

## Travel has Changed since Early 2020

-By Jesse Funk, Regional Travel Manager

Here we are, two years past the first COVID positive case in Wisconsin (February 5, 2020) and the travel world (the whole world, really) is desperately trying to get back to something we remember as normal.

While you can make an argument that some parts of society are *better* because of the pandemic (more work from home or flexible work options, better mobile ordering technology at restaurants and grocery stores, and an ultra-low unemployment rate), it's difficult to find any area of the modern world that was not touched by COVID-19.

The travel industry was one of the most impacted areas of the globe. People stopped flying (either by choice or by mandate), entire fleets of rental cars sat idle, and hotel occupancy rates dropped to near zero for a while. As the travel industry ground to a halt, other areas of the economy were impacted. Convention centers, restaurants who depend on business travelers and tourists, and theme parks were also severely affected.

As each of these areas began to rebuild, it was impossible to follow the same business model that led them into 2020. Just as San Francisco was never the same after the 1906 earthquake and New Orleans will forever carry the scars of Hurricane Katrina in 2005, the course of the travel industry has been changed forever.

Nobody can predict how things will look in the next 25, 50 or 100 years based on the events of the last two years, but here are a few changes we know already. If you haven't traveled since early 2020 or before, take note. It's a whole new world.

- Staffing shortages are everywhere (leading to limited service or complete closures)
  - Airlines have canceled flights due to staff shortages
  - Restaurants have varied hours or may be limited to takeout only
  - Airport services may be limited or closed
    - Think valet, stores and airline counter agents
  - Hotels may have only one person working at the front desk
  - Rental car shuttles may not be operating as frequently
- Technology is everywhere
  - Mobile apps for airlines, hotels and car rentals have become essential.
  - Use these apps to check in, obtain your hotel room digital key, and bypass the rental car counter
- Rental car shortages are now common
  - Rental car fleets have been reduced, in some cases dramatically reduced
  - Advanced reservations are highly recommended since car rental companies no longer have many unused vehicles in their parking lot
- Cash is no longer king
  - Don't be surprised if you can't pay with cash. Many merchants and vendors are moving to a "touchless" experience which means paying with a credit card or mobile payment.

- That said, your valet, bellman or coffee shop server will probably still appreciate a cash gratuity
- Patience and a smile go a long way
  - The need for patience and understanding is more important now than it ever was before.
  - Everyone involved in trying to get you to your destination safely wants you to have the best experience possible. Trust them and trust they are doing the best they can for you.