

Amadeus Insights: U.S. Spotlight

# Friction Removed

By recognizing every traveler and their frustrations are different, we can better manage and find ways to overcome friction.

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# Foreword

Today, the world is more accessible than ever before. A vast network of travel providers makes getting to even the most far-flung hotspots possible.

However, despite the wonder of travel that so many of us enjoy, too often we feel friction when booking a trip, during the journey, or when we arrive at our destination.

The industry often talks of this friction, but for travelers it can still translate to frustration and stress. For example, we have all likely missed a connection, been delayed, received poor service or even been overwhelmed by confusing choice when making a booking.

Our new United States-focused research confirms friction is real. It is felt in many ways, some within the control of the travel industry and others not. But there is no one source of frustration or friction, it depends on the context of your travel – whether with family, friends or for business.

Understanding the source of these frustrations is important if our industry is to prosper. Concerns and fears about potential friction have a real impact on whether some travelers will embark on a journey at all.

In *Friction Removed* we explore these travel frustrations and more. By understanding traveler

frustrations better, we can explore ways to overcome them. Technology has a big part to play. However, the human touch, the smiling face and words of reassurance at the right moment, is also vital.

Through a joined up and collaborative approach to tackling travel friction we can create more seamless, end-to-end experiences that travelers expect and increasingly demand. This is why we are building an industry-wide ecosystem which enables data and process connectivity across the whole trip, including airport, hospitality, distribution, airline, payments, and corporate travel management segments.

At the same time, by prioritizing the interoperability of trip management tools with evolving distribution technologies, like NDC and hotel amenity-based search, we can enhance the travel experience. Optimizing travel alert notifications and tools to automate action and ensure the continuity of a trip during disruption will also help further reduce friction.

At Amadeus, we are focused on making the travel experience better for everyone, everywhere. Insights into travel friction help us to innovate better technologies. I hope you enjoy *Friction Removed*. Through insight and understanding we can improve every journey, whether we are traveling for pleasure or business.



**Robert Buckman**  
Senior Vice President,  
Solution Consulting,  
Amadeus



# Executive summary

**→ Let's think differently. A new mindset is needed to address friction.**

Removing frustration from the traveler experience requires a shift in industry mindset. Currently, much of the sector remains siloed, since travel companies often focus only on their particular niches. But travelers are often frustrated with more systemic issues, such as the domino effect of flight delays, or being asked to provide paper identification across multiple touchpoints on a single journey. But today new tools, such as instant travel alerts and automated ticket reallocation or compensation, as well as end-to-end recovery solutions with near instant re-accommodation, mean we can do more to overcome friction than ever before. However, cross-industry collaboration is needed to bring these new technologies to life.

**→ Don't be complacent. More frustrations result in reduced travel volumes.**

As frustrations are often commonplace it can be easy to think it's something travelers can live with. But this can change! Addressing traveler frustrations isn't just a "nice to have," it can be the difference between securing that booking or not. While extreme weather events are beyond the control of the industry, how to deal with them isn't. To support growth, the industry needs to deal with traveler frustration too.

**→ Friction is personal. There is no one-size-fits-all solution.**

Each individual experiences their own travel frustrations. But context matters. For example, traveling for leisure or business brings different frustrations. And studies show younger travelers find sourcing the right routes and accommodation significantly more frustrating than those over 65. Knowing the traveler and addressing their individual needs matters.

**→ Money matters. Less affluent travelers can be hit hardest.**

While each traveler is impacted differently by the challenges of travel, the burden can often fall on those with lower household incomes. A lack of flexibility, high costs, time constraints, limited access to information or a host of other factors often present insurmountable obstacles to less affluent travelers; often resulting in a decision against taking a trip. This is something which must be addressed to build better journeys for all.

# Executive summary

## → Business travel and stress go hand-in-hand.

Business travelers generally experience more friction than leisure travelers, citing comparing prices across sites, understanding fees and taxes, and finding suitable accommodation options as particular frustrations. The increased frequency of travel may explain this difference. As a key driver of industry revenues, understanding the needs of this segment is key to mutual success.

## → Technology can make a difference. But it's not the only thing.

The use of apps, biometrics, digital bag tracking, digital ID, and virtual assistants are all considered ways to address travel frustration. Self-service solutions in use at airports and with airlines are reducing wait times, and improving the punctuality of checked bag delivery, while auto bag drops and biometric smart biopods can also further reduce delays. Technology that empowers customers is a common theme of innovation. However, technology is only part of the solution. And as technology plays an ever-increasing role in the traveler journey, the “human touch” remains vital. Travelers crave personal connection, empathy, personalized service and emotional reassurance that technology alone cannot provide.



# Introduction

Travel friction is a regular topic of discussion across the industry: that frustrations and pain points negatively impact on the traveler journey is well understood. Thus, many across the travel ecosystem – travel sellers, travel providers, technology companies, concierge firms, travel management companies – continually express the need to enhance the traveler experience by removing the irritations regularly raised by travelers.

But when it comes to travel friction, the traveler perspective is often at odds with the industry. The industry wants to remove “friction,” but the experience of friction is different for every traveler. There is no one-size-fits-all solution to addressing it. And at times it can seem as if travel companies are not truly incentivized to remove frustrations from the end-to-end journey, instead focusing solely on their particular area.

To understand these differing perceptions, Amadeus commissioned market research organization **Mercury Analytics** [🔗](#) to study the nature of the frustrations encountered during the travel experience. Over 1,000 U.S.-based business and leisure travelers were recruited to provide quantitative insight, as well as qualitative feedback in the form of open-ended questions.

The study is designed to reveal what the concept of travel friction means for travelers, how they define and experience it, what they want to eliminate or reduce, and what a ‘frictionless travel experience’ would look like. In parallel, *Friction Removed* explores how technology can help us overcome some of the most common travel frustrations seen today and how we can build better journeys for all.





## Deeper understanding

Despite industry efforts to overcome common frustrations, including delays, complexity and poorly connected trips, through the use of new tools such as biometrics, self-service or predictive search, the traveler experience can still be challenging for many.

There is no simple solution, no technological cure-all which will remove friction from the travel experience. Change will instead need to be collaborative, incremental and tailored, with many organizations coming together to create better experiences. *Friction Removed* seeks to understand the steps needed to drive this change, helping reduce travel frustration and build better journeys for all.



# Where does frustration exist on the U.S. traveler journey?

Frustration when traveling takes many forms – and this is particularly true for business travelers, who are on the road more than most. With every traveler experiencing friction in different ways, an industry-wide response that takes into consideration the total trip experience is required to build better journeys, every time.



# Where does frustration exist on the U.S. traveler journey?

Travel frustration can take many forms—physical, logistical, psychological—and this is reflected in the findings of *Friction Removed*.

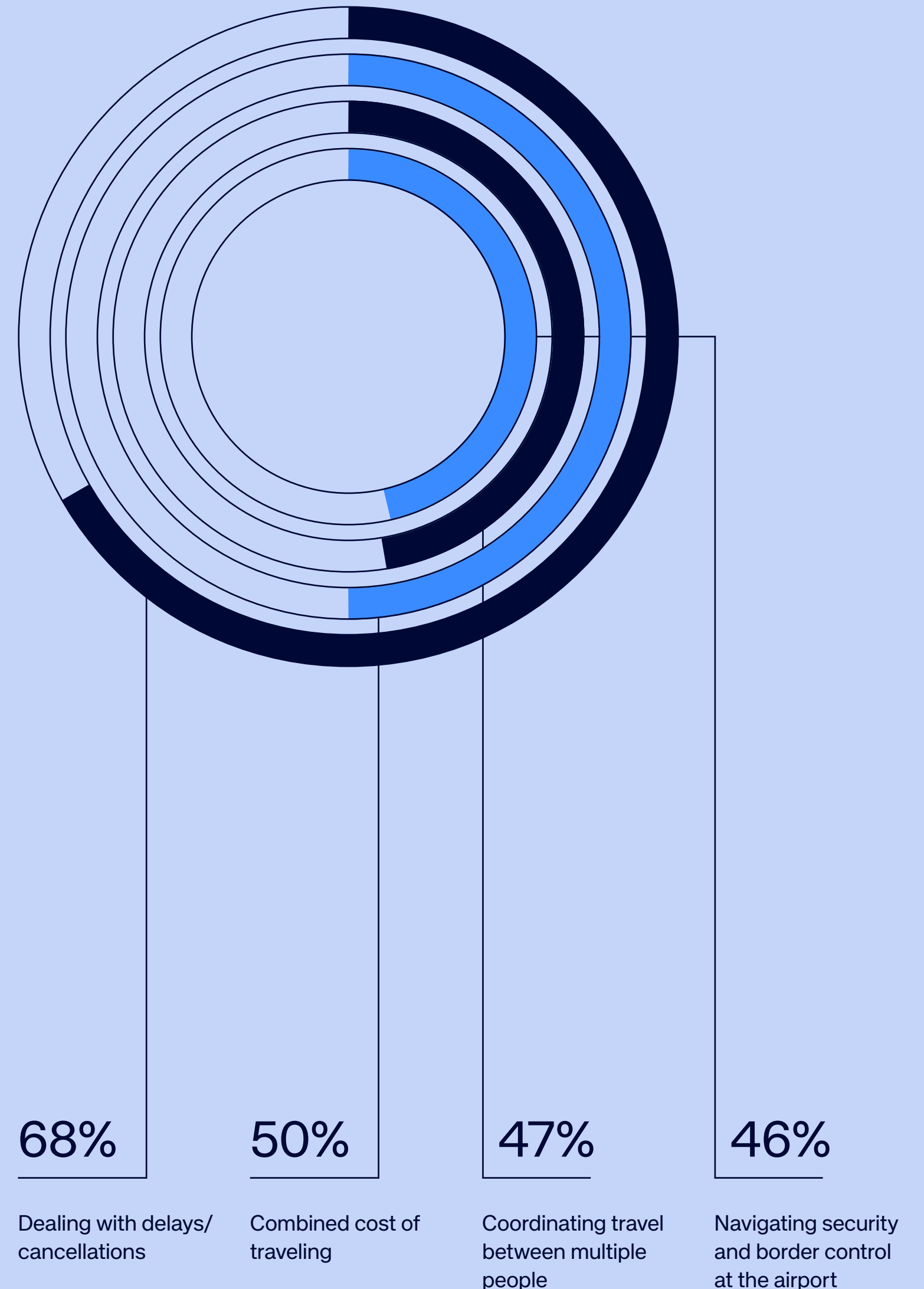
When asked to indicate the level of frustration caused by various aspects of travel, United States-based travelers most often cited dealing with delays/cancellations as a cause for concern, with 68% of respondents identifying it as distressing.

Travelers expressed exasperation over their schedules being disrupted due to delays that stretch for hours, or their flights being canceled entirely. This can cause a domino effect, leading to missed connections, rescheduled plans, and a general sense of uncertainty.

The combined cost of traveling (50%) and coordinating travel between multiple people (47%) were also among the top causes of distress, followed by navigating security and border control at the airport (46%).

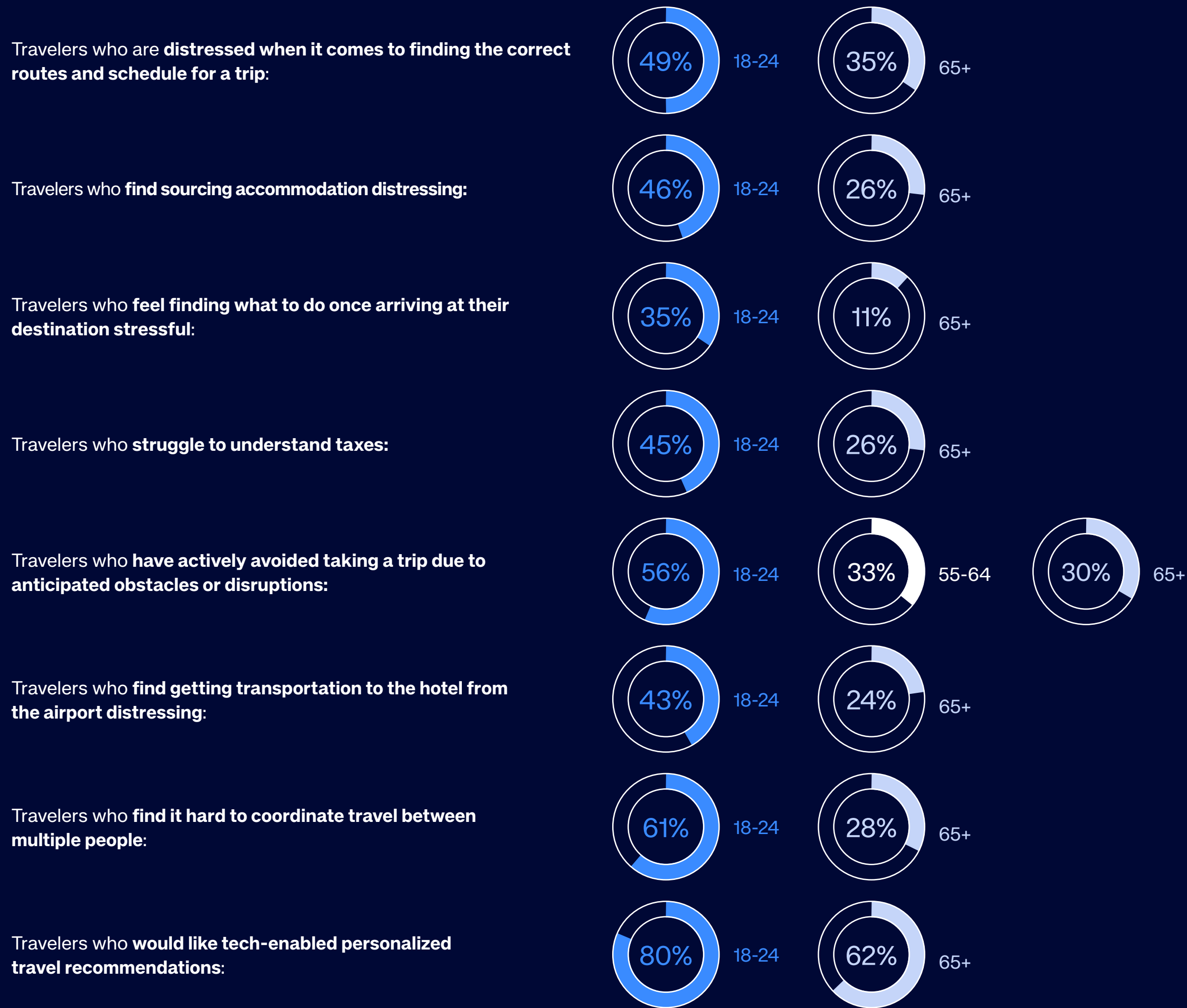
Passengers pointed to long lines, rigorous security procedures and the perceived rudeness or inefficiency of Transportation Security Administration (TSA) agents as exacerbating frustrations. The experience of having to remove shoes, limit liquid items and endure lengthy waits can create a tense atmosphere.

## Distressing aspects of travel:



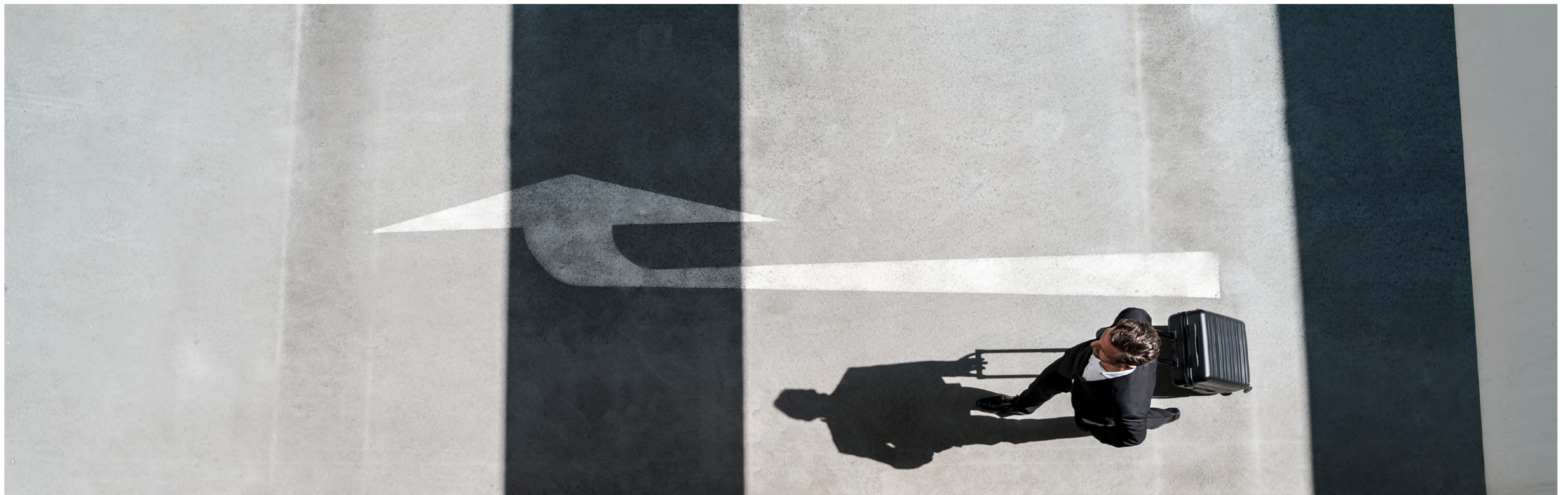
# Concerned youth

*Friction Removed* highlights a surprising trend – **younger travelers are being overwhelmed as they plan, book and execute a journey.**



It seems that potentially less experienced, **younger travelers feel a greater sense of friction during some elements of the journey.** On the other hand, those aged over 65 are remarkably resilient when on the road.



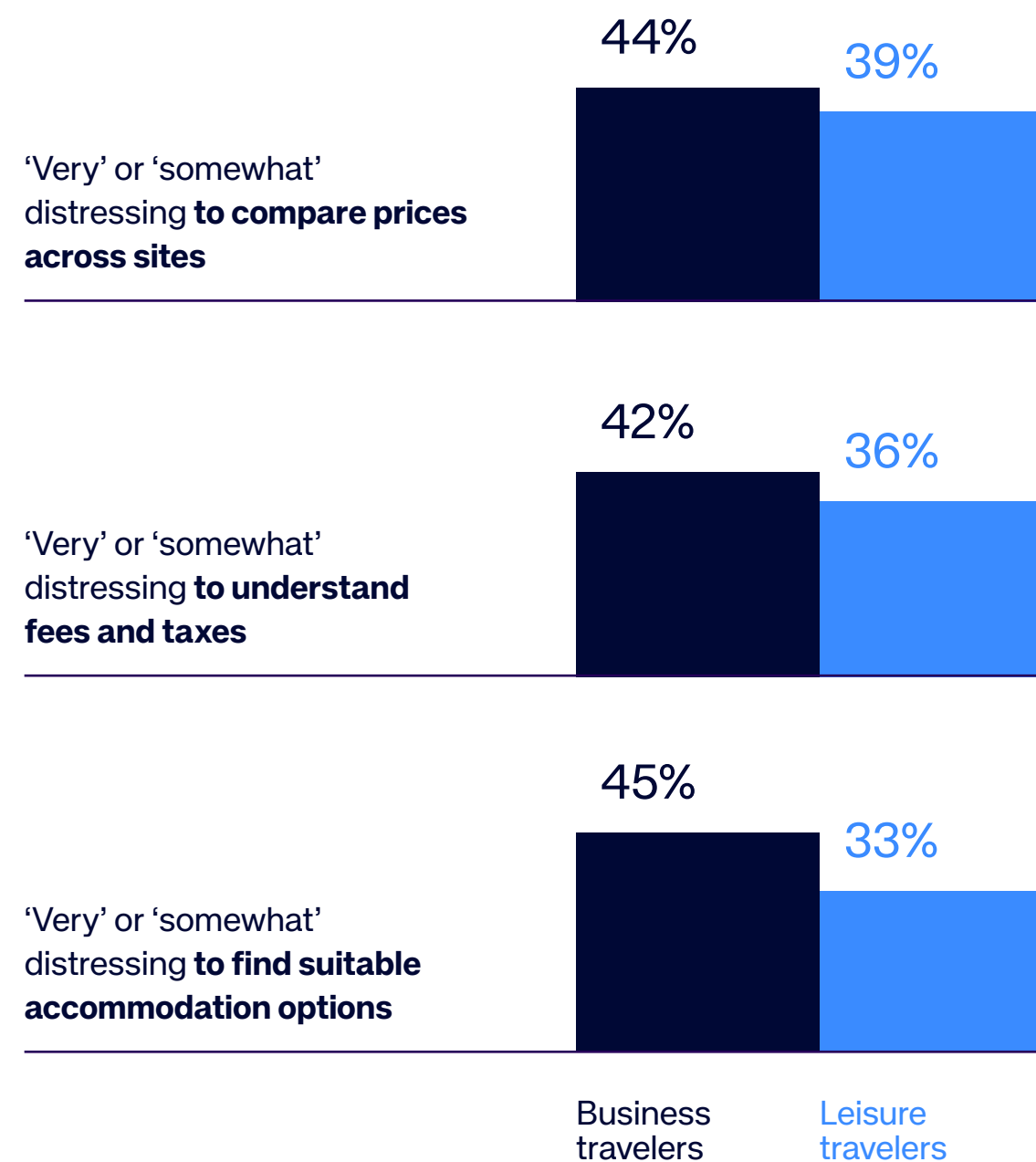


## Traveling for business can be more stressful than leisure

When segmented by type of traveler, business travelers generally experienced more friction, perhaps because they travel more frequently. For example, higher numbers of business travelers cited comparing prices across sites (44% against 39%), understanding fees and taxes (42% against 36%), and finding suitable accommodation options (45% against 33%) as very or somewhat distressing than their leisure counterparts.

Additional business traveler pain points mentioned include overbooked flights and the discomfort of crowded or poorly serviced airplanes. Complaints about seating discomfort and lack of personal space are also recurring themes, highlighting the importance of comfort during travel for business purposes.

Lastly, logistical challenges such as traffic, difficulty finding transportation, and problems with hotel accommodations were pointed out, emphasizing the importance of the end-to-end travel experience, beyond just the flight.



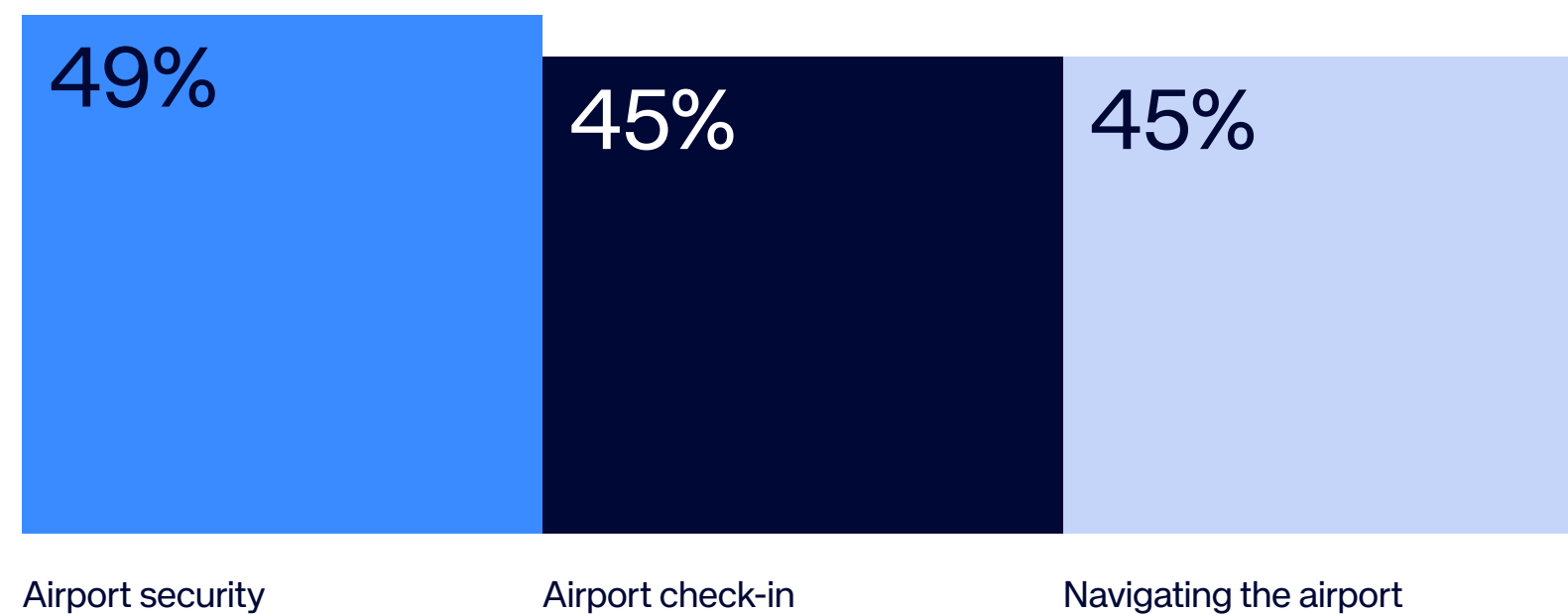
# Navigating the airport can cause friction

Airports themselves, especially large and crowded ones, contribute significantly to travel friction. When asked at which point of the journey they experienced the most distress, U.S. travelers placed airport security (49%), airport check-in (45%), and navigating the airport (45%) among the top three.

Many respondents find the process of getting through large terminals, managing time efficiently, and ensuring they reach the correct gate quite daunting. Overcrowded terminals further add to this anxiety, making navigation and finding seats harder.

Segmented by type of trip, business travelers also found transit – including getting to and from the airport and destination by car rental, taxi or ride share – challenging, with 44% placing this element of a journey among the top three most stressful.

## When do U.S. travelers experience the most distress?



# What takes travelers to the breaking point?

Leisure Trips

Business Trips

## Airport security

49%

42%

## Airport check-in

46%

44%

## Navigating the airport (e.g. finding the gate)

48%

42%

## In transit (including getting to/from the airport and destination by car rental, taxi, or ride share)

40%

44%

## Planning / Researching

32%

31%

## Booking

25%

27%

## While on the plane / transit

23%

26%

## Returning home

21%

23%

## At the destination

16%

20%

“Service at the airport is both the greatest challenge and greatest opportunity to reduce travel friction. Research suggests navigating the airport currently presents a number of obstacles for travelers, especially during check-in and security, and these can only be overcome through better use of technology and greater collaboration between airports, airlines and border control.

In order to create a frictionless travel experience, the travel ecosystem must work in partnership to understand each unique trip on a holistic level, from end to end.”

**Chris Keller**  
VP, Americas, Airport IT,  
Amadeus





## The whole traveler journey needs to be considered

Interestingly, 38% of all travelers report finding suitable accommodation either very or somewhat distressing, suggesting there is room for improvement when it comes to accommodation inspiration and search. Similarly, 32% of those questioned found booking accommodation stressful too, adding further cause for concern. Are travelers being overwhelmed by the variety of options or channels on offer, or are prices unclear?

Ground transportation and transfers were additional areas further highlighted by respondents – with 34% of all U.S. travelers finding it either very or somewhat distressing getting to the hotel from the airport. This figure rises to 41% of business travelers. It appears, having negotiated the airport, flight and

arrival, acknowledged as the most friction-filled elements of a journey, stress is compounded by additional challenges on the final leg of the trip to the destination.

In fact, 15% of respondents said transit – including getting to/from the airport and destination by car rental, taxi, or ride share – was the most stressful element of the journey. This is second only to airport security (17%).

New technology solutions may be able to help in this scenario, providing access to multiple, integrated suppliers that can be included as part of the trip. More flexibility and choice can reduce friction.

# Friction is different for everyone

Delving a little deeper into responses, additional variations can be seen when it comes to travelers with different levels of household income.

A total of 45% of respondents reporting an annual household income of \$30,000 or less found finding suitable accommodation either very or somewhat distressing, a figure which falls to 36% among respondents reporting household income of more than \$150,000 per year.

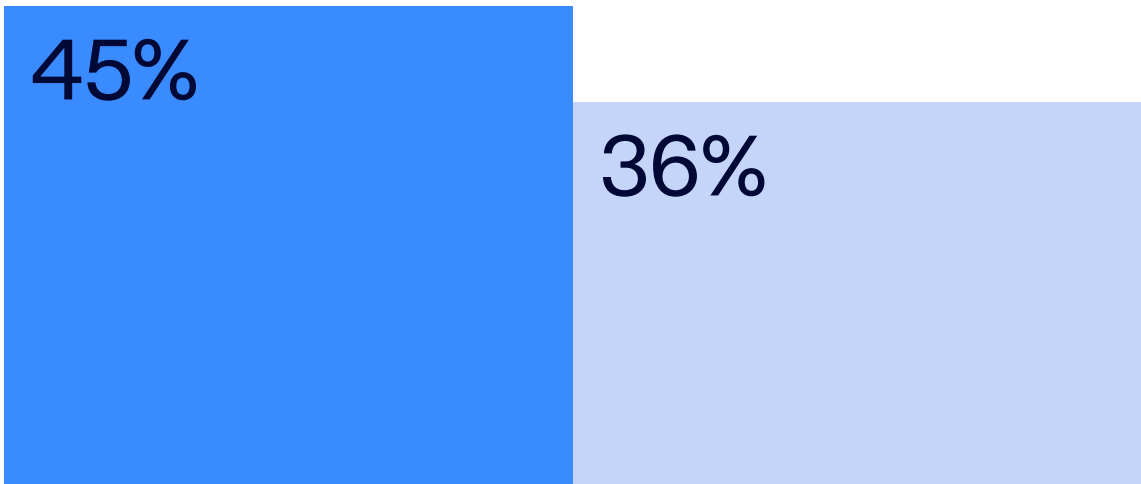
Similarly, 34% of less affluent travelers found booking accommodation very or somewhat distressing, compared to 25% of the higher earners. While finding out to spend one’s time in a destination was a source

of distress for 33% of lower income households, significantly more than those at the higher end of the income scale (14%).

However, income level was no defense against delays – with 67% of those with a household of income of less than \$30,000 finding delays very or somewhat distressing, compared to 75% of those earning more than \$150,000.

A combination of cancellations, cost, navigation and coordination all play a role in creating travel friction during a journey – but each traveler experiences these pain points in different ways. Each journey is different, and every traveler is unique.

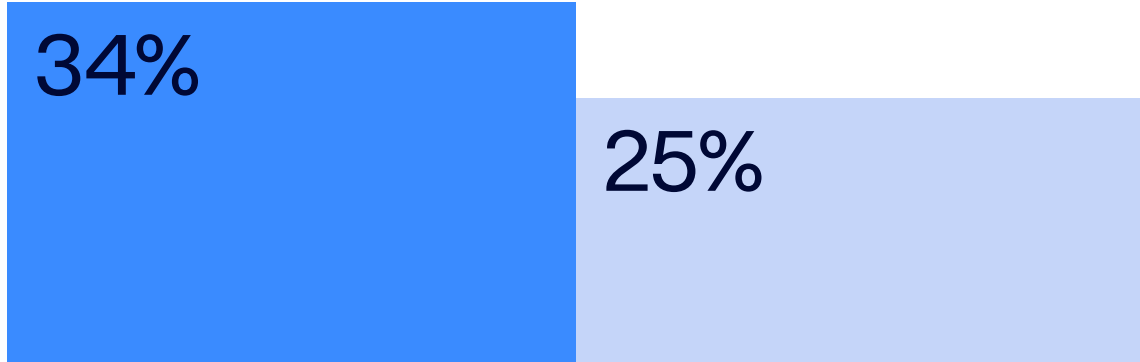
**Finding suitable accommodation either very or somewhat distressing**



Respondents reporting an annual household income of **\$30,000 or less**

Respondents reporting an annual household income of **more than \$150,000**

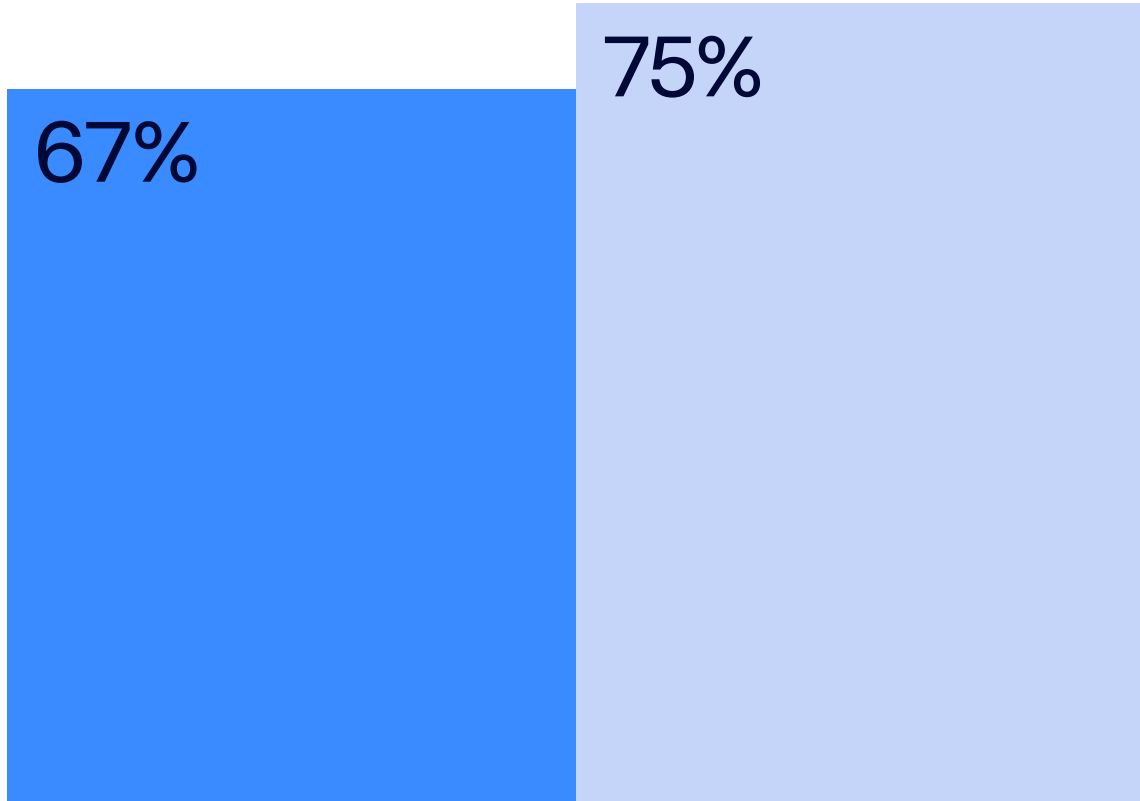
**Booking accommodation very or somewhat distressing**



Respondents reporting an annual household income of **\$30,000 or less**


Respondents reporting an annual household income of **more than \$150,000**

**Delays are very or somewhat distressing**



Respondents reporting an annual household income of **\$30,000 or less**

Respondents reporting an annual household income of **more than \$150,000**



# How can technology help the industry overcome travel friction?

Technology solutions – whether mobile apps, biometrics, self-service, or automation – can support travelers overcome the friction they experience when on a journey. However, it isn't a silver bullet. It is important that technology deployment takes into consideration travelers and their needs, as it is clear that along with technology there is always a role for the human touch.

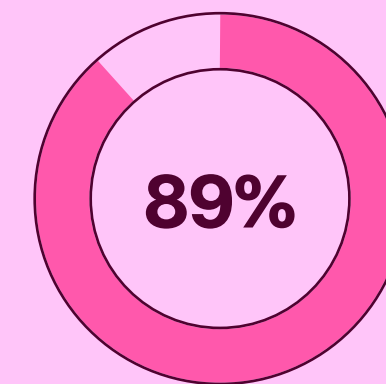


# How can technology help the industry overcome travel friction?

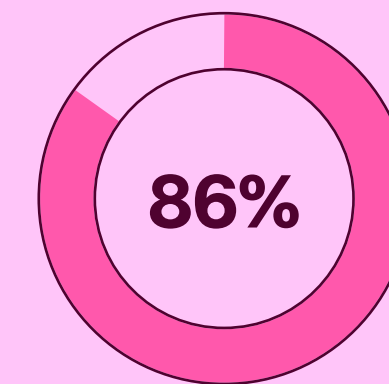
Technology has woven itself into the fabric of everyday life. Travel is no different and *Friction Removed* identifies a number of established and emerging technologies travelers believe can mitigate travel frustration while away from home.

## How helpful are technologies at reducing travel-related distress?

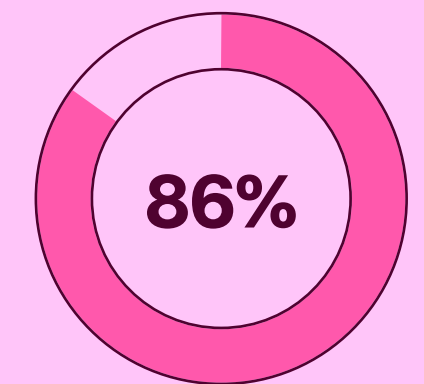
All were cited as 'very' or 'somewhat' useful by the most travelers.



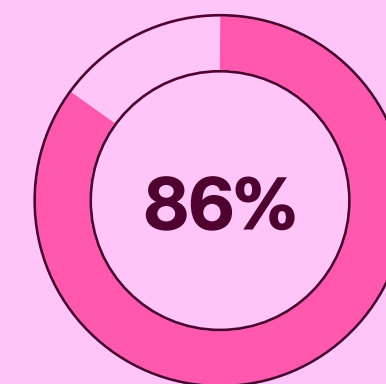
Mobile apps for travel planning/booking



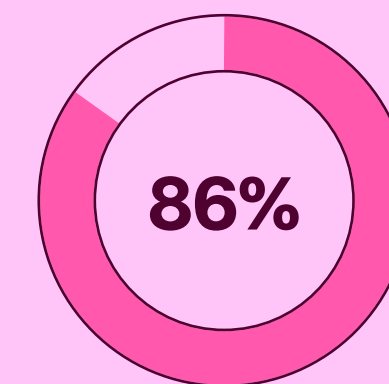
Automated rebooking for delays/cancellations



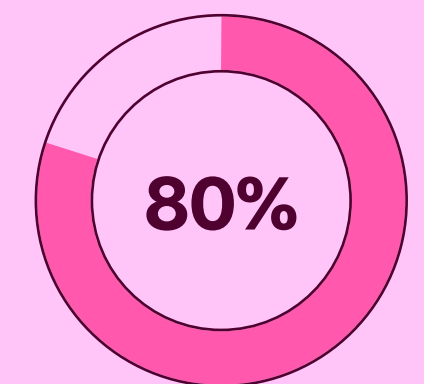
Digital bags/baggage tracking



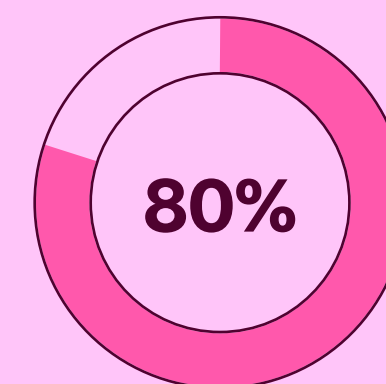
Integrated travel booking across airlines and hotels (one-stop shopping for all your travel needs)



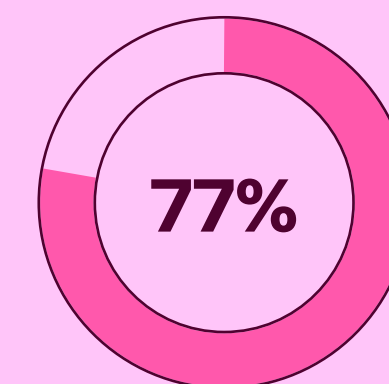
Fully digital identification and travel documents



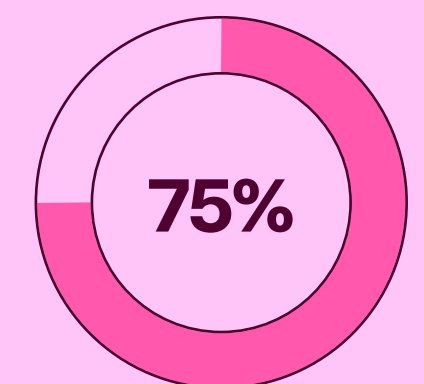
Personalized travel recommendations



Biometric screening (such as fingerprint or iris recognition)



Virtual assistants for travel queries



Augmented reality (virtual tours, interactive maps, translation)

Both leisure and business travelers recognize the indispensable role that technology plays in enhancing convenience, communication and overall satisfaction of a trip. However, their perceptions diverge in several critical areas reflective of their unique travel needs and priorities.

Leisure travelers highlight how processes could be streamlined with technology, such as online check-in, automated bag drop-offs and biometric screenings, which could make airport navigation faster and more efficient. Technology is also seen as aiding in planning, reservations and staying informed about delays and road conditions through apps and real-time updates. These conveniences alleviate some hassle, offering a smoother travel experience and reducing uncertainties that can lead to stress.

**However, the image of technology is not all positive.**

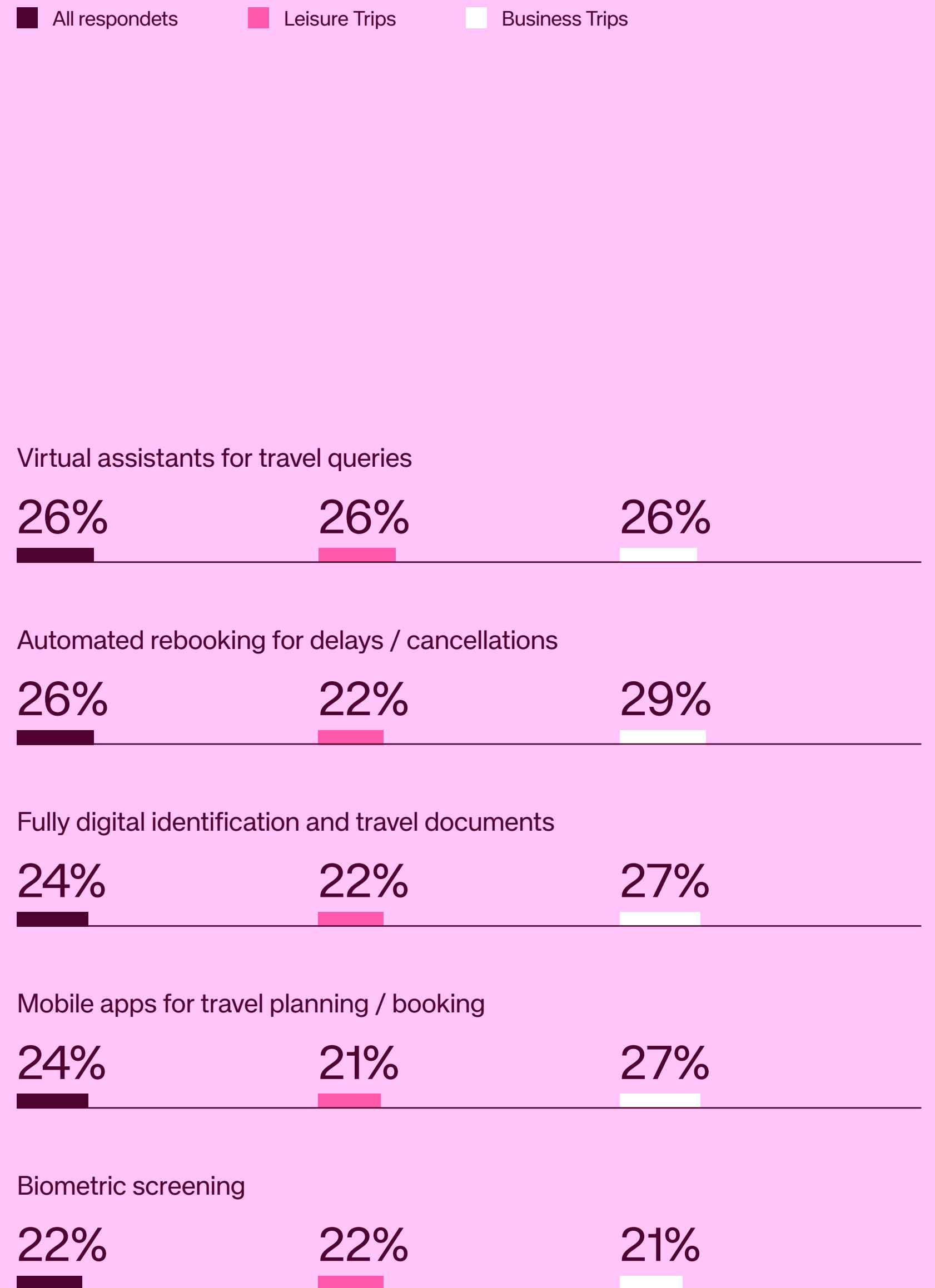
Some travelers note that when technology fails, it increases stress, underscoring the dependency on its proper functioning. There are also concerns about potential privacy infringements and the overwhelming nature of trying to navigate complex technological solutions, especially for less tech-savvy individuals.

For business travelers, technology plays a significant role in reducing travel-related stress. A prominent theme is the efficiency technology brings to the travel experience. Many note that technology helps streamline various processes such as booking flights, checking in, and navigating through airports with tools like biometric screening and real-time updates. Devices and apps that assist in planning, offer early notifications, and provide additional information are highlighted as beneficial for reducing time spent on manual tasks and improving overall efficiency.

Additionally, the integration of Artificial Intelligence (AI) and virtual assistants to provide personalized recommendations, real-time problem-solving, and seamless transition between different travel stages are seen as potential enhancements that could significantly ease the travel process.

To date, the industry has delivered a variety of proof-of-concept solutions utilizing AI to address real-time problem solving by simplifying fare rules and the understanding of PNR, or trip history. Elsewhere, AI has been used to help recommend trips using natural language, while new search solutions use machine learning to better curate results based on user search history and profile.

## Which technologies can increase stress? Just let me speak to a person!



“The research suggests the role of technology is largely viewed favorably by both leisure and business travelers today and a large majority welcome the impact technology can have in reducing friction. It is the role of the industry to ensure new technology can be applied in a way that makes tangible improvements to every journey, improving the travel experience, every time.”

**Joelle Cuvelier**  
SVP Customer Success  
Management, Americas,  
Amadeus

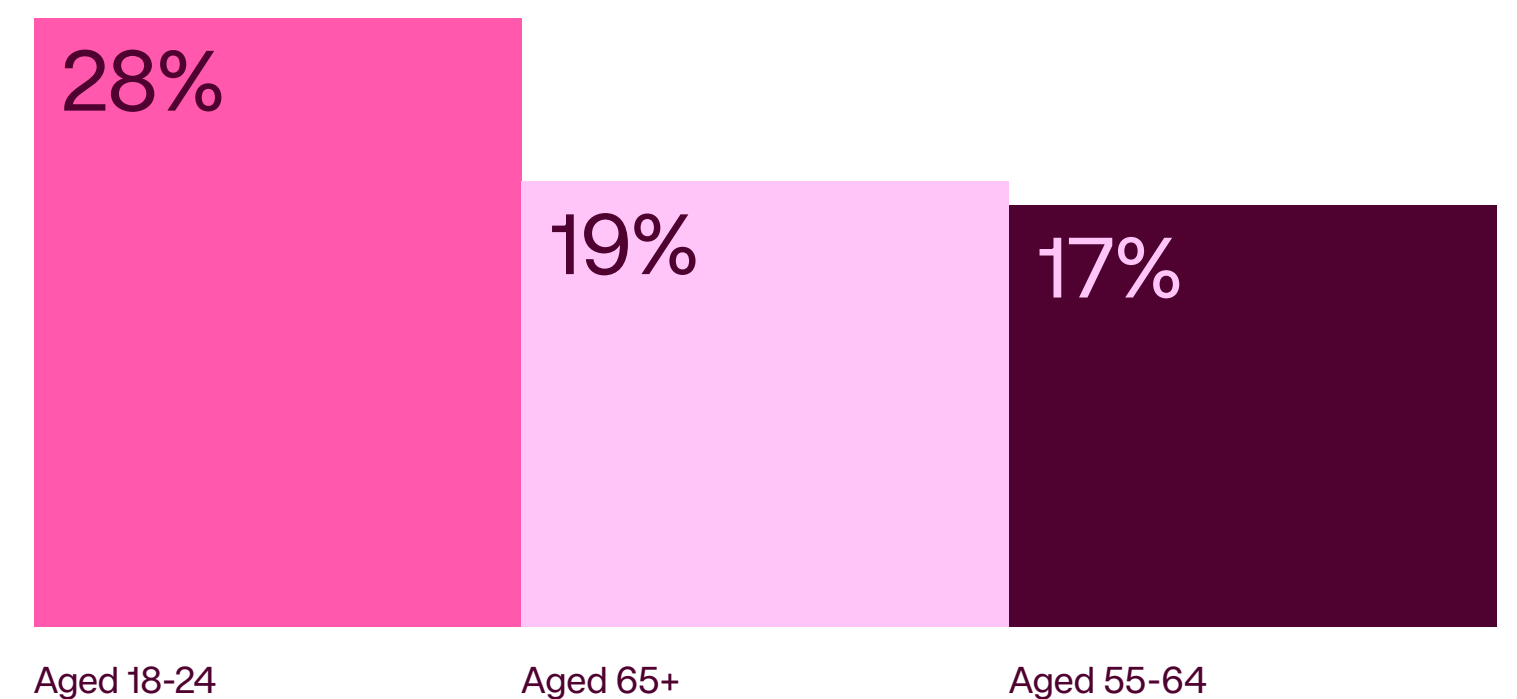
Still, some travelers express concerns regarding the over-reliance on technology, worrying it could potentially slow things down or increase stress for those not tech-savvy. This is an important takeaway for the travel industry. Demonstrating the importance of introducing technology in a way that makes it accessible for the traveler. As in any sector, showcasing how technology can drive better human interaction as well as automate processes, and reassuring travelers about privacy.

It is clear that technology isn't a silver bullet when it comes to addressing traveler frustration. And indeed, in some cases, it may even cause added stress.

When asked which technologies would increase travel frustration, virtual assistants for travel queries, automated rebooking for delays (both 26%), fully digital identification and travel documents, mobile apps for travel planning (both 24%), and biometric screening (22%) were also cited by the highest number of travelers.

Interestingly, younger travelers saw mobile apps for planning and booking as adding to frustration, with 28% of those aged 18–24 citing the technology as a potential concern, compared to only 17% of those aged 55–64 and 19% of those aged over 65.

**Find technology like mobile apps as potential concern when planning and booking:**



# The human touch is still vital

Even as the power of technology grows, the human touch remains vital in successfully overcoming travel frustration. Only a personal connection can bring empathy, offering the personalized service and emotional reassurance that technology alone cannot provide. Such interactions ensure customers feel heard, cared for, and supported, especially during complex or stressful situations, ultimately enhancing the overall travel experience by blending the best of both technology and human insight.

*Friction Removed* research points to a number of situations where more human interaction is sought by travelers. Among leisure travelers, airport security and border control (where 44% of respondents

sought more human interaction) and hotel and accommodation check-in and check-out (43%) were the most often cited parts of the journey.

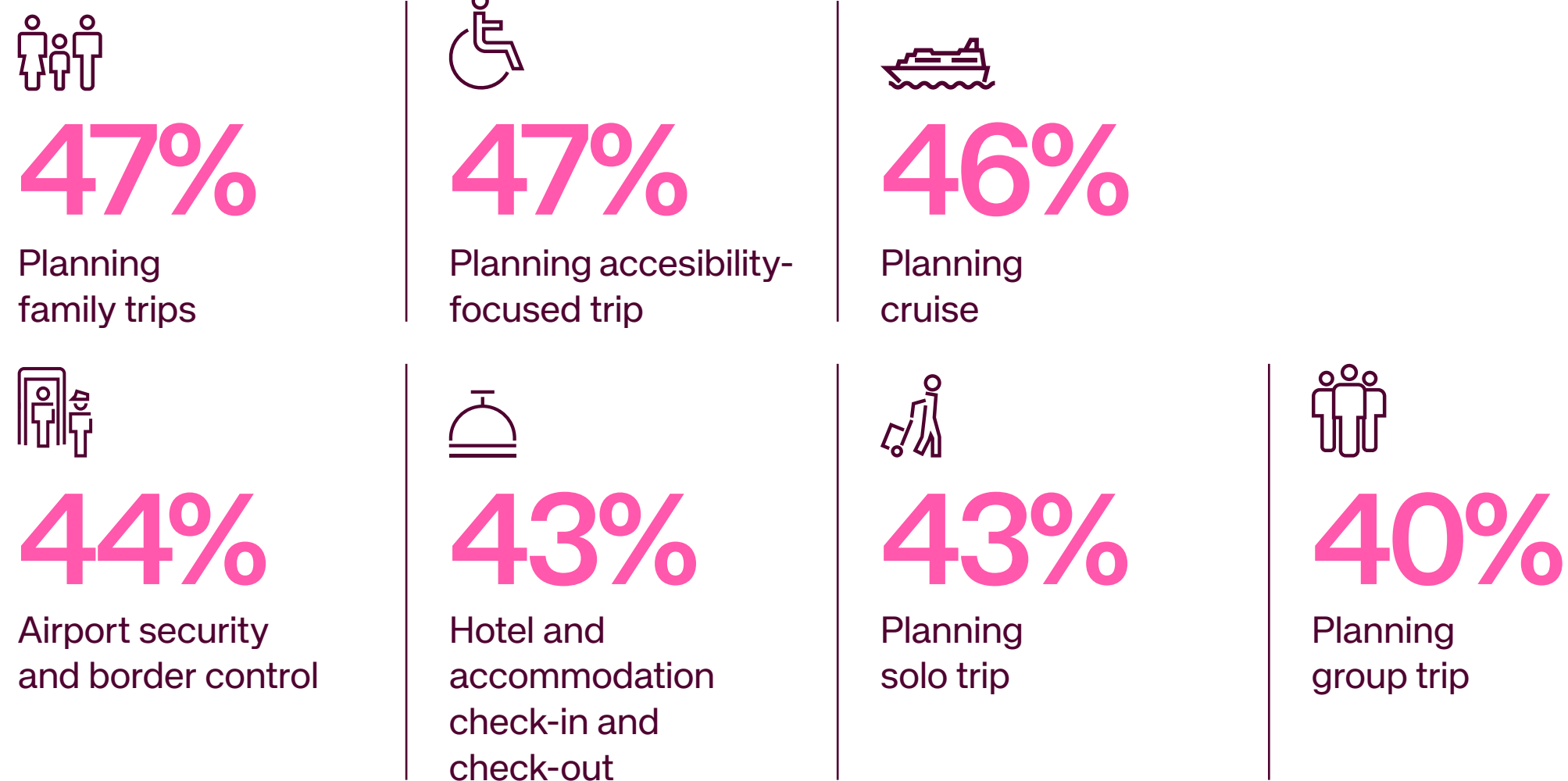
Leisure travelers also see a significant role for human travel sellers when it comes to planning a trip. This group would prefer more human interaction planning almost any type of journey, led by family trips (where 47% of respondents want more human interaction), accessibility-focused trip (47%), cruise (46%), solo (43%), and group (40%).

In general, older travelers preferred more of the human touch, with 31% of those aged 65+ seeking human interaction when organizing transportation,

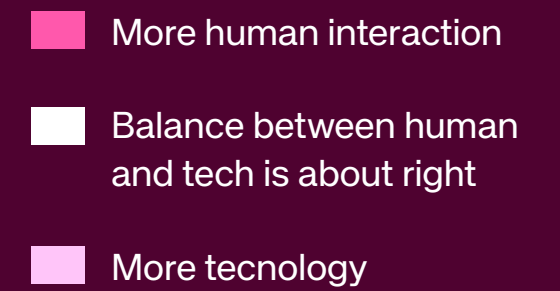
alongside airport check-in (34%) accommodation check-in (38%), being informed about changes to travel plans (32%). In each case, the figure is at least 6% higher than all other age groups.

Business travelers, in contrast, sought a greater role for technology in all elements of the on-trip experience – but would prefer more human interaction when planning family, cruise and group trips. This reinforces the value that many travelers place on travel agents when it comes to more complex trips where additional insight and expertise is required.

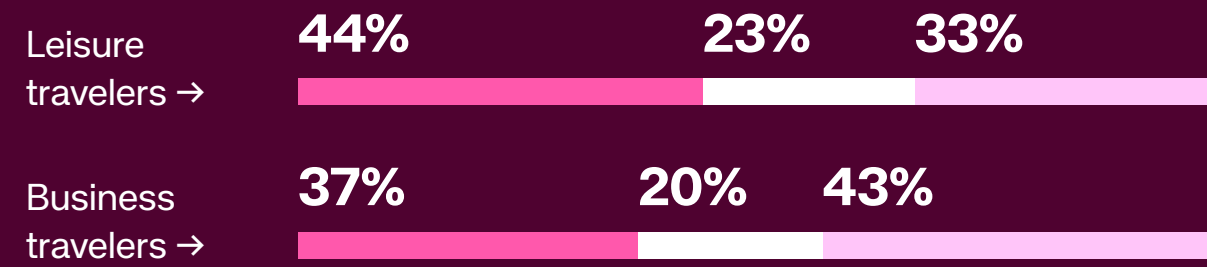
## Where human interaction matters most to leisure travelers:



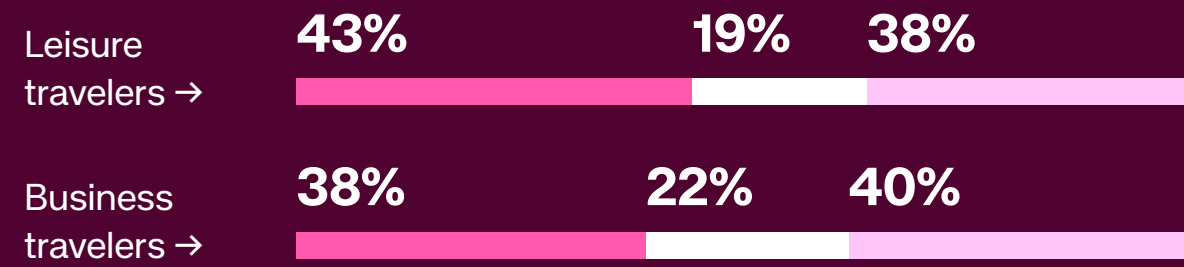
# Where leisure/business travelers want more human interaction or more technology



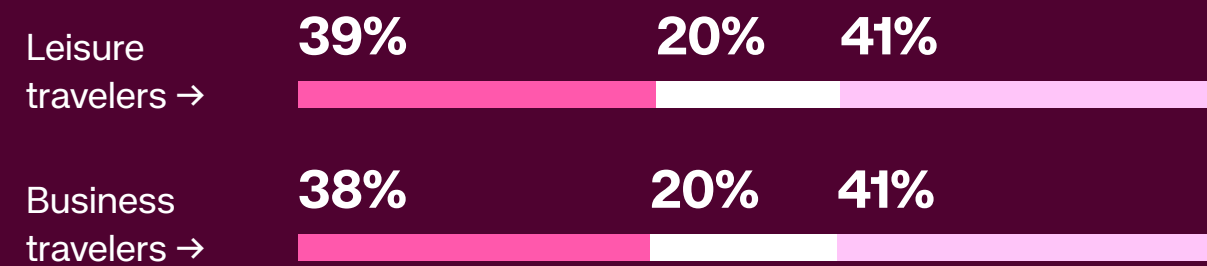
## Airport security and border control



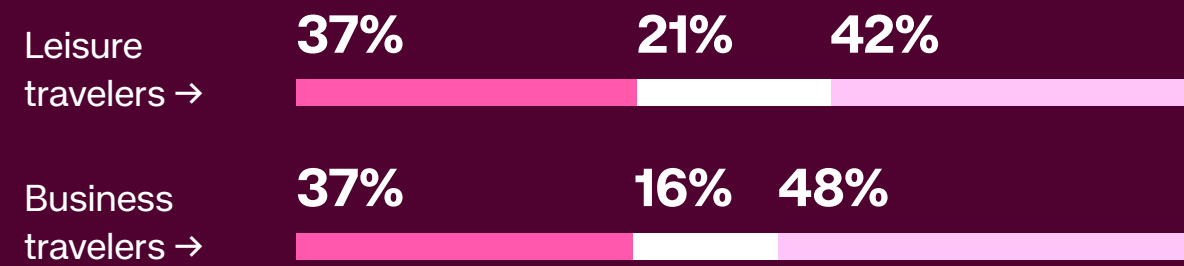
## Hotel and accommodation check-in and check-out



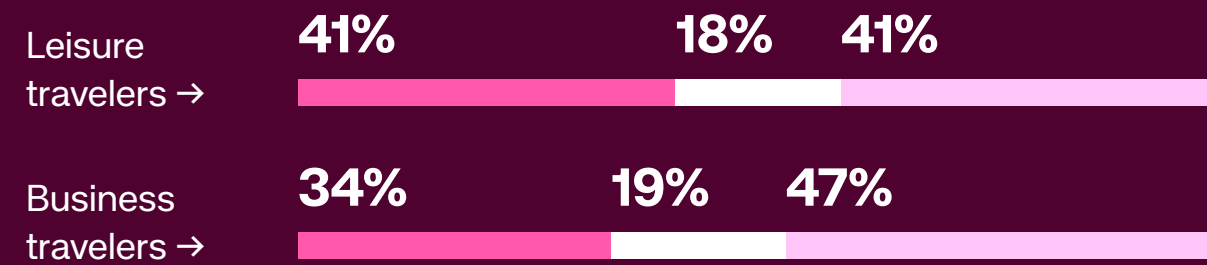
## Organizing transportation (taxis, ground transfer, air, car rental, rail, etc.)



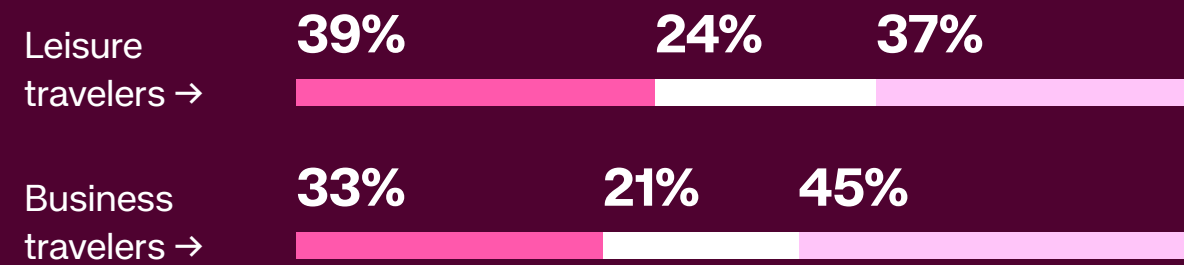
## Airport check-in



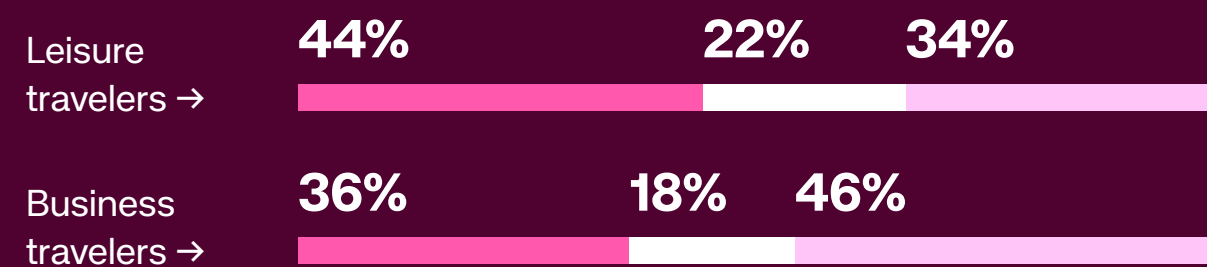
## Being informed about changes and / or disruption



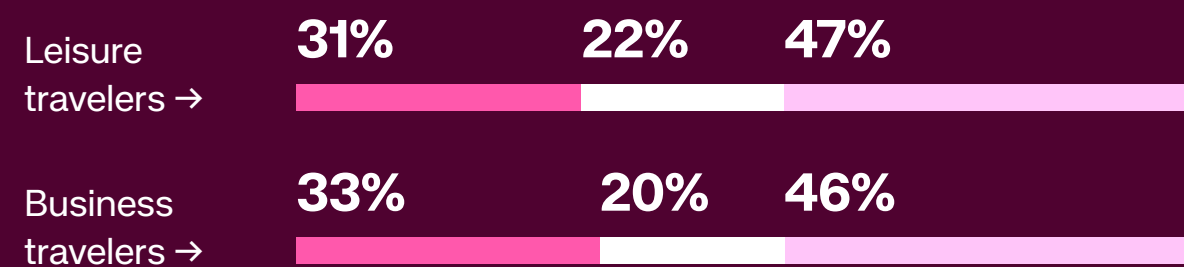
## Organizing trips and experience at your destination



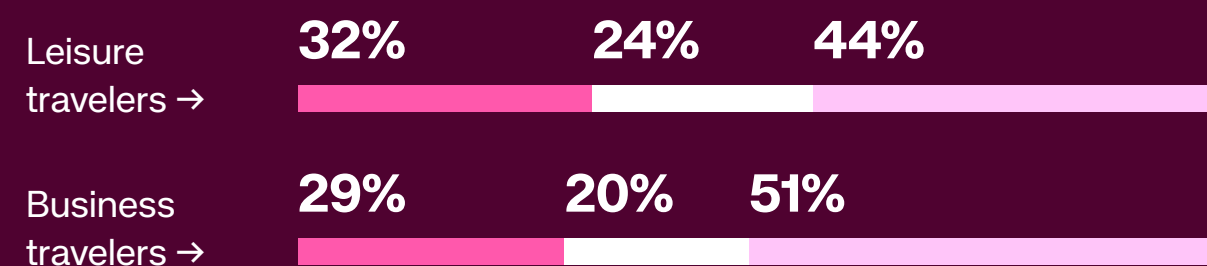
## Information accessibility while on your trip



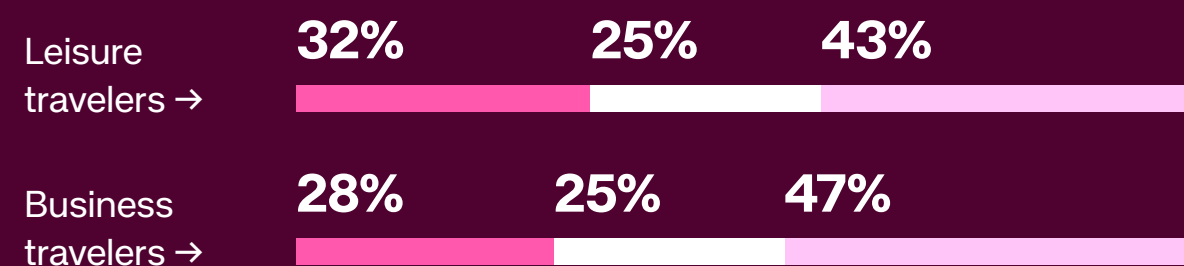
## Planning and booking travel



## Providing feedback and reviews post-trip



## Searching for travel inspiration and ideas



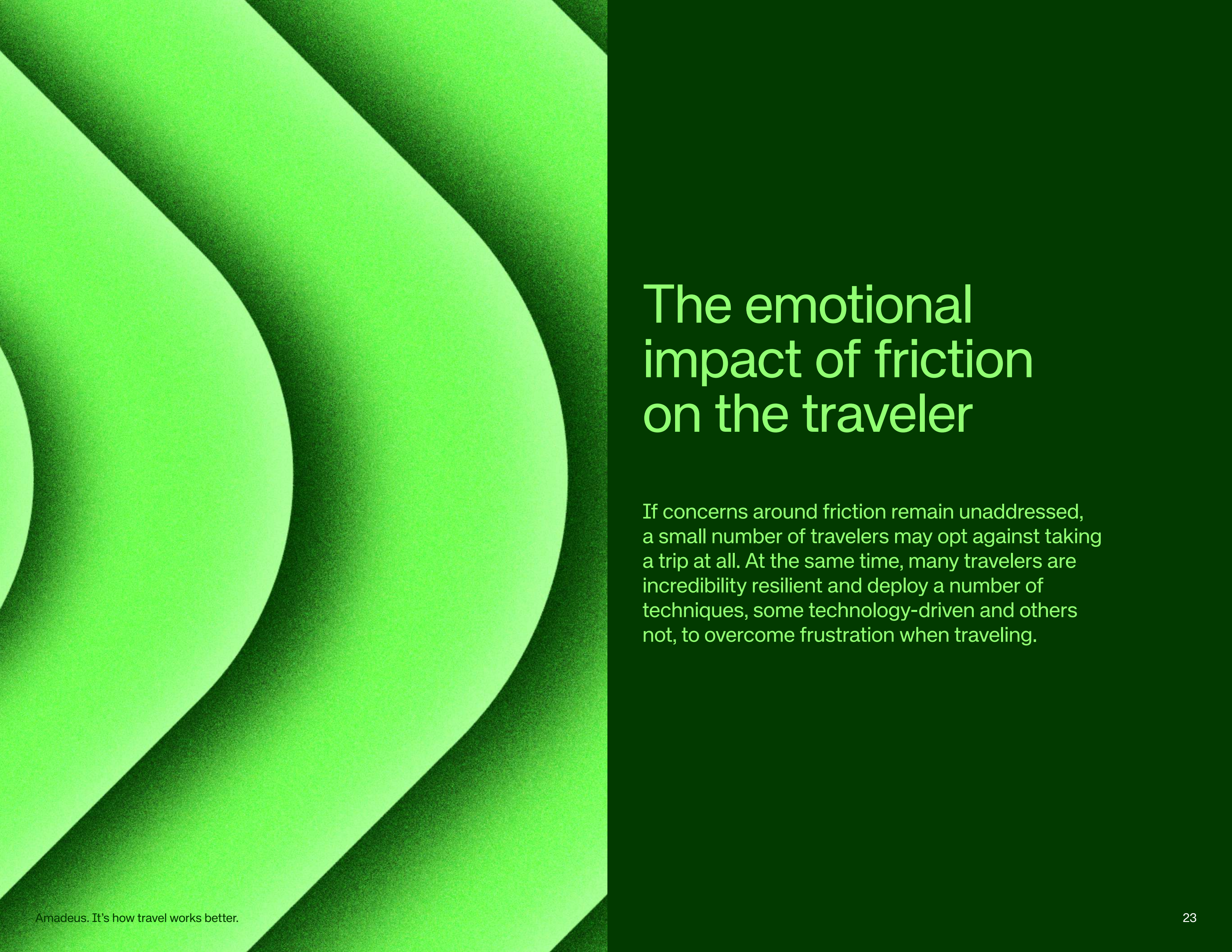


## Travel industry can learn from trailblazers in other sectors

Travelers – both business and leisure – experience technologies in other parts of their lives that they would like to see introduced into the travel sector.

Among leisure travelers, frequently mentioned desires included the need for more robust AI integrations, such as virtual assistants like Alexa or chatbots, for quick access to information and easier trip planning, while others focus on practical enhancements like better luggage tracking and faster identification verifications.

Business travelers pointed to a similar desire for greater AI and automation integration. Respondents mention the potential of AI-driven personal assistants to help manage travel logistics more efficiently, such as auto-rebooking flights or providing real-time, personalized travel advice. Additionally, the idea of better connectivity through improved Wi-Fi and advanced communication tools also surfaced. Noteworthy mentions include the use of fingerprint ID for security, augmented reality, and real-time baggage tracking to streamline and personalize the overall travel experience.



# The emotional impact of friction on the traveler

If concerns around friction remain unaddressed, a small number of travelers may opt against taking a trip at all. At the same time, many travelers are incredibly resilient and deploy a number of techniques, some technology-driven and others not, to overcome frustration when traveling.

# The emotional impact of friction on the traveler

With these travel frustrations in mind, some 14% of travelers frequently avoid taking a trip due to anticipated obstacles or frustrations – a figure which increases to 18% among business travelers. Those aged 25-34 are most likely to avoid travel, with 23% saying they frequently avoided taking a trip due to anticipated problems. Moreover, a third (33%) of all travelers occasionally do so, while 19% have done so on a single occasion.

When it comes to differentiation by wealth, 52% of those reporting annual household incomes of less than \$30,000 said they frequently or occasionally cancel trips due to anticipated disruption, a figure which falls to 42% among those with annual incomes over \$150,000. This suggests the burden of travel friction can fall harder on those with lower incomes.

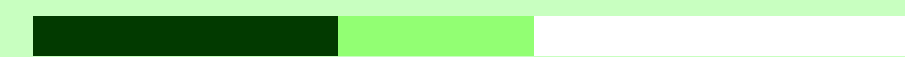
More encouragingly for the travel industry, nearly half (45%) of leisure travelers have never skipped a trip due to predicted travel frustrations, while a quarter (24%) of business travelers have never done so.

Weather events are often (but not always) cited by travelers as the reason for avoiding travel, which is clearly out of the control of the travel industry. However, how the industry deals with weather-related disruption is within the control of the industry. If travelers felt that more effective responses to disruption, or easier refund approaches, were in place, they may be less inclined to avoid taking that trip.

Let's call the whole thing off!

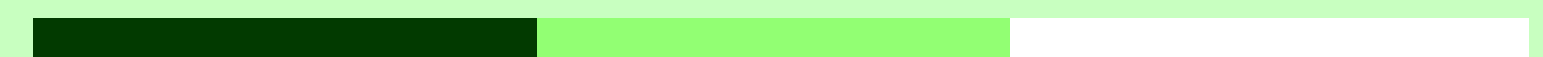
## Yes, frequently

14% 9% 18%



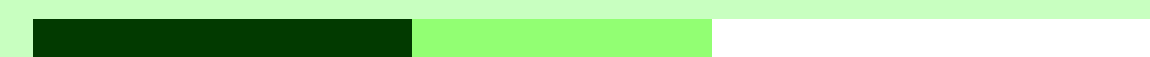
## Yes, occasionally

33% 31% 34%



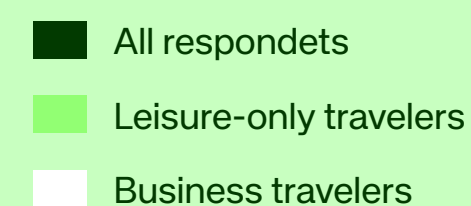
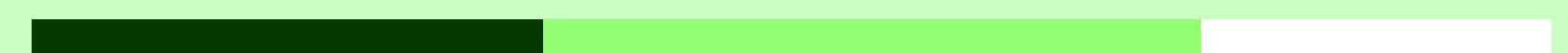
## Yes, but only once

19% 15% 23%



## Never

35% 45% 24%





Both leisure and business travelers face a range of anticipated travel frustrations that affect their willingness to travel. However, the nature and prioritization of these concerns reveal underlying differences in how each group perceives and responds to travel-related issues.

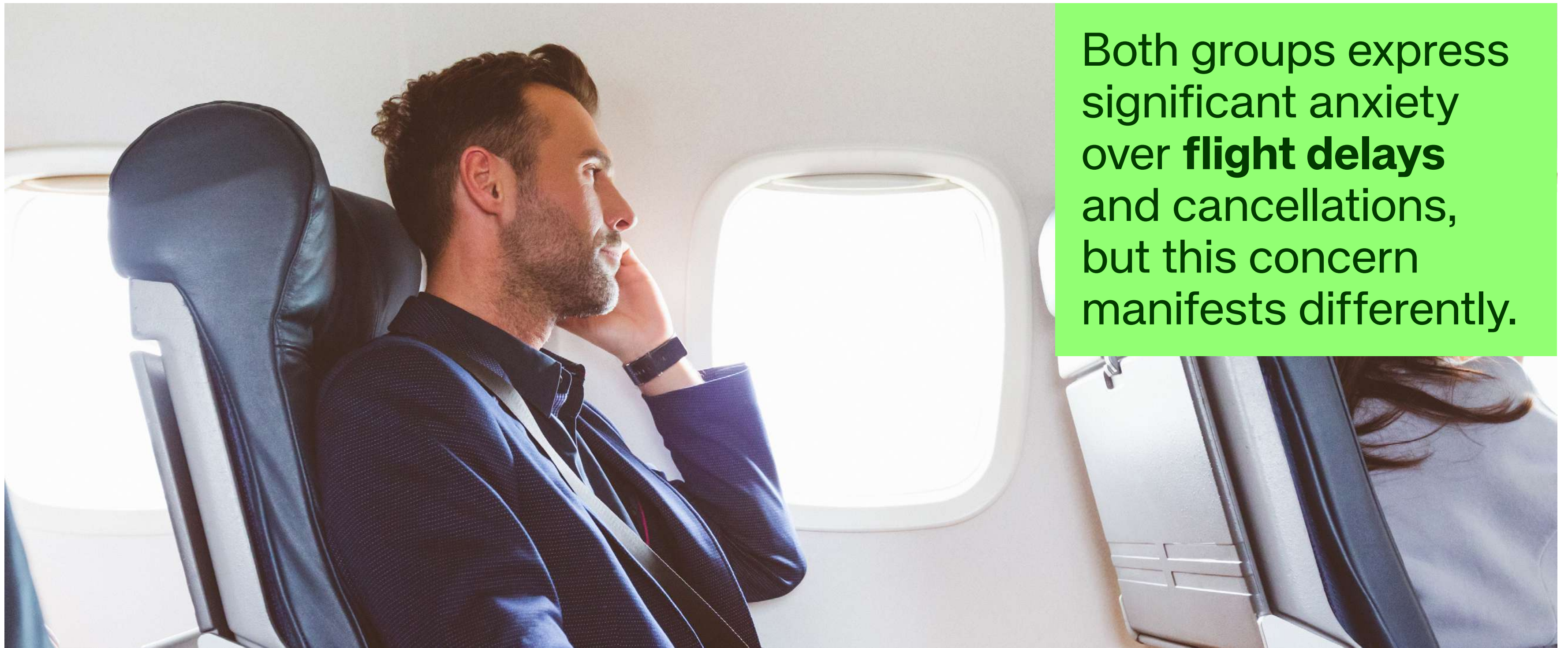
When asked to provide more insight, leisure travelers said they had previously skipped a trip due to anticipated friction, with bad weather cited as a primary deterrent. These travelers worry about winter storms, hurricanes and heavy rains disrupting not just flights but also making driving hazardous. This concern is ranked as the highest priority, reflecting their desire for a predictable and safe travel experience.

Business travelers, while equally aware of the risks posed by severe weather, rank it slightly lower than leisure travelers do. Their principal worry is the delay and cancellation of flights, which can result in missed business engagements and wasted time. This subtle difference highlights how the consequences of weather disruptions weigh differently on each group.

Both groups express significant anxiety over flight delays and cancellations, but this concern manifests differently. For leisure travelers, these disruptions cause stress and inconvenience, derailing meticulously planned trips and anticipated vacations. They rank this concern highly because whether they are looking for adventure or a little rest and relaxation, any disturbance can spoil their experience.

For business travelers, however, the stakes are different. Their professional obligations amplify the repercussions of business traveler frictions, rendering flight delays and cancellations a critical impediment for them.

As illustrated in [page 12](#), navigating airports is a major concern for leisure-only travelers. They find the process of checking in, dealing with long security lines, and managing baggage stressful. This concern is exacerbated for those with medical conditions or disabilities. Business travelers, on the other hand, are more troubled by crowded airports and planes, viewing these conditions as significant stressors.





## How does friction make U.S. travelers feel – and how do they respond?

When asked how friction made them feel, U.S.-based leisure travelers expressed emotions including frustration, stress, anxiety, and annoyance. Many *Friction Removed* respondents articulated feelings of being overwhelmed, nervous and impatient, with a desire to shorten or even cancel a trip.

However, a smaller yet noteworthy segment of respondents demonstrated greater resilience or acceptance of travel frustration. These individuals tend to exhibit a "go with the flow" mentality, emphasizing the importance of staying calm, being prepared for the unexpected, and handling disruptions pragmatically. They often mention strategies like looking for help, finding alternatives, or simply taking things in stride without letting the disruptions ruin their travel experience.

This suggests a divergence in coping mechanisms among leisure travelers, where some are more adaptable and less likely to let obstacles dampen their spirits, while others are significantly more affected.

### **Is it technology, people or other things that can best help travelers deal with travel friction?**

Leisure travelers indicated a strong preference for self-reliance and personal coping mechanisms. Many respondents mention relying on themselves

to remain calm and navigate through disruptions, indicating a high level of confidence in their own problem-solving abilities. Comfort items like music, books, and stuffed animals, along with personal devices such as smartphones for internet searches and GPS, are frequently mentioned tools to manage stress and find solutions during travel interruptions. This suggests that these travelers place considerable emphasis on personal strategies and technology to handle unforeseen travel challenges.

In addition to self-reliance, there is also a notable dependence on close companions and family. Spouses, partners, and friends are frequently cited as sources of emotional support and practical help. This reliance on a close circle for comfort and assistance highlights the importance of interpersonal relationships and connection in managing travel stress.

Furthermore, feedback indicates that official sources like airline staff, travel agency personnel, and airport workers are also trusted for information and assistance, demonstrating a multifaceted approach where professional help is important. This presents an opportunity for the industry to be the first line of action when travelers find themselves frustrated when things don't go to plan.

# Take note! The top 8 things travelers want to reduce stress

- 1 **Faster and more efficient** airport security lines
- 2 **Reduced flight delays and better communication** during disruptions
- 3 **More comfortable seating** and access to amenities during travel
- 4 **Thorough pre-planning** and maintaining consistent schedules
- 5 **Lower travel costs** and transparent pricing
- 6 **Improved customer service** and support at airports
- 7 **Personal stress management techniques** and calm companionship
- 8 General desire for a **smoother and more efficient** overall travel process

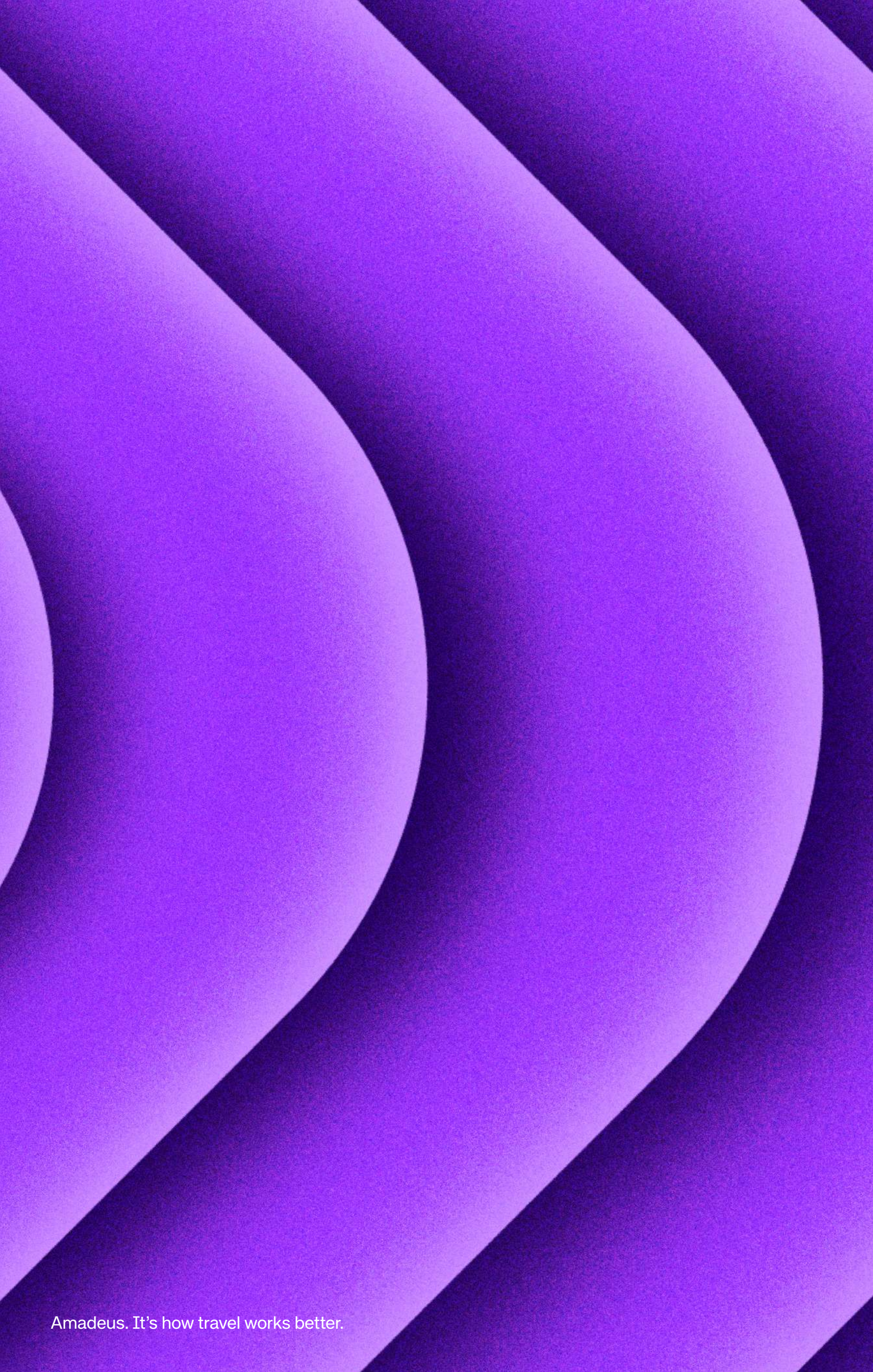




Among business travelers, feelings of frustration, stress and anxiety were also reported. In contrast to leisure travelers, however, this group relies on a diverse array of resources when facing travel frustration.

Technology plays a significant role in helping business travelers manage disruptions. Devices such as smartphones and apps for airlines, weather, and navigation serve as key tools for obtaining real-time updates and finding alternative solutions. Communication tools like social media and the internet are also commonly utilized. Family support, particularly from spouses, is another notable resource, providing emotional reassurance and practical assistance.

**Collectively, these findings highlight the importance of not just self-reliance but technology and supportive networks in navigating business traveler friction.**



# Who do travelers hold responsible for travel friction?

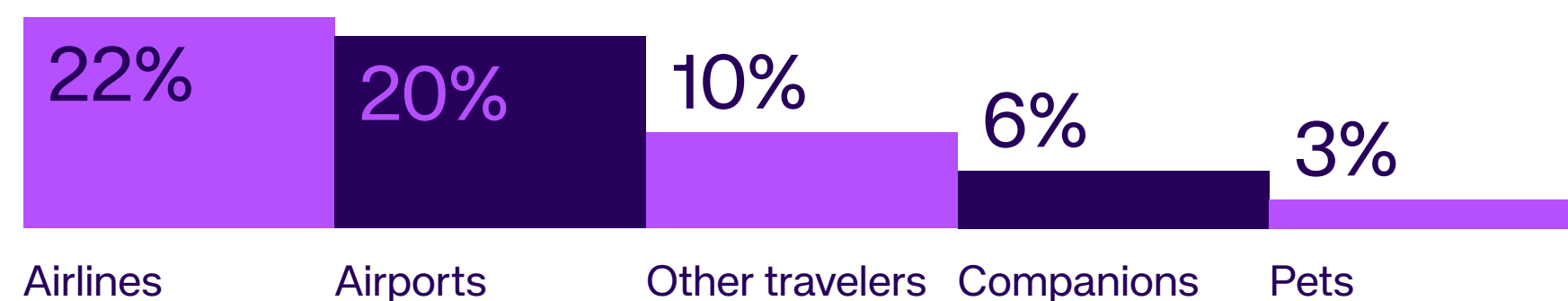
Travelers can find it hard to attribute responsibility for travel friction – with no single stakeholder held accountable. But what is clear is that negative traveler experiences can impact on the reputation of travel companies, even if they are not responsible for them. That is why when it comes to building better journeys every time, the travel industry must collaborate and work together to bridge the gaps that lead to traveler frustrations.

# Who do travelers hold responsible for travel friction?

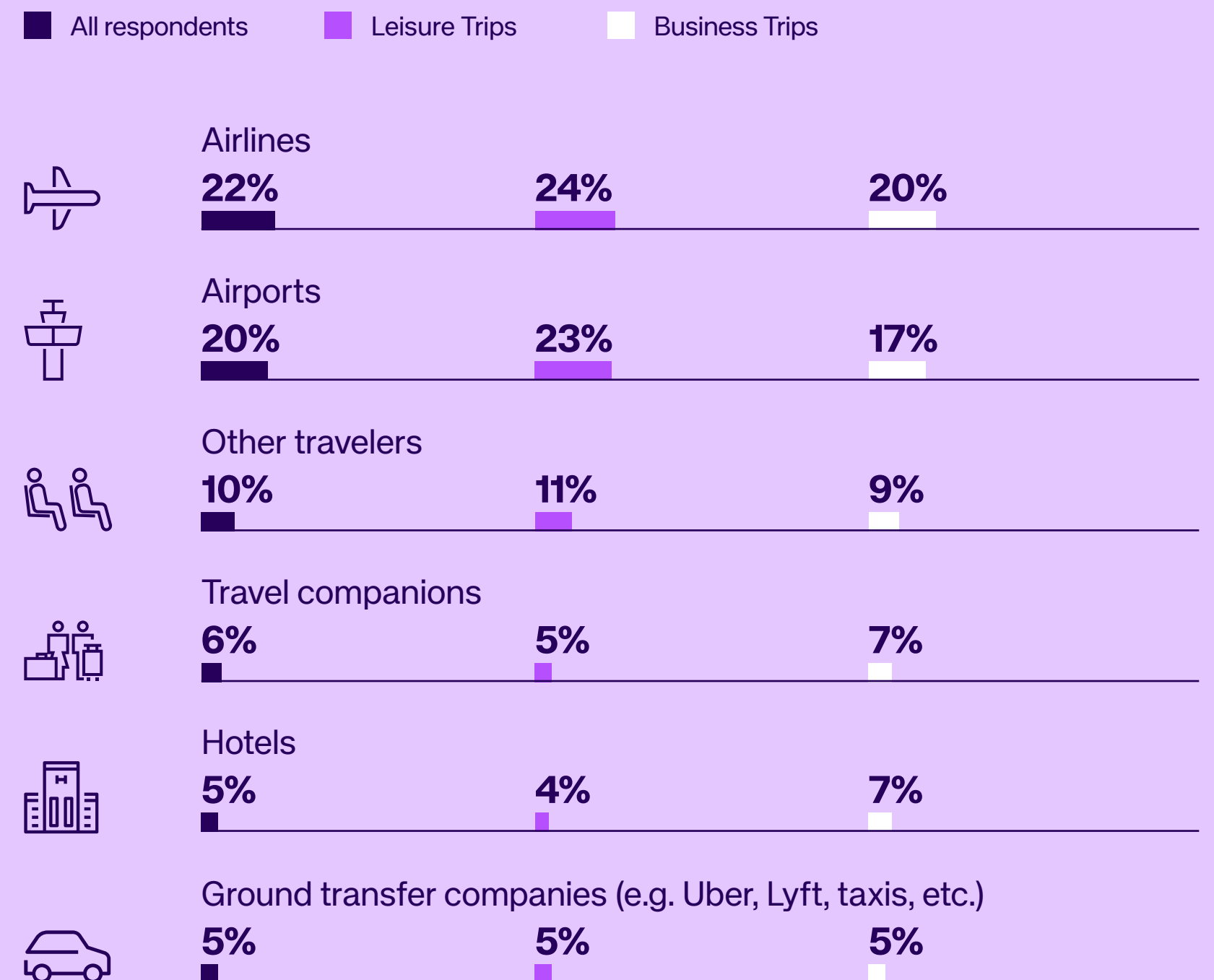
When it comes to placing responsibility for travel friction during a journey, passengers – both business and leisure – tend to not have a specific focus.

When asked to think about who they hold accountable for the different causes of traveler frustration while traveling, airlines (22%) come to the top, rising to 24% among leisure travelers. At the same time, 20% of travelers cited airports as most responsible for distress.

Interestingly, 10% of travelers blamed other travelers, with those aged 45-64 twice as likely (14%) to blame other travelers than those aged 25-34 (7%). Even companions (6%) and pets (3%) were blamed for causing frustration, with those aged 35-44 more likely to blame animals than travel agents, payment providers or travel insurers for frustrating journeys.



## Where do travelers feel responsibility lies?



Travel agencies, your company, payment providers, pets, travel insurance providers, travel management companies, and tour/experience companies were also mentioned, each by less than 7% of respondents.



This lack of targeted focus when it comes to allocating responsibility for travel friction is perhaps some good news for specific industry segments. At the same time, it provides evidence that travelers feel that responsibility for travel frustration is shared. This highlights the importance of collaboration across the travel ecosystem. Only by taking an end-to-end, holistic view of a journey, in the same way a traveler does, can traveler frustrations truly be addressed.

“As the industry moves to the public cloud, we have the opportunity to deploy new technology and integrations to provide travelers with a more personalized experience. Today, we can quickly deliver innovations internally, or via partners, through cloud-native services. By connecting formerly-siloed travel providers and sharing data from planning and booking to traveling and post-trip activities, we can enhance the experience for travelers. As we connect these dots, and by integrating services into a cohesive platform, we can simplify the travel experience and reduce friction.”

**Jay Richmond**  
Senior Director, Solution Consulting,  
Amadeus



# How do business travelers face travel friction?

Whether it is implementing travel policies, challenges with expenses, or sourcing appropriate accommodation, business travel presents unique friction points for corporate travelers. Luckily, technology can overcome these pain points by taking a platform approach to delivering comprehensive access to content from multiple sources and easy comparison with corporate policy information incorporated.



# How do business travelers face travel friction?

Although the needs of leisure and business travelers overlap in many cases, the latter also have a range of distinct friction points unique to professional needs and schedules.



For example, frequently mentioned concerns are the tight schedules and strict timelines that business trips often impose. Typically, business travelers must adhere to fixed itineraries and deadlines, making delays and changes stressful. Flight delays, cancellations, and unexpected disruptions can significantly impact the ability to attend important meetings or events, leading to increased anxiety, pressure and travel frustration.

Another prevalent issue is navigating crowded airports and enduring long security lines. Business travelers often find these experiences more frustrating than leisure travelers because any delay in these areas can jeopardize their tight schedules. Security checks can be particularly cumbersome, especially when they

involve carry-on items necessary for their work, such as laptops and electronic devices. The potential for luggage damage or loss further complicates journeys and can create significant inconveniences, such as not having access to necessary business attire or materials at their destination.

Many business travelers also express issues with the overall cost and planning of trips. Finding cost-effective flights (as well as hotels and ground transportation) that align with both their schedules and company budgets can be challenging. Additionally, travelers must often book trips on short notice, limiting their ability to find affordable options. Expense management during travel, like keeping meticulous track of receipts and ensuring

reimbursement for travel expenses, adds another layer of stress. This is something regularly cited by business travelers, reinforcing the need for a more integrated approach to travel and expenses. The rigidity of pre-arranged flights and accommodations often leaves little room for adjustments, exacerbating the frustration.

New technology will help us to overcome many of these concerns. Connected platforms provide the most comprehensive access to content from a variety of sources, enabling efficient comparison shopping – all with corporate policy information included. Innovative solutions can help travelers understand potential costs for trips likely to change by presenting fare rules more simply.

Friction points felt by business travelers (in ranked order):

- 1 **Tight schedules** and strict timelines
- 2 **Airport crowding** and long security lines
- 3 **Cost and planning challenges**
- 4 **Communication problems** and cultural barriers
- 5 **Lack of relaxation** and personal time
- 6 **Interpersonal issues with colleagues**
- 7 **Cumbersome luggage**
- 8 **General lack of enjoyment** compared to leisure travel

Why is it so difficult to comply to company policy?

- 1 **Lack of clarity** and intuitiveness in policies
- 2 Stress from **last-minute travel plans**
- 3 Challenges posed by **airport security**
- 4 **Discomfort** associated with budget travel options
- 5 **Ambiguity** in policy guidelines
- 6 Extensive **preparatory requirements**
- 7 **Trust issues** with travel vendors
- 8 **Exhaustion** from commuting and traveling

One area of potential friction faced exclusively by business travelers is compliance with company policy. The most frequently discussed issues here revolve around the complexity and lack of clarity in travel policies. Many *Friction Removed* respondents discussed that processes are not intuitive, and the systems used lack clarity, making it challenging to follow the correct steps without errors.

Additionally, policies often require travelers to take cost-saving measures, such as booking flights with connections or choosing cheaper accommodations, which adds to travel time and stress, especially when trips are last-minute. The preparation required for compliance is also seen as burdensome, contributing to the overall difficulty. As companies are increasingly focused on enhancing the employee experience, it

is clear that removing frustrations from the travel process can be a key component when it comes to employee satisfaction.

Here, the latest tools can help reduce friction, allowing corporate policy to be embedded so that search results for air and hotel accommodation is in alignment with company policy and supplier relationships.



# Building a better business travel experience

When it comes to business traveler friction, technology has a significant role to play, according to *Friction Removed* research.

Among the business travelers questioned, 58% would like to see more self-service options, followed by automated travel and expense tracking (54%), digital and/or biometric identification (50%), and mobile phone access to destination information (49%).

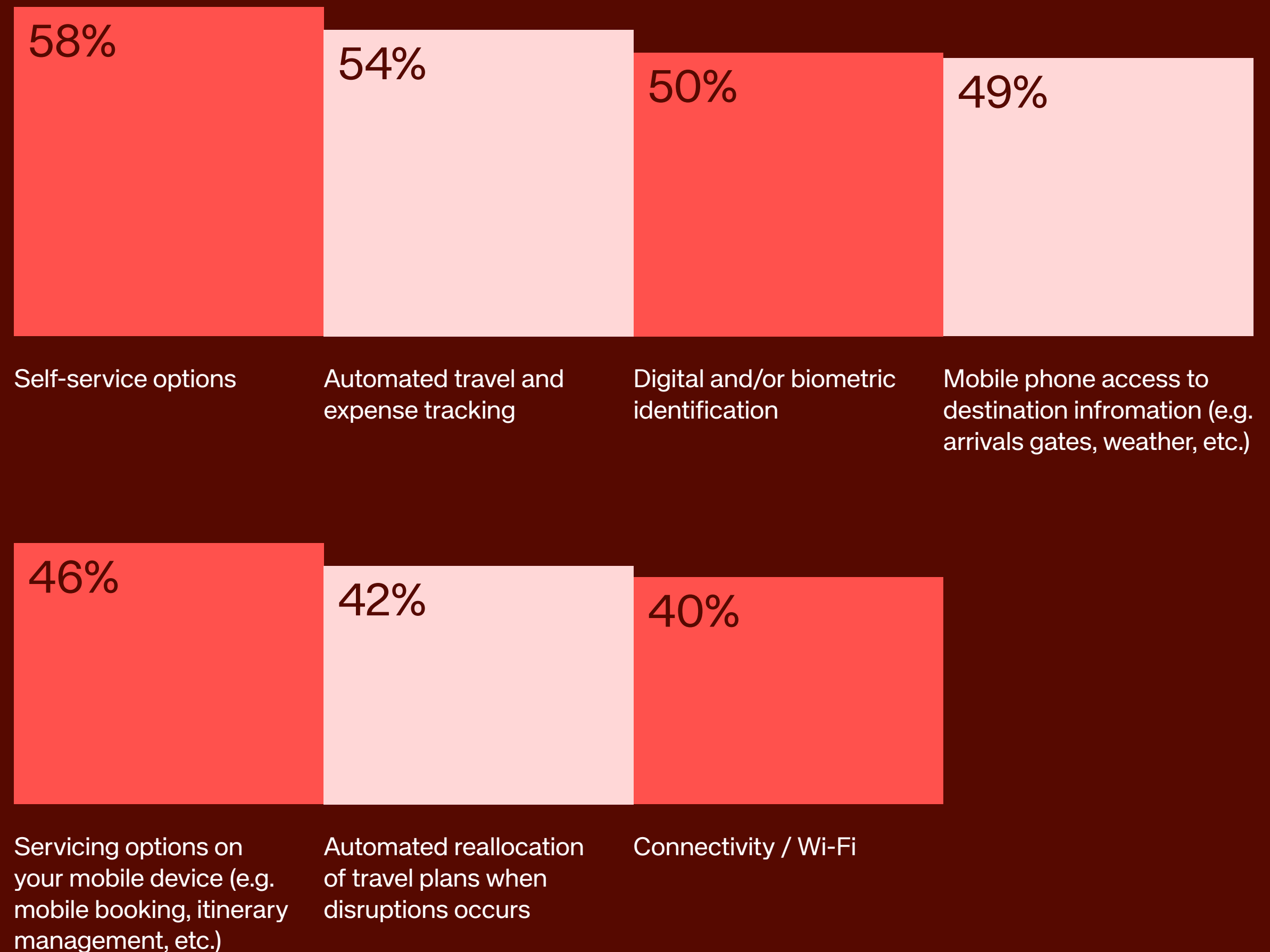
New API integrations can help, presenting the opportunity for industry stakeholders to enable traveler self-servicing in point-of-sale tools, for both third party or proprietary online booking tools.

Given the right tools, business travelers feel empowered to reduce friction themselves, automating processes, rebooking, seeking information and taking decisions. This independence can allow greater flexibility when navigating sometimes complex and rapidly changing travel itineraries. The role of technology is key to empowering individuals, enhancing the value of human interaction and not solely about automation.

Interestingly, smaller numbers of business travelers also seek less technology in certain situations. Some 20% of those questioned would like to see less connectivity/ Wi-Fi, perhaps suggesting a desire for a moment to disconnect during a flight, while 14% would like less technology when it comes to automated reallocation of travel plans when disruption occurs. The latter again suggests these business travelers seek independence, working to make their own decisions rather than seeing trips replanned without their input.

# What do business travelers want?

## Business travelers



“Travel sellers, suppliers and technology providers must seek a balance when it comes to the integration of technology into the journey. While automatic rebooking, biometrics and always-on connectivity certainly bring benefits, research suggests business travelers will reject these innovations if they overly infringe on their sense of independence and autonomy. Technology should assist in the decision-making process, but not dominate it.”

**Jay Richmond**  
Senior Director,  
Solution Consulting,  
Amadeus



# Conclusion

*Friction Removed* illustrates the full range of challenges and frustrations that face both business and leisure travelers.

It is clear that there is no single definition of travel friction, but concerns center on dealing with delays and cancellations, with changes to schedules having a domino effect, impacting a whole trip. Travelers also experience stress at the airport, with check-in, security and navigating the space also areas of concern. Business travelers face additional tensions around comparing prices, understanding fees and finding suitable accommodation options within corporate policy.

To overcome these areas of travel friction, the industry must work toward greater collaboration, developing universal solutions that treat each journey as unique, assisting passengers in new and innovative ways. By facilitating collaboration across the value chain, we can enhance innovation and improve the end-to-end trip experience, optimizing each and every trip for the traveler.

Travel friction should not be underestimated. Some 14% of potential travelers frequently avoid travel due

to anticipated disruptions, a figure which increases to 18% among business travelers. This has an impact on the health of the industry, demonstrating that removing friction should be a major priority as it impacts travel volumes and revenues, in addition to traveler satisfaction.

While one of the chief concerns, bad weather, is beyond the control of the travel industry, its impact can be mitigated through effective communication, rebooking and support. Elsewhere, reducing delays, improving check-in and security procedures, enhancing customer service and offering more comfortable amenities can reduce travel aversion – presenting an opportunity to drive revenue. If those who avoid travel today can be tempted back through reduced friction, there is scope for a significant uptick in traveler numbers.

Today, travelers struggle to identify who is responsible for travel friction, allocating accountability across a wide variety of stakeholders. This reinforces the importance of addressing traveler frustration for all travel stakeholders.

By connecting the dots between stakeholders – airports, airlines, hospitality, car rentals, and destinations – the travel ecosystem has a chance to create the holistic, end-to-end experiences that travelers demand, with each segment contributing to a greater overall outcome.

If the industry is able to view a trip in the same way as a traveler, each journey will be enhanced.

“*Friction Removed* research suggests there is a significant revenue opportunity being left on the table for the travel industry if we don’t address the key frustrations that travelers experience or fear. If disruption can be minimized and effective solutions implemented to reduce friction throughout the travel journey, substantial numbers of both leisure and business travelers would clearly be more likely to take the trips they are currently avoiding.”

**Robert Buckman**  
Senior Vice President,  
Solution Consulting,  
Amadeus



# How can technology help?



*Friction Removed* highlights tremendous potential for technology in overcoming the stresses of a journey – but it must be deployed in a way that benefits the traveler. Mobile apps, automated rebooking, digital bag tags, integrated booking processes and digital identification are all seen by travelers as technologies that can significantly reduce friction. Further deployment of these solutions can greatly contribute to an improved experience. Technology must, however, be reliable and accessible to all, as failure or inaccessibility can drive further stress.

The human touch also remains vital. During the booking process for many types of vacations – including family, solo and accessibility-led travelers seek the guidance, support and expertise of travel sellers to ensure they received a tailored experience, a total trip orchestration, curated to their needs. During elements of the journey itself, at airport security or hotel check-in for example, many leisure travelers would prefer more human interaction.

The travel ecosystem should therefore seek to balance the deployment of innovative solutions with the benefits of human interaction – with the combined strength of both offering the greatest potential to reduce friction. Technology to enable travel industry staff to better deliver for the traveler is a killer application.

Facing challenges with scheduling, policy adherence, cost calculations and a lack of downtime, business travelers are open to a greater role for self-service, automated travel and expense solutions, and biometric information sharing. With distinct needs, business travelers have unique technological requirements and must be treated accordingly to avoid adding further friction to the travel experience.

Technology is already addressing many of the frustrations identified in this research by both business and leisure travelers. Automated rebooking when disruption occurs, biometric check-in at the airport, automatic bag drop reducing traveler wait times

significantly, virtual assistants and more personalized travel recommendations, are all making travel easier. However, what is clear from the findings in this research is that understanding what works for different travelers matters, providing increased choice and options that enable travelers to harness and interact with technology in a way that works for them.

Looking ahead, there is significant potential for generative AI to address traveler frustrations. Whether that is by providing digital assistance when booking, enhanced recommendations, or enabling the industry to better understand post-travel feedback.

Technology offers the travel ecosystem a chance to make each journey better. By treating each passenger as an individual and working to understanding their needs and points of frustration, there is an opportunity to enhance the experience. With the right deployment of the right solutions at the right time, the industry can make the experience better for everyone.





# Key Takeaways

- 1 Industry needs to think about the entire travel journey**, from inspiration to post-trip to address traveler frustration effectively, beyond just the booking experience, the airline experience or the hotel experience.
- 2 Travel sector needs to think differently**, recognizing that friction is an industry-wide challenge, no one company or segments can address is alone, and that is why a mindset shift is required.
- 3 Industry needs to scale solutions** which is why a platform approach to removing travel friction is needed. For example, in the case of a flight delay the domino effect on ground transportation and hotel bookings can be addressed by automated notifications, ensuring travel providers act to meet the needs of the traveler.
- 4 Travel sector needs to address traveler stress** as a way to demonstrate value to the ultimate customer, not just increasing traveler satisfaction, but also encouraging those travelers who fear anticipated disruption to travel more.

# What does frictionless travel mean in practice?



You're at the airport in Seattle waiting to board your flight to Atlanta. You've got a big customer meeting in the morning. The flight's scheduled to arrive in Atlanta at 9:00 pm. You've arranged a car transfer at 9:30 pm to take you to the hotel where you're looking forward to trying a new sushi restaurant that's recently opened to rave reviews.

Just before boarding the airline makes a dreaded delay announcement. The flight is pushed back by an hour and a half. You start thinking about the need to call the transfer company, and, of course, you get that sinking feeling that not only will you be late, but you'll likely miss out on that amazing sushi you were hoping to try.

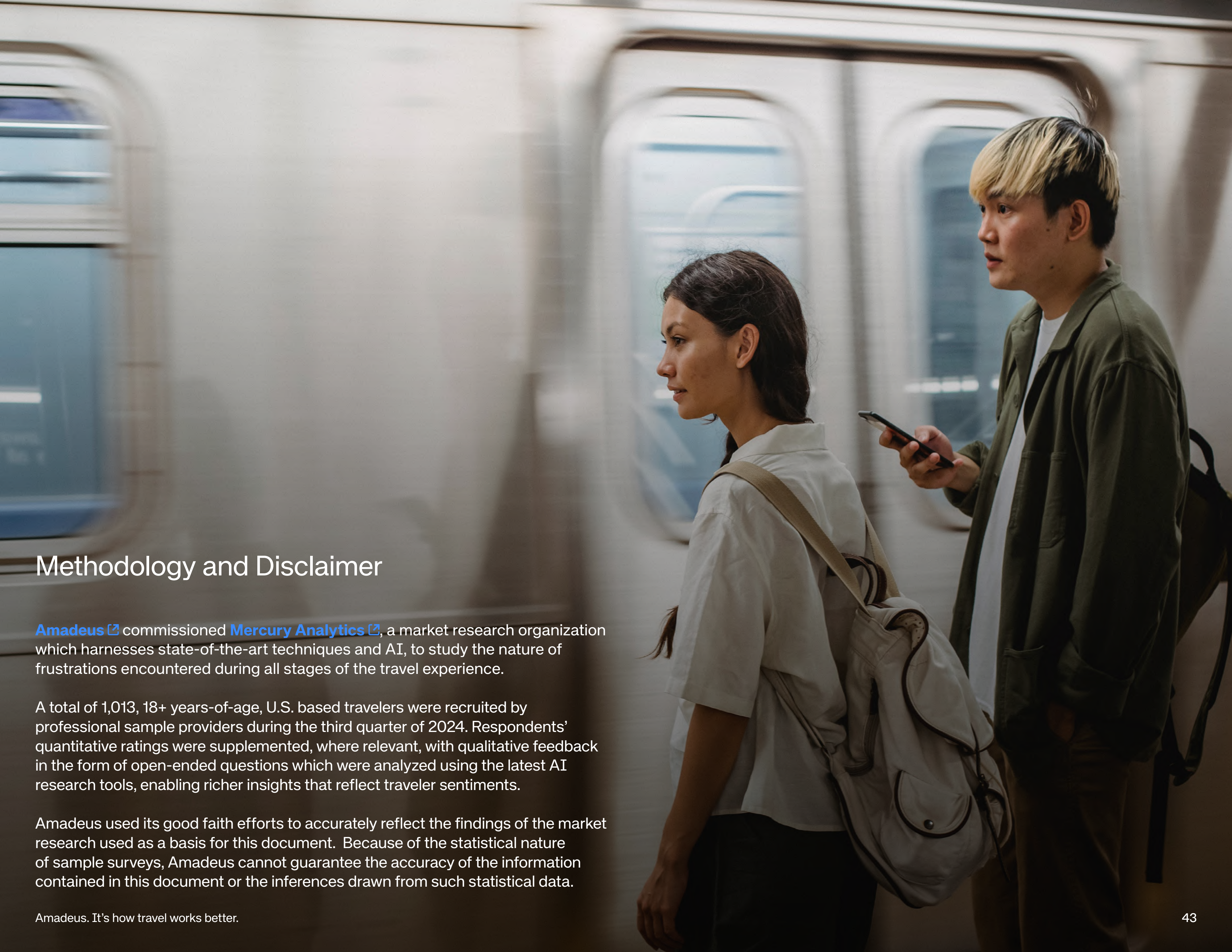
But, working behind the scenes, technology has coordinated a number of events triggered by the flight

delay. The car transfer has now been automatically notified of your new arrival time. The transfer company sends you a message to your mobile phone advising you of the new pick-up time, location, car and driver details, all within a minute of the announced flight delay.

Simultaneously, the hotel receives notification of your late arrival. The hotel knows you're coming in on a long-haul flight and that you'll be arriving after the closure of the onsite restaurants. Therefore, the hotel triggers a notification to your mobile with your room assignment, so you can check-in on your phone and skip the lobby when you arrive. Additionally, they send you a selection of late-night bites that can be delivered to your room prior to arrival. You select the chicken Caesar salad.

You arrive in Atlanta, and your driver is at the designated point and time and whisks you off to your hotel. As the hotel is using biometrics, check-in is as simple as a quick smile for the app. You're all set. You arrive at the hotel and proceed directly to your room, with your key pre-downloaded, where you're delighted to see that your salad waiting for you.

This travel journey isn't just some future wishful thinking. It's what our industry can deliver by working together and thinking about the traveler across the entire journey.



## Methodology and Disclaimer

[Amadeus](#) commissioned [Mercury Analytics](#), a market research organization which harnesses state-of-the-art techniques and AI, to study the nature of frustrations encountered during all stages of the travel experience.

A total of 1,013, 18+ years-of-age, U.S. based travelers were recruited by professional sample providers during the third quarter of 2024. Respondents' quantitative ratings were supplemented, where relevant, with qualitative feedback in the form of open-ended questions which were analyzed using the latest AI research tools, enabling richer insights that reflect traveler sentiments.

Amadeus used its good faith efforts to accurately reflect the findings of the market research used as a basis for this document. Because of the statistical nature of sample surveys, Amadeus cannot guarantee the accuracy of the information contained in this document or the inferences drawn from such statistical data.

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