

Combining business and leisure trips

A QUANTITATIVE LOOK AT THE BLEISURE PHENOMENON



Executive Summary

Recent technological progress has changed the way people work. Mobile and internet devices allow uninterrupted connection to the outside world and employees may switch from work to personal activities and vice versa multiple times during the day. The mix between work and personal time increasingly impacts more areas of business operations. In this paper we study *bleisure* - the situation in which an employee is adding personal (leisure) days to his or her business trip.

For this research we analyzed a data set of air transactions corresponding to business trips booked by Carlson Wagonlit Travel (CWT) worldwide between 2011 and 2015. Most of the results are based on a subset of 7.3 million flights taken by 1.9 million business travelers during 2015.

Our definition of bleisure requires a Saturday night stay at destination either at the beginning or at the end of a trip, or both. Using this definition, we find that every year 20% of business travelers take bleisure trips, and these account for 7% of all business trips. These values have remained largely unchanged since 2011, which indicates that this is not a new phenomenon.

Our analysis shows that for 46% of the bleisure trips the personal days occur at the end of the trip, for 34% at the beginning, while for the remaining 20% leisure occurs at both ends of the trip.

We establish that the percentage of bleisure trips, or bleisure *rate*, depends on the traveler demographic category:

- ▶ Female business travelers are more likely to take bleisure trips than their male counterparts: we measure an 8.5% rate for women vs 6.8% for men.
- ▶ Younger travelers are significantly more likely to take bleisure trips: for travelers aged 20 to 25, the rate is close to 15%.
- ▶ Frequent travelers are the least likely to take bleisure trips: the rate is below 5% for the most frequent travelers.

We also find that the likelihood of a bleisure trip increases with the distance between the origin and the destination cities: intercontinental trips have rates more than three times higher, on average, than those measured on domestic routes.

These results advance our understanding of the bleisure phenomenon and can be used by travel industry professionals to better anticipate and address the needs of business travelers.

Introduction

For many jobs today, advances in technology have made it possible to work away from the office. As more and more employees are getting used to working remotely, the boundary between work and personal time is disappearing [1]. This trend impacts how businesses operate, from hiring strategies to office space management and employee connectivity policies.

In corporate travel, extending a business trip for personal purposes is known as “bleisure” or “bizcation”. The reasons behind a bleisure trip are varied and may include discovering a new city, visiting friends or family, looking to relax, or seeking entertainment. Previous studies have investigated bleisure by using traveler surveys [2], yielding a number of valuable insights into travelers’ perception and preferences. In this paper, we complement this knowledge through a quantitative analysis of business travel data.

Our analysis focuses on a subset of business trips which start or finish with a week-end stay - as evidenced by the presence of a Saturday night at destination at either end of the trip. While this selection does not cover the full extent of bleisure¹, it does allow us to derive interesting results. Specifically, we aim to answer the following questions:

1. Has bleisure been growing recently?
2. Is bleisure more popular with the younger traveler segment?
3. Is there a stronger propensity for bleisure in either gender group?
4. How are these preferences changing as employees travel more frequently?
5. How does bleisure depend on the origin and destination cities?

We will show that bleisure has been relatively stable recently and that the fraction of bleisure trips depends on the traveler segment as well as on the trip itinerary. Beyond these results, this quantitative approach opens up new opportunities to investigate and predict how different types of factors – be it geographic, temporal, social, or related to the corporate travel policy – impact bleisure trends.

¹ For example, the “leisure” part may occur during the working week or during a single week-end day.

Scope of the Study and Overall Bleisure Rates

This study is based on a CWT-booked data set of 29 million air transactions corresponding to business trips taken between 2011 and 2015. Most of the results presented in this analysis are based on the 2015 data set (Table 1), while previous years' data was used solely to investigate the historical trends.

To avoid unusual destinations and ensure robust statistical results, the sample was limited to destinations having more than 1,000 booked flights annually (regardless of the origin). In addition, we selected only round-trips for which the length of stay was below 30 days.

As explained in the previous section, identifying a Saturday night present at either end of the trip is a central element of the analysis. This definition of bleisure can only work for countries in which the legal working week is Monday through Friday; for this reason, the scope of our analysis is restricted to these markets only.

BLEISURE DEFINITION

To be tagged as “bleisure” a trip must be at least two nights long and satisfy at least one of the following two conditions:

- › Flight arrival at destination occurs on a Saturday
- › Flight departure from destination occurs on a Sunday

This simple definition allows us to identify trips which stand out compared to a standard business trip: most business meetings take place during the working week, and in general there is little business reason for travelers to arrive two days before meetings start or depart two days after meetings end.

Note: We emphasize that the above definition does not capture all bleisure trips; as a consequence, we cannot determine the full extent of the bleisure phenomenon. However, this definition allows us to detect variations and trends in bleisure for different traveler segments or cities; these insights are useful in understanding the mechanism of bleisure.

HIGH-LEVEL BLEISURE MEASUREMENTS

Table 1 presents the fraction of bleisure trips measured in 2015, and shows that the percentage of bleisure trips to the top business cities worldwide is about 7%.

Business destinations	Total trips	Bleisure trips	Bleisure rate
Top 100 cities	7.3 M	0.5 M	7.2%
Top 200 cities	8.2 M	0.6 M	7.0%

TABLE 1. THE FRACTION OF BLEISURE TRIPS FOR THE TOP BUSINESS DESTINATIONS (2015). THE TOP 100/200 RANKING IS DETERMINED BY THE VOLUME OF TICKETS BOOKED BY CWT TO EACH DESTINATION.

To understand if bleisure has been growing recently we performed the same measurement for the years 2011-2014. The four measurements range between 6.9% and 7.2%; thus, we observe no significant increase in bleisure rate between 2011 and 2015.

We have also investigated when the leisure part of the trip is more likely to take place:

- › In 46% of the bleisure trips, the personal days occur at the end of the trip.
- › In 34% of the bleisure trips, the personal days occur at the beginning of the trip.
- › In 20% of the bleisure trips, the personal days occur both at the beginning and at the end of the trip.

In the next section we will examine the relationship between bleisure and traveler demographics, using the top 100 destinations data sample (Table 1).

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The fractions of bleisure travelers and bleisure trips have not changed significantly between 2011 and 2015

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Bleisure Rates in Different Traveler Segments

The number of travelers in our top 100 destinations sample is 1.9 million; one fifth of these have taken at least one bleisure trip during the calendar year 2015. We probed how bleisure varies among different traveler segments determined using CWT's traveler profile database (CWT Portrait).

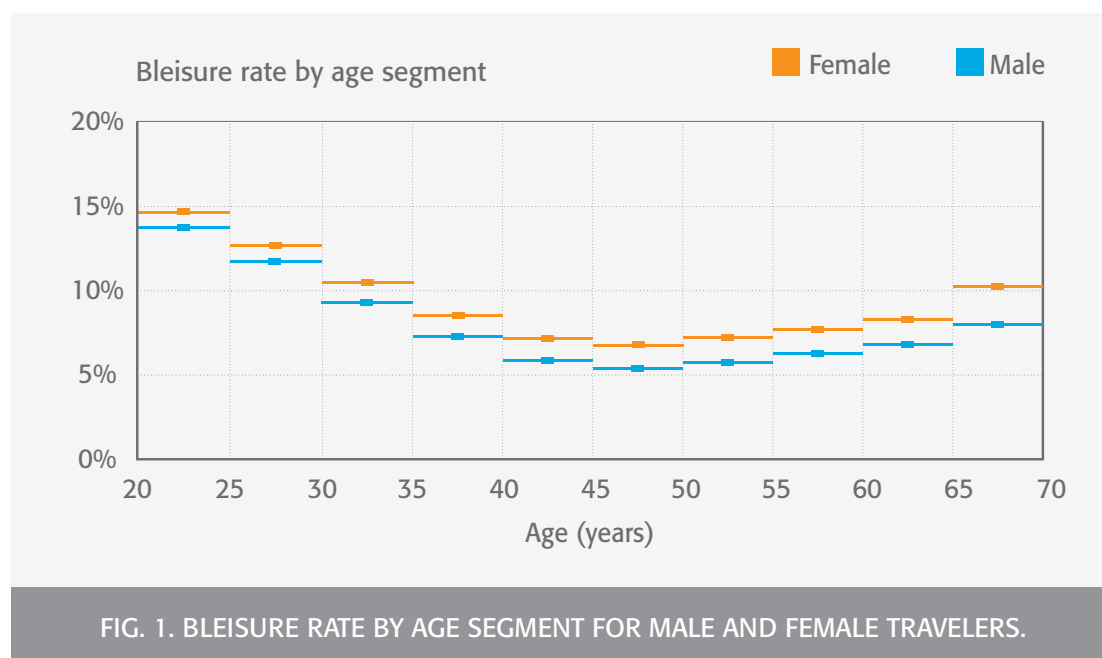
BLEISURE BREAKDOWN BY GENDER

The male-female split in our sample is 70:30, and in either gender group 20% of the travelers take one or more bleisure trips, annually.

For the top 100 business destinations we measure a higher bleisure rate for women (8.5%) vs men (6.8%). To explain this observation we have looked at the average number of bleisure trips per bleisure traveler per year: this has roughly the same value (1.4) for both genders. However, women take overall fewer business trips than men, on average. This difference in the total amount of business travel is responsible for the higher bleisure rate measured in the female population.

BLEISURE BREAKDOWN BY AGE

A similar study was conducted by looking at different traveler age segments. The results are presented in Figure 1 and show that the bleisure rate is highest for the youngest traveler group: a traveler under 25 is two to three times more likely than one aged 45-50 to add a week-end to his or her business trip.

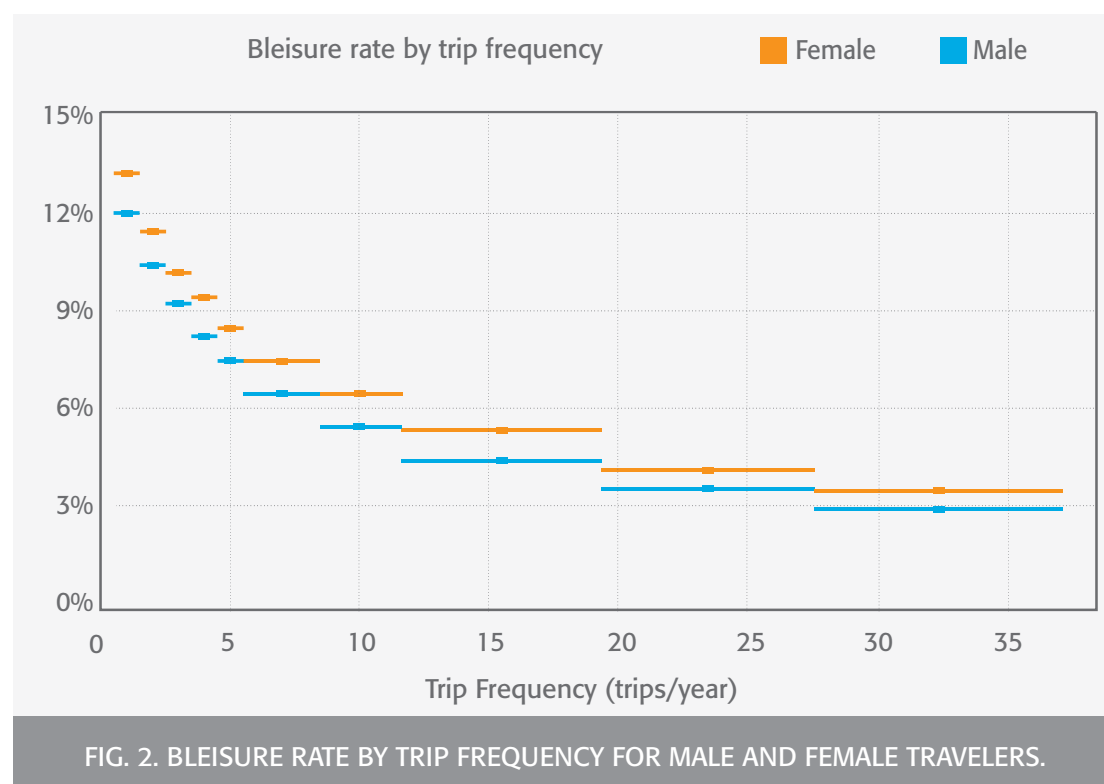


To explain this finding, we calculated the average number of bleisure trips per bleisure traveler in each segment. Across the age range 20 to 65, this varies from 1.3 to 1.5 bleisure trips/year. At the same time, the amount of total travel varies much more significantly (+2 trips/year), from the 20-25 to the 45-50 age interval. The larger denominator in the bleisure rate is thus responsible for the lower values observed in the 45-50 group.

Interpretation. These results show that travelers appear to have a fixed capacity for bleisure: when they do it, they take 1 to 2 bleisure trips per year almost irrespective of how much they travel. In other words, bleisure does not scale with the total amount of travel.

BLEISURE BREAKDOWN BY TRIP FREQUENCY

The bleisure rate variation with the traveler's number of trips per year is presented in Figure 2. The higher the trip frequency, the lower the fraction of bleisure trips, consistent with our previous observation that bleisure does not scale with increased travel². Frequent travelers taking 20 trips or more per year are less than 5% likely to take a bleisure trip during a given year, and they combine for 8% of all bleisure trips. By contrast, one third of all bleisure trips are taken by employees traveling once or twice a year.



² In fact, we do measure a small variation of bleisure with the total amount of travel: every 12 new business trips generate one additional bleisure trip, on average.

Bleisure Variation with Trip Itinerary

Besides traveler's profile, the origin and destination cities also impact bleisure rates. For example, when the two cities are within the same country (domestic trips) we may expect a lower amount of bleisure. Domestic trips involve less time and money so can be accessed more easily or often by the traveler, and the culture at destination may be very similar to that at origin. At the other end of the spectrum, long intercontinental trips offer a chance to experience something very different from the ordinary. Our data confirm this hypothesis: bleisure trips account for 5.2% of the domestic trips and 9.7% of the international trips, respectively. The highest bleisure rate (18.4%) is measured for international trips for which the origin and destination cities are located in different geographical regions.

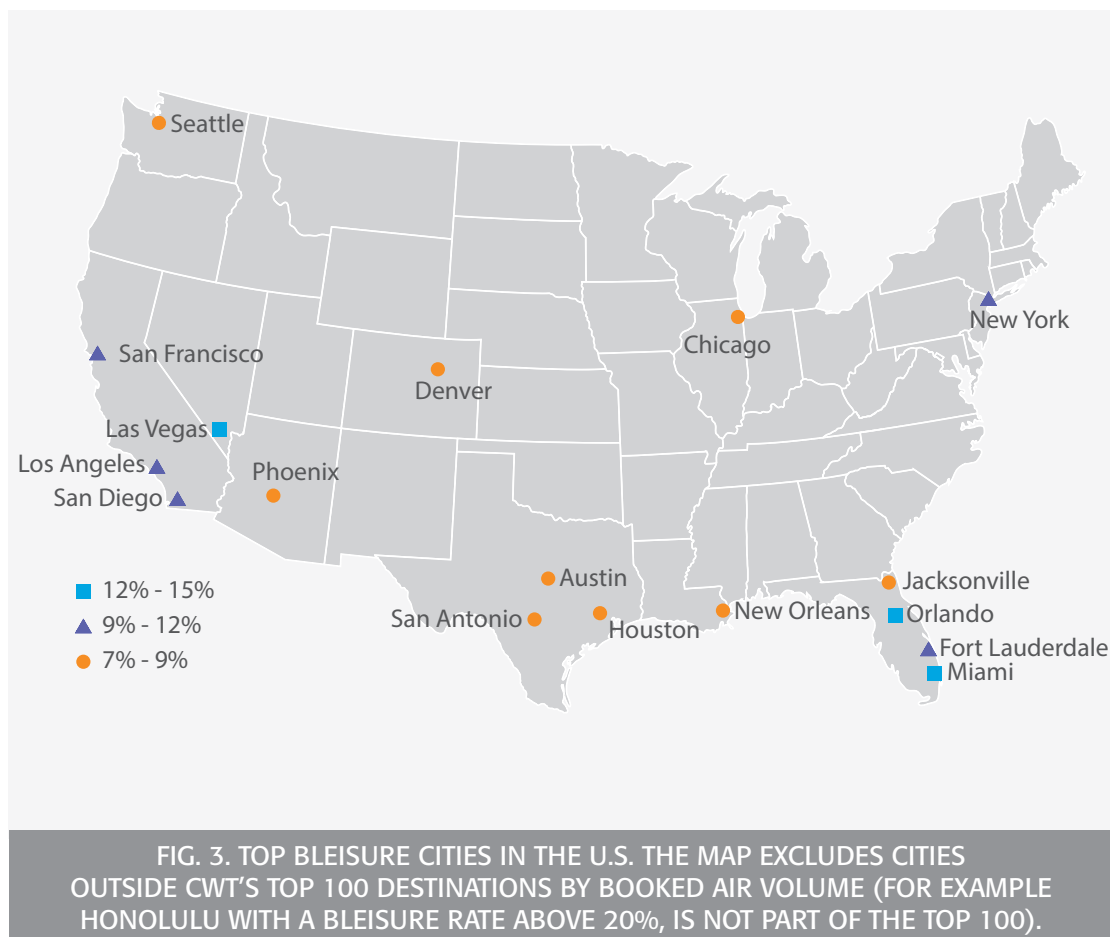
As an example, Table 2 shows the bleisure rate for ten international routes. It is clear that the higher bleisure rates correspond to longer distances between the cities. More importantly, this Table illustrates that the bleisure attractiveness of a destination depends on the origin city: London is very appealing to San Francisco business travelers (23% bleisure rate) and less so to those coming from Paris (2%). As a rule-of-thumb, an increase of 600 kilometers in the distance between cities corresponds to one additional percentage point in the bleisure rate, on average.

Origin-Destination Pair	Bleisure Rate	Origin-Destination Pair	Bleisure Rate
LONDON → SAN FRANCISCO	24%	SAN FRANCISCO → LONDON	23%
SINGAPORE → LONDON	21%	LONDON → SINGAPORE	13%
NEW YORK → PARIS	19%	PARIS → NEW YORK	15%
NEW YORK → LONDON	15%	LONDON → NEW YORK	13%
PARIS → LONDON	2%	LONDON → PARIS	2%

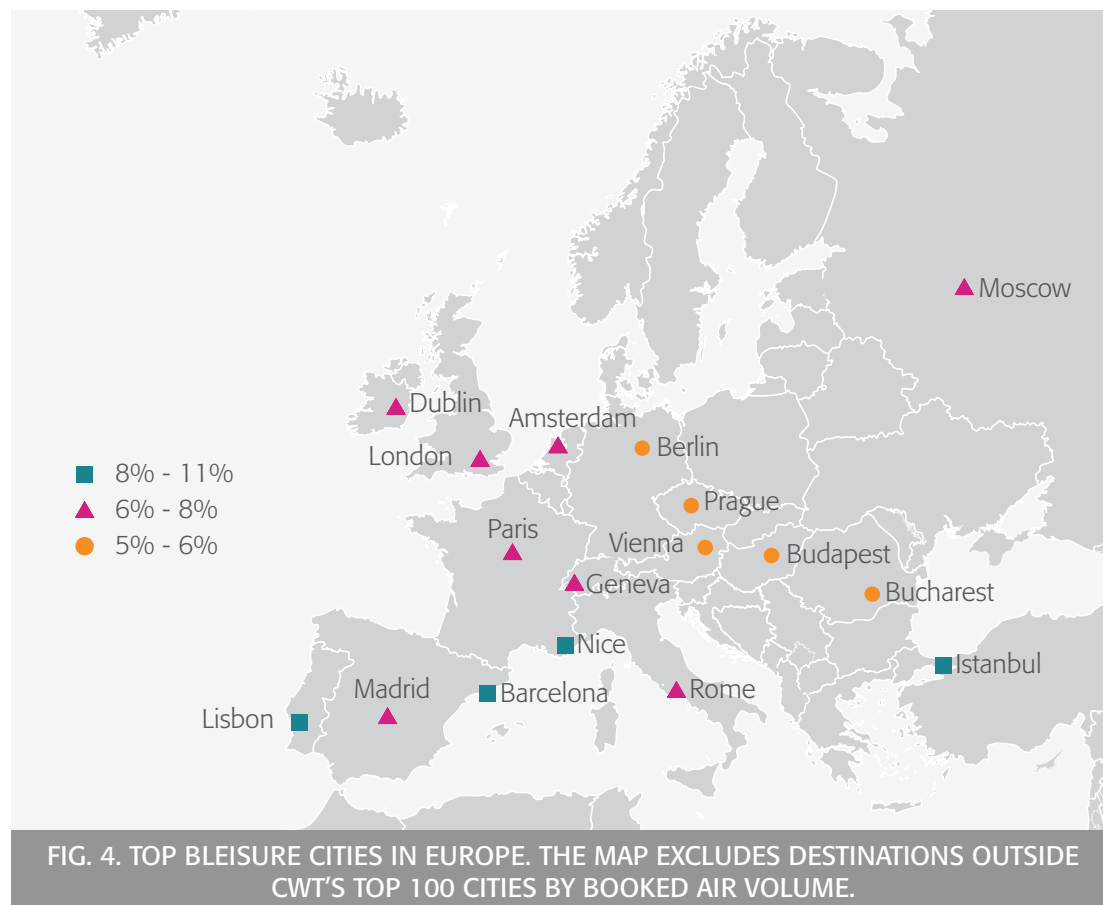
TABLE 2. BLEISURE RATES FOR SEVERAL INTERNATIONAL BUSINESS ROUTES.

We can calculate an overall bleisure rate for a given destination city by performing a weighted average of the rates associated with the different routes to that destination, with the weights determined by the ticket volume recorded on each route. For this calculation to be accurate, the ticket dataset has to reflect closely the actual mix of incoming business travelers from all domestic and international origins.

We performed this measurement for the top United States and European destinations for business, with the top bleisure cities shown in Figures 3 and 4. This geographical scope has the highest route coverage and ticket volume within our data.



// The larger the distance between the origin and the destination cities, the higher the likelihood for bleisure... //



For the continental US, Florida and California are the top states for bleisure destinations. In the top European cities for bleisure we measure slightly lower rates, a consequence of the shorter domestic and continental routes.

Conclusions

This research continues our series of investigations into business travelers' preferences and behavior [3,4]. Specifically, we present results from a quantitative analysis of bleisure, the combination of business and leisure days within the same trip. The scope of the investigation is limited to bleisure trips which start or end with a Saturday night stay in countries where the working week is Monday through Friday. By construction, this definition precludes a measurement of the full extent of bleisure, but it does allow us to obtain a number of insights:

- › Bleisure has been relatively steady between 2011 and 2015: the fractions of bleisure travelers and bleisure trips have changed very little within this period.
- › Bleisure rates depend on the traveler demographic category:
 - Female travelers are more likely to take bleisure trips.
 - Youngest travelers are most likely to favor bleisure (more than twice as likely as the average).
 - Frequent travelers are the least likely to add personal days to their trips.
- › Bleisure rates depend on the trip itinerary:
 - The farther apart the origin and destination cities are located, the higher the probability of a bleisure trip.

Beyond these results, this method can be extended to analyzing bleisure volumes by week of the year and route, or mapping the relationship between bleisure and different types of events taking place at destination. As such, it can benefit hospitality and destination management professionals to better anticipate and meet the needs of business travelers. Our findings can also be used by corporate travel managers: while bleisure has been relatively stable lately, it is expected to mostly impact travel programs with a large share of intercontinental trips. In these cases, it is beneficial to analyze how bleisure is incorporated into the current travel policies, considering both its human and financial implications.

References

- [1] World Economic Forum, "The Future of Jobs", public report (2016).
- [2] See for example BridgeStreet Global Hospitality: "BridgeStreet IQ Report: The Bleisure Report 2014", public online report (2014).
- [3] CWT Solutions Group, "Stress Triggers for Business Travelers" (2012).
- [4] C. Ciobanu, J. Donna, G. Lungu and G. Veramendi, "Gender Differences in Booking Business Travel", CWT Solutions Group Report (2016).

Credits

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