24-25 June**
- **Business Travel Show America – 14-15 October** The future of business travel: Key trends HR leaders must prepare for in 2026.

This year, Business Travel Show - will identify and share key business travel trends HR teams must grasp in 2026. In addition to delivering a practical conference programme, the Business Travel Show events are the perfect place to find the suppliers and short cuts you need to build a future-ready corporate travel programme that protects and performs.

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