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Rebuilding Trust:
What Customers Want from Travel Companies in 2023

Consumer trust in the travel industry hit a low during the pandemic and the staffing shortages that followed.

Thankfully, the industry is now back on its feet. But the disruption we saw over the past few years is fresh in consumers' minds.

So, what can travel companies do to win back relationships with consumers and regain their trust?

We surveyed 1,005 travel customers to find out what they want from travel companies right now and how you can rebuild consumer trust in 2023.

Key findings include:

42% of consumers **trust travel companies less** as a result of the disruptions and challenges they've faced over the past few years

Almost half of customers want **more human interaction** during the booking process and throughout the customer journey

More than half of consumers want **more regular updates and communications** before they travel

49% of customers expect **personalised recommendations from travel companies** so they can make the best travel decisions

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Demand for travel is back to pre-pandemic levels - but the customer experience isn't

The demand for travel is up - with 80% of the industry seeing bookings return to pre-pandemic levels.

But only 10% of travellers agree that the travel experience itself is back to pre-pandemic levels.

From causing people to miss out on squeezing in a meal at the airport to even making them rush to get to the gate, the most pressing issue that travellers reported was long check-in times at airports. This hasn't been helped by post-pandemic processes being more complex, alongside unexpected cancellations and long delays.
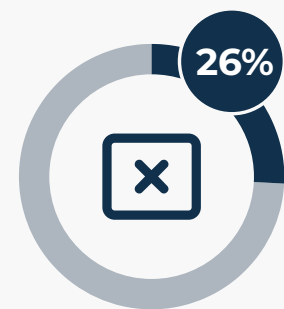
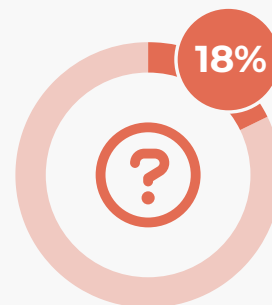## Key issues travellers are seeing include:

36%
Long check-in times
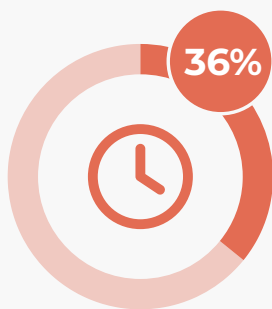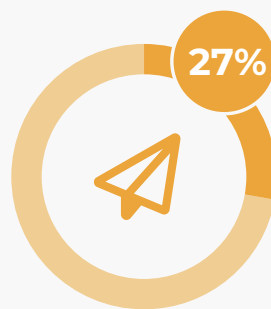
27%
Airport processes are more complex

26%
Flight cancellations and changes

20%
Less flexible flight times

18%
Lack of information pre-departure

42% of customers have lost trust in travel companies

Long delays, unexpected cancellations, and other factors have had a knock-on effect on customer opinions. In fact, many customers are feeling more negative overall about interacting with travel companies.

When it comes to consumer trust, 28% more people have lost trust in travel companies than increased it. 12% more people also think that accuracy of information is worse, rather than better. While 14% more say that reassurances provided are worse rather than better.

Level of trust

Accuracy of information

Reassurances provided

44%

52%

49%

14%

18%

19%

42%

30%

32%

☺ Better   😐 Same   ☹ Worse
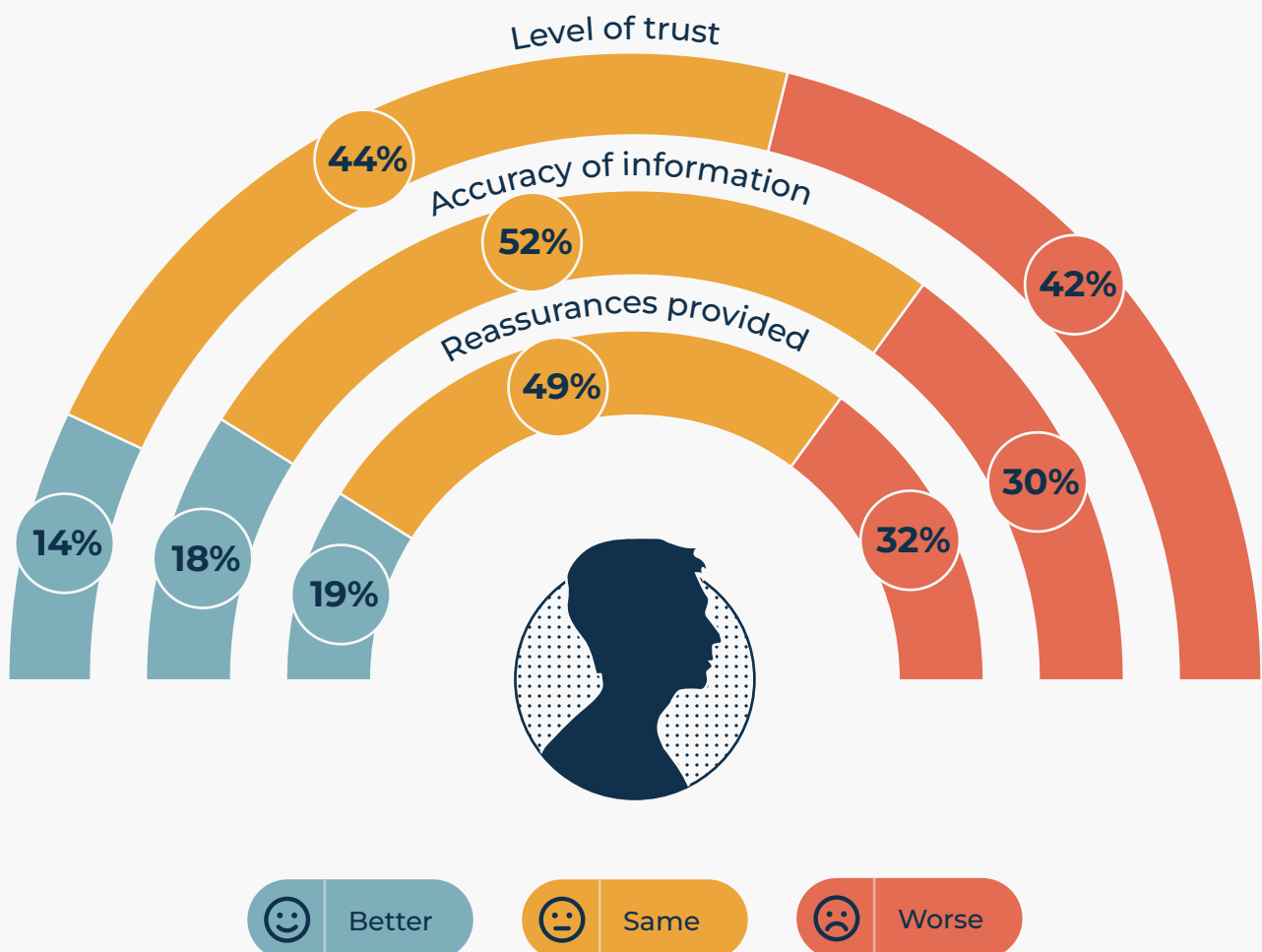
So, why has trust in travel companies over the past few years dropped more notably than it's increased? The key factor was the impact of cancellations, followed by struggling to speak to a customer service rep and slow response times.
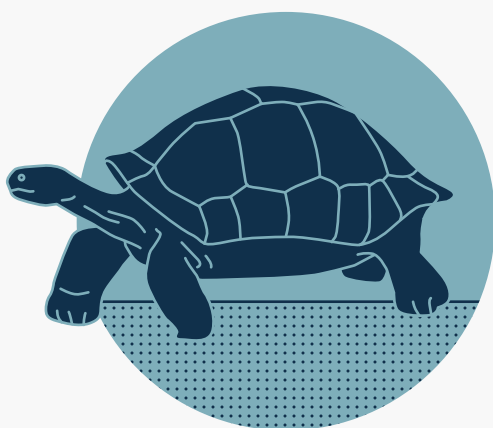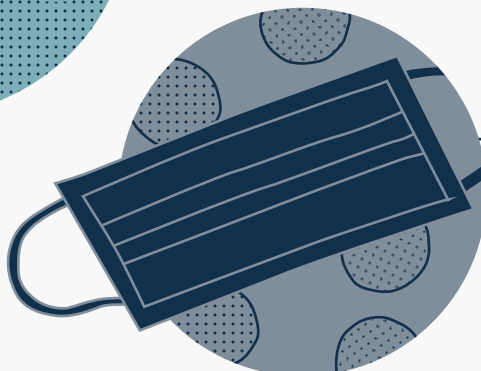
Why have customers lost trust in travel companies?

76% said they have had issues with cancellations

52% couldn't get someone to speak to

44% said responses were slow

33% were refused refunds during COVID

How To Rebuild Customer Trust

Customer trust might be lower right now - but winning back that trust is a simple task. It just requires understanding what your customers really want - and how you can give it to them.

So, what do customers want more of?

Almost half of all customers want better personalisation

Just under half of all customers (49%) want better personalisation during the booking process. That might include tailored recommendations according to their preferences and travel history, or adjusting the customer journey to suit their preferred medium of interacting with you (e.g. sending reminders by text but notifying them of more significant changes by phone).
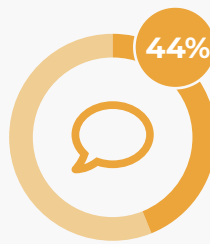
Nobody likes waiting in a three-hour queue and being transferred multiple times just to get through to the right person to speak to. Customers also want assurance that there's a dedicated person they can talk to if a problem arises. Being able to deal with problems quickly and efficiently is also key here.
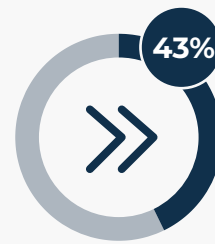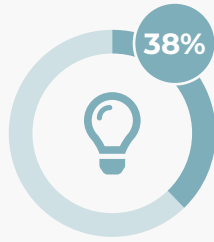
What do customers want more of?
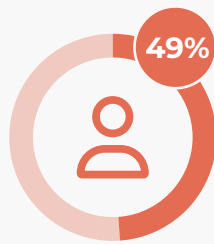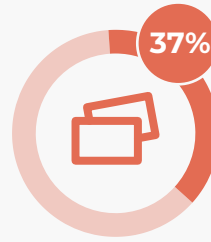
49% Greater personalisation

44% Someone to talk to if there's a problem

43% Swifter resolution of issues

38% More suggestions and proactivity

37% More vouchers or discounts

Ultimately, customers want better customer service. They want better recommendations, better contact options and swifter resolutions of issues. If you can help give them that, you'll increase loyalty, boost sales and grow revenue in the long term.

How we can help

- Instant access to deep customer insights so you can make personalised recommendations and offers based on customers' order history and travel preferences

- Give your customers more contact options and keep a detailed record of all interactions and preferred modes of communication

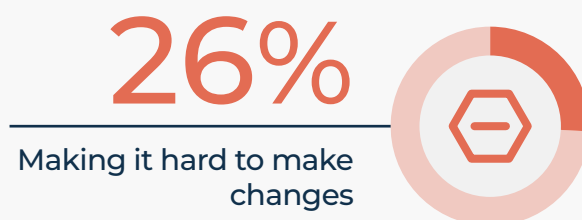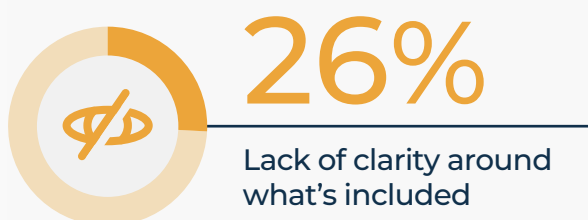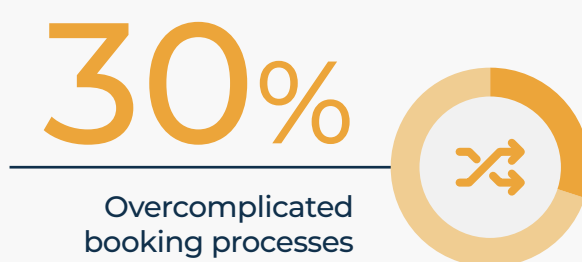**inspiretec**

Customers are sick of additional charges

We've talked about what customers want more of. But what do they want less of?

Costs associated with bookings are high on the list of annoyances for customers, with the number-one thing being when they're charged to make changes to their bookings.

One in every three travellers also finds it annoying when elements of bookings push up the overall price - like adding baggage, selecting seats or reserving specific rooms.

As well as costs, customers are frequently irritated by lack of clarity on their booking or destination and complicated processes.

What do customers find annoying?

41%
Being charged to make changes

33%
Elements of bookings pushing up the price

31%
Lack of clarity around vaccination requirements of destinations

30%
Overcomplicated booking processes

26%
Lack of clarity around what's included

26%
Making it hard to make changes
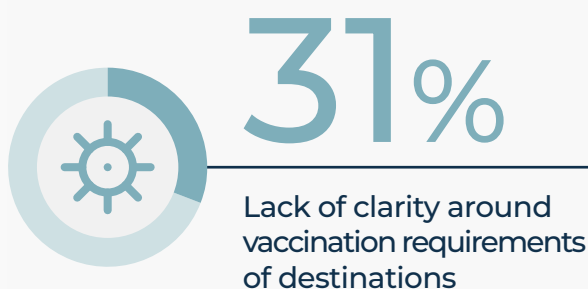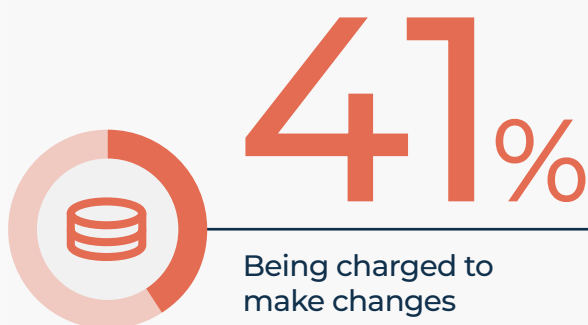
How can travel companies make travellers feel less anxious before travelling?

55%	51%	43%	42%
Text message updates and confirmations	Online portal where they can find information	Being able to speak to travel operator	Online check-in
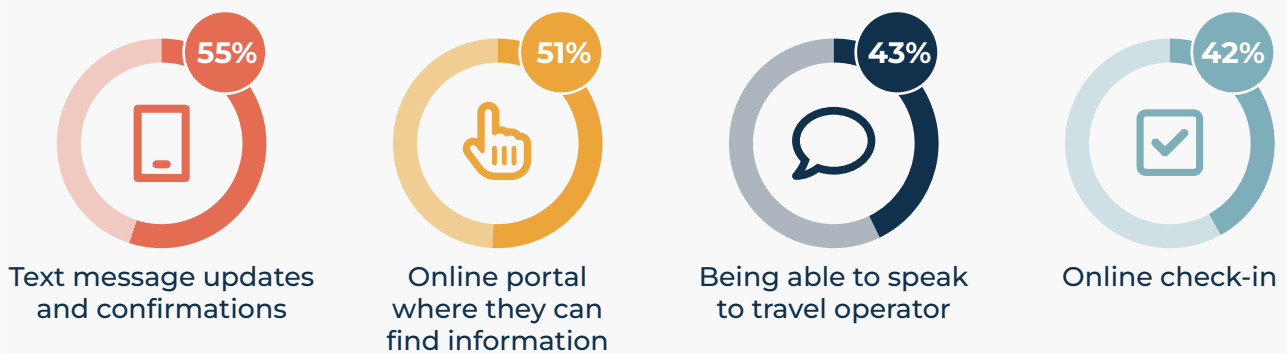
Better information can help customers feel less anxious before travelling

Travelling can be a stressful time for customers. So, it's important to reassure them that everything is in hand.

Key to this is offering better information sharing, such as sending text message updates and confirmations on their bookings and offering an easy-to-access online portal where they can find everything they need to know about their booking in one place.

As we saw earlier, it also helps to give them easy access to a travel operator who they can chat to if they have any questions or run into any problems.

How we can help

- Comunicate with customers across multiple channels, all managed from one central platform

- Set up an online portal customers can use to check in, review bookings and ask questions

- Give your agents instant access to customer data as soon as they call so you can answer questions and deal with issues faster

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How to create a simpler booking process

31% of customers want a simpler booking process. So, how do you give it to them?

Using more technology (like online self-service) isn't always the answer. While 28% of people think travel companies should use more technology, 21% actually think they should use less.

So, perhaps the answer is somewhere in the middle. Just over half of people think that a mix of human interaction and technology is just about right.

Should travel companies be using more or less technology?

Much less

Slightly less

A mix of human and technology

Much more technology

Slightly more technology

14%

14%

7%

18%

10%

?
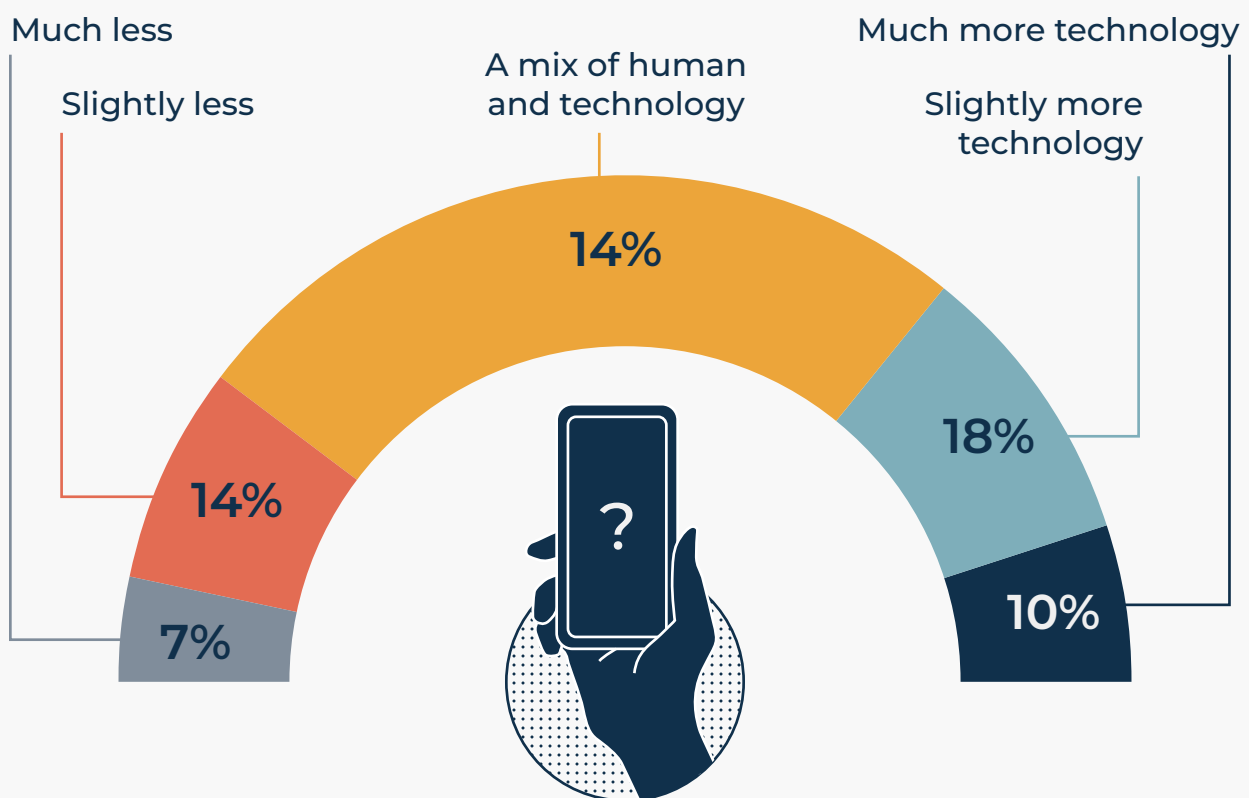
Technology is great for analysing data, personalising the user experience and automating tasks. But it can't replace the personal quality of dealing with a human or make the same kind of situational judgements.
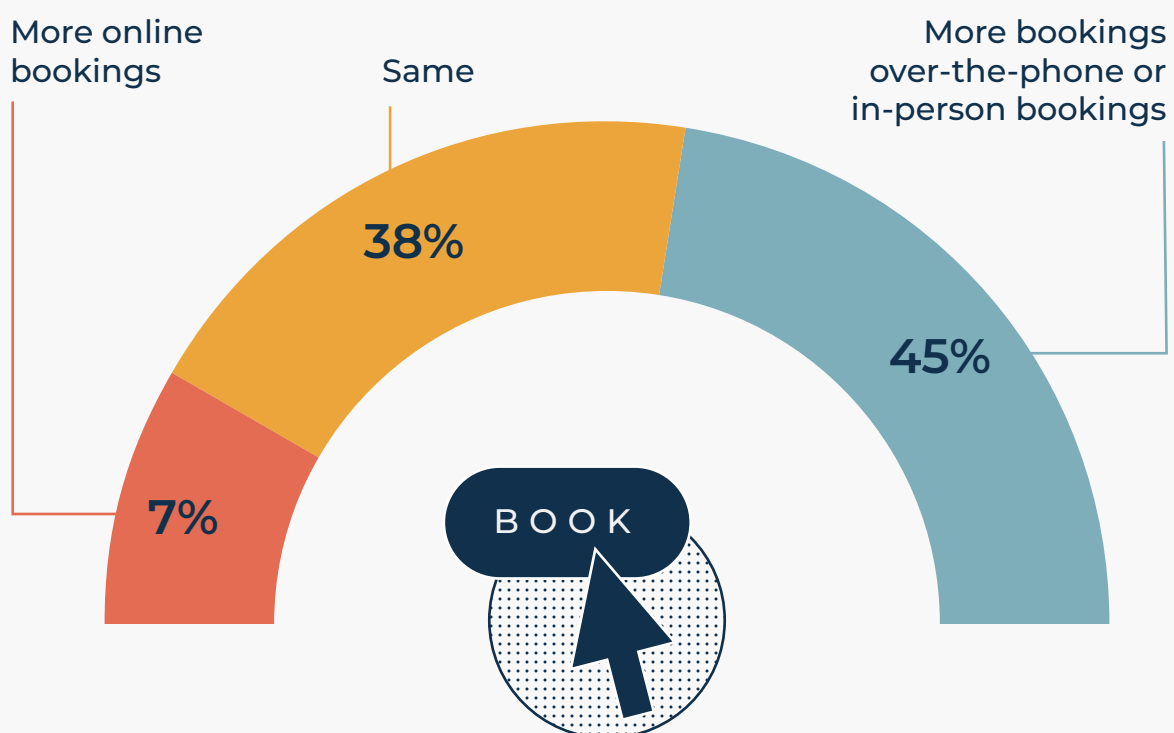
A mix of the two is ideal for giving customers the most personalised and accurate experience, while also connecting with them on a personal level.

Customers prefer in-person bookings over self-service

Customers prefer a mix of human interaction and technology when booking package holidays. But, specifically when making bookings, they'd prefer to deal with a human rather than a self-service tool.

In fact, 45% of people prefer making bookings over the phone or in person - versus just 17% that prefer using online self-service tools.

Do customers want to make more online bookings or over-the-phone/in-person bookings?

More online bookings

Same

More bookings over-the-phone or in-person bookings

38%

45%

7%

BOOK

Top reasons for booking package holidays:

53% Easier booking process

46% More cost-effective

42% ABTA holiday protection

29% More advice from travel operators

29% Too complicated to do it all myself
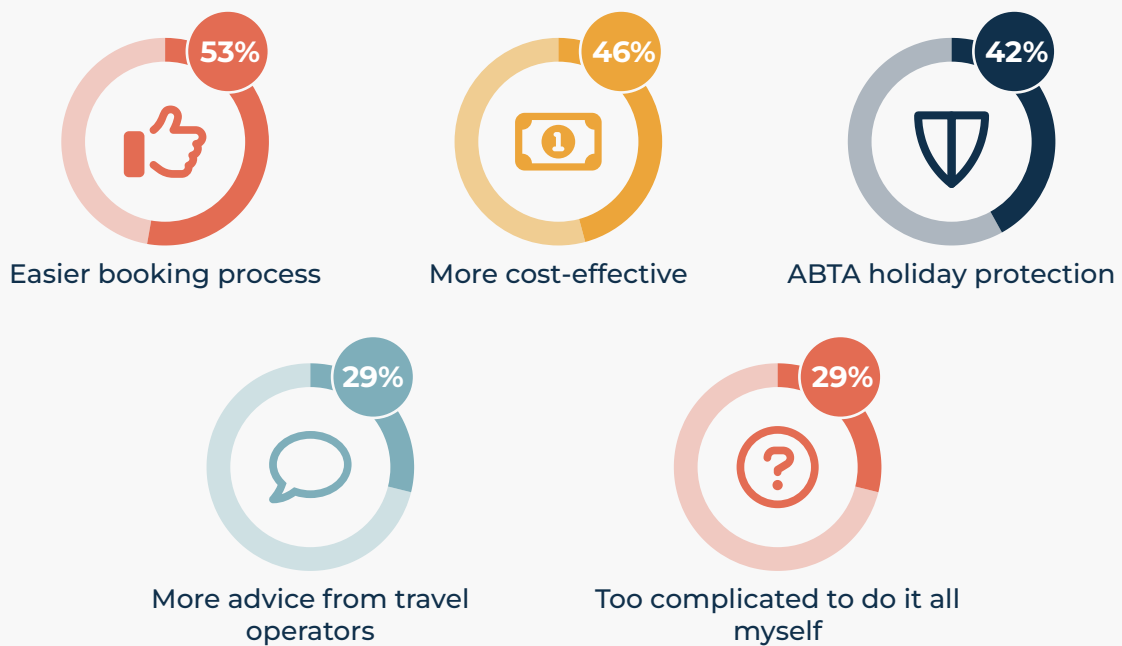
Booking package holidays with travel companies are also a hit with customers because, on the whole, they give customers a far easier booking process, are more cost-effective than booking independently, offer ABTA holiday protection, and more.

How we can help

- Offer a better over-the-phone booking experience by equipping agents with all the customer data and tools they need to make personalised offers and recommendations without asking too many questions

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Recap: What travel customers want in 2023

So, what do travel customers really want in 2023?

Here are the top four priorities on travellers' minds this year.

Rebuilding consumer trust might take some effort. But by giving customers what they really want from their travel experiences, you'll be one step closer.

1 More human interaction to help simplify bookings and resolve issues quickly

2 Personalised recommendations to help them find the best travel options

3 Greater self-service options for documents and itineraries

4 Regular communication and updates in the run-up to travelling

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Head of Delivery, Travelopia