

Are Your Female Business Travellers Safe on the Road?

by Wendy Helfenbaum

**STUDIES HIGHLIGHT GAPS IN
MANAGED TRAVEL PROGRAMS**

Insurers and risk managers estimate that women make up nearly half of business travellers worldwide. Two recent studies conducted by the Global Business Travel Association (GBTA)—one targeting travel buyers in collaboration with WWStay, and another with AIG Travel surveying business travellers—revealed surprising results about how women perceive their safety while travelling and gaps in how companies protect their female employees who travel for work.

83% of women reported experiencing one or more safety-related concerns or incidents while travelling for business and 80 per cent said safety concerns have impacted their productivity while on work trips.

“This number was eye-opening, and underscores the importance of raising awareness and implementing more measures that will make female travellers feel safer and better prepared,” says Rhonda Sloan, head of marketing and industry relations at AIG Travel, which sells travel insurance and travel-related services.

While 69 per cent of US travel buyers believe that female travellers generally face greater risk when travelling for business, only 18 per cent reported having gender-specific policies in place. Companies have much to learn about duty of care, says Scott Solombrino, GBTA’s executive director and chief operating officer. For example, one out of five travel buyers said their company does not offer an assistance hotline, a simple and important resource for female travellers.



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“Also, **61%** of travel programs rarely offer chauffeured transportation for female travellers,” says Solombrino.

“Do you really want somebody depending on a ride-share if they’ve landed at midnight? It only takes one thing to happen, and you’re into millions of dollars in liability for the corporation, which is responsible for travellers from the time they leave their home until they get back.”

Other basic measures that could be more widespread include having women stay on the third floor or above in a hotel, making sure those rooms have double locks and checking that booking options such as Airbnb have security systems in place.

“I don’t think it’s negligence; it’s just a matter of slow awareness on a very, very difficult policy issue that has taken decades for people to focus on,” says Solombrino, adding that GBTA’s educational forums help companies create global travel programs that are duty-of-care compliant with global standards.

Industry partners getting it right

Many companies have taken measures to ensure incident-free travel, says Solombrino. “The chauffeured transportation industry has taken the lead since the ‘80s,” he says. “Airlines now have no-tolerance policies for abuse and big brands in the hotel industry have made concerted efforts to make people understand that safety comes first for them.”

For example, after surveying its guests who were uncomfortable having strangers deliver room service to their rooms, Marriott introduced Fresh Bites. Guests order food that gets dropped off outside their door. Toronto Markham Marriott was the Canadian test hotel for the concept.

“There’s nothing to sign. It gets charged automatically to the room,” explains general manager Hiren Prabhakar, adding that Marriott has also implemented new on-boarding procedures for staff that address guest safety.

“All associates complete risk management e-learning courses about harassment, security awareness and global anti-corruption. Marriott also has mandatory human trafficking awareness training for on-property staff in all hotels,” he says.

While hotels usually provide 24-hour security and lighted hallways, many corporate travel programs book employees into apartment-style lodging, says Dawn McGowan, vice-president of global sales and business development for WWStay, which provides extended-stay corporate housing units.

To ensure safety, she says, team members vet properties around the world, using a pink lady symbol to designate ones that are especially safe for female travellers.

“Corporate budgets should not be the deciding factor when it comes to safety and security for a female,” she says. “Knowing you’re booking a curated property that meets the duty-of-care requirements is very important.” Sloan suggests companies survey their female employees about their ongoing travel-related concerns, ask how they rate the company’s current efforts and provide a list of travel-specific policies or programs that are not currently available.

“Companies should also take a more proactive role in educating employees about travel safety, and business owners or HR directors should reach out to their insurance company or risk management advisor to access information, resources and customized training on this topic,” says Sloan, noting that AIG Travel has a dedicated Women’s Travel Safety microsite: aig.com/travel/forwomen.

Solombrino believes that more dialogue will help decrease travel-related issues. “Corporations will then have a much more determined effort to guarantee that their program is meeting the needs of the modern traveller.” 🔥

