



BACK IN BUSINESS CLASS

After a few years in the doldrums, corporate travelers have returned to find improved airplanes, more inviting hotels and expanded services and rewards



Business travel is cyclical, and over the last three years most road warriors have had a close-up view of bad times. Companies cut back, ordering them

to stay close to home base, and the few business trips allowed required multiple levels of management approval. Business class was banned. First class? Out of the question. Expense reports were examined and reexamined. Those “fun” business trips to meetings and conventions were canceled—and many thought they’d never return, replaced instead by dull teleconferences from desktops or windowless boardrooms.

The nice thing about cycles, though, is that for every *to* there is a *fro*. After a few stagnant years at the bottom of a cycle, business travelers are witnessing a return to the upside. An improving global economy means that travel budgets are expanding; pent-up demand is being expressed, and business travelers are creeping back onto the road and into the skies to reestablish old connections and make new ones, face-to-face.

“Business travel is back; the front cabins of planes are full. Companies and their travelers now realize that you can’t do business hiding at home under the covers. They know they’ve got to get back out there in front of clients and customers,” says Thorsten Kirschke, global COO of Carlson Hotels, the giant Minneapolis-based hospitality company that includes brands such as Radisson, Country Inns & Suites By Carlson, Park Inn by Radisson and Park Plaza, and sister company Carlson Wagonlit Travel. “This trend is confirmed by our own numbers and those of our partners and consultants.” In 2010, Carlson reported a 12 percent increase in system-wide sales, to \$6.5 billion, for its global hotel business.

Global airlines are seeing an uptick in performance, too. “In the U.S. we experienced a 21 percent increase in business travel sales in 2010 compared to



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2009, and our forward bookings for 2011 are very positive," says Don Bunkenburg, Managing Director, Corporate Sales and Regions, North America, at Lufthansa. "The most pronounced increases have been in the automotive and financial industry segments. Geographically, demand for flights has been greatest between the U.S., Europe and India."

As business travelers climb back to the upside of the cycle, here are some highlights to look forward to.

The hotel industry kept on building during the recent recession because many projects were already underway when the economy tanked in 2008.



Newer planes

Newly profitable airlines are keeping assembly lines busy at Boeing, Airbus and Embraer this year, rolling out a slew of newer, faster, more efficient and more comfortable aircraft to the delight of travelers around the world. Lufthansa launched new Airbus A380 nonstops between Frankfurt and New York–JFK in February, and its new big bird will fly between San Francisco and Frankfurt starting in May. Frankfurt–Miami flights are set to begin in June. Lufthansa's new double-decker flagship has been flying between Frankfurt and Johannesburg, Beijing and Tokyo since last year. (The carrier will have a total of 15 A380s by 2015.) Lufthansa is also the launch customer of Boeing's longest and most efficient version of its 747 line, the new 747-8 Intercontinental, and expects delivery of the first one (of 20 on order) in 2012.



Bigger seats

With more business travelers willing to pay a premium to be able to sleep well on intercontinental flights, airlines are pouring lots of money and creativity into their business and first-class products. Lufthansa's new A380 offers a whopping 98 lie-flat business-class seats, great for arriving rested and ready to work. Lufthansa's exclusive eight-seat first-class section on the A380 offers several extra touches to guarantee comfort, such as a special system that moistens cabin air to 25 percent humidity (up from the standard desert-like 8 percent); special sound-absorbing

insulation in floors, walls and curtains; and a seat that flattens into a 6.8-foot bed (which upon request will be made up with all-cotton sheets, a comforter and a full-size pillow). Lufthansa is also currently upgrading first-class comforts on its 747-400 fleet, where each of the eight individual seats will have a genuine full-flat bed right next to it. Zzzzzzz.



Sweeter hotels

The hotel industry kept on building during the recent recession because many projects were already underway when the economy tanked in 2008. That's great news for business travelers who can now choose among hundreds of nice new hotels in major business travel destinations.

For example, Radisson will open 44 new hotels around the world this year, including the spectacular 334-room Radisson Blu Aqua Hotel in downtown Chicago. Opening this fall on 18 floors of the new 81-story Aqua Tower, the debut will mark the arrival from Europe of Radisson's upper upscale, design-forward Blu tier of the brand. One of the most dramatic features of the hotel will be its 12,500-square-foot ballroom with floor-to-ceiling windows and spectacular views of the city skyline, Millennium Park, Pritzker Pavilion and Lake Michigan. (Think about that the next time you attend an event in the windowless, frequently below-ground-level ballrooms at many hotels.) A second Radisson Blu hotel is slated to open in Minneapolis in March 2013.



Improved rewards

Travel suppliers are rolling out new benefits and promotions to welcome back business travelers. The new Club Carlson loyalty program now offers free in-room Internet access to members at Radisson hotels worldwide and Carlson hotels in North America; no elite status is required—all guests have to do is enroll (if they are not already members). Plus, members who register and stay twice at a Carlson property between now and June 15 can earn one free night at any of over 1,000 Carlson hotel properties worldwide. Learn more at clubcarlson.com/freenight. As airlines consolidate and loyalty shifts, credit card companies are also rolling out new offers. Starting this month, American Express now offers Platinum cardholders a \$200 credit to cover new airline fees, free access to hundreds of airport lounges, and a big 25–50K-point bonus just for signing up.



Better technology

One of the limitations of the popular Gogo in-flight Wi-Fi system used by some U.S. carriers is that it's a ground-based system, and has limited range over water. Lufthansa has worked around that obstacle by installing FlyNet, a new satellite-based broadband Internet system that operates on most of its flights over the North Atlantic. What's even more appealing about FlyNet is that users can pay for it in euros (starting at €10.95 for one hour and €19.95 for 24 hours) or frequent flyer miles (starting at 3,500 miles/hour). —Chris McGinnis

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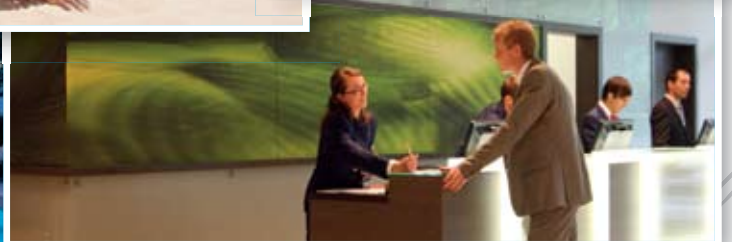
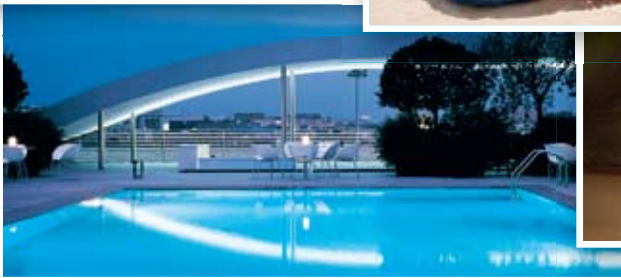
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