

ASBTA: Travel Clubs Low Priority for Small Business Travelers

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Are Small Business Executives Missing out on Discounts, Business and Leisure Travel Awards, and Other Advantages?

A surprisingly high percentage of small business travelers do not belong to any travel clubs, reported the American Small Business Travelers Alliance (ASBTA), which just completed its first comprehensive online travel survey of current and prospective members. ASBTA is a national, non-profit alliance that provides valuable services and functions focused specifically on the travel needs and interests of small business owners.

"Surprisingly, the survey revealed that almost 70 percent of respondents indicated that they are not taking advantage of travel clubs," said Chuck Sharp, ASBTA President. "We're talking about people working for small businesses on tight budgets and who are frequently taking 10 or more business trips each year, but aren't benefiting in any way from discounted fares and services, frequent flier miles and reward points, expedited service and upgrades, and even free or discounted leisure travel."

The problem may be due partially to the fact that many travel clubs have been historically geared toward the individual or corporate traveler, so small businesses are likely unaware that many new programs and services are now designed to directly benefit both small businesses and their employees who travel. And since most travel experts insist that business travelers generally save more money by doing most of their business with a few preferred travel service providers - such as a particular airline, car rental company or hotel chain - small businesses have the opportunity to save even more money by taking advantage of the money savings and perks offered by the industry's best reward and frequent traveler clubs.

Frequent flier clubs 'go one step farther'

For instance, while most travelers are aware of the frequent flier clubs offered by many major airlines, programs like American Airlines' Business ExtrAA (www.businessextraa.com) go one step farther by offering additional advantages to both business owners and their employees. Each time an employee uses his or her Business ExtrAA account number when purchasing qualifying tickets on American Airlines, American Eagle(R), and AmericanConnection(R), they earn AAdvantage(R) miles and the company earns Business ExtrAA points, which can be redeemed for travel awards that may be given to clients, employees or friends.

National Car Rental's Business Program (www.nationalcar.com) offers small businesses complimentary memberships for all traveling employees to National's Emerald Club program, which enables members to skip long lines through expedited rental service at most airports. Employees can also earn frequent flyer miles and coupons for use on leisure rentals through the Business Program, while the small businesses save money with benefits like unlimited mileage for round trip rentals.

"Programs like these clearly go beyond the basic travel reward clubs in terms of advantages and bottom line savings, but they are only the tip of the iceberg," said Sharp. "Unfortunately, we also noticed in our survey results that although the respondents who did belong to at least one travel club generally belonged to the most high profile clubs - such as American Airlines' AAdvantage(R), Marriot Rewards, and Hertz #1 Club Gold - some equally great programs went virtually unnoticed."

Hotel programs like TripRewards(R) allow members to earn reward points or airline miles by staying at any participating Cendant hotel, including Ramada, Days Inn, Travelodge, and many others, in the United States and Canada. Reward points and airline miles can also be earned by shopping with TripRewards partners, including Avis and Magellan's Travel Supplies. (Visit <http://www.triprewards.com> for more details.)

Small businesses can also take advantage of services like Expedia's(R) Business Advantage program (www.expediabusinessadvantage.com). Businesses enrolled in this free online service have access to the many advantages normally offered only to paid members of Expedia's(R) Corporate Travel site, including business-friendly rates and special offers for flights, hotels and car rentals, as well as corporate agent support.

Some small business travelers may think that travel clubs would be of little benefit to them if they use a travel agent to book travel services. For instance, the 29 percent of survey respondents who indicated that they book their hotel accommodation through a travel agent may not be aware that a program like TripRewards includes so many different hotel groups it's very likely at least one of them will be recommended by their travel agent.

"There is certainly no lack of opportunities for small businesses to benefit from travel clubs, it's just a matter of making them aware of their options," said Sharp. "Our goal is to help build this awareness and build the bridge between the travel clubs and small businesses."

About ASBTA:

ASBTA is dedicated to educating the small business traveler and promoting the travel industry at large. The American Small Business Travelers Alliance (ASBTA) is a national, non-profit organization serving small business travelers by providing information regarding resources and services, savings on air fares, car rentals, and accommodations, as well as technology designed to improve your travel experience. To achieve its mission, ASBTA will utilize an integrated communication program while working closely with travel-industry companies. If you're a small business owner and want to learn more, visit our site and register free at www.asbta.com.

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