7TH ANNUAL

GLOBAL BUSINESS TRAVEL REPORT

Worth the trip: Driving travel value in a time of change

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Introduction

Charlie Sultan,
President of Concur Travel,
SAP Concur

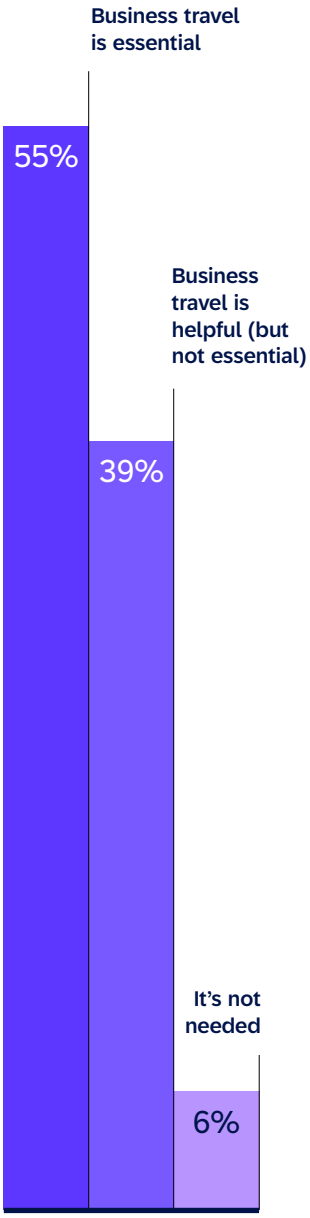
Now in its seventh year, the Global Business Travel Survey, conducted by Wakefield Research between April 30 and May 12 2025 in partnership with SAP Concur, offers a fresh view of business travel in today's complex business landscape.

This year's edition draws insights from 5,000+ travel stakeholders across 29 countries, including 3,750 business travelers, 700 travel managers, and (new this year) 600 CFOs. We have also brought in commentary from experienced travel managers who shared their candid thoughts during a group discussion about this year's research findings.

The results offer a few surprises. Ninety-three percent of travel managers anticipate that their budgets will stay the same or increase this year. However, rising costs – a consequence of inflationary pressures – often cancel out bigger budgets, so organizations may turn to subtle cutbacks on expenses and budgets associated with business travel: a practice we call "travelscrimping." Then there's anecdotal evidence suggesting the loyalty perks that make business travel more pleasant are harder to earn. Additionally, some 85% of travelers say they will use personal funds to improve comfort.

Adding CFOs, the ultimate budget-holders, to our survey provides a more holistic view of business travel. Most report stable or rising budgets, but 43% believe over half of their company's business travel could be replaced by teleconferences or other non-travel means of connecting. This raises a question: are they measuring the full value of business travel?

TRAVELERS SAY TRAVEL IS INDISPENSABLE FOR THEIR JOB



Survey of 3750 business travelers across 24 markets. See end of report for full details

At SAP Concur, the answer lies in smarter tools, seamless integrations, and AI that preemptively and autonomously resolves issues before they affect travel or finance teams. While AI can do more, human oversight and personal touch remain essential to business – and business travel.

Business travel isn't disappearing – it's evolving. The value of face-to-face connection endures: building trust, closing deals, launching projects. Companies that adapt with smarter strategies and better tools will be the ones that thrive.

BUT TRAVEL MANAGERS SAY BUDGETS ARE TOO SMALL

69%

say budgets don't reflect the importance of business travel to business success

Source: Survey of 700 travel managers in seven major markets

AND CFOS ARE CONCERNED

81%

say budget limitations mean employees aren't traveling enough to be effective

Source: Survey of 600 CFOs in six major markets.

The state of business travel in 2025: Five key facts

1

Digital tools still don't replace travel

Even as 43% of CFOs say over half of travel could move to virtual, they're still funding it. Why? Because face-to-face meetings still drive business outcomes. Fifty-five percent of business travelers say it is essential to do their jobs.

2

Travel budgets are projected to rise, or stay the same

Despite geopolitical and economic pressures, 89% of business travelers, 93% of travel managers, and 90% of CFOs globally still expect their organization's travel budget to increase or stay the same this year.

3

Travelscrimping is real and it's costing travelers

Small year-on-year company cutbacks are eroding the travel experience. Eighty-five percent of travelers are prepared to dip into their own pockets to improve trips, especially younger staff.

4

Travel managers must focus on safety to meet travelers' concerns

Fifty-eight percent of travelers say they are concerned about air safety, and 16% are so concerned they hesitate to fly at all. Forty percent say they would refuse to travel to some parts of the world on safety/social grounds.

5

AI and cybersecurity are changing the game

Technology brings both promises and threats. Seventy-five percent of travelers say it is at least likely that coworkers are using AI to falsify travel expenses, while cybersecurity is now a top concern for traveling employees.

Today's travel budgets: The challenge of driving value

In 2025, despite persistent economic uncertainty, geopolitical unrest, and the uptick in virtual meetings, companies foresee travel budgets going up or staying the same. A strong majority expect budgets to grow or remain stable: 89% of business travelers, 93% of travel managers, and 90% of CFOs report no planned cuts to travel budgets.

However, budgets may still be catching up with previous sharp increases in the cost of travel: data from the International Air Transport Association (IATA) shows average return airfares have come down only a few percent after rising 36% over 2022/3.

Ryan Taylor, global head of travel at oil and gas firm Harbour Energy, notes: "Suppliers have the upper hand because people are doing more leisure travel, which affects the cost of hotel accommodations and seats on planes."

Many companies struggle to align funding with travel's strategic importance. Survey findings reveal a persistent gap between business travel needs and available budgets, despite plans for increased investment. Sixty-nine percent of travel managers say their company's travel budget doesn't reflect the importance of travel to business success, and 81% of CFOs say that budget limitations prevent employees from traveling as much as needed to do their jobs effectively. Companies aim to travel smarter by consolidating trips, focusing on high-impact meetings, and cutting unnecessary travel.

93%

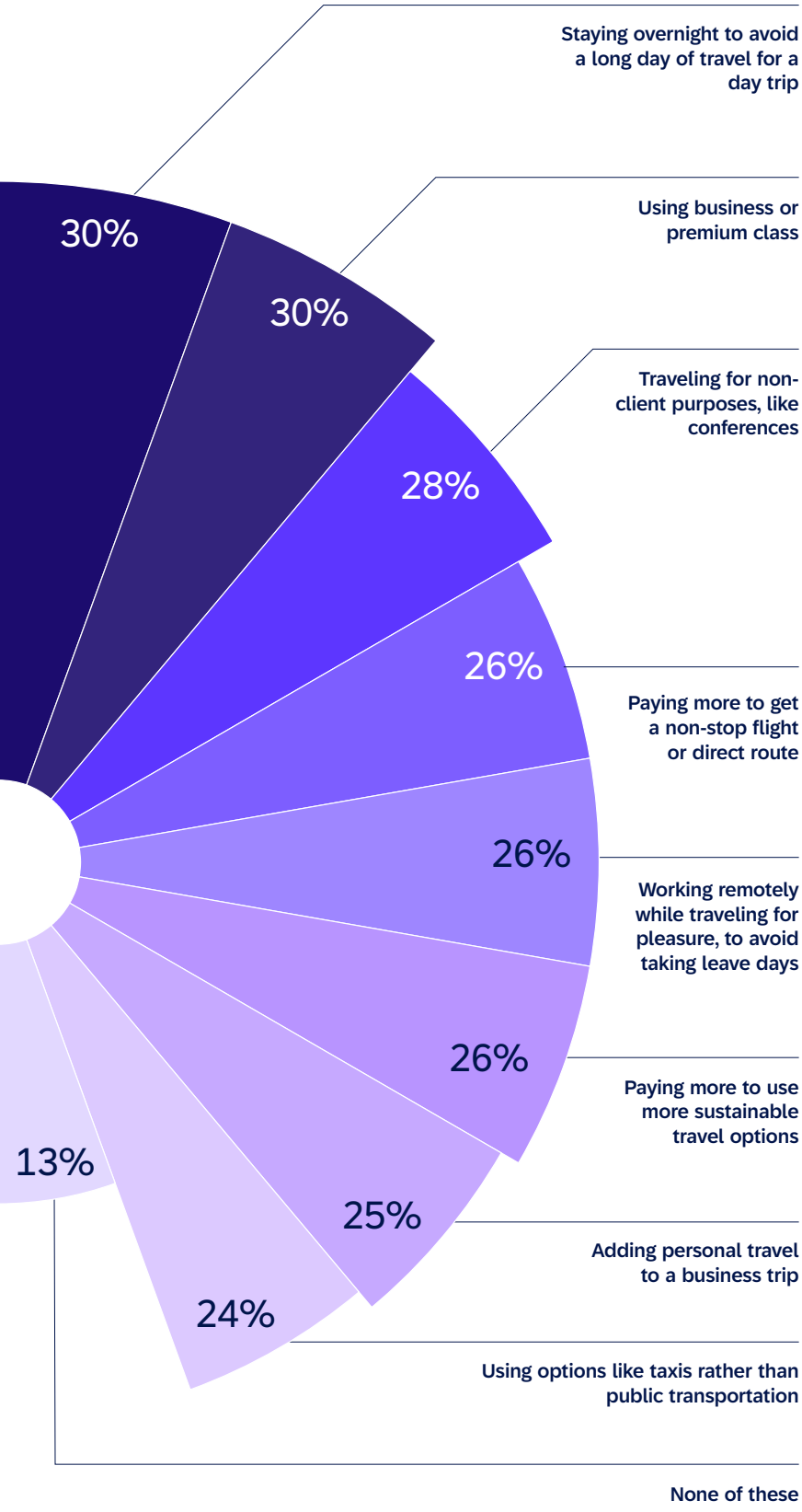
of U.S. travelers

admit they choose more expensive options on business trips than personal travel against

84%

globally

TRAVELSCRIMPING: WHAT CUTBACKS HAVE TRAVELERS EXPERIENCED IN THE LAST 12 MONTHS?



Meanwhile, employees often experience these cost measures not as big policy changes but as "travelscrimping" – subtle cutbacks to stretch corporate travel budgets. For example, 30% of travelers report reduced access to business/premium class flights; 30% on staying overnight to avoid a long day trip; and 26% on paying more for a direct flight. Sixty percent of business travelers, 59% of travel managers, and 59% of CFOs report that travelscrimping is being implemented.

Yet some are able to enjoy a modicum of comfort. After all, travel isn't easy, and employees traveling for business expect perks. Eighty-four percent say they spend more freely on business trips funded by their company than leisure trips. Among them, 34% choose higher-end hotels or premium rooms than when they pay themselves, 33% are more likely to take direct flights, 32% are more likely to opt for private transport (like Uber), 29% dine out more lavishly, 26% order more room service, and 22% tip more generously.

> "Many companies struggle to align funding with travel's strategic importance."

The bottom line is clear: these perks are important to travelers and they take advantage of them on the company dime (where possible). And when travelscrimping leaves them no option, 85% percent of travelers say they're prepared to spend their own money to improve the quality of their business trips (see "Who is paying to avoid a middle seat?" later in the report).

Who's making the decisions?

There's a clear tension between the perspectives of business travelers, travel managers, and CFOs over who really drives travel program decisions, especially as companies put cost control front and center.

Travelers mostly see travel managers as the main influencers, likely because they enforce policy. Travel managers are divided: 43% say they hold the most influence, while 41% of travel managers believe the CFO makes the final call.

But CFOs leave little room for doubt: 69% say they're the ones in charge. Only 9% of CFOs and 16% of travel managers say traveler input is most influential in shaping policy, even though 28% of travelers believe they're the key decision-makers. Interestingly, travel managers seem to gain more control in organizations where policies are mandated: 47% say they hold the most sway in such setups, compared to just 38% in companies with looser or no policies. Ultimately, the balance of power over business travel is less a matter of structure and more a matter of perspective; it's a three-way tug-of-war between those who travel, those who manage, and those who control the budget.

43%

of travel managers say they hold the most sway on changes to travel policies, but

69%

of CFOs say CFOs make the decisions. Just

28%

of travelers believe it's the travelers who have most influence

Safety and security: Who travels and who refuses

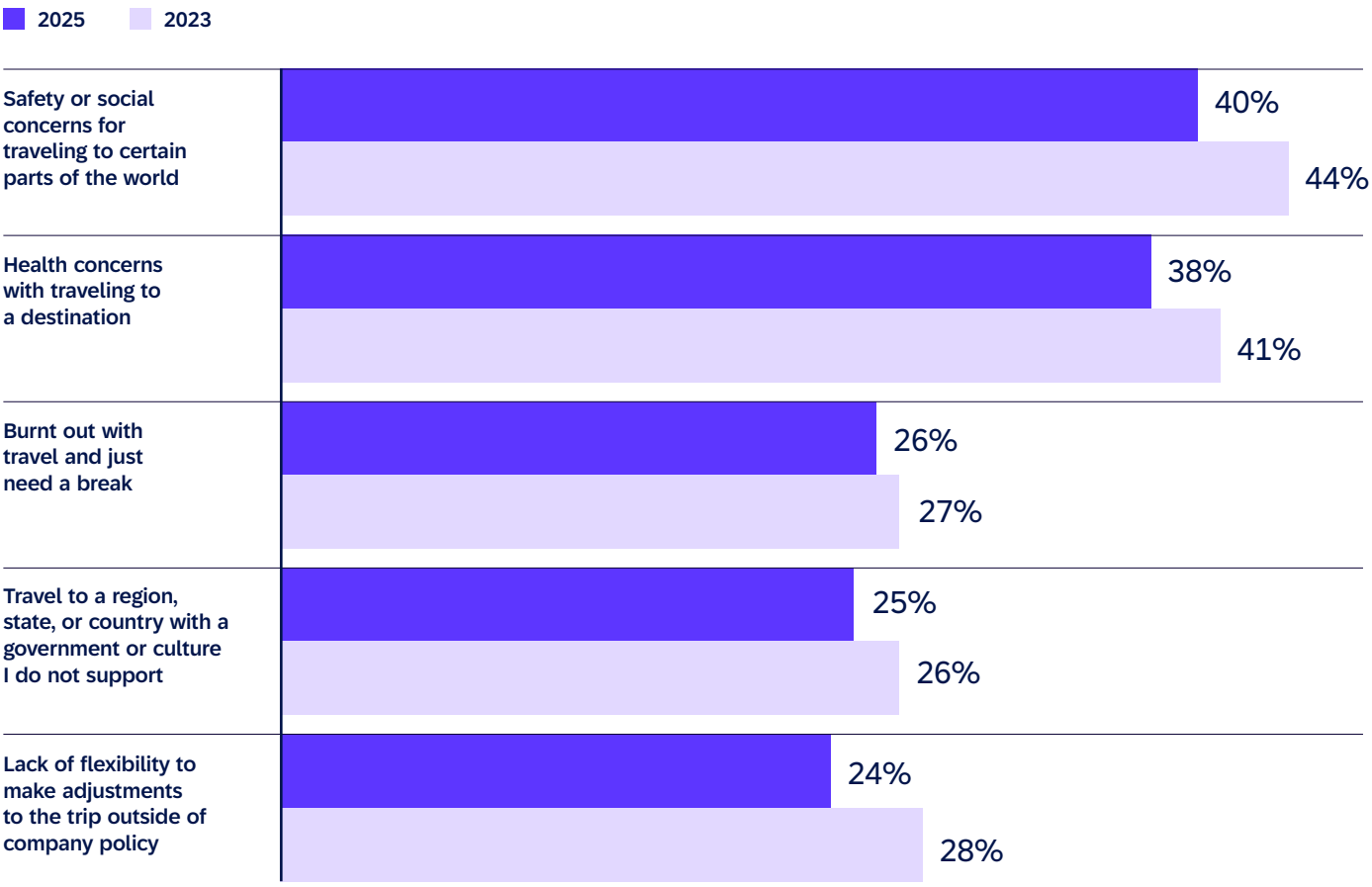
Air travel anxieties are increasingly weighing on the minds of business travelers. The survey took place in the wake of several major air disasters, including the January mid-air collision near Washington, D.C. (the deadliest U.S. crash since 2001), and the South Korea crash in December that claimed 179 lives. The more recent Air India Ahmedabad disaster, which claimed 279 lives, perpetuates the anxiety.

In total, 546 fatalities from air accidents in the past 12 months have rattled traveler confidence.

"Aviation safety is a huge concern. Will the plane take off? Will I get there? How am I getting home?" says Paula Finn, global travel and expense manager for speciality materials firm Mativ. Disruptions only amplify the stress. "If you're traveling through certain airports, you're going to be delayed. You're going to go from a one-hour flight to a six-hour flight," she adds.

Fifty-eight percent of business travelers express some concern about flight safety, and 16% say it makes them hesitant to fly for work at all. That figure rises to 27% in the Middle East, compared with just 4% in Japan.

WHY WOULD TRAVELERS REFUSE A BUSINESS TRIP?



But overall, 90% of business travelers say they'd consider refusing a trip. The top reason was safety or social concerns: 40% cited this, down from 44% in 2023 when the question was last asked in this way. The next most-cited was health concerns related to the destination (38%).

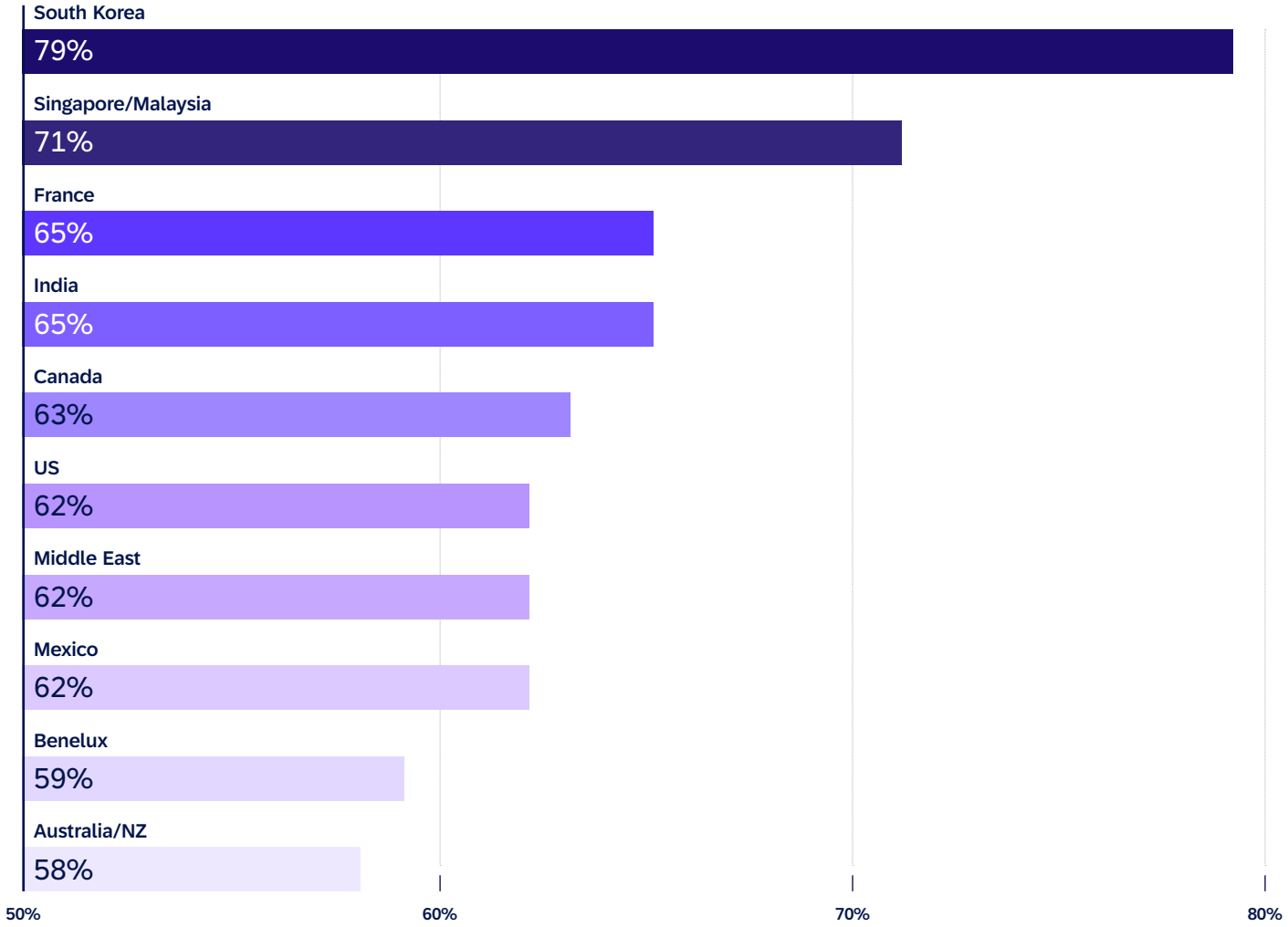
These aren't the only friction points: one in five travelers say they would refuse a trip if it involved an indirect flight. Alicia Zarazua, global travel manager at industrial firm ESAB Corporation, explains: "Their main concern is, am I going to make my next flight?" That concern extends beyond inconvenience. Missing a connection can mean getting stranded in a transit hub that isn't the traveler's final destination – and in some cases, not a place they feel safe or comfortable staying.

While CFOs are under pressure to control costs, they still need staff to travel. When asked about top business risks, 45% ranked employee reluctance to travel on par with geopolitical tensions. It's a delicate balance between business demands, personal risk, and peace of mind.

90%

of business travelers say they'd consider refusing a trip

WHICH COUNTRY'S TRAVELERS ARE MOST CONCERNED ABOUT AIR SAFETY?



Who is paying to avoid a middle seat?

As corporate travel budgets are stretched and travelscrimping becomes commonplace, business travelers are increasingly reaching into their own pockets to maintain a comfortable experience. From window seats to hotel upgrades, many are self-funding small luxuries once covered by company policies.

U.S. travelers are among those most willing to pay out of their own pocket for a better experience, with 91% willing to do so, while in India the figure is a striking 99%. In contrast, just 66% of French and 73% of Japanese travelers are funding their own upgrades. Younger travelers, whose personal travel budgets may be tightest, are most likely to spend more to enhance their business travel: 93% of Gen Z and 88% of millennials supplement travel budgets with personal funds, compared to only 62% of baby boomers.

Most business travelers (84%) have recently started taking steps to make ends meet at the end of a business trip, ranging from making sure not to overspend on daily allowances to making the most of giveaways.

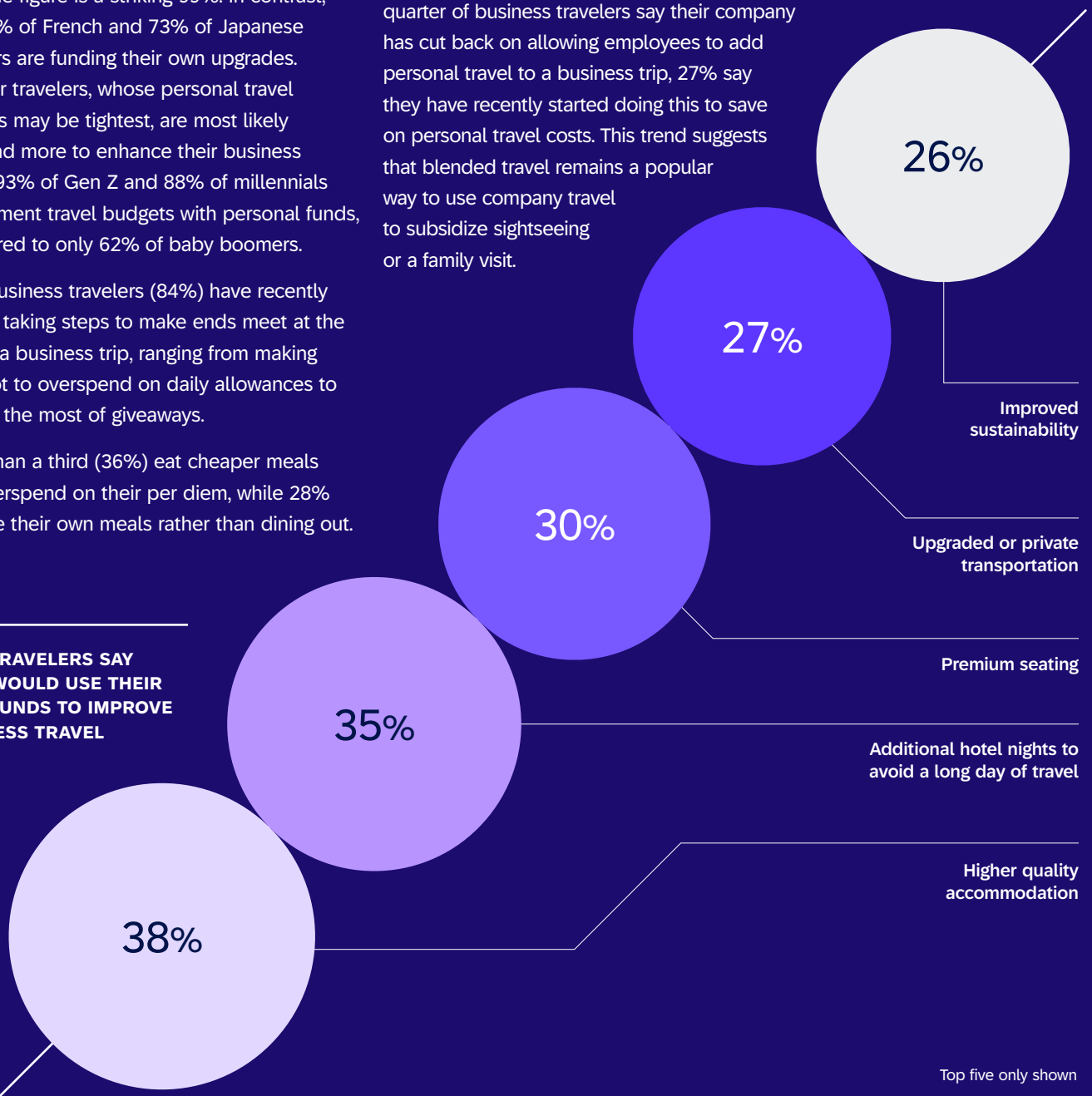
More than a third (36%) eat cheaper meals to underspend on their per diem, while 28% prepare their own meals rather than dining out.

Some business travelers also benefit by taking leftover food and drinks (26%) or grabbing free items from hotels and conferences (24%).

There are clear generational differences: 92% of Gen-Z travelers take steps to make the most of their travel allowance, compared with 87% of millennials, 73% of Gen X, and 64% of baby boomers.

The future of combining business and leisure travel, "blended travel," is complex. Although a quarter of business travelers say their company has cut back on allowing employees to add personal travel to a business trip, 27% say they have recently started doing this to save on personal travel costs. This trend suggests that blended travel remains a popular way to use company travel to subsidize sightseeing or a family visit.

HOW TRAVELERS SAY THEY WOULD USE THEIR OWN FUNDS TO IMPROVE BUSINESS TRAVEL



Top five only shown

What do CFOs think of business travel?

While CFOs tend to be seen as the budget gatekeeper, our research shows that they view business travel as a critical investment, not just another expense.

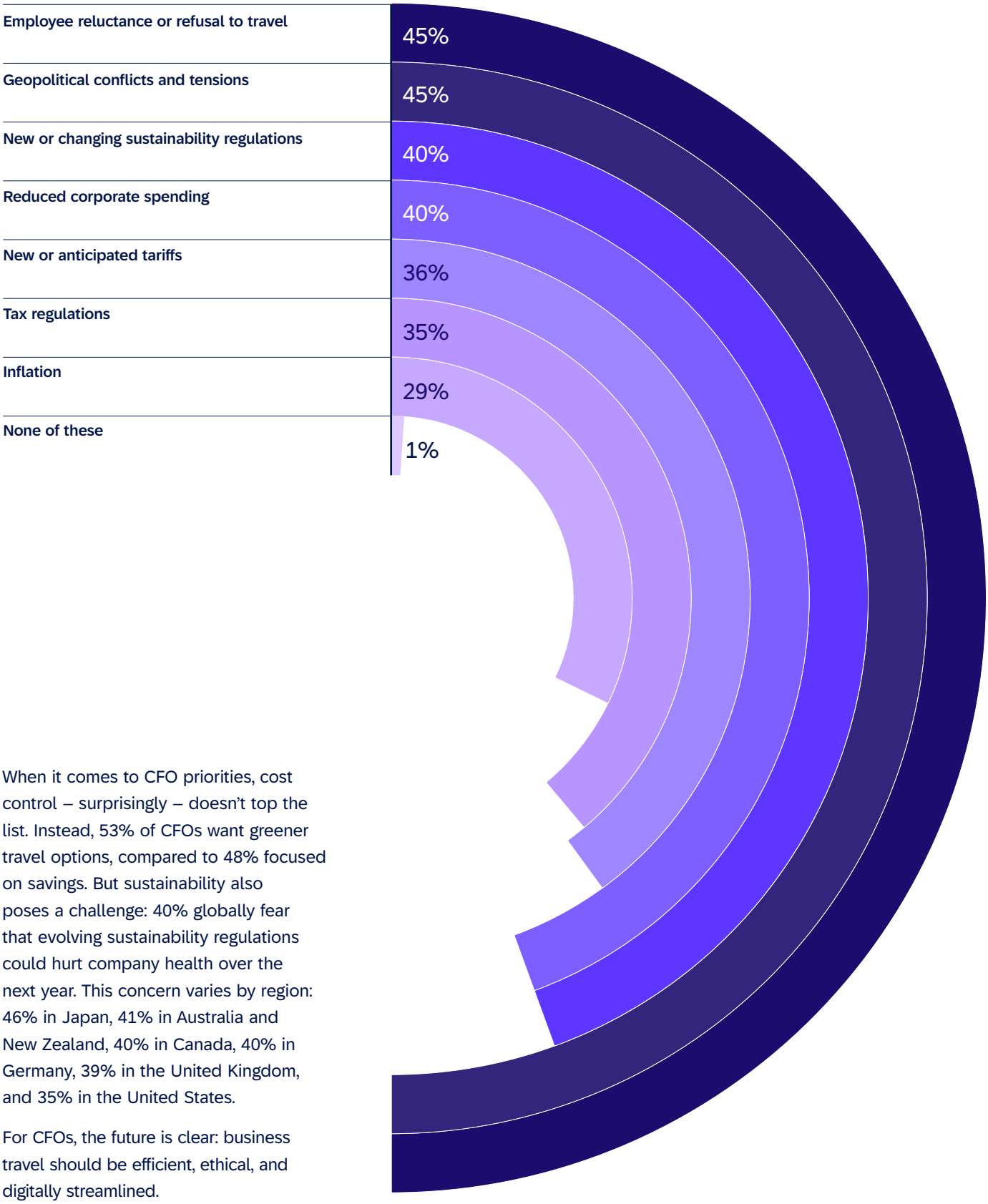
Forty-five percent say they're concerned that employee reluctance to travel could negatively affect their company's health in the next year. Ninety percent either foresee increased travel budgets or expect them to stay the same: 53% expect them to rise somewhat and 23% to rise substantially. This is despite the fact that 43% agree that more than half of their company's travel could technically be replaced by virtual meetings.

Travel managers are alive to this issue, with 33% saying a push to virtual meetings is one of the greatest threats to business travel. Paradoxically, 70% of business travelers say they are very willing to hit the road, up from 67% in 2023.

90%

of CFOs either foresee increased travel budgets or expect them to stay the same

CFOS' PERCEPTION OF THE FACTORS LIKELY TO IMPACT THEIR COMPANY'S HEALTH IN THE NEXT YEAR



When it comes to CFO priorities, cost control – surprisingly – doesn't top the list. Instead, 53% of CFOs want greener travel options, compared to 48% focused on savings. But sustainability also poses a challenge: 40% globally fear that evolving sustainability regulations could hurt company health over the next year. This concern varies by region: 46% in Japan, 41% in Australia and New Zealand, 40% in Canada, 40% in Germany, 39% in the United Kingdom, and 35% in the United States.

For CFOs, the future is clear: business travel should be efficient, ethical, and digitally streamlined.

AI is the new frontier in expense fraud

The age-old problem of falsified expense reports is entering a new era, one defined not just by human creativity, but also by artificial intelligence.

While employees have long been able to use dubious websites or photo-editing tools to generate fake receipts, generative AI tools now allow them to create hyper-plausible, personalized receipts that can slip past even seasoned approvers. In the United States, where AI adoption often moves fastest, 70% of business travelers believe it's at least somewhat likely that AI is already being used to fabricate expenses, compared to a global average of 55%. In Japan, only 24% say the same.

But AI is not just fueling the problem – it may also be the best defense. Over half of CFOs (55%) expect AI to catch more errors and fraud than traditional methods. When asked which would be easier to deceive on expenses, 56% of travelers said their company's approval team, while only 44% said an AI-enabled platform.

> "If the program is not embracing AI, it's going to be behind."

Paula Finn, global travel and expense Manager for Mativ, puts it plainly: "If the program is not embracing AI, it's going to be behind." As compliance risks rise, companies must treat AI as both a potential threat and a necessary safeguard. The battle over expense fraud is shifting and AI is on both sides of the fight.

CFOS' MIXED THOUGHTS ON AI-POWERED APPROVALS FOR TRAVEL

WHO TRAVEL MANAGERS THINK WOULD BE EASIEST TO DECEIVE

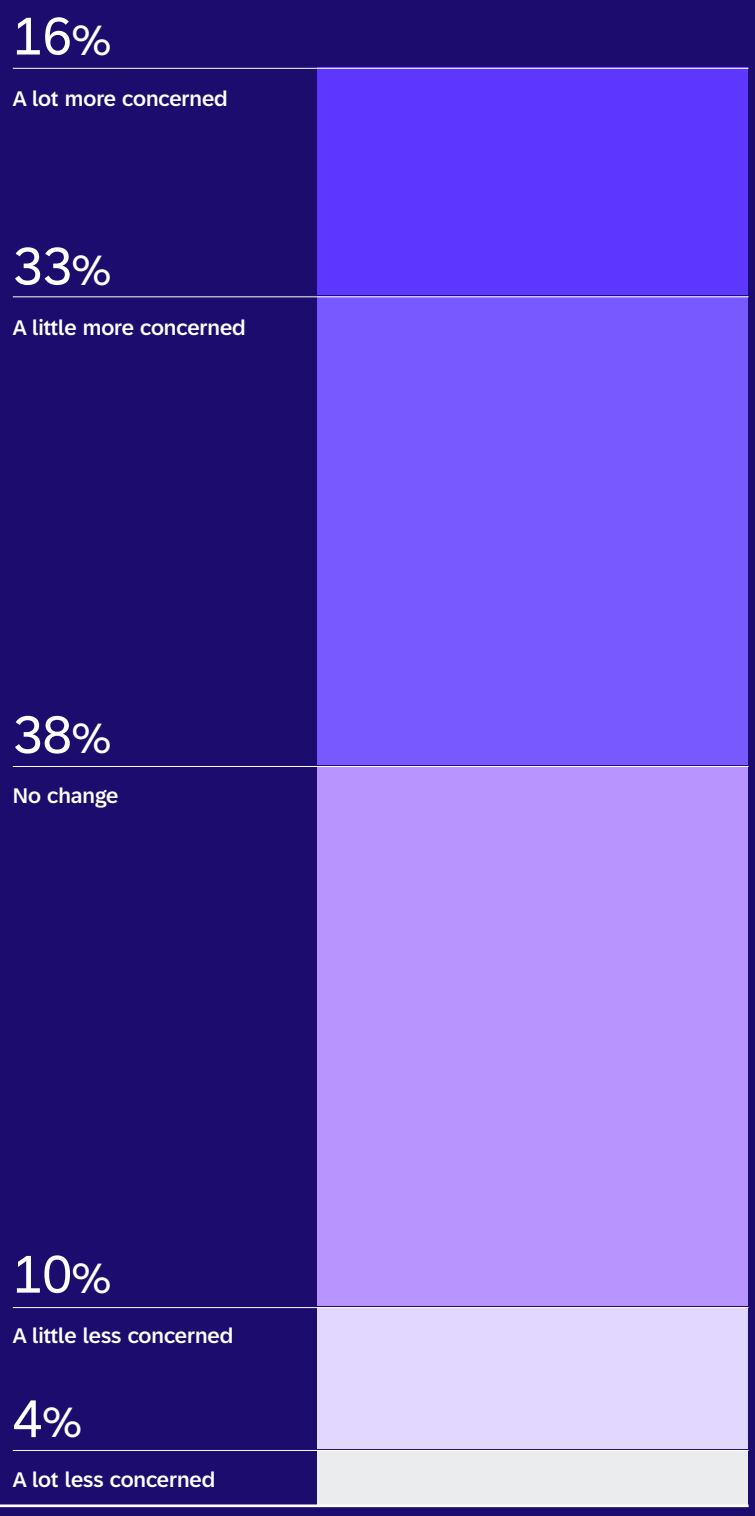
The cyber danger and what to do about it

Cybersecurity is no longer the sole concern of IT departments. It's now a frontline issue for business travelers. Sixteen percent of global travelers say they're a lot more concerned than they were last year about data breaches during business trips. While this is partly due to a rise in hidden phishing attacks, pressures in certain countries at border control to unlock laptops and share social media credentials also have an impact on traveler concerns.

Overall, 48% of travelers report increased concern about cyber threats while abroad. This shifting risk landscape has not gone unnoticed. A majority of travel managers (56%) say their companies have already updated cybersecurity guidelines, while 27% say they haven't but are currently reviewing them. Similarly, 66% of CFOs say their companies have already updated cybersecurity guidelines and 24% are in the reviewing process.

Practical measures are gaining traction. Travel policy experts recommend integrating cybersecurity protocols into travel policy and introducing them to employees during their onboarding process, not after they are already on the road. Some firms are equipping travelers with temporary replacement phones and laptops for high-risk destinations. Closer collaboration between travel managers and IT teams is increasingly essential.

HOW CONCERNED ARE TRAVELERS WITH DATA BEING HACKED WHEN ABROAD COMPARED TO A YEAR AGO?



Travel managers under pressure

Today's corporate travel managers are balancing more responsibilities than ever before. Once seen as primarily policy enforcers and procurement coordinators, they are now central to strategic decision-making: navigating cost control, sustainability, duty of care, digital transformation, and rising traveler expectations.

Yet despite their expanding duties, recognition hasn't kept pace. According to our research, 67% of travel managers say their role is undervalued – and 26% of that sample feel this strongly.

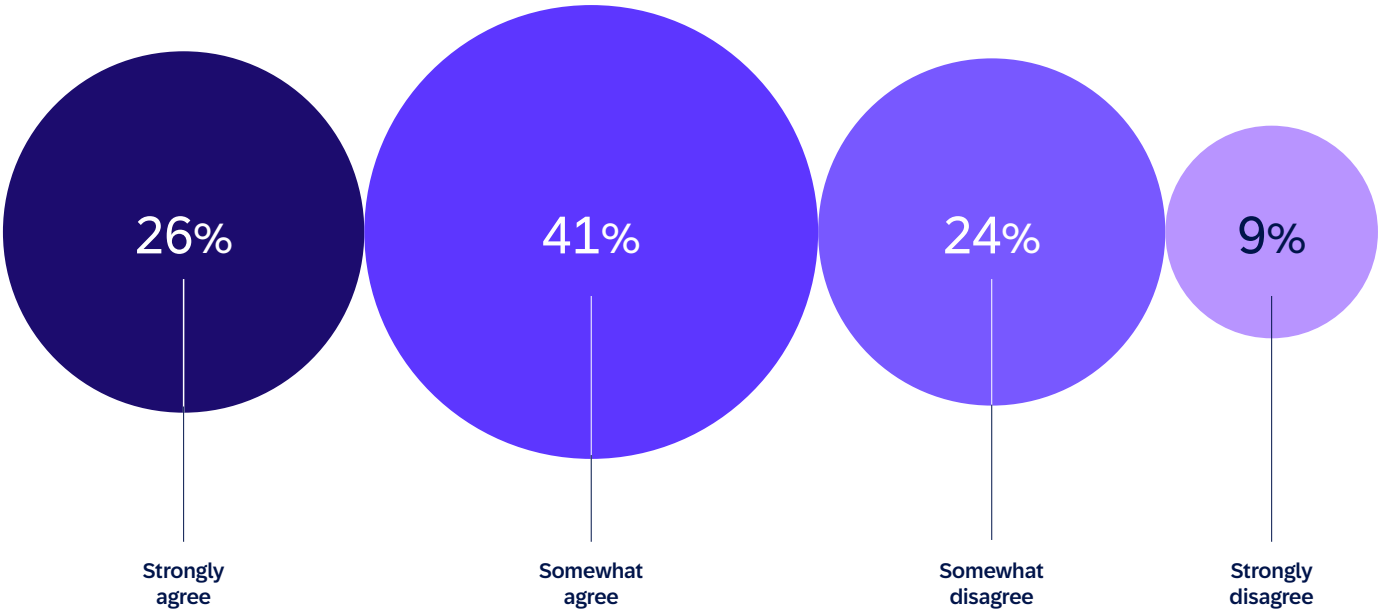
This disconnect is particularly striking given how much is being asked of them. Business travelers increasingly expect a higher level of service and support, and 86% say their travel manager could do better. Their requests are practical and revealing: 45% want more comfort-enhancing options when traveling; 41% want clearer communication around policy changes; and 40% want easier access to sustainable travel choices. Despite widespread concerns about personal safety while traveling, only 38% of travelers feel their travel manager is doing enough to ensure their wellbeing.

CFOs also see room for improvement: of the 600 CFOs surveyed, just three said their travel managers are doing all they can to support the company's success. Asked where travel managers could improve, 53% said they should increase the use of sustainable travel; 53% thought travel managers should do more on traveler safety; 51% said they should communicate policy changes better; and 51% said travel managers should do more to keep travelers happy. Clearly, the business sees the value in the function – if not always the person performing it.

86%

of business travelers say their travel manager could do better

DO TRAVEL MANAGERS THINK THEIR ROLE IS UNDERVALUED?



Generational dynamics add further complexity. Younger employees are more openly critical of their company's travel programs. An overwhelming 94% of Gen Z and 89% of millennials say they want better support, compared to just 64% of baby boomers. These differences likely reflect distinct expectations when it comes to communication, flexibility, and the integration of digital tools.

Technology is a double-edged sword in the hands of the travel manager. On one side, it's adding pressure: 33% of travel managers fear that increased virtual meetings threaten the future of business travel strategies. On the other hand, AI offers new opportunities to streamline workflows and improve responsiveness. In 2025, 48% support using AI to automate repetitive tasks – up from 40% in 2024. The number of travel managers who say AI should be used to automate "as much as possible" has also increased, rising from 24% to 28%. That said, trust in automation is still tentative. Only 28% are comfortable with AI filing expense reports, but just 1% fear that automation could replace their role entirely.

Cost pressures are further complicating the picture. "We're having a lot of issues getting corporate contracts that used to be easily attained," says Zarazua, global travel manager at ESAB Corporation. Inflation, vendor consolidation, and shifting airline pricing strategies have made negotiated agreements harder to secure – placing additional pressure on travel managers.

In response, many are looking to behavioral insights to make travel smarter, not just cheaper. "We're trying to look at people's behaviors," says Taylor, global head of travel at Harbour Energy. "Use the virtual meeting technology if you can – at least for internal meetings – but travel smarter."

Amid all these shifts, safety remains the one constant priority. "We don't care what the cost is – it's the safety aspect of it," says Finn, global travel and expense manager at Mativ. Taylor echoes this: "We would not jeopardize anyone's safety. If an employee came back with a concern, we would act immediately."

Another rising concern is cybersecurity. As business travelers become more mobile and digitally exposed, they're increasingly targeted by phishing scams and digital fraud. "Fraud comes in many ways," Zarazua cautions, "and you have to constantly be learning to recognize when something looks suspicious."

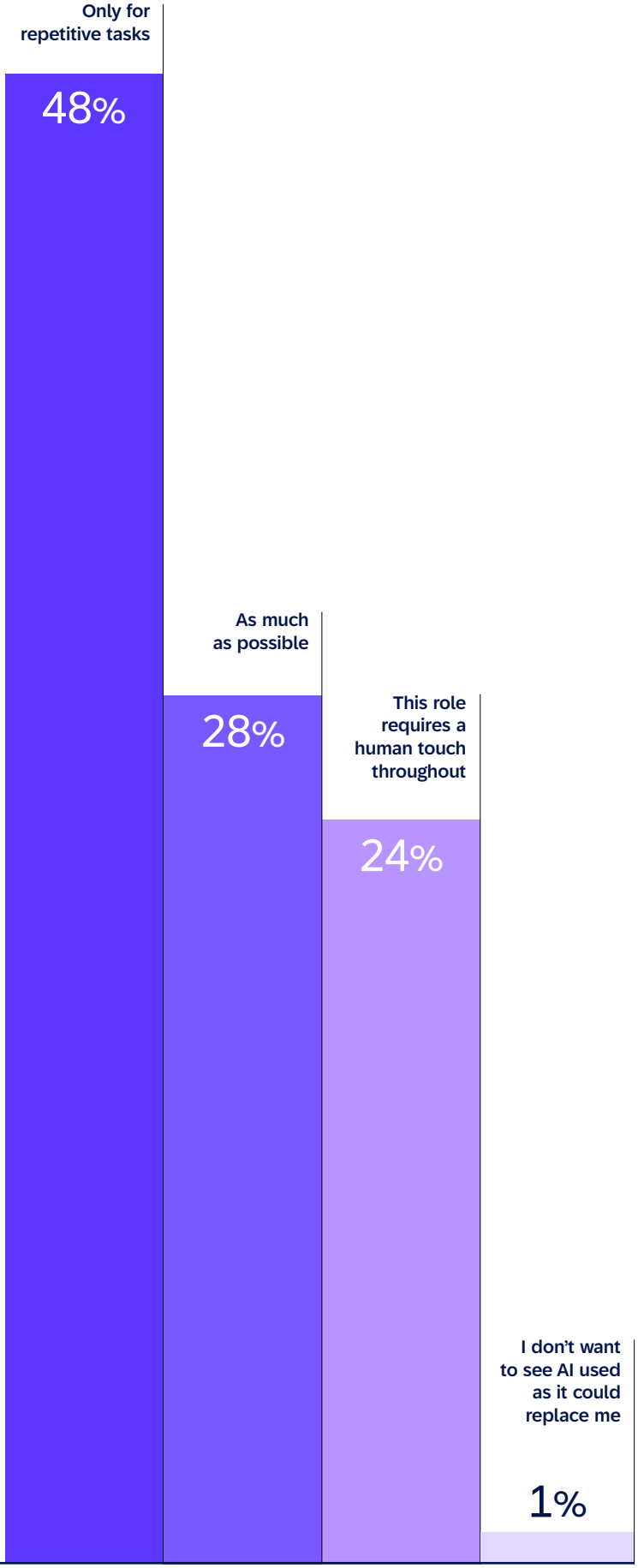
All of this paints a clear picture: today's travel manager is under intense pressure and often feels undervalued. They are tasked with reducing costs, improving traveler satisfaction, maintaining safety, hitting sustainability goals, integrating AI and other tech tools – all while managing fragmented systems.

> "We would not jeopardize anyone's safety. If an employee came back with a concern, we would act immediately."

If businesses don't rethink how they empower and support their travel managers, they risk not only burnout, but missed opportunities to optimize spend, improve safety outcomes, and elevate the employee experience. The modern travel manager is no longer just a back-office function. They are operational strategists – and increasingly, risk managers – on the front lines of business mobility.

To move business travel forward, it's time to match responsibility with recognition.

WHERE TRAVEL MANAGERS THINK AI SHOULD BE USED



AI-powered booking: Ready for take-off?

Among travel managers, the mood towards AI has clearly warmed. Just a year ago, nearly a third (32%) felt that booking travel required a human touch AI could not replicate. This year, that number has dropped to 24%. This shift suggests growing confidence in AI's capabilities, especially for automating routine or time-consuming tasks.

However, that openness is conditional. Travel managers must also navigate travelers' concerns about AI-powered travel bookings, which have changed little since 2024. The top three are: wanting assurance that personal data will be robustly protected (45%); asking for training on how to use AI tools (39%); and guarantees against algorithmic bias (36%). Travel managers will have an uphill task if asked to introduce AI that doesn't meet these objections.

> "We're exploring ways to use AI to improve planning and enhance the overall travel experience."

Business travelers are still approaching AI with a healthy dose of caution. Eighty-seven percent say they are not yet comfortable using AI tools to book trips, a very slight change from 90% last year. This suggests that while awareness may be increasing, comfort levels are slower to follow.

On the other hand, there are specific areas where travelers are showing enthusiasm for AI. Forty-four percent are comfortable with AI managing pre-trip changes, while 39% say they are okay with AI assistance during

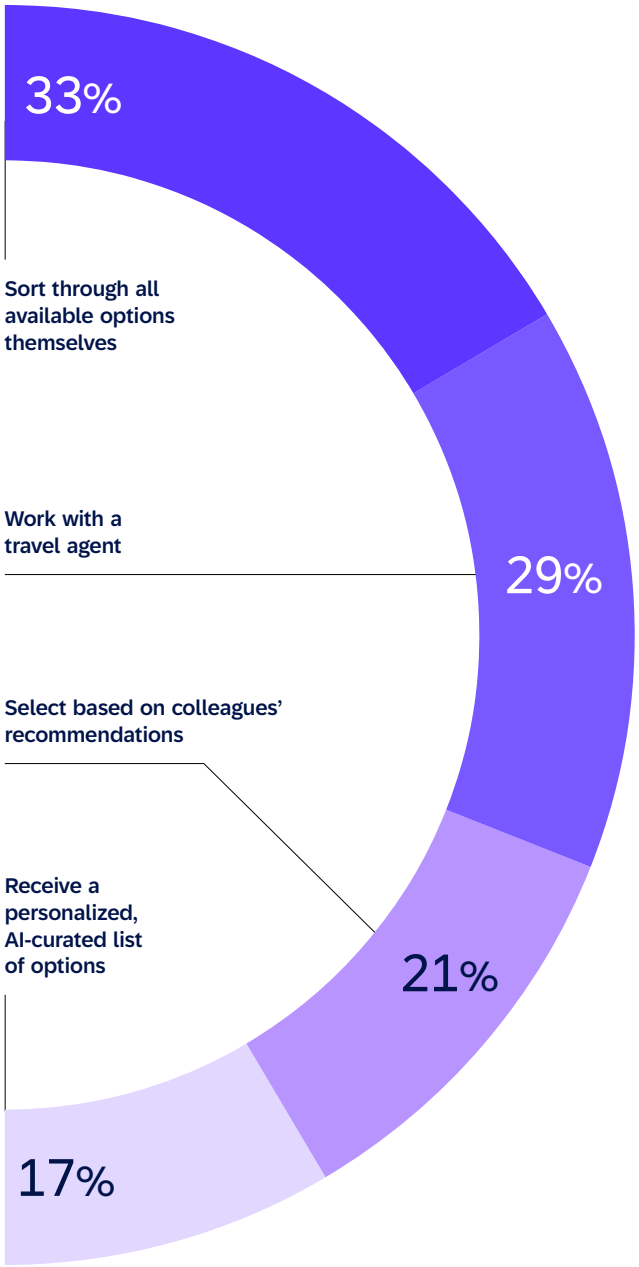
52%

of travel managers are comfortable with AI supporting travelers during booking, but just

28%

are OK with AI support on filing expense reports

WHICH BOOKING EXPERIENCE DO TRAVELERS MOST PREFER?



the booking process, particularly for tasks like flagging delays and offering rebooking options. But there are limits: only 17% are enthusiastic about receiving AI-curated travel suggestions based on their preferences, suggesting travelers aren't yet ready to hand over the decision-making.

Some early adopters are already reaping the benefits. Zarazua of ESAB Corporation explains how her company's AI tool can analyze flight history to predict delays and offer smart rebooking options. "We're exploring ways to use AI to improve planning and enhance the overall travel experience," says Finn, global travel and expense manager for Mativ.

Overall, it's clear that businesses need staff to hit the road, and employees are generally happy to do so if their concerns are met on safety and other issues. CFOs think they are supporting the business by maintaining or bumping up travel budgets, yet travel managers say these funds often fall short of covering travel's true value.

The result is that travelscrimping is impacting the traveler experience: in future surveys we will keep a careful eye on whether travelers eventually say enough is enough. Finally, as AI and cyber risk reshape the travel landscape, all stakeholders must adapt – balancing efficiency, risk, employee comfort, and costs. Solving this equation is essential for organizations to continue to reap the very real value generated by business travel.

WHERE ARE BUSINESS TRAVELERS COMFORTABLE WITH AI SUPPORT?

About Wakefield Research

Wakefield Research is a leading, independent provider of quantitative, qualitative, and hybrid market research for thought leadership and strategic insights. Wakefield Research is a partner to the world's leading brands and agencies, including 50 of the Fortune 100. We conduct research in nearly 100 countries and our surveys appear regularly in top-tier media.

Survey methodology

The Concur Business Travelers - Global Survey was conducted by Wakefield Research between April 30 and May 12, 2025, among 3,750 Business Travelers in 24 markets: the United States, Canada, the United Kingdom, Germany, France, Benelux (Belgium, Netherlands, Luxembourg), Sweden, Denmark, Norway, Finland, Italy, Spain, ANZ (Australia, New Zealand), Middle East (UAE & Saudi Arabia), Japan, Korea, India, Mexico, Brazil, SEA (Singapore & Malaysia), South Africa, Portugal, Switzerland, and Austria. Includes an oversample to increase the total number of U.S. Utilities respondents to 100, and an oversample to increase the total number of U.S. Higher Education respondents to 50.

The Concur Travel Managers - Global Survey was conducted by Wakefield Research between April 30 and May 12, 2025, among 700 Travel Managers, defined as those who direct or administer travel programs for businesses, across 7 markets: Germany, Italy, Canada, Japan, ANZ (Australia and New Zealand), the United Kingdom, and the United States. Includes an oversample to increase the total number of U.S. Utilities respondents to 100, and an oversample to increase the total number of U.S. Higher Education respondents to 50.

The Concur CFO - Global Survey was conducted by Wakefield Research between April 30 and May 12, 2among 600 CFOs across 6 markets: Germany, Canada, Japan, ANZ (Australia and New Zealand), the United Kingdom and the United States Includes an oversample to increase the total number of U.S. Utilities respondents to 100 and an oversample to increase the total number of U.S. Higher Education respondents to 50.

Results of any sample are subject to sampling variation. The magnitude of the variation is measurable and is affected by the number of interviews and the level of the percentages expressing the results. For the interviews conducted in this study, the chances are 95 in 100 that a survey result does not vary, plus or minus, by more than 1.6 percentage points for the global business travelers sample, by more than 3.7 percentage points for the global travel managers sample, and 3.6 percentage points for the global CFO sample, from the result that would be obtained if interviews had been conducted with all persons in the universe represented by the sample.

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