

COVID-19 WILL DRASTICALLY CHANGE TRAVEL HABITS FOREVER - BIGGEST AIRLINE PASSENGER CONFIDENCE SURVEY

News / Airlines



Flying habits are set to change drastically for the long-term, with eight in ten airline passengers (83%) not expecting to return to their previous travel routines once the COVID-19 pandemic is over. This is just one of the key findings from a new global passenger survey commissioned by Inmarsat, the world leader in global mobile satellite communications. The 'Passenger Confidence Tracker' is the world's largest survey of airline passengers since the pandemic began. It reflects the views and attitudes of 9,500 respondents from 12 countries across the globe about the future of flying. While the majority of passengers (60%) feel satisfied with the aviation industry's response to the challenges of COVID-19, the survey reveals areas of opportunity for airlines to encourage passengers back to the skies.

Philip Balaam, President of Inmarsat Aviation, said: “With safety and reputation becoming even more important to today’s flyers, there is a clear need for airlines to differentiate themselves in order to encourage passengers back onto their flights. Digitalisation lies at the heart of both; minimising critical touchpoints in the passenger journey to improve confidence, all the while keeping passengers connected and entertained.”

Only a third (34%) of passengers surveyed have taken a commercial flight since the pandemic began, and this appears to have sparked a shift in attitudes to flying. Four in ten passengers (41%) expect to travel less by any means and a third (31%) plan to fly less. This sentiment is even higher among Asian passengers, with 58 per cent in India and 55 per cent in South Korea planning to travel less in the future.

Despite this change, there are early signs that travellers are beginning to feel confident about flying again; almost half (47%) of passengers surveyed expect to feel ready to fly within the next six months.

The study reveals significant variance across the world when it comes to passenger confidence about flying in light of the pandemic. Hungarian and British fliers are most confident, with 26 per cent and 16 per cent respectively saying they would get on a flight today. Asian passengers are less so; over a third (35%) of South Koreans expect not to fly again until COVID-19 disappears.

Travel confidence broadly correlates to levels of public concern about COVID-19. For example, South Koreans and Singaporeans are twice as likely to describe their behaviour in relation to the virus as ‘highly cautious’ than Britons.

Passengers are currently more fearful of catching the virus abroad than on the plane. In fact, many think they are at a greater health risk in other environments, such as the gym and public transport. Recent IATA research supports this, suggesting people are more likely to be struck by lightning than catch COVID-19 on a plane.

While passengers largely feel confident at passport control, security and communicating with cabin crew, they are less comfortable visiting the toilet inflight, and being in close proximity with others. The study indicates that solutions that minimise touchpoints and reduce interactions would go furthest in addressing pain points - such as contactless payments inflight (83%) and staggered security queues (84%).

When it comes to ensuring personal safety, passengers have disregarded the automatic 14-day quarantine. Instead, the results show a desire for a consistent set of measures to make the journey safer – such as mandatory face coverings, or a 48-hour test before travel.

Almost half of passengers (44%) say that reputation is now a more significant factor when choosing an airline than it was pre-pandemic. It has therefore never been more vital for airlines to differentiate and gain a competitive edge.

The research highlights that improving inflight experience is one way to achieve this. From extra legroom (43%) to free baggage (39%), value added services are becoming increasingly important to passengers returning to the skies.

Digital solutions are fast-becoming essential to an enjoyable inflight experience, with almost four in ten (39%) agreeing that onboard Wi-Fi matters more today than ever before. This is most significant for Indian and Brazilian passengers. Destination status alerts, real time luggage tracking

and pre-clearing immigration on the plane - all enabled by cabin connectivity - are among the top new aspects of the journey passengers want to keep post-pandemic.

Inmarsat is transforming the global aviation industry by bringing complete connectivity to every aircraft and flight path in the world. Passengers can browse the internet, stream videos, check social media and more during flights, with an onboard connectivity experience on par with broadband services available on the ground. In addition, Inmarsat's flight deck solutions combine cutting-edge satellite technology with secure IP broadband connectivity for enhanced operational efficiency and safety.

The 'Passenger Confidence Tracker' will be explored in greater detail later today (10 November, 14.30 GMT) at FlightPlan, the aviation industry's largest virtual convening, hosted by Inmarsat and the Airline Passenger Experience Association (APEX). To find out more, register now at flightplan.wavecast.io.

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