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Survey Shows Rise In Business Travelers' Plans To Fly

By Amon Cohen

MARCH 03, 2010 -- Business travelers on both sides of the Atlantic believe they will fly more this year, according to a survey published this week by aviation consultancy Ascend, but Europeans are less optimistic than their U.S. counterparts.

Thirty-five percent of the survey's 250 respondents expect to take more flights in the next 12 months, compared with only 10 percent forecasting an increase in 2009. Conversely, only 13 percent expect to take fewer flights, compared with 45 percent last year. However, 16 percent of Europeans think they will fly less, against 9 percent of U.S. business travelers.

When it comes to expectations regarding travel budgets, the transatlantic gap is even wider, with 27 percent of Europeans expecting their air spend to fall, against only 15 percent of Americans. Overall, 20 percent of respondents expect to spend less on air, compared with 54 percent in 2009, while 28 percent think they will spend more up from 9 percent in 2009.

Peter Morris, chief economist for Ascend, believes the differences in European and American expectations mirror the economic fortunes of the two. "The downturn in the U.S. was deeper and longer, and it particularly hit the domestic air market," he said. "Europe was quite slow to go down and now it is being slow to come back."

The survey also suggests business travelers are becoming more compliant about booking flights through managed travel channels, with the proportion saying they use a travel agent climbing from 40 percent to 48 percent. At the same time, those saying they book through the Internet fell from 36 percent to 29 percent. "We are seeing the pendulum swing to more centrally managed programs," said Morris.

Asked which aspects of flying have gotten worse over the past two years, business travelers rated security queues as their number-one *bête noire*, ahead of departure delays and deteriorating onboard service. The top-rated improvement was more efficient checkin, followed by better availability of cheap fares.

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