



# Nordic Business Travel Report

Issue 2025



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# Executive summary

Business travel is on the rise, and companies face the challenges of increasing travel costs, ensuring employee well-being, and meeting sustainability goals. By utilising technology, prioritising health, and effectively managing risks, businesses can better prepare for potential losses, accidents, or incidents.

The business travel landscape is evolving rapidly, influenced by global events, regulatory changes, sustainability initiatives, and technological advancements. These diverse transformations require organisations to reassess their travel risk management frameworks, ensuring that employee safety measures are robust, adaptive, and aligned with regulatory and risk management standards.

When managing travellers and their safety, employers have a legal and ethical duty to identify and assess risks and hazards they may face during their journey. Companies can establish various measures and strategies, as well as practical guidelines, to mitigate potential risks and their impacts. Planning and implementation of necessary services are recommended to be in place for any incidents, accidents, or illnesses that may arise during business travel by company employees. This principle extends further to travel safety management where the development of action and recovery plans in case of emergencies are formulated. It is of high importance for companies to foster a proactive safety culture, with this mindset extending to business travel. Adherence to the various safety protocols ideally remain consistent and adapt accordingly whether employees are traveling or working onsite.

The COVID-19 pandemic, ongoing conflicts such as the war in Ukraine, and environmental crises have profoundly changed global mobility, compelling organisations to prioritise safety, adaptability, and sustainability. Moreover, the surge in remote work has shifted traditional travel patterns, promoting more flexible working arrangements and locations.

In response to the present dynamic conditions, the demand for robust and adaptable travel-related services for globally mobile employees is at an all-time high. Essentially, the increase in extreme weather events such as hurricanes and wildfires, driven by climate change, necessitates effective crisis management and adaptable travel policies.

This report seeks to provide insights into the significant shifts in both Nordic and global travel dynamics, including tightened travel regulations, expanded sustainability policies, and a broader commitment to Duty of Care—encompassing mental health support and digital security for travelling employees. Additionally, geopolitical tensions, along with increased sensitivity to social and cultural issues, are compelling critical updates to existing travel policies.

# 1. Introduction

Business travel continues to be a regular part of working life. Employees commonly travel as a necessity in their day-to-day work. This is why employers must carefully evaluate potential risks associated with business travel, including health, safety, and security concerns, to ensure comprehensive risk mitigation strategies are in place.

Our report assesses the current state of business travel within the Nordics and globally, addressing evolving responsibilities and the need to maintain and update travel risk management strategies and insurance models. By consolidating analysis of real-world claims data and insights, along with perspectives from insurance and risk management experts, clients, and a global network of partners, we provide actionable recommendations to meet the diverse needs of employers and their travelling employees.

While business travel is an essential part of maintaining and developing business operations, professional networking, and e.g., skills development and travelling for seminars or training purposes, it can also result in negative impacts on the employee's well-being and health (Corporate Business Travel, 2023). In fact, research has shown that there are several health implications, with exhaustion (32%), stress (30%), homesickness (29%) and anxiety (28%) being the most common symptoms experienced by travelling employees (World Travel Protection, 2024).

According to research at Columbia University, other problems can emerge from extensive business travel such as an increase in smoking and sleep deprivation. Travel disrupts circadian rhythms, leading to irregular sleep patterns and negatively influencing dietary habits and personal hygiene, further contributing to long-term health concerns. It can be deduced that frequent travel has an overall impact on an employee's concerns over their working conditions, as fatigue and health issues begin to emerge.

“ In this report, we seek to understand; What are the most effective strategies for businesses to mitigate travel risks for their employees?



## 1.1. Trends in business travel

One emerging trend is the growing capability to conduct virtual meetings, reducing the need for frequent in-person interactions. This shift has enabled companies to reconsider the necessity of non-essential travel, prioritising cost-efficiency and environmental sustainability.

In addition, the concept of "bleisure" travel is becoming more popular, where employees blend business trips with leisure activities. Companies are increasingly accommodating this by offering more flexible travel policies, recognising the potential benefits for employee well-being and job satisfaction, while still maintaining productivity.

Travel has been a constant feature of both business and personal life, but the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic brought international tourism to a standstill, with airport arrivals plummeting by approximately 72% from 2019 to 2020. Although global tourism is recovering as COVID-19 risks decrease, travel patterns have shifted, with some regions and sectors still lagging below pre-pandemic levels, especially in corporate travel, where hybrid work models have reduced the need for business trips. More recently, following Russia's attack on Ukraine, as well as tensions in the Middle East, the potential for terrorist attacks remains very high, thus many countries are advising travellers to be extra cautious when travelling.

Other factors such as economic downturns and social inequality can also have an impact (Passante, 2021). It is therefore valuable to consider both new and old risks (political instability, environmental hazards, or social unrest) that have risen alongside terrorism and war, all of which make implementing precautionary actions that employees can take when travelling increasingly important.

Many companies have sustainability goals concerning both internal and external business practices, such as employees taking the train instead of flying if possible (Pratt, L. 2023). This is not only more sustainable from an environmental perspective, but often economically as well. What has followed is a need for employees to justify certain trips and why they might be necessary.

There are some differences between business and leisure travelling. Among these are the most common injuries. For leisure travel, the most frequent injuries are often sport related along with heatstroke and traffic accidents. Some of these are, of course, also possible during business travel.



2.

## Travelling for business

Risk management, travel management, and security management are crucial functions in any company with employees who travel for work. While companies have a solid understanding of their insurances and the applicable conditions, questions still arise whenever an incident occurs.

### 2.1. Ensuring duty of care

To effectively implement Duty of Care, companies are adopting advanced technological tools and data analytics. Furthermore, organisations are developing customised travel safety protocols based on the geopolitical and environmental risks specific to each destination. This not only ensures proactive risk management and legal compliance but also builds trust among employees, as they feel more secure knowing that their employer has robust, responsive systems in place to protect their well-being and safety.

As Duty of Care (DoC) is an organisation's moral and legal responsibility to protect its employees against threats and risks when they act on a global level, it is important to define the acceptable levels of risk exposure for employees, ensuring that any potential hazards are mitigated through comprehensive risk assessments and strategic decision-making processes. This question becomes particularly challenging when companies hire local personnel in the areas where they operate. What responsibility do they have to ensure that they also have adequate insurance? This issue can be viewed as more of a moral question than anything else.

Companies must take responsibility for the safety of all their employees when they are out traveling. To ensure this, many work to make sure that travel only occurs when necessary and only to specifically approved areas. To fulfill their Duty of Care obligations, companies increasingly depend on a combination of comprehensive travel insurance policies and partnerships with specialised travel security partners that provide employee



training, real-time risk assessments and alerts, emergency response services, and crisis management support. Security partners can include emergency support as well as risk assessment service providers, for example.

Combining the requirements of GDPR along with other privacy protection regulations in accordance with the company's Duty of Care is an ongoing challenge for many. Balancing these responsibilities while ensuring compliance with local laws and regulations may differ from country to country. All aspects must be taken into account while prioritising employee safety and well-being.

## 2.2. Have a clear policy in place and communicate it effectively

When planning and creating travel guidelines for employees, it is important to identify and understand the local risks in the most common destinations. For these locations, it is essential to conduct regular reviews of both existing and emerging risks to ensure the company remains prepared and can implement timely, appropriate safety measures.

If a company has offices in multiple countries, it is important to maintain regular dialogue with the local teams to ensure that the company is always up to date on any new and existing risks. For less common destinations, it is important for an employer to know the risks their employees may face in the destination country.

## 2.3. Understand the needs of employees and employers

In addition to addressing immediate safety and health concerns, companies must also consider the long-term effects of frequent business travel on employees' mental and physical health, as well as their work-life balance. Extended time away from home can lead to burnout, stress, and decreased job satisfaction, which can negatively impact overall productivity. Organisations are recommended to implement support systems, including counseling services and regular wellness check-ins, to proactively address these issues. Furthermore, offering flexible travel policies, such as allowing longer recovery times after extended flights or trips, can help maintain employee well-being and overall engagement.

Employees and employers require certain regulations to ensure that people traveling for work do so safely. This needs to be a comprehensive approach, sometimes even beyond any given country's respective laws and legislations. The importance of a unified duty of care on a global level is of significance in situations where employees are sent out to, for example, build a factory in a rural area and urgent medical care is suddenly needed. To be able to send an employee to a proper hospital with sufficient intensive care is an important factor for companies. Access to adequate medical care is not available in all locations, making it crucial for companies to secure global health insurance plans that include emergency medical evacuation and relocation services, ensuring employees receive the best possible treatment, no matter where they are positioned.

If for any reason an employee is not able to travel and must cancel a trip due to illness or similar, proper cancellation cover ensures a full reimbursement of any costs not refunded by the airline or travel agency. In addition, having a travel assistance partner who provides online tracking via mobile applications is of high value to ensure employees' safety, and is voluntary for employees to use. This is a good way not only locate employees in the event of accident or emergency, or if they need to be contacted, but also a means of analysing where employees travel to most often and the countries' respective risks and hazards to develop a useful risk management tool.

It is equally important to put emphasis on the physiological and psychological effects of travel on employees. This includes traveling over different time zones, air quality, and eating and drinking new or unfamiliar foodstuffs and beverages. All of these factors can have negative impacts, eventually culminating in employees becoming sick by exposure to abnormal materials, foods and conditions. For example, the symptoms jet lag can be insomnia,

fatigue, irritability and digestive problems. It takes a day or two for the body to adjust to the new time zone, and the complications arising from the strain of travel should be carefully considered (Suni & Singh, 2024).

Employees are ideally provided with a single point of contact to streamline communication, ensuring that all health, safety, emergency, or logistical issues are efficiently addressed in various situations. A dedicated contact and clear communication protocols reduce confusion and ensure consistent and prompt responses, enabling employees to navigate unforeseen challenges during their travels.

## 2.4. Preparedness is key when travelling to less common locations

Before beginning business trips, particularly to high-risk or remote locations, it is crucial for companies to prioritise the mental and physical health of their employees. Pre-travel health screenings and consultations are recommended to be provided to ensure that employees are physically prepared for the journeys. Additionally, offering access to mental health resources, such as stress management training and counseling, can help employees cope with the emotional strain of extended travel or challenging environments. By addressing both physical and mental well-being before travel, companies can help reduce the risk of illness, burnout, and other health-related issues that may arise during the trip.

Cultural sensitivity and awareness are equally important when preparing employees for business travel, especially to less familiar or high-risk destinations. Understanding local customs, traditions, and social norms is crucial not only for personal safety but also for fostering positive and effective professional relationships. Companies can invest in cultural training programs that cover key aspects such as appropriate dress codes, communication styles, gestures, and etiquette, which can differ significantly from region to region. Being well-versed in these cultural nuances helps employees avoid unintentional offenses and navigate the social landscape more confidently. This cultural awareness not only enhances the employee's ability to interact with local contacts but also shows the organisation's commitment to respecting local practices, which can strengthen business partnerships and ensure smoother operations in foreign environments.

Employees traveling to high-risk or less common destinations must preferably be equipped with detailed, up-to-date security and safety-related information, accessible through comprehensive platforms such as a company travel portal, which can include local threat assessments, emergency protocols, and contact details for local authorities. Having this information in advance enables employees to make informed decisions, avoid dangerous situations, and respond swiftly in case of emergencies.

It is important to stay up to date with issues relating to current risks in the destination country, such as epidemics, political instability, environmental hazards, economic sanctions, travel restrictions, social unrest, and changes in visa or entry requirements. Additionally, cyber threats or data security risks are ideally monitored in particular regions.

Sharing experiences after a trip with colleagues is one way to identify specific risks for the next person traveling to the same location. Companies benefit from having insights into the issues employees faced during their travels.

Although travel risk management policies may be static, real-life situations often require flexibility and exceptions to established procedures. Travel risk management is dynamic by nature, and unforeseen incidents or emergencies may necessitate deviations from company policies to ensure employee safety. When accidents or incidents occur, it is inevitable that questions will arise, highlighting the need for adaptability and swift decision-making to address unexpected challenges effectively.



It is good to recognise that employees who are not accustomed to frequent travel often have many questions about their insurance coverage and what conditions apply. It must therefore be understood that even though frameworks and policies are implemented, companies must be expected to be versatile and flexible enough to handle incidents on demand.

## 2.5. Sustainability and business travel

Business travel cannot be made more sustainable through initiatives that focus solely on travel, other aspects concerning business travel such as environmental, social, and economic impact must be considered and regulated. Gaining an understanding of the social dimensions impacting business travel such as stress, other health-related issues, unnecessary costs and other environmental decisions can elevate a company's wholistic understanding of how to make business travel more sustainable (Gärling et.al, 2016).

Companies are recommended to focus on the sustainability of accommodations and other travel-related services by choosing hotels with eco-friendly practices, such as energy efficiency and waste reduction. Encouraging employees to adopt green habits during their trips, like minimising energy use can further support environmental goals.

Meeting policies can be created for employees to have guidelines for when a meeting requires face-to-face contact or when it is sufficient to have it online.

Companies can benefit from having a clear travel policy to ensure that employees know what guidelines to follow. These can include restrictions of when rail is favourable to air travel based on distance. For example, If has a time-based restriction: employees are advised to take the train if they can get to their destination withing 3.5 hours using this method of travel. This is a great way to control the number of in-country flights. Companies can even go as far as saying that domestic trips will be done via train, if possible, considering the geographical area.

Comparing the total kilometers travelled by If employees in 2018 (20 million kilometers) to 2023 (less than 15 million kilometers), we can see a significant drop in air travel following the time-based guideline implementation.



3.

## Risks related to business travel

A risk can be defined based on the combination of a threat and vulnerability. Duty of Care (DoC) primarily revolves around reducing the vulnerability of traveling employees which necessitates managing any threats which pose significant challenges for an organisation. The threats are dynamic and vary across different countries and are constantly evolving, making it difficult for companies to exert any influence over the threats. By staying vigilant and well informed about potential threats, organisations can mitigate vulnerabilities. It is imperative for the level of risk to align with the company's risk appetite, reflecting not only organisational considerations but also those of individual travelers. The core of the DoC can therefore be described as reducing the vulnerability against threats. (Guardian-Security Risk Management, 2019).

### 3.1. People play a vital role

As the Duty of Care policy refers to the well-being of people, it is essential for the affected employees to fully understand its scope and implications. Thus, it is vital to establish or adjust to an organisational culture that prioritises employees in all aspects of work. For example, a traveller who is heading to London might primarily have concerns about potential terrorist attacks, especially in a major city that has a history of such incidents. However, the percentage of individuals impacted by such events is considerably lower compared to those involved in traffic accidents due to unfamiliarity with local practices, such as looking in the opposite direction while crossing the streets. Thus, fostering an understanding of these common risks is essential for promoting informed decision-making and ensuring the safety of travellers (Guardian-srm, 2019).

It is therefore important to create a culture within the organisation where employees proactively remain vigilant of their surroundings, as that will aid in mitigating this threat. It is imperative to create a balance between regulation and empowerment, as excessively hard governance has been shown to lead to apathy or resistance among employees. A company ideally fosters a pragmatic security culture where the focus is on pertinent aspects of safety and security. This approach encourages individuals to take ownership of their own safety while ensuring that organisational guidelines are followed effectively and willingly (Guardian-srm, 2019).

### 3.2. No true standards

Ultimately, following any incident, it is the public's perception which determines if a company's efforts were sufficient, a judgment often made retrospectively. Unlike other regulatory frameworks where certification provides validation, Duty of Care policies lack such formal endorsement, leaving organisations to rely solely on their best efforts. Unlike many frameworks, Duty of Care lacks formal certification or clear benchmarks, making it harder for companies to know if they have met their responsibilities. Instead, organisations must rely on internal audits, comprehensive risk assessments, and external evaluations to ensure their Duty of Care policies are both effective and adaptive to emerging risks. The optimal approach is therefore to be as prepared as possible, with procedures in place to protect employees (Guardian-srm, 2019).

Since the COVID-19 lockdowns and travel restrictions, the interest towards travel risk management has returned to pre-pandemic levels, or even higher. Companies may also be more aware of health and safety risks associated with travel: we tend to be more aware of global risks such as epidemics, war, and the side effects of political unrest, to mention just a few examples.

Without formal standards, companies are suggested to implement continuous evaluation mechanisms to assess the effectiveness of their Duty of Care policies. This involves regular audits, feedback from employees who travel frequently, and collaboration with external experts. By maintaining a feedback loop, companies can quickly adapt to evolving risks, improve their policies, and ensure their travel risk management practices remain relevant and effective.



Travel risk management is ideally approached as proactively as risk management in general. We can only manage those risks that have been identified, and this applies to travel as well. As with any risk, travel-related risks can be mitigated by targeting the probability or severity of risk, or both.

Companies' HR and risk management functions play a big role in travel risk management. The traveling employee needs to be aware of the risks relating to travel as such, but also to the specific destination. Another angle, where HR has an important role, is the employee's fitness to travel. Consulting and collaboration with health care providers can help to identify and mitigate the health risks travel can cause or aggravate.

To ensure systematic travel risk management, the risks and their mitigating actions can be analysed before, during and after travel. This helps to identify those issues and actions that may take a longer time to tackle, as well as those that depend on careful planning and instruction.

Some common concerns — or weaknesses — in companies' travel risk management include, for example, action plans for various kinds of emergencies or unforeseen issues when abroad. Simply knowing where and whom to call in case of emergency is sometimes unclear, as well as communication and action plans in general if something unexpected occurs.



### 3.3. Risk assessment and perception of risk

Furthermore, the risk assessment process involves a collection of multiple sources, including both open sources such as media and the internet, and collaboration with global partners like Falck, Anvil and International SOS, to manage and assess the risks associated with each trip.

Travel-related risks are recommended to be assessed in a systematic way, just as any other risks. When assessing risks, one can consider both typical and permanent risks specific to the destination. Also, those risks which relate to all likely modes of transportation are ideally covered. In addition to the permanent risks, it is important to revise risks that have appeared recently or may escalate during the trip. For example, epidemics, political unrest, and extreme weather conditions may be risks that have appeared or changed since the previous risk assessment.

A systematic risk assessment, which is updated on a regular basis, is important in ensuring that the understanding of the risk landscape is up to date and that the relevant risk mitigating actions are planned and in place.

Risks that are easy to imagine or that have been discussed in public recently are easily overestimated. Such risks and accident scenarios are, for example, terror attacks and natural hazards, such as storms and floods. Experience shows, however, that the most probable travel-related risks are loss of luggage, traffic-related accidents, and ordinary illnesses such as flu or stomach flu. The use of systematic risk assessment helps to reduce such subjectivity in risk assessment.

Knowing the risks as they are at the time of travel is the cornerstone for safe travel, as only identified risks can be managed. Both the traveller and HR need to be aware on their part, while safety is recommended to be considered throughout the journey: before, during and after the trip. As risks may always appear that are unforeseen or have been missed in risk assessment, it is important to have relevant action plans in place for various contingencies or even emergencies.



Travel-related risks must be evaluated through a structured and data-driven approach, incorporating both qualitative and quantitative methods to capture the wide range of potential incidents. This includes leveraging predictive analytics to identify emerging risks and deploying scenario planning to reduce the impact of worst-case situations.

### 3.4. Mitigating the risks

When the travel security policies and crisis management policy is in place, the company has succeeded in their Duty of Care. There are many different procedures that can be put into place to ensure this, and the following sections will explore in detail the essential considerations. Employing external experts or consultants can enhance the company's ability to implement and carry out comprehensive risk management and a Duty of Care strategy. Some highlights from Guardian-Security risk management (2019) are provided below:

1. **Travel policy must be clear**  
To effectively implement procedures that mitigate business travel risks, it is crucial to clearly define the scope of the Duty of Care and understand the necessary policy actions. This involves setting clear boundaries and defining the company's expectations for non-covered parties who still engage with the organisation, while outlining specific responsibilities for those falling under the umbrella of the Duty of Care.
2. **Safety and security training**  
Understanding how the company can provide coverage under their Duty of Care is essential. An extensive travel security policy will help enforce the company's travel standards and ensure employee safety. This policy outlines not only who should be covered, but also delineates the safety and security training requirements for various destinations or travel scenarios.
3. **Risk assessment and mitigation measures**  
Companies are recommended to conduct thorough risk assessments and implement mitigation measures. For instance, if an employee is traveling to a high-risk country where there's a threat of kidnapping, the company could mitigate this risk by arranging for an armoured vehicle to pick-up and drop-off the employee.
4. **Insurance that matches the requirements**  
Companies must also assess the countries they operate in and the associated threats that should be included or excluded in their insurance coverage. It's necessary to comprehend the scope of the various insurance policies and their specific coverage.
5. **Rehearse and exercise the plan**  
When all of the above is established and the scope is clear of what is expected by whom, it needs to be decided how often this plan should be exercised. This includes how regularly it should be revised and updated along with what trainings and resources are crucial for current and future possible crises.



Other important considerations are continuous monitoring and real-time communication, as well as post-travel evaluation and incident reporting. While the travel security policy and risk assessments are crucial before the trip, ongoing monitoring of the situation during travel is equally important. Companies are recommended to implement systems for real-time communication with employees, such as mobile apps that provide instant alerts and updates regarding new risks or emergency situations. This ensures that employees are kept informed throughout their trip and can make adjustments based on the latest intelligence.

Companies benefit from conducting post-travel evaluations to identify what worked well and what could be improved. For example, employees can report any incidents or near-misses they experienced during their travels. This feedback can help refine travel policies, update risk assessments, and improve future safety measures.

4.

## Insights from client interviews

The following section presents the data from structured in-depth interviews conducted in collaboration with If Insurance clients to detail some patterns and findings they have experienced relating to business travel risks. The companies interviewed, based in Sweden, Norway, Denmark, and Finland, are large corporate enterprises with extensive and varied business travel requirements. Operating globally, these organisations face a broad spectrum of challenges, necessitating tailored travel strategies and comprehensive risk management solutions to meet their evolving needs.

### 4.1. “The impacts of COVID-19 are still providing learnings”

A substantive global event highlighted by companies in the interviews was the COVID-19 pandemic. Looking at it from the points of view of senior stakeholders and management, this had a significant effect on business travel and paved the way for multiple learnings and insights. The pandemic shifted the focus significantly on travel preparations and how to do things differently. During COVID-19, many companies had to regularly assess the safety of travelling to different countries.

Today, business travel is returning to normal, however many companies have changed their policies “for good” and have also tightened budgets after the pandemic years. For example, flying to another country for a meeting that could be done online is more difficult to justify today than it was before COVID-19.

The pandemic significantly shifted the focus of travel preparations, forcing the interviewed companies to rethink safety protocols, risk assessments, and logistical planning. Moreover, the pandemic underscored the need for contingency planning, leading companies to build more resilient and adaptable travel policies that can respond to various challenges.

### 4.2. “Consider Environmental, Social, and Governance factors”

The top priority is always safety and health, followed closely by ESG factors. Some interviewed companies have integrated tools into their travel management systems and established direct communication with employees to provide practical tips on reducing their CO2 emissions. Many companies are focused on adopting a more sustainable approach in all business operations, including business travel where much of the focus is on renewable energy. These companies aim to emphasise sustainability and environmental values in their travel methods and explore alternative options. Although some of these companies already have policies in place, they are not always followed or applied as extensively as instructed.



### 4.3. “The changing climate is here to stay”

Looking at the extreme weather changes seen across the world, it is evident that is impacting businesses more and more. In India for example, in the past few months, record-breaking high temperatures have reached up to 50 degrees Celsius, whilst Germany on the other hand faced exceptional flooding. All this is due to rising temperatures, indicating a changing global climate pattern which naturally impacts business travel. It is crucial to monitor these developments closely.

### 4.4. “Conflict areas cause concerns”

There are instances where companies send employees to regions that insurers classify as high-risk, while the company considers that the necessary safety measures have been implemented. In such cases, some companies arrange additional high-risk area travel insurance coverage to ensure that business operations can continue with enhanced protection. For example, when companies send employees to Ukraine, there is a limit to how much additional insurance coverage can be purchased. Companies need to carefully assess the risks and determine which types of coverage are essential to ensure employee safety. This involves conducting thorough risk assessments to identify potential threats and understanding the limitations of available insurance plan, ensuring that both employers and employees are prepared for any gaps in coverage. Conscious decisions must be made covering what is deemed of highest importance: for example, understanding that medical evacuation from a war zone may not be possible, and travellers must be prepared to handle such situations independently. Is that something employees and employers are willing to agree on?

#### 4.5. “High-risk areas raise concerns”

Many companies restrict travel to high-risk areas, and if someone needs to travel to such areas, they must obtain pre-approval before booking anything. However, some companies' business operations require employees to travel to high-risk areas where it is important to incorporate a travel security partner, either on their own or in collaboration with the insurance company. These security partners can assist with tracking travellers' locations, and if there is an incident, the partner can provide the company with information about employees in the affected area. In addition, they can offer employee training, evacuation planning, emergency response co-



ordination, and real-time updates and alerts on local risks, helping both employees and employers stay prepared for quickly evolving and high-risk situations.

Companies closely monitor political changes and geographical incidents, such as the water shortage in India and the conflict between Ukraine and Russia, to assess how these events might impact a company's business and the employees sent to these countries. This situation requires companies to examine the potential future shifts in political risks and view the broader risk landscape in relation to their business operations and its probable impacts.

Currently, there are two main conflicts that have a greater impact on most companies operating on a global level: the war in Ukraine and conflicts in the Middle East. The countries involved in the conflicts are locations where some companies had, and may still have, employees working. These ongoing conflicts require organisations to analyse each situation individually in the context of the business they operate and the potential risks that the employees situated there might face.

#### 4.6. “Costs and travel go hand in hand”

Due to cost-saving measures, a few companies have had to update their travel policies to match these new corporate demands. These policies may include clauses that restrict travel for internal meetings. One of these limitations can specify the minimum flight duration required to book a business class ticket instead of an economy ticket, while some companies opt for economy-class tickets for all flights regardless of duration, or require that tickets must be booked at least 14 days in advance.

#### 4.7. “Digital solutions help lower costs”

Companies have significantly enhanced their digital capabilities, resulting in a major shift in how business travel is approached. By adopting tools like Teams and other online platforms, many businesses have found that virtual meetings can replace in-person travel more easily than initially expected, leading to reduced travel needs and cost savings.

Travel limitations due to factors like COVID-19 and international conflicts have made it easier to reduce travel-related costs, and for many companies cutting expenses has become more natural given the current global situation.

#### 4.8. “High-risk incidents put procedures to the test”

According to the client companies interviewed, business travel risk management solutions are primarily tested in critical situations that demand crisis management. For minor incidents, such as missed flights or lost luggage, most companies rely on a well-structured pre-existing framework to handle these incidents effectively. However, when it comes to handling larger and more diverse crises, many companies feel they still need to enhance their processes to manage serious, perhaps even life-threatening situations.

As an example, when a crisis occurs, a company that has a 24/7 physical security operations centre will ideally initiate an automated process to contact the traveller. If this initial contact fails, it is recommended to establish alternative ways to secure information about the employee and their location.

#### 4.9. “Expectations on the insurer”

Based on the conducted client interviews, it was clear that companies value insurance providers who offer a 24/7 professional alarm centre that supports employees during incidents such as injury while traveling. This also applies to situations that may fall into a gray area of coverage, where immediate assistance is required, regardless of whether the incident is fully covered by insurance. In such cases, the priority will be on providing support rather than focusing on the costs involved. This service can also include assistance in multiple languages, ensuring comprehensive support for diverse clients.

Further, the potential of integrating a company’s own chosen travel risk management partner with the insurer is essential in terms of creating a strong relationship and seamless process. The travel partner could then align with the insurance coverage and handle emergencies according to the coverage and be able to operate without the need for employees to verify their insurance details per each incident.

5.

## Case: Insights into business travel to China

Travelling to China for business has recovered in 2024, however international business travel is still catching up to pre-pandemic levels. It is expected that China's international travel market will grow significantly, driven by more relaxed visa policies and increased flight capacity. Businesses planning travel to China can expect a continued upward trend in travel volume, especially with demand for face-to-face meetings increasing across key sectors. Ping An, an If international network partner, supports our clients when travelling to China and in their operations in the country. In an interview with Ping An, valuable highlights were captured on the insurance sector perspective on business travel to and from China.

According to Ping An, recent changes have significantly impacted business travel to China. The post-pandemic recovery has been notable, as COVID-19 restrictions severely affected business travel from 2020 to early 2023. However, since 2023, China has gradually reopened and is now back to normal. In addition, digital transformation has accelerated, with increased use of virtual meetings and remote collaboration tools serving as alternatives to in-person visits. Ping An highlights that, "moreover, policy support from the Chinese government has made it more convenient for foreign businesspeople to travel to China. Simplified visa procedures and improved flight punctuality have further promoted the development of the business travel market."

Expected future changes in business travel to China include sustained recovery and growth. It is anticipated that business travel will continue to recover and experience rapid growth in the next few years. Digitalisation and intelligence will play a significant role, with big data, artificial intelligence, and other technologies being widely applied in business travel management to improve efficiency. Policy optimisation is also expected, as the Chinese government will continue to refine visa policies, although these may be influenced by geopolitical changes. Lastly, diversification is anticipated, with growing importance placed on second-tier Chinese cities as business destinations.

### 5.1. Risks in business travel to China

Current common risks in business travel include increasing geopolitical tensions and natural disasters, which can cause travel disruptions or safety concerns. Regulatory compliance issues are also a concern, as complex rules in China may affect business operations. Unexpected changes in entry requirements and the visa application process can also pose challenges for travellers. Health and security concerns are significant, as changing environments may make people vulnerable to diseases. For example, food safety can be seen as a major concern.

Cultural differences and language barriers can lead to misunderstandings and communication challenges. Financial risks, such as currency fluctuations, can impact travel budgets and expenses. Finally, climate change is a significant risk, as it leads to more frequent extreme weather events that can disrupt travel plans, e.g. by severely affecting transportation.

Expected changes in the next few years include increased geopolitical tensions, which may lead to more risks for travellers. There will be an increased focus on sustainable and green travel practices, promoting environ-





mentally friendly options. Travel risk management tools and technologies will become more diversified, and there will be enhanced awareness of risk management. There is potential for stricter regulations on data transfers, affecting how information is shared and managed. Climate change will continue to be a significant factor, influencing travel conditions and safety.

## 5.2. Chinese residents travelling for business within China

People residing in China are also increasingly traveling within the country for business. There has been a growing demand for domestic business travel, which has increased significantly as an alternative to international trips. The resumption of international flights has been slow compared to pre-pandemic levels. The capacity of international flights has not yet fully recovered, and the visa application process remains cumbersome. Additionally, the changing global political and economic environment, along with the impact of the pandemic, has heightened attention to risk management and employee safety during business travel. Expected future changes in business travel within China include the expectation that “the domestic business travel market is anticipated to continue thriving, maintaining its prosperity.”



## 6. Summary and considerations

What does the future hold for business travel? According to Kelleher, there has been a notable shift in travel patterns, especially following the impacts of COVID-19. The rise of hybrid work models has significantly reshaped the landscape of business travel, as companies increasingly adopt remote work options and virtual meetings. This shift has extended beyond routine business interactions, with larger conferences and conventions now incorporating hybrid and virtual formats to better align with evolving attendee preferences and address ongoing health and safety concerns. As a result, the purpose of travel has shifted towards in-person engagements that cannot be easily replicated online, such as high-stakes negotiations and critical client meetings. Moreover, there has been a noticeable change in the priorities of business travellers, with a greater emphasis on health, safety, and flexibility in travel arrangements. Sustainability concerns have also gained prominence in travel decision-making, evidenced by a reluctance towards short one-day trips. Furthermore, many companies were able to reassess travel needs for employees during the corona pandemic, as travel budget savings materialised. Travel related costs and time spend are more in focus now than ever before.

Managing risks remains paramount. To further enhance the Duty of Care obligations, companies are recommended to focus on clearly defining their travel policies and ensuring that all parties understand their roles and responsibilities. Comprehensive safety and security training tailored to the specific risks of each destination is essential for employee preparedness. Additionally, businesses may implement extensive risk assessments and appropriate mitigation measures, especially for high-risk areas. For example, arranging specialised transport or additional security for employees traveling to unstable regions can be a crucial. Ensuring that the correct insurance coverage is in place, and regularly rehearsing and updating crisis management plans, is vital for maintaining the efficacy of these strategies. Regular reviews and updates ensure that travel policies remain aligned with evolving global risks and operational needs.



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