

Four ways technology is shaping the next leisure travel revolution

Boeing's now-iconic 747 Jumbo Jet revolutionised travel in the 1970s by making mass international air travel affordable. As technology changes the way we travel, trends indicate that a second revolution is underway.



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“Just as the economies of the Jumbo Jet made the dream of an overseas holiday attainable for many more people nearly 50 years ago, today technology is shaping the way we decide where to go, what to do and the experience we have,” says Edward Frost, British Airways’ commercial manager for South and East Africa.

The airline, which flies to some 200 destinations in nearly 90 countries, has identified four technology influenced trends which are increasingly shaping the way its customers are holidaying.

1. Always-on: While the unrelenting pressure of constantly being available means some people expressly seek destinations with no connectivity, many more are choosing holidays that add to their mental or physical well-being. Examples include spa-breaks, yoga retreats and cycling or walking trips.

Bleisure, an awful contraction to describe adding a leisure component to a business trip, is an associated trend. British Airways has responded by making loyalty programmes such as the Executive Club and On Business more flexible, allowing busy executives more opportunity to extend business trip to include some ‘me time’.

2. Enhanced experience: The comfortable familiarity of being recognised and having your needs anticipated is one reason your parents' generation might have returned to the same resort or hotel year after year. Now your digital profile means airlines, hotels, even restaurants can provide more intuitive customer service.

Five years ago British Airways began using technology to enhance service when it provided iPads to cabin crew. Initially, this helped crew resolve issues, such as helping customers with tight connections, but it has since evolved to allow them to deliver a more personalised service.

3. Constant evolution: Much has been made, rightly so, of how disruptive innovations such as Uber and Airbnb have given consumers more options and flexibility at better prices. These disruptors are likely to face increased regulatory pressure as traditional businesses fight to regain market share. They will also have to contend with second-generation disruptors looking for ways improve or undercut their offerings or split off niche markets. It's an environment where standing still isn't an option and the evolution of the British Airways app is a case in point.

In 2008 it was the first airline to launch an iPhone app. The same year it became the first UK carrier to offer mobile check-in. In 2011 it extended mobile check-in to Windows phones. Two years later Passbook boarding passes were made available for iPhone users. In 2014, the mobile app was relaunched, with functionality that enabled customers to make and change bookings. In 2015 it was the first airline to develop an app for the Apple watch. It now also allows customers to save multiple boarding passes to their phones.

Other useful benefits include iBeacon technology, which gives iPhone customers a welcome pop-up message and the Wi-Fi password when entering the Terminal 5 lounge. It also gives customers in Terminals 3 and 5 'push notifications' on their smartphones informing them when the gate is open and when the aircraft is boarding.

4. Less sightseeing more experience: If the Boeing 747 shrunk the world for holidaymakers in the 1970s the internet has put it at millennials' fingertips. Perhaps this is why the global-village generation is shifting from its parents' dip-in, dip-out sightseeing holidays to total-immersion experiential travel. Typically this may involve community volunteer work or participating in conservation projects.

"There's no doubt about the fact that technology is having a major influence on travel trends," says Frost. "Just 20 years ago when we launched ba.com it was little more than a handful of pages, showing basic timetable, product and contact information."

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