

business trends

Getting More From Business Travel

(NAPSA)—A recent survey from the Travel Industry Association of America (TIA) suggests that business travel is still well below 2000 levels, and won't fully recover until 2003. Yet despite the state of the industry, travel continues to remain very affordable.

With dramatic reductions in prices for airline tickets and hotel stays, many are hopeful business travel will increase over the coming months. With this in mind, "road warriors"—people who travel frequently on business—should maximize options like hotel frequent guest programs and airline frequent flyer programs, designed to reward them for their loyalty to a particular company.

One of the cornerstones to consider when selecting a hotel frequency program is the variety of rewards that can be earned. In most cases, rewards are earned based on the number of hotel stays or the amount of money spent for accommodations. The key to earning the most rewards is to analyze each program to determine which structure will allow members to reach their top levels sooner. Reaching the top or elite level of a program lets members earn rewards more quickly.

These programs offer many tangible benefits, including the ability to earn a free night's stay at any of the hotel chain's locations. Most of the top-rated hotel programs also offer the all-important airline frequent flyer miles. In the world of frequency or loyalty programs, airline miles are a valuable currency.

Loyalty programs are continuing to evolve and are finding more ways to appeal to frequent travelers. Some have begun to offer gift certificates as a redemption option. These gift certificates can be used at some of the country's top retailers or restaurants.

The La Quinta hotel chain goes even further. Through its new La Quinta Returns program, members can earn airline miles, free night certificates and gift certificates that can be used at more than 200 national retailers and



Hotel loyalty programs offer express check-in, room upgrades and many other benefits.

restaurants. The chain also offers tickets to professional sporting events and entertainment venues, including jazz clubs, comedy clubs, amusement parks and rounds of golf at 1,600 resorts across the country.

While it's important to know that a hotel loyalty program provides an assortment of first-rate rewards, it's good to know that certain membership benefits are also available during each stay. Standard membership benefits—usually offered to entice prospective members to join—such as express check-in, free faxes, free local calls, room upgrades and even in-room welcome gifts can play a crucial role in making the decision to join a program.

Savvy travelers should consider other elements of a loyalty program. The program's mix of partners can increase the ability to earn miles or points. For example, some have a credit card partner that allows points or miles to be earned based on purchases using the card. Others even offer bonus points for doing business with certain rental car companies, mortgage companies and financial services companies.

In today's competitive travel industry, there is a myriad of travel loyalty programs to reward travelers for their patronage. A little research could lead to free gift certificates for meals, free shopping, entertainment and even free vacations. For more information, visit www.LQ.com/returns.