

BCD^otravel

Cities & Trends Asia Pacific

2023 EDITION

Copyright © 2024 BCD Travel N.V. All rights reserved.



About the report

Business travel can be a barometer for economic growth. The rise and fall of business travel volumes reflect the level and health of economic activity within a region or country. BCD's *Cities & Trends 2023 Asia Pacific edition* shows the top destinations for APAC business travelers with insights into how they travel. The findings are based on BCD flight and rail data from 2023 in a range of APAC markets.* This APAC edition follows the recently published 2023 [Europe edition](#) and [U.S. edition](#). The reports are produced annually.

*Australia, China, Hong Kong, India, Japan and Singapore



Top 10 APAC cities



Top 10 intercontinental cities



Top 5 countries



Top 10 routes



Top 5 layover cities



Cabin class and flight type



Top 10 rail routes in China and Japan

Top 10 APAC cities

Singapore is clearly leading the way in APAC, reclaiming its status as a major meetings, incentives, conferences and exhibitions destination post pandemic. Robust government support, with S\$870 million (US\$664 million) OneAviation Support Package for the aviation sector in 2021 and more than S\$300 million (US\$223 million)¹ has helped its tourism sector continue its post-pandemic recovery amid intensifying global competition in 2024.² It has maintained its position as the primary financial hub in the region ahead of Hong Kong and now ranks as Asia's top financial center and the third globally.³ In 2023, Changi Airport recovered to about 86%⁴ of its pre-pandemic passenger volume, driven by a strong rebound in Northeast and Southeast Asia traffic, making Singapore an accessible and convenient destination for business.

¹Source: [Ministry of Transport, Singapore](#)

²Source: [Channel News Asia](#)

³Source: The Global Financial Centres Index 34 (GFCI 34) that provides evaluations of future competitiveness and rankings for 121 financial centres around the world.

⁴Source: [Asian Aviation](#)

1 Singapore



6 Shanghai



2 Hong Kong



7 Seoul



3 Bangkok



8 Taipei



4 Tokyo



9 Jakarta



5 Kuala Lumpur



10 Manila





Top 10 intercontinental cities

The list of intercontinental cities is led by Europe with six cities in the top 10. San Francisco is the only American city in the top five.



The APAC region is set to play a significant role in global business travel spending this year, accounting for 42% of the total.* BCD leverages its advanced technology and industry expertise to help travelers and companies navigate the complexities of business travel in APAC, one of the most diverse regions. **We support our corporate clients by keeping them informed of developments, advising on supplier negotiations, managing risks, and providing travelers with tools they enjoy using, ensuring they can travel confidently and effectively.**



Greg O'Neil

President, Asia Pacific, Middle East, Africa and Global Network
BCD Travel

*Source: GBTA's 2023 Business Travel Index™ (BTI)

Top 5 countries

According to BCD flight transactions, Singapore was the most visited APAC country last year, followed by China. The recovery of international travel to and from China has lagged behind the rebound in the country's domestic travel industry following the end of its zero-COVID policy. Domestic air travel is at 17% above 2019 levels, while international air travel is still recovering.* Factors such as a shortage of flights, high ticket prices, and administrative hurdles in obtaining visas have contributed to this slower recovery.

The United States is the most visited country globally, followed by Germany. This is not surprising because four American cities were among the top 10 intercontinental cities.

APAC

- 1 Singapore
- 2 China
- 3 Japan
- 4 Thailand
- 5 Hong Kong SAR

Intercontinental

- 1 United States
- 2 Germany
- 3 United Kingdom
- 4 Netherlands
- 5 France

*Source: [IATA Quarterly Air Transport Chartbook](#)

Top 10 routes

According to BCD flight data, the most frequently traveled routes* for APAC flights primarily depart from Singapore, which accounts for four positions in the top 10 city pairs. Hong Kong follows with two city pairs in the top 10.

The top 10 arrival hubs for APAC routes are predominantly in Southeast Asia and North Asia, with Singapore being the most popular destination.

For intercontinental city pairs, Bangalore to Frankfurt tops the chart. The most frequently traveled routes for intercontinental flights from APAC mainly depart from Tokyo and Singapore, together holding seven positions in the top 10 routes.

The top 10 arrival hubs for intercontinental routes are largely dominated by European cities, with Frankfurt being the most popular.

APAC

- 1 Kuala Lumpur to Singapore
- 2 Singapore to Kuala Lumpur
- 3 Bangkok to Singapore
- 4 Singapore to Bangkok
- 5 Singapore to Jakarta
- 6 Singapore to Hong Kong
- 7 Hong Kong to Singapore
- 8 Jakarta to Singapore
- 9 Shanghai to Hong Kong
- 10 Hong Kong to Shanghai

Intercontinental

- 1 Bangalore to Frankfurt
- 2 Shanghai to Frankfurt
- 3 Singapore to London
- 4 Tokyo to Frankfurt
- 5 Tokyo to New York City
- 6 Tokyo to San Francisco
- 7 Tokyo to London
- 8 Singapore to Amsterdam
- 9 Shanghai to Munich
- 10 Singapore to Frankfurt

*Top routes combine data of multiple airports for the following cities: London (Heathrow, London Gatwick and London City); New York City (John F. Kennedy, Newark and La Guardia); Shanghai (Pudong and Hongqiao) and Tokyo (Narita and Haneda).

Top 5 layover cities

Due to flight times, costs or the lack of direct flights, it's common for travelers to make one* or more stopovers especially for intercontinental journeys.

Thanks to its location and excellent connectivity, Singapore is unsurprisingly the top city for layovers on APAC flights.

For intercontinental flights from APAC, the Middle East leads the way, with Dubai and Doha ranking as the first and third most popular layover cities.

*When looking at data for this report, flights with one or multiple stopovers are considered.

APAC

- 1 Singapore
- 2 Kuala Lumpur
- 3 Bangkok
- 4 Hong Kong
- 5 Sydney

Intercontinental

- 1 Dubai
- 2 Frankfurt
- 3 Doha
- 4 Istanbul
- 5 San Francisco

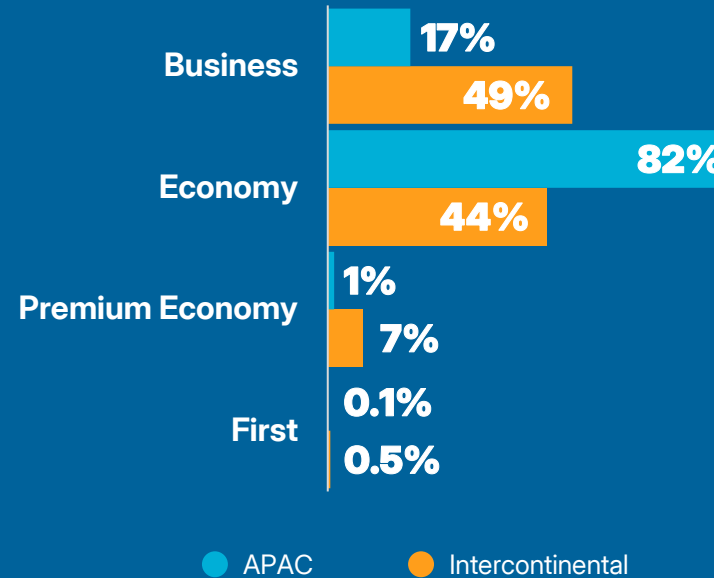
Cabin class and flight type

For APAC flights, most travelers booked economy and only 17% booked business class. For intercontinental flights, the figures shift significantly, with 49% booking business class and 44% booking economy.

Comparatively, in the U.S., business class and economy class account for 53% and 36% of intercontinental flights, respectively. In Europe, 47% of travelers booked business class, and 42% booked economy for intercontinental flights.

Most APAC flights are direct (91%), largely due to the well-connected route networks within countries. In contrast, only 20% of intercontinental travel from APAC is direct. This could be due to the relative lack of availability of direct flights to traveler destinations.

APAC & intercontinental cabin classes



Direct flights

APAC
91%

Intercontinental
20%

Top 10 rail routes

China

- 1 Shanghai to Beijing
- 2 Changsha to Shenzhen
- 3 Beijing to Shanghai
- 4 Shenzhen to Changsha
- 5 Shanghai to Hangzhou
- 6 Hangzhou to Shanghai
- 7 Shanghai to Suzhou
- 8 Yancheng to Shanghai
- 9 Wuhan to Changsha
- 10 Suzhou to Shanghai

Japan

- 1 Tokyo to Osaka
- 2 Osaka to Tokyo
- 3 Tokyo to Nagoya
- 4 Nagoya to Tokyo
- 5 Osaka to Nagoya
- 6 Nagoya to Osaka
- 7 Tokyo to Kyoto
- 8 Kyoto to Tokyo
- 9 Yokohama to Nagoya
- 10 Nagoya to Yokohama



China and Japan rail insights

Rail travel is a popular choice for domestic business travel in China and Japan. Unlike air travel, which requires lengthy check-in and security processes, rail travel offers quicker boarding and deboarding, significantly reducing overall travel time especially for distances up to 1,200 km.

Train stations in both countries are typically located in city centers or business districts, providing easy access to key areas. Train tickets can also be more economical compared to airfares, especially when considering hidden costs such as transportation to and from airports and baggage fees.

The China Railway High-speed system, including the renowned Beijing-Shanghai line, offers extensive coverage and high speeds, greatly reducing travel times between major economic hubs. Our data shows that a second-class rail ticket can be up to 50% cheaper than economy class airfare, while a first-class rail ticket can be 10%-20% cheaper. However, a business class seat on the train can cost more than an economy or even premium economy airfare.

In Japan, there's a long-standing cultural preference for rail travel, deeply rooted in the country's history and infrastructure development. The Shinkansen, or "bullet train," is famous for its punctuality, speed and reliability, connecting major cities like Tokyo, Osaka and Kyoto with rapid transit times. According to BCD data, 50% of all domestic travel is conducted by rail due to its high frequency, lower fares and ease of travel.



10-20%

The cost of first-class rail can be lower than economy class airfares

50%

of Japan's domestic travel is on rail



Sustainability has become a top corporate priority, with travel buyers increasingly aware of business travel's environmental impact. Chinese companies lead in sustainability, favoring high-speed rail over air travel for its cost-effectiveness, efficiency, and convenience, especially for distances between 800-1,200 km. As the rail network expands, it's becoming more competitive with air travel. To support this, BCD Travel China offers Rail+, simplifying booking, payment and expense management for frequent train travelers.



Jonathan Kao

Managing Director, North Asia
BCD Travel



Agnes Heng

Director
Marketing & Communications, APAC

agnes.heng@bcdtravelapac.com

About BCD Travel

BCD Travel helps companies travel smart and achieve more. We drive program adoption, cost savings and talent retention through digital experiences that simplify business travel. Our 15,000+ dedicated team members service clients in 170+ countries as we shape a sustainable future for business travel. BCD's leading meetings and events management and global consultancy services complete our comprehensive suite of solutions for all aspects of corporate travel. In 2023, BCD achieved US\$20.3 billion in sales. For more information, visit www.bcdtravel.com.