

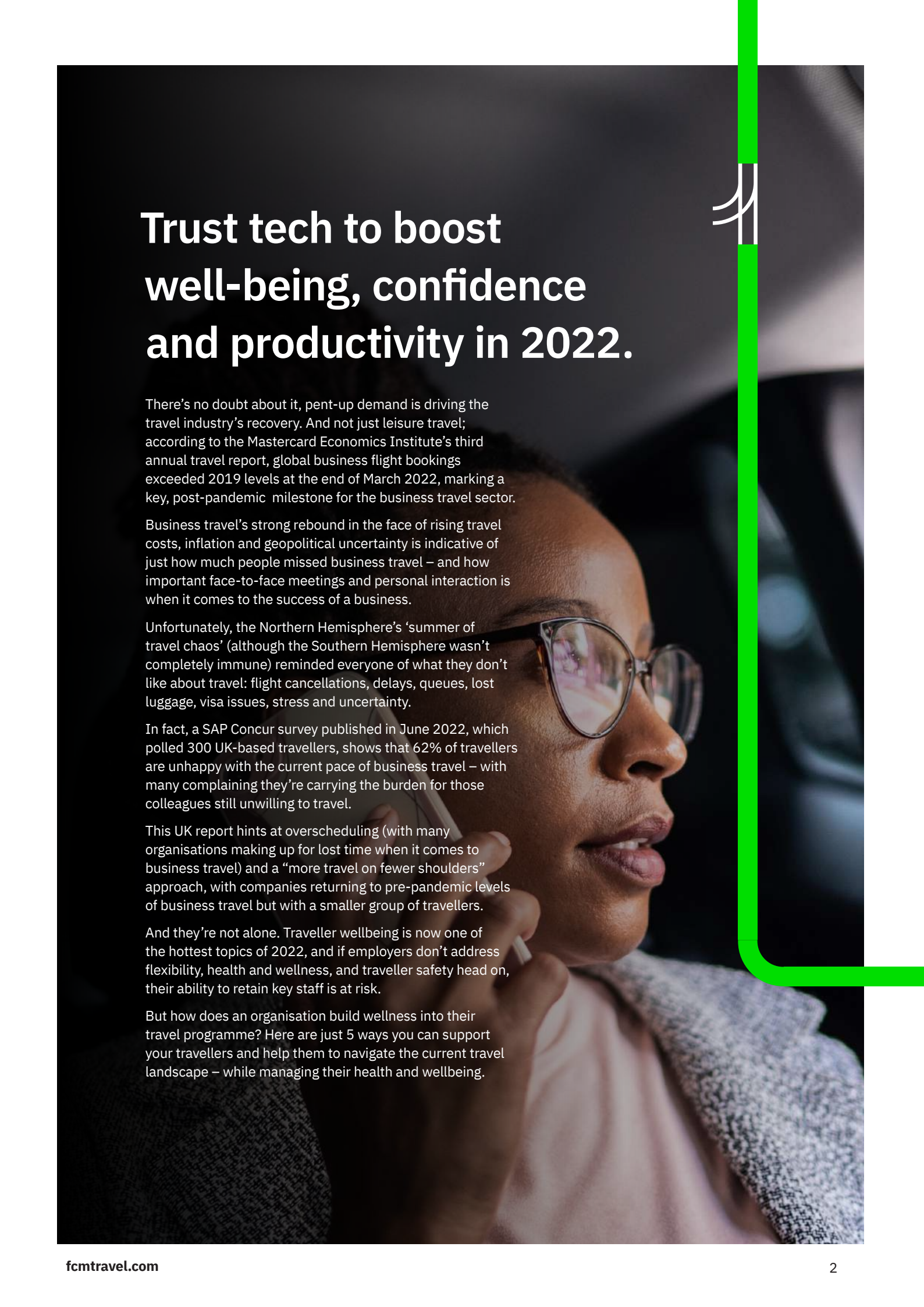
A close-up, high-angle shot of a young woman with dark hair, smiling warmly. She is wearing white earbuds with a visible cord. She is seated in what appears to be the back of a car, with the window and interior trim visible in the background. The lighting is soft and natural, coming from the side.

FCM

Health check.

Where are you in terms of
traveller wellbeing?

fcmtravel.com



Trust tech to boost well-being, confidence and productivity in 2022.

There's no doubt about it, pent-up demand is driving the travel industry's recovery. And not just leisure travel; according to the Mastercard Economics Institute's third annual travel report, global business flight bookings exceeded 2019 levels at the end of March 2022, marking a key, post-pandemic milestone for the business travel sector.

Business travel's strong rebound in the face of rising travel costs, inflation and geopolitical uncertainty is indicative of just how much people missed business travel – and how important face-to-face meetings and personal interaction is when it comes to the success of a business.

Unfortunately, the Northern Hemisphere's 'summer of travel chaos' (although the Southern Hemisphere wasn't completely immune) reminded everyone of what they don't like about travel: flight cancellations, delays, queues, lost luggage, visa issues, stress and uncertainty.

In fact, a SAP Concur survey published in June 2022, which polled 300 UK-based travellers, shows that 62% of travellers are unhappy with the current pace of business travel – with many complaining they're carrying the burden for those colleagues still unwilling to travel.

This UK report hints at overscheduling (with many organisations making up for lost time when it comes to business travel) and a "more travel on fewer shoulders" approach, with companies returning to pre-pandemic levels of business travel but with a smaller group of travellers.

And they're not alone. Traveller wellbeing is now one of the hottest topics of 2022, and if employers don't address flexibility, health and wellness, and traveller safety head on, their ability to retain key staff is at risk.

But how does an organisation build wellness into their travel programme? Here are just 5 ways you can support your travellers and help them to navigate the current travel landscape – while managing their health and wellbeing.

01

Understand the challenges

It's fantastic to see business travel return, and for many travellers it is an exciting time. But it is important to stop for a minute, and ask ourselves if we really want to go back to exactly how things were before, be it frequency of travel, sustainability, or health and safety. Or if it might be time take an alternative approach to business travel.

Because while business travel can be a great way to improve productivity and performance, it can take a toll on employee wellbeing. A study conducted by Collison found that 35% of business travellers had concerns about the impact of travel on their mental health – and even admitted that they had at some point given a false reason to avoid having to travel for work.

Frequent fliers often face unique challenges that other workers do not, including feeling isolated from their homes and family and missing their regular routine. Changing time zones plays havoc with one's sleep patterns, while jet lag can sometimes take up to a week (or more) to shake off. All of this impacts employee productivity, negatively impacting your company's bottom line.

The answer? A new, proactive approach to health and wellbeing.

One which looks at closely at company culture, your current travel policy, and travel programme data in order to keep travellers safe, well and productive while on the road.

02

Update your travel policy

Employees are looking for greater work-life balance, but how far is your organisation willing to go in order to support them? And what might a 'health-centric' travel policy look like?

According to Bonnie Smith, GM of FCM, this is a good place to start:

Make it easy for business travellers to make healthier choices

No-one enjoys the thought of a 'red-eye' flight, long-layover, or a chancily short, mad-dash connection. Prioritise convenient flight times and work with your travellers to ensure they have enough time to conclude their meetings – and make their flight.

The same goes for accommodation options: make sure your travellers have a pool of safe, comfortable and conveniently-located hotels to choose from – with all the mod cons and amenities they need.

Take note of traveller preferences

It's amazing how the smallest details can make the biggest difference. "Ideally, we want the traveller to feel safe and well cared for, but also to thoroughly enjoy their trip from beginning to end," says Smith. "This is why it's important to capture each traveller's unique travel preferences. For example, where they like to sit on the plane, what type of meals they enjoy, their special dietary requirements, their preferred hotels, etc., and make bookings and reservations accordingly – in line with the company's travel policy, of course."

Reward healthy travel habits

Would you consider health and fitness reimbursements? In other words, picking up the tab for gym visits, fitness classes or spa treatments while your employees are travelling? Other ideas include increasing a traveller's daily per diem, so they enjoy a healthy breakfast – or providing a full post-trip 'duvet day' to help employees get some rest before they return the office.

Improve the travel experience to prevent burnout

Employees who travel frequently for work take on a lot. To ease the burden, employers can modify their travel policies to include upgrades on long flights, full lounge access wherever possible, or a day off whenever flights exceed a certain distance or time.

Think beyond the hotel option

Serviced apartments offer a homier atmosphere than traditional hotel accommodations, allowing business travellers to maintain their daily routines while away from home. With access to a fully equipped kitchen, for example, business travellers can prepare healthy meals instead of eating out daily.

Negotiate perks and upgrades

Over and above your travel policy, chat to your TMC about how they can get involved. Many global TMCs will be able to use their influence (aka buying power) and existing supplier relationships to negotiate special perks on your behalf. These include free upgrades, priority boarding and lounge access as well as early check-in or late check-out. Which can make a massive difference for weary travellers.

03

Deliver a seamless journey

According to SAP Concur, anxiety and stress around the current travel landscape is top of mind for most business travellers. Enter tech.

Employees want their companies to leverage technology in order to help them navigate the latest guidelines and restrictions (which still look very different around the world), as well as the challenges encountered at some of the busiest hubs as pent-up demand continues to outstrip supply. In a report published by SAP Concur in April 2022, business travellers ranked their top five investment asks as:

1. Adding or updating apps with real-time travel updates and booking (46%).
2. Tools for quicker expense reimbursement (43%).
3. Tools for navigating the latest travel safety requirements (41%).
4. A travel management system (40%).
5. An integrated system for travel and expense reporting (39%).

This is echoed by the findings of a recent GBTA/FCM survey of travel managers across North America, Europe and Asia Pacific which shows that technology is now the most important factor when travel managers select a TMC, ahead of costs/ fees, account management quality, and support. In fact, three in five (59%) travel managers include technology as one of the most important factors when selecting a TMC.

“It is not simply about getting a traveller to their destination and back safely,” says Smith. “It’s about the entire, end-to-end journey; from a fast, easy-to-use booking platform and consistent experience, to streamlined approval processes, digital travel wallets and on-the-go communication.”

The FCM platform focuses on content (with a wide choice of on-policy options to meet a traveller’s preferences); gamification (delivering a simple, intuitive user experience); analytics (for up-to-the-minute reporting); and 24-hour, ‘always on’ support.

For Smith, FCM Mobile has been a game-changer. “The FCM platform is available across all devices, which means a traveller can check their itinerary, receive updated information and travel alerts, and even ask questions and receive support.”

The FCM chatbot deals with straightforward questions, while a traveller can access instant support from a travel expert at the touch of a button.

“Honestly, travellers just want a seamless, stress-free journey – and we make that happen by giving them the right tools and putting the right information at their fingertips, not to mention instant, afterhours support if they need it,” says Smith.

04

Use data and dashboards to give you the edge

The wonderful thing about travel data? Strategic visibility. Not only in terms of financial visibility and travel risk management, but also in terms of the health and wellbeing of your travellers.

Mbali Mngomezulu, Business Development Manager at FCM – Middle East & Africa, says that travel data is incredibly powerful.

“The FCM Platform’s dynamic Health & Safety Dashboard allows travel managers to analyse past, current and future trips, paying careful attention to which travellers are carrying the load.”

The interactive dashboard allows you to pull selected data on trips and travellers, which means you can analyse typical traveller behaviour and

flag any issues. “For example,” says Mngomezulu “if you have a traveller away for 4 nights, but you’ve only booked 2 night’s accommodation, you can be pretty sure they’re sleeping on an aeroplane.”

According to Mngomezulu, your TMC should constantly be collecting data regarding previous travel experiences and traveller behaviour as well as gathering insights and predictions regarding future travel. “This allows you to make strong recommendations for new strategies surrounding travel, as well as suggestions for any necessary changes that you should be making to your current travel programme and/or policies,” says Mngomezulu.

“And the great thing about the FCM Platform is that the data is instantly available. Gone are the days when you have to wait for monthly reports from an account manager. You can take a deep dive into your travel programme whenever you need to, revealing areas where you’re overspending; identifying opportunities to save; looking at how you can improve traveller safety or structure trips to ensure that travellers are happy and healthy – ultimately ensuring that your business travel contributes to your organisation’s goals, success and bottom line.”



Dashboarding is also useful pre- and post-trip. Create traveller surveys to gather information and insights and then use dashboards to measure and track traveller satisfaction, implementing changes where necessary.

The Institute of Travel Management recommends that travel managers ask their travellers some important questions, including:

- How do you feel about this business trip?
- What can we (as a company) do to make sure you feel happy, rested and productive during your time away?
- How is this trip going to affect your personal life and your physical and mental wellbeing?
- Is there anything you are worried about for your trip?
- What would you like changed, or implemented for future trips, to give you a better experience?

For Mngomezulu, it’s a very pro-active approach to traveller wellbeing. And one that could have a significant impact on attracting and retaining key staff.

05

Upgrade your duty of care

Of course, dashboards are invaluable when it comes to traveller safety and duty of care. The biggest tech advancements have been around real-time traveller tracking features, as well as round-the-clock communication channels.

“Tech features like instant alerts, traveller tracking, monitoring and reporting are now non-negotiables when it comes to risk management,” says Smith. “Increasingly, companies are relying on travel advisors with the in-depth knowledge and experience to identify and mitigate risks; understand the different risks associated with different destinations; have the agility needed to keep up with changing travel restrictions; and have the tech capabilities to track and communicate quickly with travellers.”



06

Put bleisure back on the agenda

Blended Travel. Bleisure. Workations. Wolidays. All terms for mixing business and leisure, a trend which is only going to grow in popularity as employees chase work-life balance – and the chance to satisfy post-pandemic, pent-up travel demand.

In fact, bleisure travel is a win-win for everyone. Business travellers get to add days onto the front or back end of their business trip to relax, recharge or explore new destinations, while businesses reap the benefits of happy, healthy, productive employees.

In a survey conducted by Deloitte in late 2021, an overwhelming majority of corporate travel managers (82%) indicated that their workers were equally or more interested in blended travel than they used to be. And the younger the employees, the more important it becomes.

Work with your TMC to put clear bleisure guidelines in place, for example:

- Who pays for what in the 'leisure' component of a bleisure trip?
- What are your preferred airlines, accommodation suppliers and processes to ensure the safety of employees on a bleisure trip?
- Who is responsible for travel insurance?
- Are leisure days incorporated into a trip, or taken as formal leave days?

According to Smith, having flexible policies and a supportive approach to bleisure travel – with a set of formal rules in place – will raise staff morale, as employees realise that the company means business when it comes to health, wellness and balance.



The last word ...

There are a number of things that both travellers and travel managers can do to ensure that health and wellbeing becomes a natural part of any business trip.

For example:

Book an earlier flight. Flight schedules are often interdependent, and delays with one flight can cause delays for other flights later in the day. By booking an early morning flight, you minimise the risk of delays later in the day ensure that you arrive at your destination on time.

Build in time. Chat to your travel manager about putting together a manageable itinerary. One where you can build in buffer time, breathing space and wriggle room. Don't dash from meeting to meeting (or worse, from flight to flight).

Download your TMC's travel app. You'll be able to access all the information you need - and receive up-to-the-minute information re. cancellations, delays or gate changes.

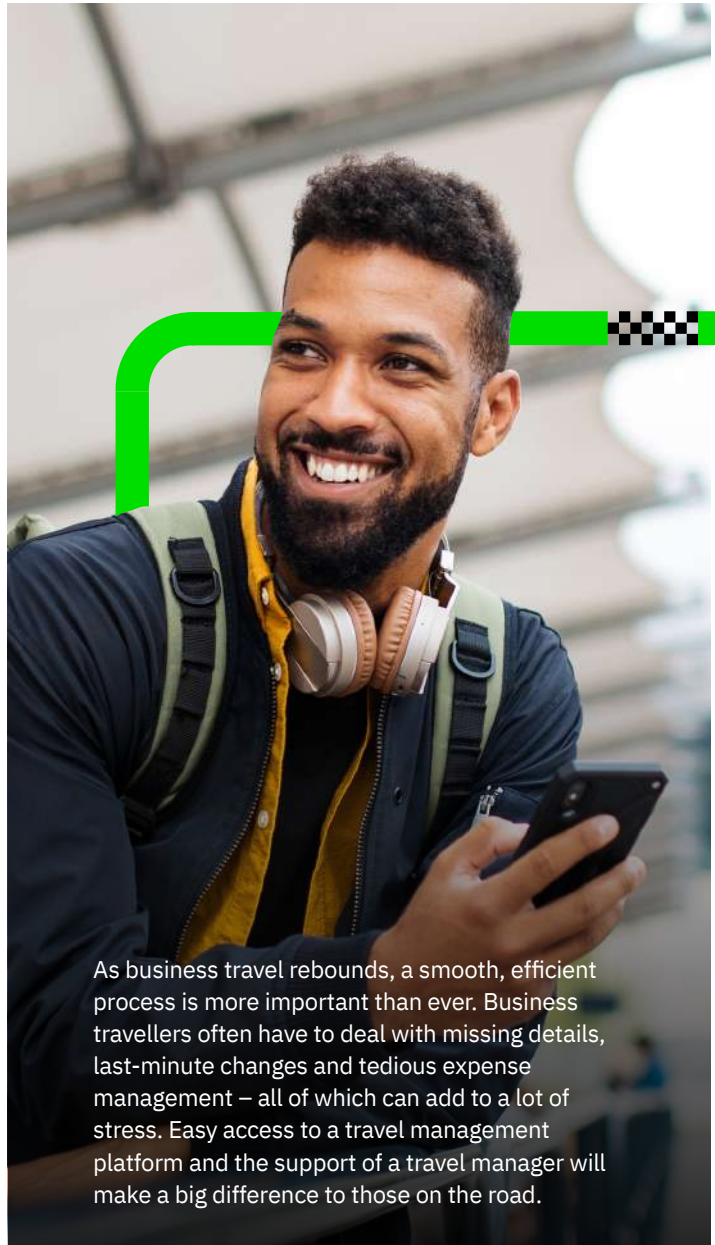
Try a jet lag app. Jet lag apps (e.g., Timeshifter) help international jetsetters adjust to new time zones. These apps recommend when to sleep, avoid caffeine, and get exposure to bright light.

Pack your running shoes. Encourage travellers to stay active while on the road – including fitness reimbursements for gym visits.

Sign-up for a hotel programme. Chat to your TMC about their recommended hotel programmes, and opt for partners with onsite gyms, pools, and loyalty programmes (great for perks like early check-in and free Wi-Fi).

Consider alternative accommodation. Self-catering studios and apartments are a great idea for stays of three nights and longer as the extra space, cooking and laundry facilities will make travellers feel more at home!

Check-in with your travellers. Open the lines of communication to establish what's important to your travellers; educate them on any changes to your travel policy; discuss ways to improve their trips – and then track your progress in terms of health and wellbeing initiatives.

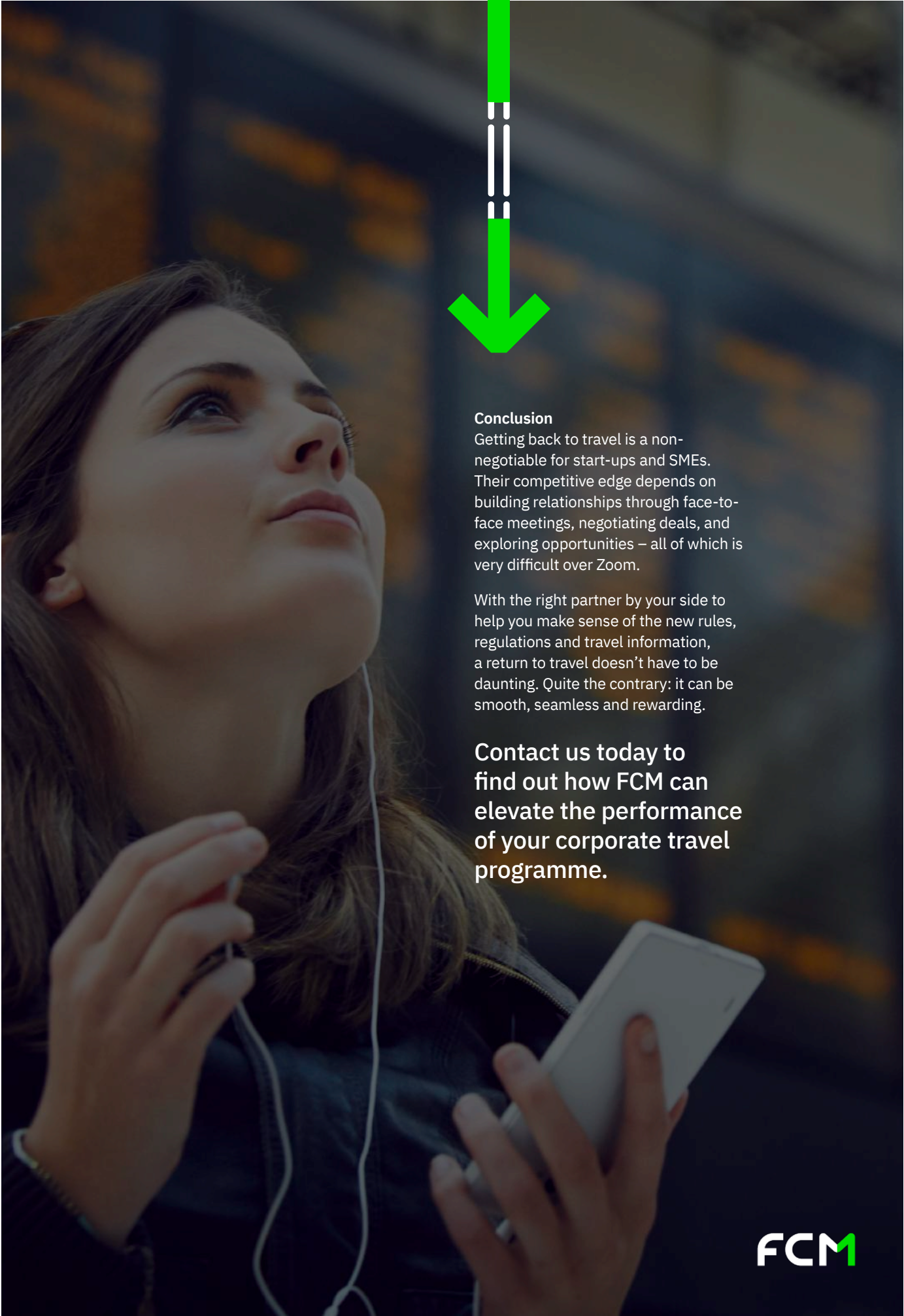


As business travel rebounds, a smooth, efficient process is more important than ever. Business travellers often have to deal with missing details, last-minute changes and tedious expense management – all of which can add to a lot of stress. Easy access to a travel management platform and the support of a travel manager will make a big difference to those on the road.

“

When designing a travel policy for your company, it's important to consider all aspects of travel, not just cost,” says Smith. “A well-designed travel programme should consider employee needs and preferences to create a culture that makes business travel a positive experience.

”



Conclusion

Getting back to travel is a non-negotiable for start-ups and SMEs. Their competitive edge depends on building relationships through face-to-face meetings, negotiating deals, and exploring opportunities – all of which is very difficult over Zoom.

With the right partner by your side to help you make sense of the new rules, regulations and travel information, a return to travel doesn't have to be daunting. Quite the contrary: it can be smooth, seamless and rewarding.

Contact us today to find out how FCM can elevate the performance of your corporate travel programme.

FCM