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## BLEISURE - A NEW TREND IN TOURISM INDUSTRY

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**Abstract:** The aim of this paper is to explain the term "bleisure" and to find out to which degree the concept is known by the graduates of a tourism program held at Bucharest Academy of Economic Studies. Bleisure combines the words "business" and "leisure" and describes a new form of tourism: a business travel that is associated with leisure activities (spa, ski, golf, sightseeing etc.) and which can involve guests of the business traveller (e.g. his family). This association can bring a lot of benefits to all of those involved: bleisure travellers, their organizations, tourism services providers (particularly hotels) and, indirectly, local communities. The research undertaken proved that term "bleisure" is not known by graduates, regardless of their work experience, and highlights the importance of promoting the concept both in educational and business areas. Undoubtedly, the future of tourism will include bleisure, a concept that will become very soon widespread.

**Keywords:** travel; business; leisure; mix; benefits

### Introduction

More and more people combine several purposes when travelling: business, leisure, entertainment or education. After decades in which business travellers said that what they do is a chore and a bore, serious and stressful, nowadays they begin to admit that they enjoy business trips. The *blended travel* in which business travellers stay longer at their destination and/ or bring along a friend or family members, has gained momentum in recent years.

### 1. The Emergence of Bleisure

The tourism industry is now more sophisticated than ever, evolving every day in directions maybe never envisaged before. Currently, the travellers can choose from a wide range of tourism forms such as cultural, sustainable, ecotourism or green, medical, educational, culinary, creative, nautical and the list goes on. But, at present, a new kind of tourism is gaining a lot of attention from both customers and practitioners: the so called "bleisure travel".

The *bleisure* term was coined by The Future Laboratory, one of Europe's leading trend, brand and futures consultancies. They created this phrase to define the blurring of business and leisure that has resulted from the changing nature of the way people work and put an end to the traditional work/life balance [1]. More and more, the term is used to describe the blending of the two travel forms (business and leisure), as more travellers extend their professional visit with a leisure trip, and bring family or friends with them to enjoy the facilities and culture of their destination.

The modern existence created a new challenge: finding an appropriate work-life balance. Bleisure travel brings added value to the equation by increasing the benefits the traveller receives from the journey. Certainly, there are cost savings, as the primary traveller will often have transportation and accommodation costs covered by an employer or business, but the appeal goes beyond money: evenings, that business travellers normally spend in the company of strangers or the television, become opportunities to explore and enjoy a new destination when accompanied by family or friends and a rush to the crowded airport on a Friday afternoon becomes a relaxing wind-down from the week when anticipated leisure activities await [2].



In the latest years, bleisure has increasingly become one of the top travel trends mentioned by well-known publications, such as *The Independent* and *The Sunday Times* [3, 4]. But, even though the term *bleisure* appeared only recently, the trend of incorporating leisure activities into business trips was noticed in early 2000's, even late 1990's. In 2000, more than two-thirds of frequent American business travellers – a sharp jump from previous years – reported that they combined leisure activities with business trips, according to the National Business Travel Monitor [5]. This trend has two components: one that involves more instances in which spouses or children tag along on business trips for a few added-in days of family fun and another that entails solitary leisure and sports activities that are being fitted into business trips, often by younger travellers who are being sent farther away from home, and for longer durations.

Very often, the bleisure traveller was identified with a smart corporate traveller that is looking for "more of more" and "less of less" [6]. The Future Laboratory's co-founder Chris Sanderson talked in an interview about the bleisure people [7]. According to him, they are tech savvy and weaned on the internet and can switch between Facebook, LinkedIn and software in the same task. They want convergence and their impact on hospitality could be profound. For Sanderson, Facebook is the new conference room for bleisure people, who are able to mouse-click their way out of most situations. On business trips they will typically stay at boutique hotels. The in-between space in their lives – when they are on the train, in the cab, at an airport or on the beach – is the heart of the bleisure lifestyle. Work no longer defines them; they define work and they define it in terms of their multimedia lives.

## 2. Benefits of Bleisure

*Bleisure* or *busitainment*, as some call the result of combining business with entertainment [8], can bring a lot of benefits to all those involved: representants of organizations that have to go on a business trip, their organization, tourism services providers (particularly hotels) and local communities. Bleisure is considered a new form of tourism that entails allowing some relaxing time, extending the trips and/ or taking guests in a business-related trip, all directly linked to a very diverse array of services to be consumed. A theatre play, a spa visit or a mini-break with family transform a stressful business trip into a relaxing getaway or a bonding family treat.

Having in mind the businessman that has to travel, it can be argued that combining business with leisure will reduce the stress of a very fast-paced life. Without much incremental expense (they don't have to pay for their air ticket, which is one of the main expenses of travel), tacking on a mini-vacation to a business trip is a great way to get some rest and relaxation [9] and is also a very good opportunity to develop one's understanding of different cultures and experience new perspectives. If the destination is not familiar, business travellers might go sightseeing during their leisure time; if it is familiar, they might revisit favourite museums or take in a spotting event [10].

Furthermore, bleisure could offer the possibility to maximize family time together as well as to do something interesting. For those who find themselves away from home, family and friends on a regular basis glamorous business travels tend to lose appeal. In their case a bleisure trip helps tackle the problem in an interesting way thereby facilitating the conflicting demands of a busy career and a balanced home life [4]. There is still the *work life – home life* dilemma when taking guests on business-related trips. The range of opinions differs from [11]:

- "Accompanying my husband to a conference is one of life's pleasures", "You don't have to rush back home", "It makes the executive's life a bit easier at home and is relatively inexpensive", "I think it is very helpful for a family to see something of each other's world." "When I'm going to a really cool destination, I think to myself <How can I get them over?>"  
to
- "I would never dream of taking my husband on a business trip. What would he do?", "I'd rather enjoy myself with the man in my life when I'm relaxed – at home."

On the other hand, blended travel can save money for travellers as well as for companies. For example, one businessman whose corporate travel policy allows him to fly business class may save his



company money when he decides to sail or fly coach with his wife instead. Fare for two is usually less expensive than one business class ticket [12]. An important indirect saving is that determined by an employee in a better shape, especially mental, a premise for working better.

For hotels and other tourism services providers, bleisure can be linked to higher revenues (additional services, extra nights) as well as reduced seasonality (higher occupancy rates in weekends) and satisfied clients that will promote their image. Communities will also benefit from the higher consumption of the services that they offer through their service providers.

Sensing the potential of this new form, service providers (especially hotels) try to adapt:

- Hyatt Resorts emphasize extras such as spa facilities, golfing, and skiing as choice activities when business travellers take time off;
- Loews Hotels created the "Harvest of Benefits" package which features an increasing food and beverage credit based on length of stay;
- Athenaeum Hotel (London) introduced a number of family-focused features: free meals for children aged 12 and under, complimentary snacks and soft drinks from the mini bar, and a kids' concierge (who gets in touch with guests before arrival to see what can be arranged to make the children's stay extra special);
- Intercontinental Hotels Group has launched a new concierge service: a sort of human travel guides with itineraries for guests who have an hour, or three hours, or a day to experience the city.

The most of this new form of tourism can be gained through intelligent information services that deliver a variety of location-aware information (transportation, history, culture, folk, art, economics, environment and nature), customized to personal preferences.

### 3. Research and Findings

In order to see if the term *bleisure* is known among graduates of Business Administration in Tourism programme, we conducted a summary research with four questions. To ensure representativeness, we interviewed the subjects in the second year of the program before an exam in 2011 winter session. Thus, there were 82 respondents out of 90 students enrolled. After invalidating two questionnaires, the final number of responses was 80.

At the first question ("Do you know the term *bleisure*?") graduates did not give any positive response. This demonstrates the need to introduce the concept for didactic use.

When asked "What do you think *bleisure* means?", almost half of respondents (47.5%) said "I don't know". 18.8% correlated the term just with *leisure*, their assumption being based simply on the form of the word that resembles more to *leisure* than to *business*. Only ten respondents (12.5%) guessed correctly, pointing both words "business" and "leisure"; is interesting to notice that six of them are not currently employed, while two work in tourism and two in accounting. These findings suggest that the association is not on the cognitive level or, in other words, that *bleisure* did not cross through the "mental tourism dictionary" of the graduates interviewed.

36% of all respondents had more than two trips abroad in the last two years and 21% of them (very few compared to the total number also) have associated both terms to *bleisure*. This suggests that the travel experience should not be associated with an automatic understanding of the word. On the other hand, half of the respondents that travelled more than two times in the last two years do not work. Therefore, the fact that they were mainly leisure travelers and didn't come across bleisure packages could better explain the low correlation with the correct meaning of the term.

Around half of the respondents are currently employed. In terms of working areas, they are distributed as follows: 23% in tourism, 11% in accounting, banking, insurance, 8% in commerce, 4% in graphics and IT and 11% in other fields. The respondents that work in the tourism industry compared to the other were more likely to associate the term with one or both corresponding terms; still, just 11% of them chose *leisure* as well as *business* to explain their understanding of the concept. The simple conclusion to be drawn is that the term *bleisure* is not commonly used in business either.



The research undertaken suggests that there is a need to promote the concept both in educational and business area. Bearing in mind that in other countries the particular bleisure package is increasingly sought, the Romanian market should also pay greater attention to it. Hotels could obtain higher income from additional services and could also contribute to promoting the area in which they operate.

### Conclusions

Bleisure, the recently released phrase by the Future Laboratory, indicates an interesting trend in the industry and a new form of tourism: spouses or children tagging along on business trips for a few added-in days of family fun or additional leisure and sports activities being fitted into solitary business trips. This new kind of tourism is gaining a lot of attention from both travellers and practitioners.

Bleisure can bring along benefits for all those involved. The bleisure traveller enjoys his time away on business by taking time to visit the place, discover its culture or relaxing at a spa, all of these with smaller costs. His organization could benefit when its employee is in a better mental shape and could save money if he is allowed to take his family, thus choosing a cheaper mean of transportation. The service providers at the destination and the community, indirectly, will gain higher revenues because of a higher consumption.

Following the model of the hotels abroad, Romanian providers have to create broader packages for business travellers. Leisure activities MUST be a part of them!

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