

# Bleisure

The future of corporate travel





Corporate travel is an essential aspect of many businesses. It allows enterprises to conduct activities such as meetings, conferences, training sessions, client visits, and other work-related events that require employees to be physically present at locations away from their usual workplace.

Managing corporate travel involves various considerations, such as travel policies, expense management, safety and security protocols, and the use of technology to streamline the booking and reimbursement processes. Many companies use travel management companies (TMCs) to handle logistics, negotiate with vendors, and ensure compliance with corporate travel policies.

The corporate travel landscape has been influenced by factors such as advancements in technology, the rise of remote work, and global events (like the COVID-19 pandemic), which have led to an increased reliance on virtual meetings and changes in travel policies.

“Bleisure” is a term that combines “business” and “leisure,” and refers to the practice of combining business travel with leisure activities. While the concept can be rewarding for employees who get to explore new destinations while on a work trip, there are challenges associated with bleisure travel. In this paper, we will explore opportunities to improve bleisure experiences, while leveraging insights gleaned from surveying and interacting with corporate travelers, travel agents and hotel travel managers.



# Findings: The Future of Corporate Travel

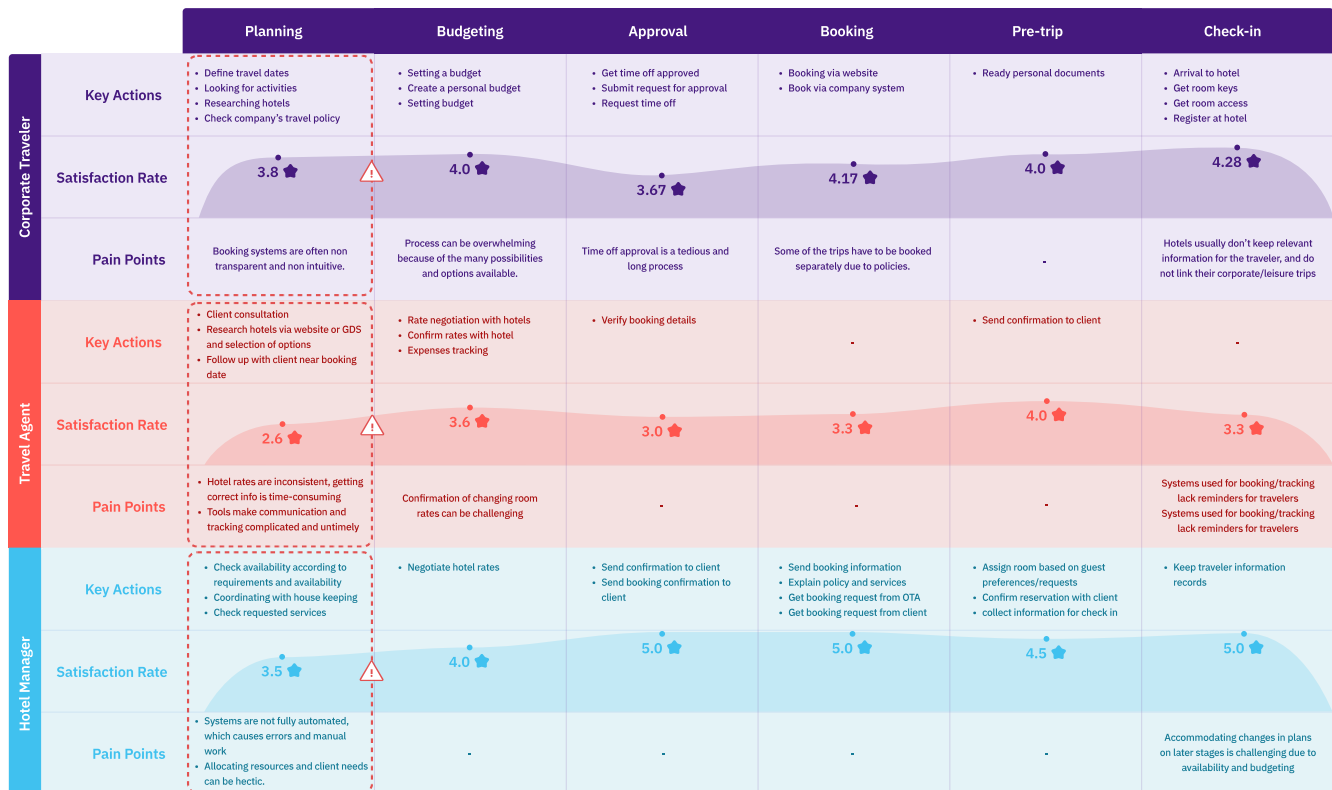
Discovering user experiences in a scenario such as business-leisure travel brings up an initial question: How much of the average corporate-led traveling becomes a bleisure travel at the end?

During testing, we found out that more than half of the average business trip becomes bleisure, 60% of the total interviewed users engage in planning both their business and leisure stay at the same hotel.

This trend is also backed by 67% of hotel managers and 100% of the travel agents that participated in this research, based on their recurrent experiences with helping clients with this specific combination of travel needs. Even if bleisure is a big part of the trend in corporate traveling behavior, we must also talk about the 40% of travelers that plan business and travel separately.

For this minority, some of the factors that keep travelers from combining personal and business travel include personal preferences, avoiding this travel combination because of the lack of freedom that can be experienced in choosing dates, places to travel, etc.

# The Bleisure Experience Map



## Navigating The Experience Map

This map represents the average experience through the process of booking a stay in a hotel for business and leisure from start up until check-in at the hotel. To better understand what happens during this specific timeline, we have split up the experience in 3 different key points:

- **Key actions:** Group together the most common actions to be taken during these stages. There are variations depending on specific processes of companies and personal preferences, but this section is meant to gather the ones done by most users.
- **Satisfaction rate:** Meant to evaluate how happy and satisfied are the users with the overall experience during the stage, it addresses their interaction with processes and digital products used while in them, being 5 the score that indicates the most satisfaction.
- **Pain points:** Describes the principal issues users encounter in the specific stage.

## Insights From the General Perspective of Bleisure Experiences

Our research considered the most common stages of trip planning: Planning, budgeting, approval, booking, pre-trip and check-in. Investigating about what happens and what the experience is in each of these stages allowed us to determine the highest ranked and lowest ranked experiences in the whole process of booking a hotel stay for bleisure from start to finish.



### **Checking in: The easiest part of bleisure travel**

For all the different people involved into bleisure traveling, meaning travelers, travel agents and hotel managers, the highest ranked stage is checking in. The interaction mostly happens between corporate travelers and front desk hotel workers and key actions on this step involve access to the booked services. The hotel needs to have all this reservation data ready to be used on the traveler's arrival.

Even if this is the stage where there are fewer issues and people are left more satisfied with the experience, research shows that it could also be enhanced by providing solutions when it comes to traveler profile linking.

Comments from users show that sometimes during bleisure, hotels are not ready for a single person to have two different types of reservations as they might use different emails, payment methods and other personal data for business and leisure purposes. Hotel linking this prior to the traveler arriving on check-in day will make the process seamless and allow the traveler to benefit from either of their accounts.

### **Improving communication for a better planning experience**

The lowest ranked stage for all 3 different profiles is the first one, the planning stage. Key actions on the planning stage have to do with starting to build up a trip from the early stages of defining travel dates, researching hotels, checking company policies, and getting inspiration for the leisure activities to do while in the leisure part of the trip.

During this stage, the corporate travelers interact with digital products and service providers like travel agents to complete these key actions. From client consultations, researching hotels and the follow-up that needs to be completed there is a lot of communication happening, which is the biggest pain point at this stage.

Current travel management tools do not offer integrations or communication tools to centralize or automate interactions between travel companies and travelers, which result in a search for workaround solutions using additional tools and resources with mixed results.



This impacts timely budgeting and reservation confirmations and becomes a problem in keeping records of conversations and adding manual work for agents and managers on capturing information and sending reminders for important steps in the planning process.

## Most Requested Services/Amenities for Bleisure

According to both travel agents and hotel managers, there is a set of amenities requested by travelers engaging in bleisure. The top requests usually include:

- High-speed internet
- Room service
- Free nights

## Bleisure Pain Points

### Pain points for corporate travelers

From the corporate traveler perspective, the most severe issues are experienced when they look for room rates and availability by themselves using booking sites or company provided portals like GDS during the planning stage which is, as mentioned before, the lowest rated.

### Priority pain points:

**Lack of transparency:** When looking for dates and prices online users often see different service rates depending on the sites, they are doing their research on. This becomes confusing and increases the time spent on the planning stage altogether, not providing clarity and consistency on room rates, amenities and services provided across platforms causes lack of trust in these customer facing sites and increases the user's effort in completing the task.

*“Booking or price checking is a game of fighting multiple sites and cookies for the appropriate price” – Corporate traveler*



**Usability issues:** Customer facing booking platforms are being perceived as non-intuitive for corporate travelers, learning curves on sites directed to customers have to be easier to conquer and navigate.

**Lack of flexibility in business travel:** During the planning stage, one non-product-related complication is with company and time-off policies that sometimes prevent or block them from customizing their trip.

*“I have limited autonomy in defining travel dates because it is my company that organizes this. I can either come a few days earlier or leave later. My company books the hotel.” -Corporate traveler*

Considering stages like Approval, Booking and budgeting pain points are associated with the process itself, it being described as overwhelming during budgeting because of the many possibilities and options available for the trip.

**Pain points for Travel agents:**

Lack of transparency is a pain point that is also shared with travel agents, having the same type of issues while trying to get the right information to budget a travel request for a customer.

From the travel agents’ perspective, a major pain point is client-agent communication. Having constant and timely communication during the planning process is key to having a smooth planning and confirmation process. The most common feedback about communication blockers in this stage are:

**The most common feedback about communication blockers in this stage are:**

- **Management tools don’t provide communication features:** Communication with the traveler happens outside the travel management system. Travel agents look for workarounds to solve communication issues, using email, calls or chat depending on availability with mixed results. Having this information live in different platforms prevents travel management tools to become their one source of truth.



*“Difficulty in following up with clients without being invasive, especially regarding reminders for travel schedules and check-ins.”*

*“Using email to communicate with clients can be problematic as some may not frequently check their email, leading to missed booking information and important updates.”*

- **Systems lack client reminder features:** Reminding travelers of pending tasks (like getting traveler documentation), changes and updates on their traveling plans is often a manual task for travel agents, which contributes to making their workload heavier and not having an option to automate it.
- **Published hotel rates are inconsistent:** Getting the correct information for budgeting and confirmation on room rates via websites or other booking tools is challenging since the information is not always consistent or true, which makes the full process time consuming, and ends up impacting both the travel agent and the traveler’s experience.

*“The process of confirming rates and negotiating prices with hotels can be cumbersome, especially for long stays.” -Travel Agent*

#### **Which tools are travel agents using?**

- We Travel
- Hostaway
- Booking Engines

#### **Pain points for hotel managers**

While travel agents have direct involvement in the processes of getting a hotel booking directly with the traveler, the situation is different for hotel managers. Their role here is to keep communication with the traveler or the travel agent to make sure that the services and the special requests (If there are any) can be provided by their hotel.





### **What's the hotel manager's role inside bleisure?**

Hotel managers have less involvement in stages like planning, budgeting, and getting approved travel requests and participate in management activities that directly supply the requested services.

This often involves speaking with agents or customers about rates and special services offered, negotiating rates in case needed and providing structure and management for the hotel to run its processes.

### **Here are two major pain points associated with bleisure travel:**

- **Lack of system automation:** Internal systems are not fully automated, some of the processes are manual which causes an increase in effort and user errors in services like room availability.
- **Resource management:** Managing changes and resources, especially when they happen in the later stages of the trip planning, these changes are often related to the agreed services.

*“Tracking and accommodating extensions to clients’ stays can be challenging, especially when it involves recalculating payments and ensuring room availability.”*

### **Which tools are travel agents using?**

- Hotel Runner
- Guesty
- Thinkreservation
- Onity PMS
- Rezhost
- GDS OTA Integrations



## Recommendations & Take Aways

Addressing some of the discoveries from this research can improve the overall experience of average bleisure travel for all parties involved.

- **Streamline communication:** Reduce friction and delays in communication by enhancing existing tools with features that allow agencies and hotels to manage communication and reminders from a single place.
- **Build for consistency and transparency:** Create ways or features that allow users from all backgrounds (experienced or new) to compare rates from various sources and guidance on choosing the best one.
- **Customization for flow flexibility:** Workflows on agencies and hotels have key activities in common which tools usually account for, but each case has its own characteristics. Building features and tools that allow for customization will give users the flexibility needed to optimize their workflows and automate tasks which can help decrease the pain points mentioned earlier in this study.
- **Profile linking:** Bleisure brings in its own challenges as it involves a very particular set of traveling behaviors, addressing these closer to the origin of travel can help with better planning. Linking personal and professional traveling profiles into one can also help reduce effort on the service side and bring in benefits for the travelers.



## Appendix - User Profiles and Participant Overview

### Corporate Travelers: 30 participants

- US or Europe-based
- Had traveled for business or bleisure at least twice in 2023
- With 4+ years of work experience

### Travel Agents: 3 participants

- With 4+ of experience working in a TMC Travel Management Company
- Had used GDS

### Hotel Travel Managers. 3 participants

- Daily use of an internal system of record, PMS, or CRS
- With 2+ work experience

### UX Methods

- Remote moderated and unmoderated user interviews with 36 participants
- Quantitative & Qualitative data with analytic tools and thematic analysis



# About Encora

Headquartered in Scottsdale, Arizona, and backed by renowned private equity firms Advent International and Warburg Pincus, Encora is the preferred innovation partner to some of the world's leading technology companies.

It provides award-winning digital engineering services including cloud services, DevSecOps, Digital Experience, Cybersecurity, Data & Analytics, Quality Engineering, Generative AI & LLM Engineering, and Product Engineering & Development. Encora has deep cluster vertical capabilities in HiTech, Healthcare & Life Sciences, Retail & CPG, Energy & Utilities, Banking Financial & Insurance, Travel Transportation & Logistics, Telecom & Media, Automotive, and other specialized industries.

With over 9,000 associates in 47+ offices and innovation labs across the U.S., Europe, Canada, Latin America, India, Australia, and Asia Pacific, Encora's global talent pool, industry vertical expertise, and proprietary agile engineering capabilities enable clients to deliver superior business outcomes through accelerated innovation cycles.

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