



# The Benefits of Attendee Travel Management

Travel to and from a meeting or an event is very much part of each attendee's event experience. Meeting planners and attendees alike can benefit from inclusion of air travel as part of the overall planning process. Best practices and customer feedback have demonstrated that integrating travel planning with meetings management can provide substantial benefits related to experience, cost and duty of care.

## INFORMING THE DESTINATION CHOICE

Air travel can influence the choice of destination for a meeting. In particular, performing an event travel analysis as part of the planning process can help planners to select the best destination among those under consideration. Items to consider when evaluating destinations from an air travel perspective include:

- **Accessibility** – Where is the airport located in relation to potential hotels and venues? How long is the ground transfer time to the meeting location?

- **Average flying time and number of direct flights** – Flight time should be considered as part of the attendee experience, especially for situations where attendees may need to transition into meetings immediately upon arrival.

- **Airfare costs** – Airfare cost comparisons can obviously have a major influence on the destination choice. In the case of two similar destinations, a significant difference in air cost can be a deciding factor.

- **Focus destinations** – Most airlines have focus



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or new destinations where they are promoting reduced fares or new aircraft. These destinations can offer savings.

- **Risk Management** – A limited number of flight choices could result in the number of attendees per flight exceeding organizational guidelines. Early indication and joint air / meeting planning can help to avoid this increased risk by identifying alternative routes, and enables planners to seek additional insurance cover in advance rather than after ticket issue

- **Previous event & travel analysis**  
– Understanding past air travel experiences and issues can help planners to make recommendations for future events.

### **OPTIMIZING THE EVENT AGENDA**

Understanding the flight pattern for an event in advance can influence the agenda timing and often reduce event costs. Arrival pattern reports can reveal where a lack of air options may prevent attendees from arriving in time for a planned start. This information will give planners the opportunity to make informed choices about the agenda and weigh alternatives. For example: Do we allow 50% of attendees to arrive the night before increasing the budget for bedrooms and food and beverage? Or is it better to move the start time to allow for morning arrivals?

Departure reports also can help with agenda planning and addressing logistical issues. If you can see that the majority of your attendees must depart later in the day, you can make arrangements

ahead for meals, negotiate late check-out past the typical 11 a.m. timing and manage luggage storage as needed.

### **REDUCING THE BUDGETARY IMPACT**

Integrating the management of air travel as part of planning allows planners to manage the budget in a comprehensive fashion. If not controlled, air travel can easily consume up a significant portion of an event budget. However, savings achieved through proper management of air travel can provide funding for other areas such as food and beverage.

Ancillary expenses associated with air travel, such as ground transportation, can also be managed to improve the attendee experience and deliver savings. Use of complimentary airport shuttles can be optimized via pre-trip communications, or the movement of an entire group from the airport to the meeting site through a negotiated agreement with a ground transportation company can result in savings as well.

### **FACILITATING EFFICIENT COMMUNICATIONS**

Communication is another area that benefits from integrated air travel planning. Communicating information regarding the booking process is simpler as air, ground transfers and accommodations are all being managed through a single source, giving planners what they need to minimize back and forth with attendees. Attendees benefit as their experience is being managed and communicated in a comprehensive manner and they can view the entire trip on one complete itinerary, inclusive of

ground transfers. This single view helps minimize the need for additional communications to attendees, and reduce the number of attendee questions sent to planners.

Hotels and other associated suppliers also benefit. With access to all attendee arrival and departure information, planners can work with the property management to ensure all rooms are ready as needed. This single list eliminates guesswork and helps with manage the flow at check-in and check-out.

During program operations, the planning team has the needed information to reach out and assist passengers in the case of a travel disruption, and to work directly with the hotel on any resulting changes that may be required. No shows for air travel can be communicated to the ground transportation resource to avoid unnecessary waits at the airport that may delay other passengers on the same transfer. Plus, early notification regarding changes to both ground transportation and hotels, as a result of a missed or delayed flight, may mean savings to the program.

Integration of air travel provides both the meeting planner and the attendee with one clear communication framework, simplifying the planning, booking and change process so all associated elements of the meeting can be managed holistically.

## **INCREASING VISIBILITY & RESPONSE TIMES**

Technology such as online meeting registration sites simplify the collection

## **MEETINGS SOLUTIONS FOR TRAVEL**

# AIRLINE ALLIANCES

Many airlines and airline alliances have offerings to benefit groups. Airlines typically define groups as ten or more individuals per flight. These offerings vary from airline to airline, but often include benefits such as:

- **One agreement/contract for all tickets / attendees**
- **Discounted fares & incentives**
- **Ability to make name changes**
- **Streamline operations / simplify planning**

However, research shows many groups do not fit into the definition of 10+ per flight. Therefore, more products are coming to market offering solutions for group movements of 10+ from multiple departure points. For example, some airlines are now offering 'conference window fares' valid with one airline or within an alliance for the duration of an event, allowing similar savings for multiple points of origin.

of attendee air travel requirements including nearest airport and desired arrival/departure time information. These systems enable planners to run ad hoc reports rather than wait for an automated daily download of the latest information, which facilitates faster turnaround time for air bookings.

This centralization of all meetings and travel data provides planners with quick access to critical attendee information in the event of an emergency situation.

### ATTENDEE SATISFACTION

Ultimately, managing air travel as part of the event planning process can also increase attendee satisfaction for the reasons listed above. As an example, we surveyed attendees of the same incentive event over the course of eight

years where air was incorporated for five of the eight years and unmanaged for the other three. The chart below shows the attendee experience is better when travel is factored into the planning stages.

Air travel is an integral part of the logistical, financial and experiential aspect of an event. In this paper, we've shown how integrated group air planning can benefit a meeting at all stages, from destination evaluation, budgetary savings, agenda optimization, improved communications, increased productivity, and risk reduction. When a single event component can have that significant of an impacts on the desired results, it's worth incorporating it into the overall event planning process.

## Impact of Attendee Travel Management

Attendee meeting satisfaction where travel is managed vs. unmanaged.



(Source: American Express Meetings & Events Attendee Satisfaction Survey)



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