

Flexibility, bleisure travel and flexcations are the new normal in travel

 By [Jonathan Ayache](#)

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If we've learnt anything over the last two years, it's the importance of pivoting your business to adapt to the ever-changing environment. While international travel continues to open up, the pandemic remains a reality that looks set to stay with us for a while.



Jonathan Ayache, Founder and CEO of Lift

Lift, for example, was the first airline in South Africa to offer 'no strings attached' flexibility - giving passengers the ability to change or cancel flights up to 24 hours before take-off. Travel remains stressful for many and this option has proven to go a long way in removing this key stress point.

Despite the impact of the 4th wave and global travel restrictions, December was the best month for Lift since we launched. We moved $\pm 45k$ people with 96% on-time performance. This reiterates that understanding customer needs and remaining customer-centric remains a differentiator in our market and is good for business.

As business travel picks-up, we foresee an increase in joint business and leisure travel, also known as bleisure travel. The Global Business Travel Association (GBTA) expects international business travel spending to surge in 2022 and possibly double by 2024. Business travellers will want to add an element of fun to really make the most of the destinations they visit. Employers are likely to agree, as they offer these trips as a perk, accommodating 'workation' requests to attract and keep the right talent.

As digital nomads become the norm in 2022, work and pleasure will become even more closely linked with flexcations increasing. This creative travel in a time of work and school flux - blends remote flexibility - invigorating a new golden age of travel. With school schedules more flexible than ever, attending classes and working can take place anywhere now. This creates big opportunities for family travel, which was traditionally seasonal. Travel opportunities will now arise at unexpected times - and travel deprived individuals are expected to take advantage in new ways.

Curated travel experiences

From dream local destinations to dream experiences - travellers are looking to create memorable experiences. With this

knowledge in mind, we've created Lift Experiences, for example, to cater to the modern traveller offering curated travel experiences to suit consumer pockets and desires. Packaged with the help of travel experts, this is one way Lift is looking to stimulate tourism amid Covid-19 waves and lockdown levels.

While curated travel experiences have become a standard in the travel industry, Lift has gone out of its way to partner with service providers who offer better flexibility through Lift Experiences, for example, allowing travellers to tailor travel experiences as much as possible.

Linked with revenge travel, and the vaccine rollout picking up pace, travel is expected to increase as travel becomes safer and countries open back up. While many outright cancelled travel plans in the last two years, many will look to squash the travel bug this year.

Innovation and rapid technological adoption are also expected to play a vital role in getting global travel and tourism to pre-Covid levels. Organisations such as the International Air Transport Association (Iata), for example, have re-emphasised the crucial need for digital solutions which will allow for the reopening of borders without quarantine. Iata stated that without these digitalising document-checking processes, the average processing time at airports worldwide might increase to eight hours if airport traffic returns to pre-pandemic (2019) levels.

In the case of South Africa, it will become essential to ensure that the Covid passport links simply to global systems to prevent high waiting times at immigration. To date, digital travel passes have proven to be an imperative measure for those looking to travel abroad, but the lack of standardisation is creating mass confusion.

As we consider what the business, frequent and occasional traveller wants, meeting them where they are will become even more crucial to customer retention in 2022 and beyond.

ABOUT JONATHAN AYACHE

Jonathan Ayache holds a Business Science and Honours in Finance and Economics degree from UCT.
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