

COVID-19 Concerns Rattle U.S. Travelers, but Nearly Half Plan to Travel in the Next Six Months: Omnitrak

49 Percent of Past-Year Travelers Maintain Travel Plans through Summer; 29 Percent of Travelers Have Cancelled Since January 2020

HONOLULU, Hawaii (March 19, 2020)—As the global travel industry grapples with the unprecedented effects of the COVID-19 coronavirus pandemic, U.S. travelers have dramatically altered their travel plans in a marked shift from behaviors in past disease outbreaks and natural disasters, according to a new travel survey by Omnitrak, a leading U.S. strategic research and branding firm that specializes in travel data.

Even so, among Americans who have traveled at least once in the past 12 months, 49 percent intend to travel between March and the end of August 2020, while 51 percent do not have current plans to travel during that period. More than a quarter, or 29 percent, have cancelled leisure travel and 12 percent have cancelled business travel since January 2020. However, for the period from March to August 2020, 8 percent have cancelled leisure trips and 6 percent have cancelled business trips because of the pandemic.

Other key finding from the Omnitrak survey from March 10-12, 2020 of 2,505 adults (18 and over) who have traveled at least once in the past year:

- **COVID-19 concerns have altered travel decisions unlike any other recent global event.** During recent disease outbreaks, natural disasters and world events, including post-9/11, SARS, Ebola and plane crashes, travelers have remained resilient.
 - During recent disease outbreaks, including SARS and Ebola, 83 percent of U.S. travelers did not change their travel plans.
 - Previously, natural disasters/extreme weather had the greatest impact on travelers' plans, with 33 percent altering plans and 67 percent proceeding unchanged.
- **The top factor in U.S. travel decisions is advice from national health officials and scientists. National political leaders rank significantly lower.** Nearly 6 in 10, or 59 percent, of travelers say that travel advice from national health officials and scientists, such as the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) is the most important factor in deciding whether to cancel a trip.
 - Other key factors: The number of COVID-19 cases reported at the traveler's destination at 57 percent; travel advice from a personal doctor at 50 percent; and travel advice from a state health official at 49 percent. An airline's reputation for upholding health and safety standards came in at 35 percent.
 - Travel advice from a state governor is on par with information from national news media at 31 percent.
 - Travel advice from national political leaders is relatively low at 29 percent, on par with information from local news media.
- U.S. travelers are not very satisfied with the timeliness or reliability of COVID-19 information currently available to them. Improving both promptness and reliability of information can play a key role in strengthening traveler confidence as the situation evolves.
 - On a scale of 1 (not at all satisfied) to 10 (extremely satisfied), travelers rated the timeliness of pandemic information at a mean of 6.7 and reliability at a mean of 6.5.



“In my 30-plus years of leading Omnitrak, COVID-19 is the most significant global travel disruption the industry has ever experienced,” Patricia M. Loui, Omnitrak Chairperson and Chief Executive Officer, said. “As the pandemic will clearly affect U.S. travel sentiment for some time to come, it’s important that the travel industry help all Americans to make sound decisions based on current science-based public health information.” The \$1.1 trillion U.S. travel industry is vital to the economy, accounting for 1 of every 10 U.S. jobs, according to the nonprofit U.S. Travel Association.

Chris Kam, Omnitrak’s President and Chief Operating Officer, noted that trustworthy public-health information would be key not just during the COVID-19 outbreak but in supporting travelers’ confidence as the industry works toward recovery in the future. “Omnitrak will continue to monitor traveler sentiment, decision-making and behaviors with in-depth surveys that will help industry executives and destination leaders to move ahead in these challenging times,” said Kam, who was responsible for the survey’s implementation and analysis.

“While we are in uncharted territory with the current pandemic, we do know that U.S. travelers have historically proven to be resilient in the face of natural disasters, 9/11, epidemics, terrorism and other major disruptions,” Kam added. “Accurate, timely information is one of the most important factors in helping travelers make the best choices for their business, leisure and family travel.” Kam has more than 25 years’ experience in marketing research in the public and private sectors with particular expertise in travel and tourism forecasting. Omnitrak’s “Coronavirus & Travel” study was conducted from a professionally managed consumer panel via an online survey methodology using a sample of 2,505 U.S. adult travelers (age 18 and over) who have traveled at least once in the past 12 months. Surveys were fielded between March 10-12, 2020.

About Omnitrak

Omnitrak, founded in Honolulu, Hawaii in 1981, is a leading strategic research and branding firm with a strong presence in the consumer, travel and retail sectors in North America and Asia. Omnitrak works with some of North America’s largest state tourism offices, which subscribe to the company’s Traveltrak America monthly tracking study of U.S. trips and expenditures with an annual sample exceeding 160,000. The company also serves a broad array of public- and private-sector corporations, helping to grow their markets, develop new products and increase brand loyalty. For more information, visit www.omnitrakgroup.com.

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