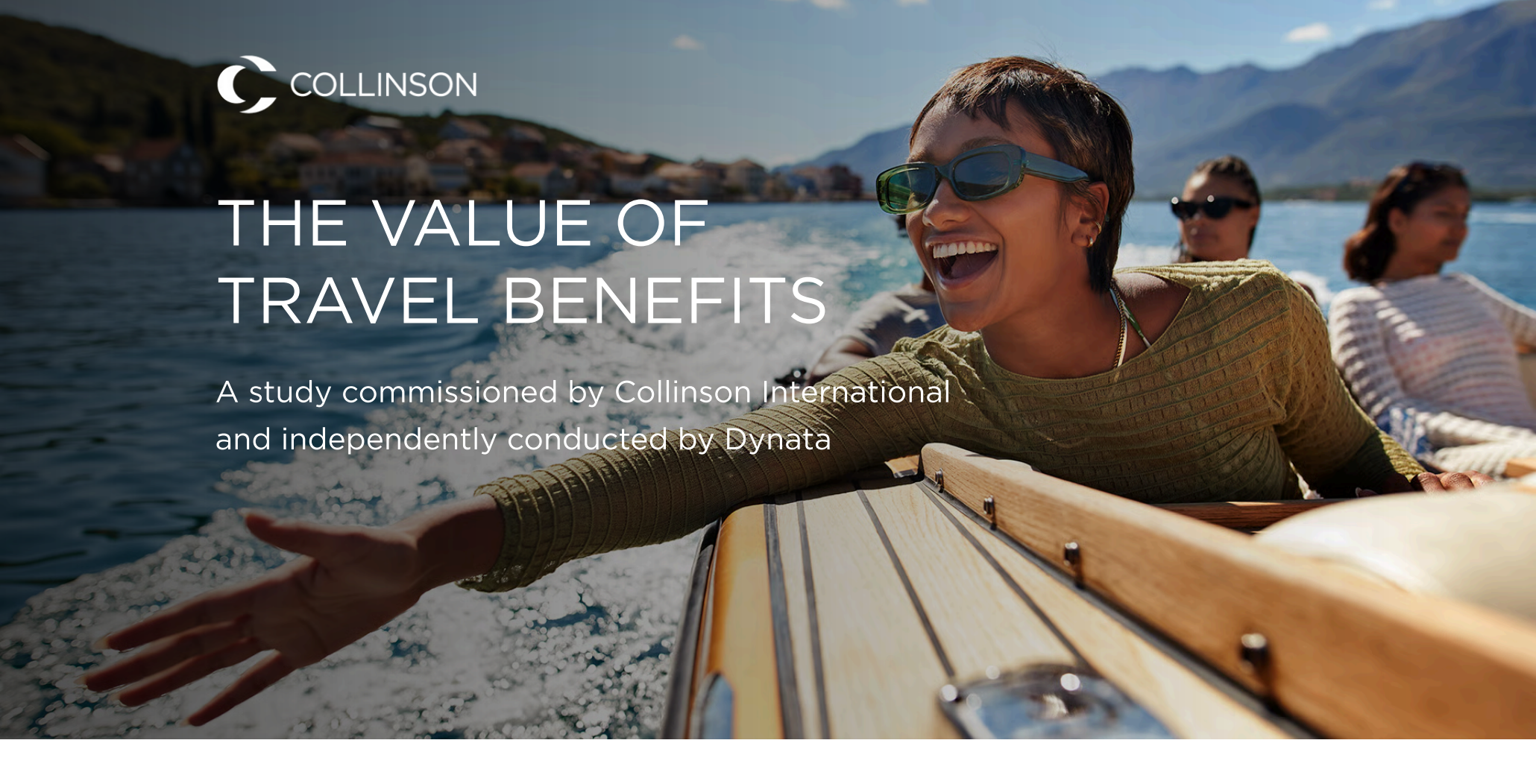


# THE VALUE OF TRAVEL BENEFITS

A study commissioned by Collinson International and independently conducted by Dynata

## Executive summary

The Value of Travel Benefits report highlights the importance of strengthening Card Value Propositions (CVPs) through enhanced travel rewards and benefits. It examines consumer preferences and behaviours in payment card usage and the influence that travel benefits have on customer engagement, card preference and spending patterns. The report delivers actionable insights that help financial institutions across Europe, The Middle East and Africa (EMEA) adapt to evolving consumer expectations, make informed decisions, strengthen their market position, and build customer loyalty.

Collinson International is a global leader in travel loyalty benefits, airport experiences and customer engagement solutions, and the owner and operator of LoungeKey™ and Priority Pass™, the original and market-leading airport experiences programme.

## Harnessing the power of travel

The global travel market is projected to reach an impressive US$955.90 billion this year, with an annual growth rate of 3.9%. This expansion outpaces many other consumer sectors and demonstrates **travel's resilience even through economic uncertainty**. Growth is being propelled by multiple factors, including rising disposable incomes, technological innovations making travel more accessible, and an evolving consumer mindset that increasingly **values experiences over material possessions.**

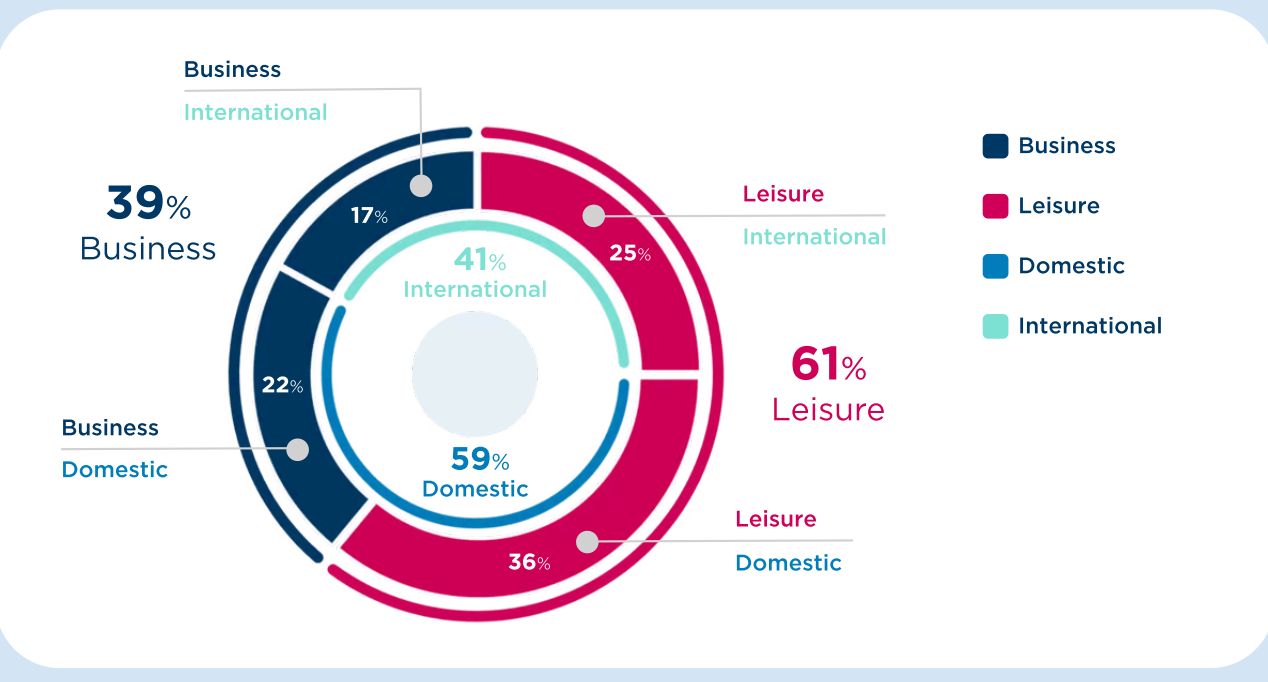
Research conducted by Collinson International highlights that more than half (55%) of respondents plan to take between 4-12 trips this year alone. This travel cadence - averaging one trip every 1-3 months - represents a profound shift in consumer behaviour patterns. Traditionally, frequent travel would have been reserved for business executives or the affluent elite. Today, however, it has **become the standard expectation** for a substantial and growing consumer segment.

Travel has transcended its status as a luxury expense to become an essential lifestyle component. 77% of consumers intend to spend between US$2,160 – $11,904 for travel this year. Despite inflation concerns and rising living costs across global markets, **travel consistently remains a top budget priority** for many households. This signals a fundamental shift in consumption patterns – experiences are now valued as much as, if not more than, traditional material purchases.

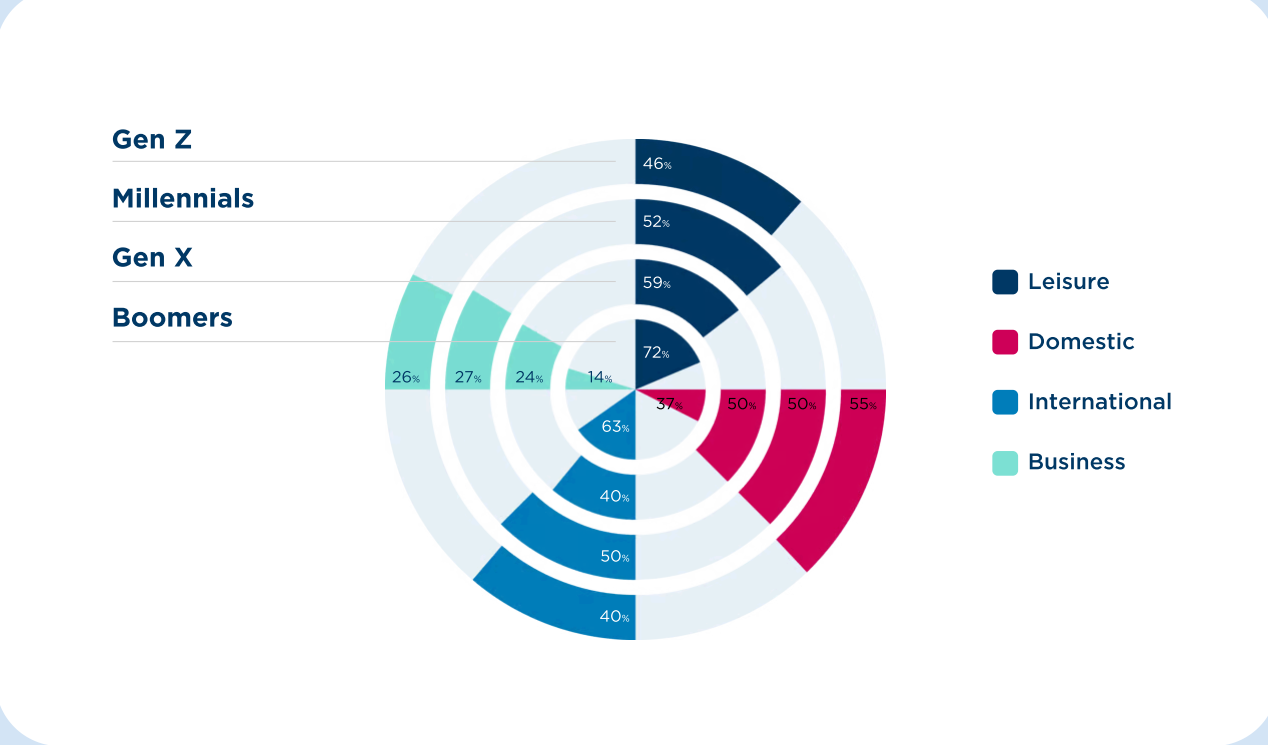
The Value of Travel Benefits report demonstrates that travel isn't merely a growing market sector – it's a powerful psychological **motivator and behaviour driver** that financial services can leverage to transform **customer acquisition, spending patterns, and long-term loyalty**. In an increasingly competitive payment landscape, travel benefits stand out as perhaps the most compelling way to **differentiate card products** and **create meaningful connections** with consumers.

## TRAVEL BREAKDOWN IN THE LAST 12 MONTHS

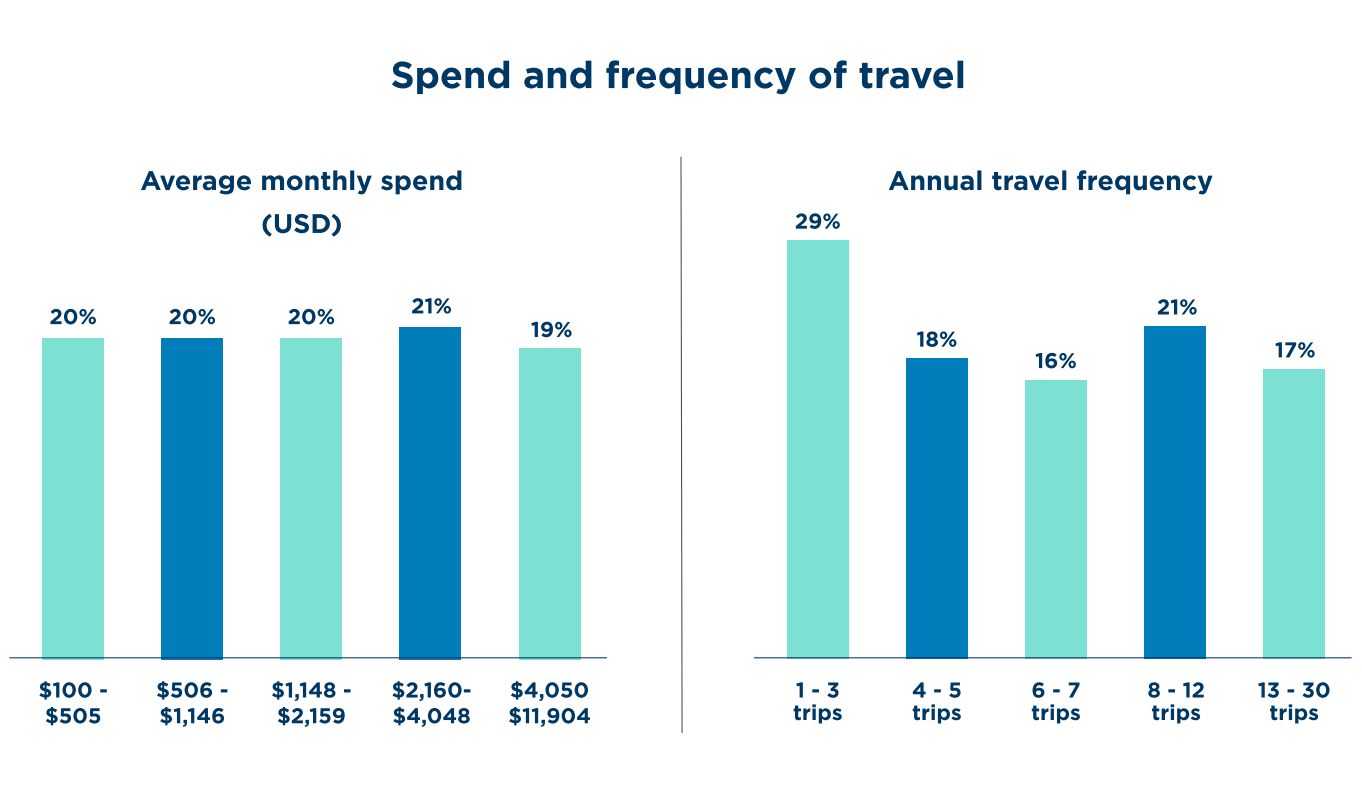
### What is the purpose for consumers' travel?



### Generational breakdown of who is travelling



### Spend and frequency of travel



In today's highly competitive marketplace, card issuers must offer services that resonate with consumers and enhance their overall travel experience. By integrating travel rewards and experiences into their strategies, card-issuing banks in the EMEA region can strategically position themselves for growth and differentiation. This proactive approach not only addresses evolving consumer expectations but can potentially drive customer acquisition, retention, and card usage.

## Key findings

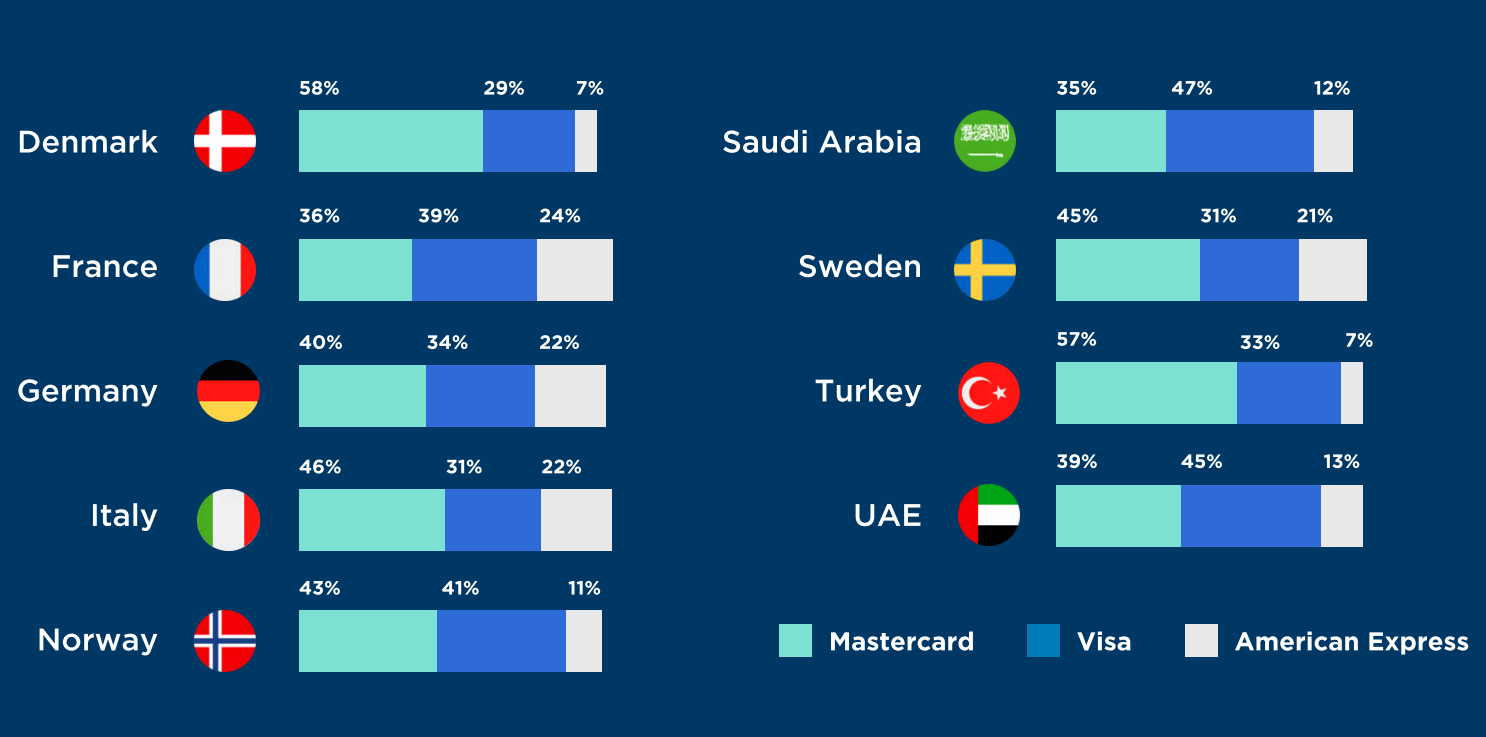
1. **Consumers have a strong reward preference**
2. **Travel-related benefits attract and retain customers**
3. **Travel rewards and benefits strongly influence card usage and spending intent**
4. **Travel rewards and benefits influence engagement and boost loyalty**

**For more information on our travel loyalty benefits portfolio, speak to our team**

## 1 | CONSUMERS HAVE A STRONG REWARD PREFERENCE

### Card type breakdown

According to the survey, respondents carry between 1-5 payment cards. 79% of cards with benefits were owned by consumers who chose to only have 1-2 payment cards, demonstrating preference and top-of-wallet for those card issuers. Baby Boomers tend to hold the most payment cards with benefits, followed closely by Gen Z and Millennials.



EMEA-wide, Visa (41%), Mastercard (40%), and Amex (14%) are the most common payment networks through which consumers access all, or most, of their rewards and benefits. Notably, consumers are 1.9x more likely to report being highly influenced-rather to sign up for a card that offers travel loyalty benefits compared to one that does not.

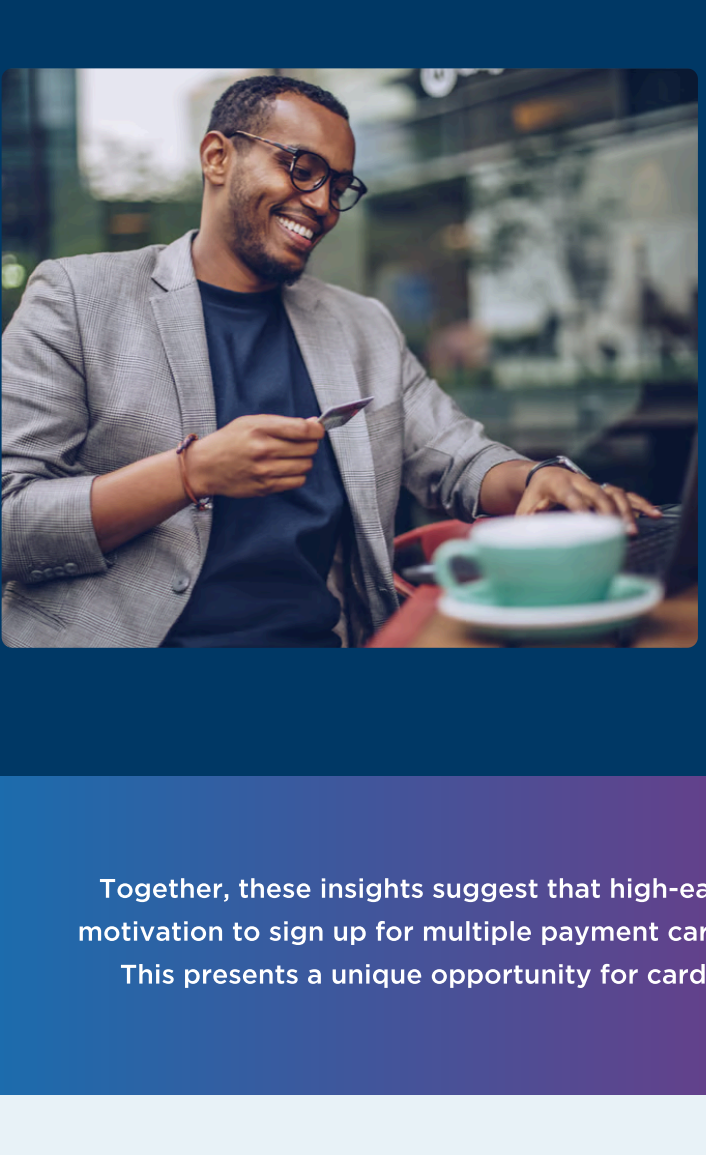
Card ownership patterns further highlight the significance of travel-related perks. Consumers with multiple payment cards are far more likely to use a payment card that provides travel loyalty benefits to pay for domestic (74%) and international (73%) travel expenses, including transport, accommodation, and activities.

While 46% of consumers own just one card or account with rewards or benefits, an equal proportion own 2-3 cards with similar offerings.

**This suggests two key consumer behaviours:**

**1. Consumers are content with a single card or account that provides access to the right rewards and benefits.**

**2. Others prefer multiple cards or accounts to maximise their coverage of rewards and benefits across different programmes.**



**Additionally, higher-income individuals and frequent travellers are significantly more likely to hold multiple cards with benefits:**

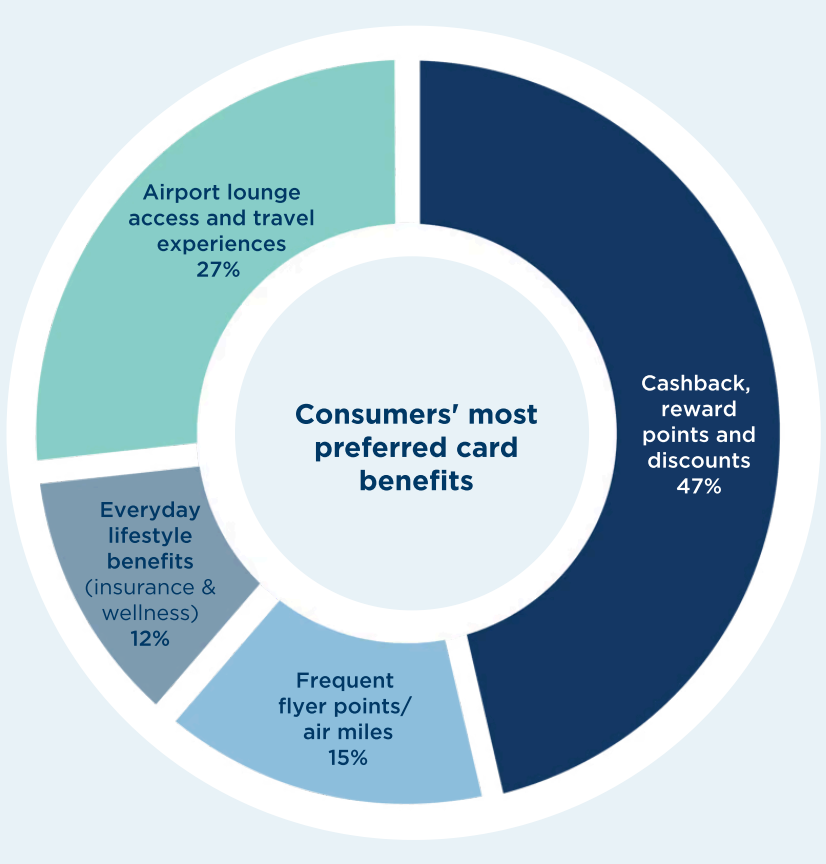
- The top 40% of earners (US$100,000 – 300,000 per year) are 1.35x more likely than the bottom 40% (US$7,000 – 72,000 per year) to hold multiple cards with rewards or benefits (63% versus 46%).
- Those taking 8 to 30 trips per year are 1.49x more likely than those traveling 1 to 4 times per year to own multiple cards with rewards or benefits (67% versus 45%).

**Together, these insights suggest that high-earning, frequent travellers have both the means and motivation to sign up for multiple payment cards to maximise their access to rewards and benefits. This presents a unique opportunity for card issuers to drive additional customer acquisitions.**

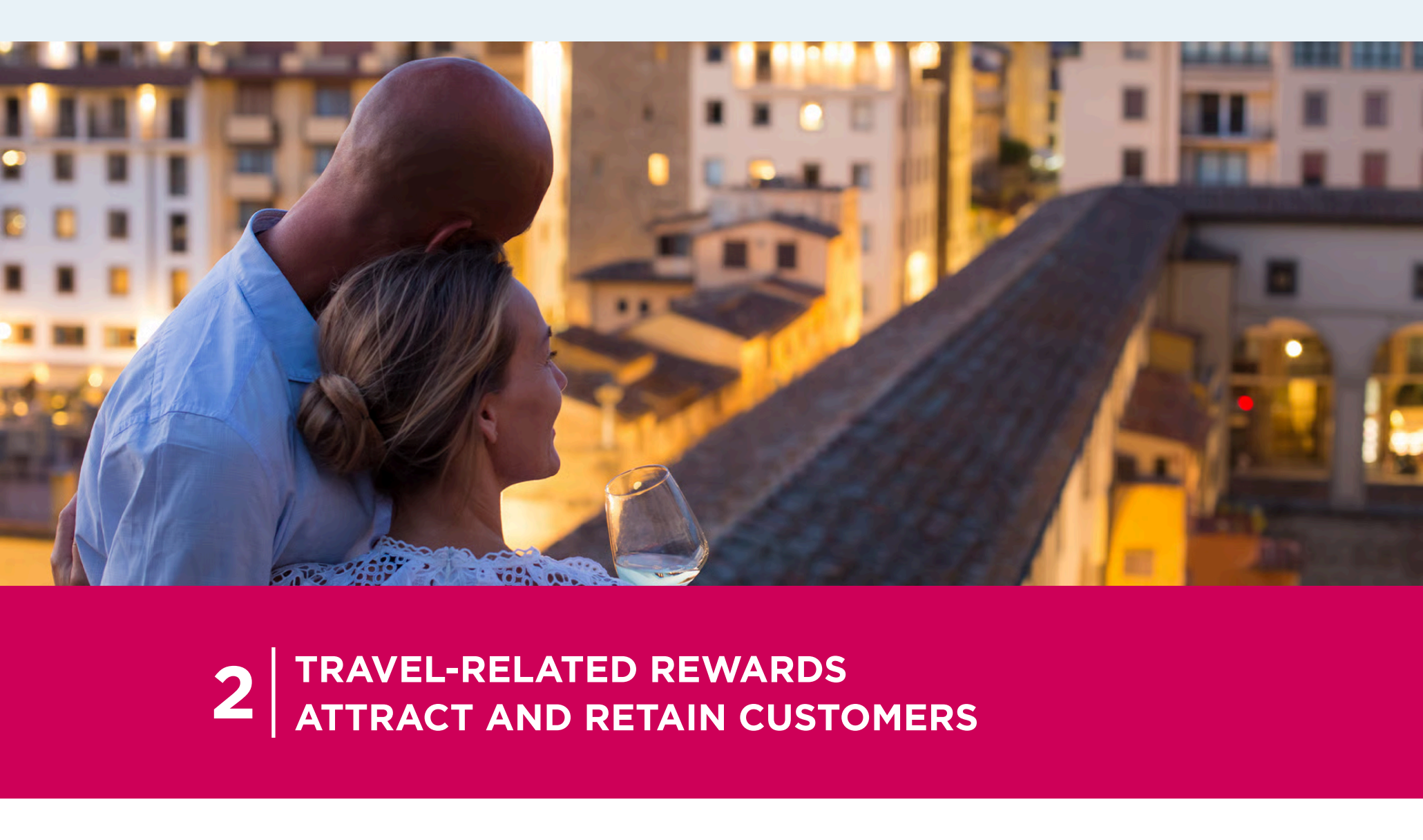
### Consumers' ranking of card benefits

The survey further reveals that cardholders are highly aware of payment card rewards and benefits, selecting **cards that best align with their spending habits and lifestyle**. When asked to rank payment card benefits by desirability, cashback and travel-related rewards, such as airport lounge access, points and experiences, emerged as the top preferences.

Demographics and travel habits further influence these preferences. While older generations are more likely to feel "rewarded" by their payment card's benefits, younger generations are significantly more inclined to feel "loyal" to the issuer that provides them.



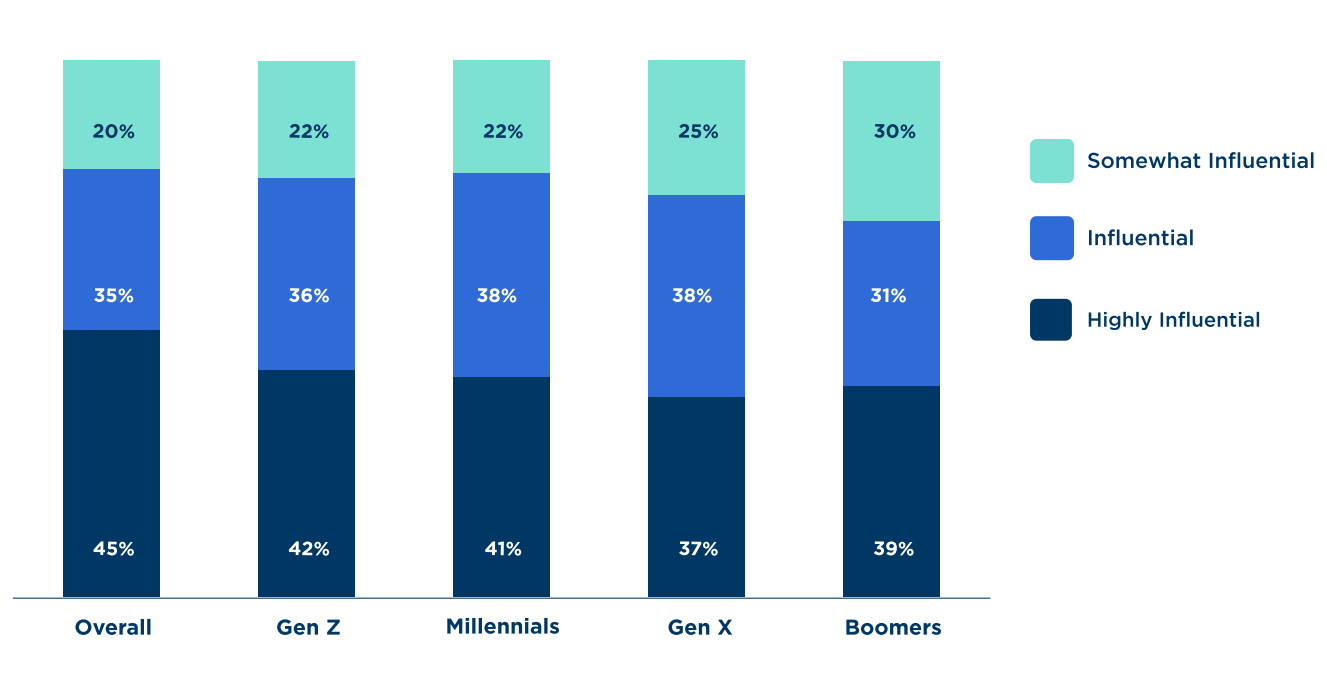
Travel-related benefits stand out as a particularly powerful engagement tool. Due to the aspirational nature of travel, these **perks create an emotional connection with cardholders**, making them a compelling acquisition and retention driver. High-earning, frequent travellers seek an offering that extends beyond standalone perks - favouring a **seamless travel ecosystem** where multiple rewards and benefits come together to **deliver an elevated experience** wherever they go.



## 2 | TRAVEL-RELATED REWARDS ATTRACT AND RETAIN CUSTOMERS

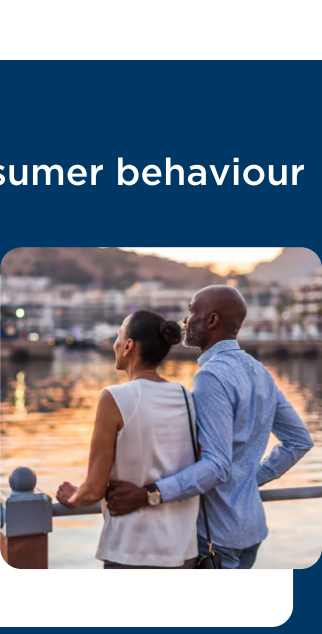
### A powerful driver of customer loyalty and retention

When making the decision to sign up for a bank or payment card, consumers are strongly influenced by the available rewards and benefits. Travel perks play a key role in decision-making, not only in card selection, but also in consumer loyalty and spending habits.



Among demographic groups, Gen Z is the most influenced by a card's offering, demonstrating a high sensitivity to the rewards available.

### 6 key travel-related benefits that have a lasting impact on consumer behaviour



**1 High earners prioritise travel perks**

Among the top 20% of earners (US$144,000+), losing access to travel benefits (specifically airport lounges) is an incentive to switch cards. **75% of these high-income** consumers would **move to an alternative provider that offers airport lounge** access as a benefit. This represents a stronger motivator for switching than for any other reward or benefit, including cashback.

**2 Benefits outweigh brand reputation**

**84%** of consumers say a card's rewards and **benefits package is "as important"** or "more important" than the reputation of the issuing bank.

**3 Travel perks drive word-of-mouth advocacy**

Consumers who receive travel benefits are significantly **more likely to recommend** their payment card to others.

**4 Lounge access is a deciding factor**

**45%** of consumers who signed up for a payment card with airport lounge access said the card's **travel benefits highly influenced** their decision.

**5 Removing benefits leads to provider churn**

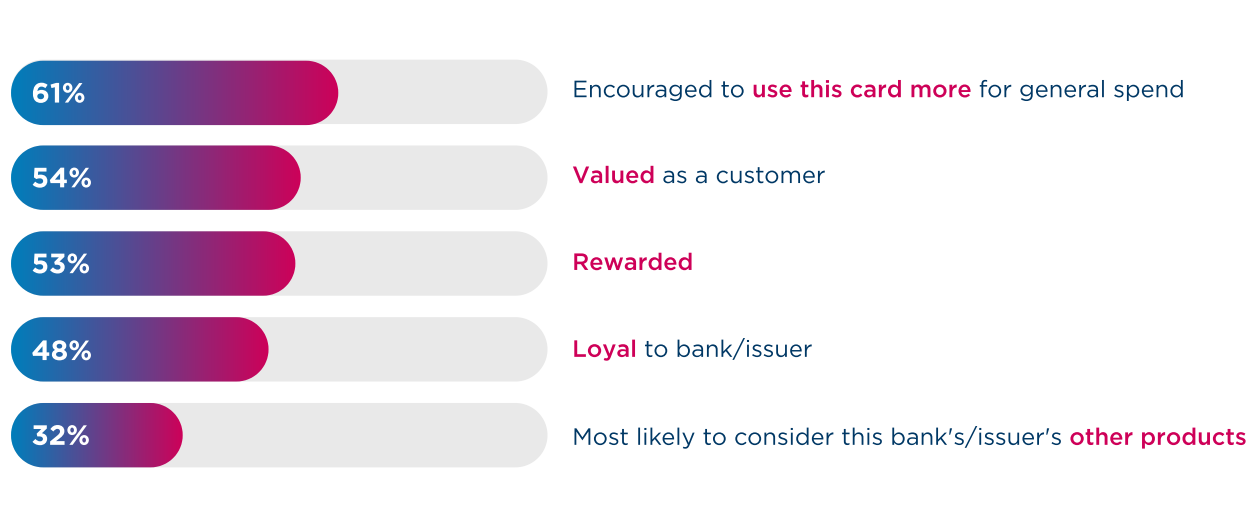
**62%** of consumers would consider **switching card providers if airport lounge access was removed** as a benefit from their current payment card.

**6 Emotional impact matters**

**53%** of consumers say access to rewards and **benefits makes them feel valued**, emphasising the deep emotional connection travel-related perks can create.

## 3 | TRAVEL REWARDS AND BENEFITS STRONGLY INFLUENCE CARD USAGE AND SPENDING INTENT

### How rewards and benefits influence cardholder behaviour

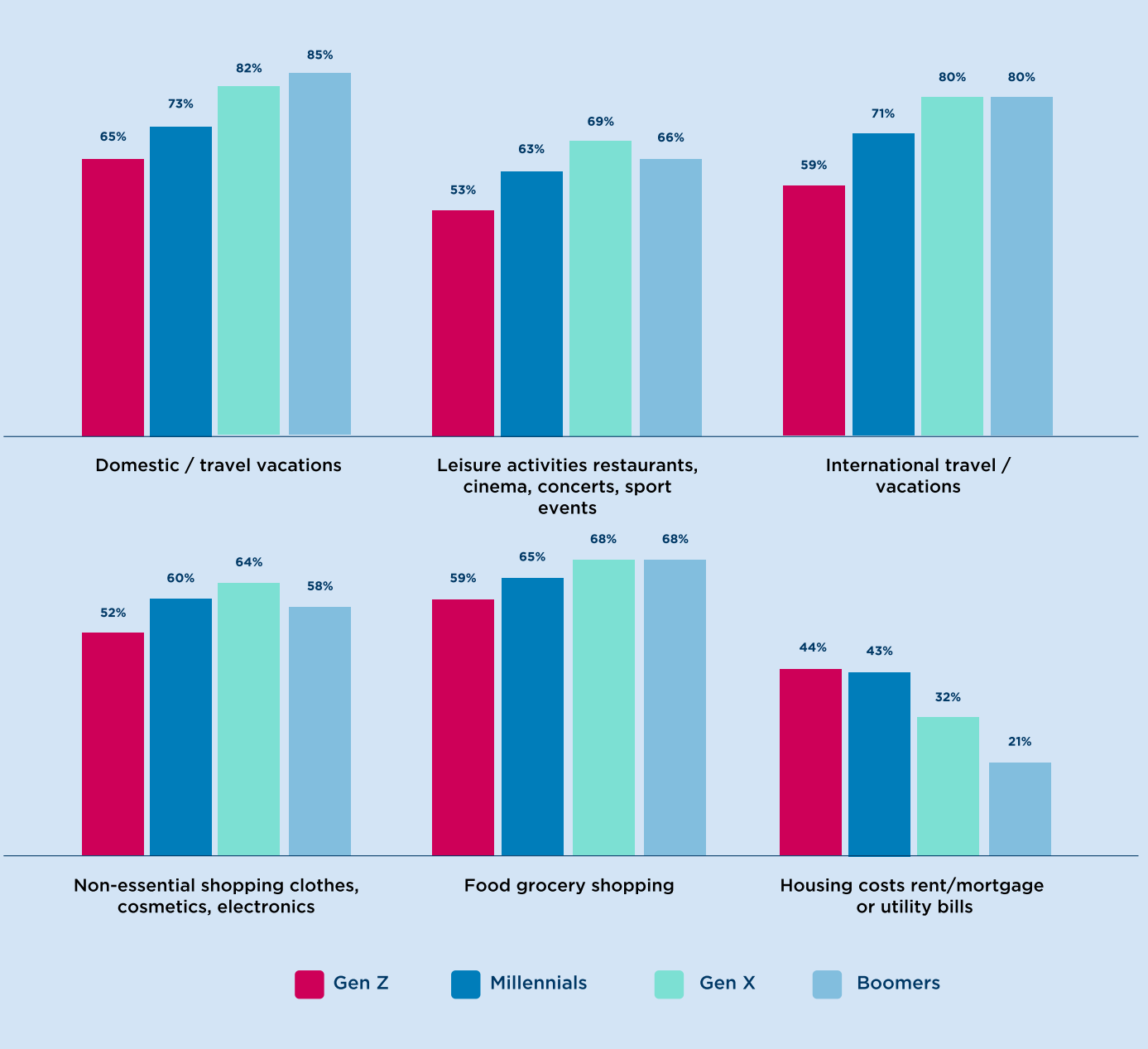


61% of consumers said that a payment card's benefits encourage them to spend more frequently with that card, while 54% feel that rewards and benefits make them feel valued as a customer. Card benefits and rewards are associated with a 60% increase in a card issuer's reward and benefits package Net Promoter Score (NPS).

This highlights the powerful role of benefits and rewards in fostering emotional engagement and long-term loyalty. Travel benefits, in particular, not only incentivise card usage for travel-related purchases but also influence everyday spending habits and overall customer sentiment.

| | Gen Z | Millennials | Gen X | Boomers |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Encouraged to use this card more for **general spend** | 64% | 62% | 59% | 55% |
| **Valued** as a customer | 48% | 54% | 57% | 57% |
| **Rewarded** | 48% | 54% | 52% | 55% |
| **Loyal** to bank/issuer | 52% | 48% | 42% | 39% |
| Most likely to consider this bank's/issuer's **other products** | 32% | 30% | 26% | 30% |

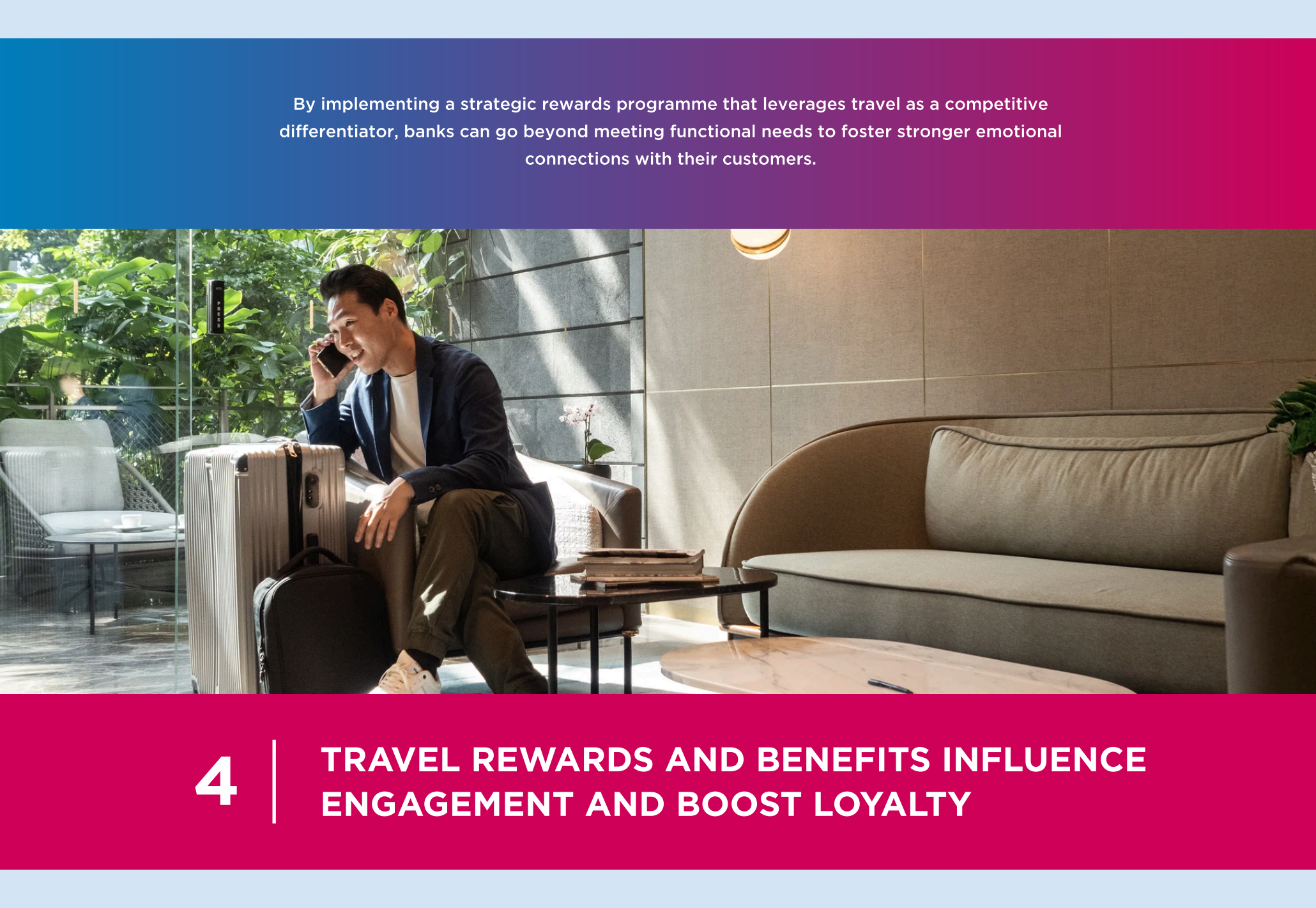
### How cards with travel rewards and benefits impact usage and spending habits



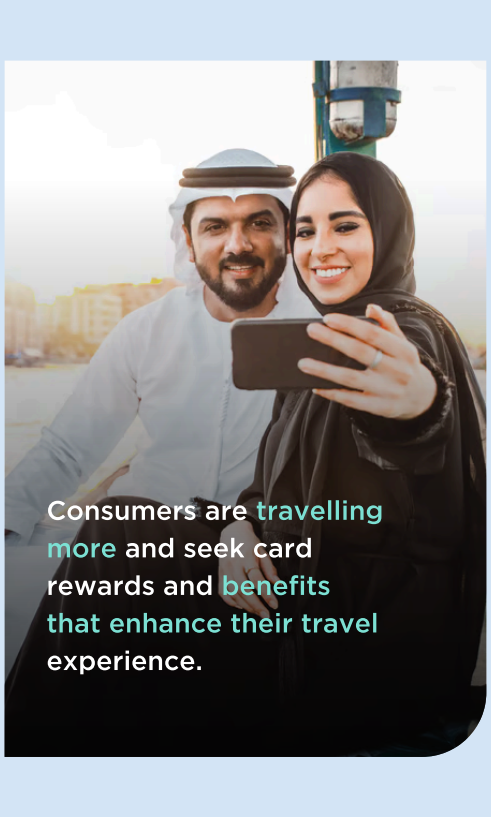
**Payment cards that offer travel benefits, such as airport lounge access and experiences, are linked to a US$360 increase in monthly spending compared to cards without these benefits.**

From a generational perspective, Boomers emerge as the highest spenders among frequent travellers who own reward-based cards - 85% of Boomers use their rewards payment card on further travel spend. Boomers' strong sentiment towards travel is valuable for card issuers to enhance their market position and drive further growth in that affluent segment.

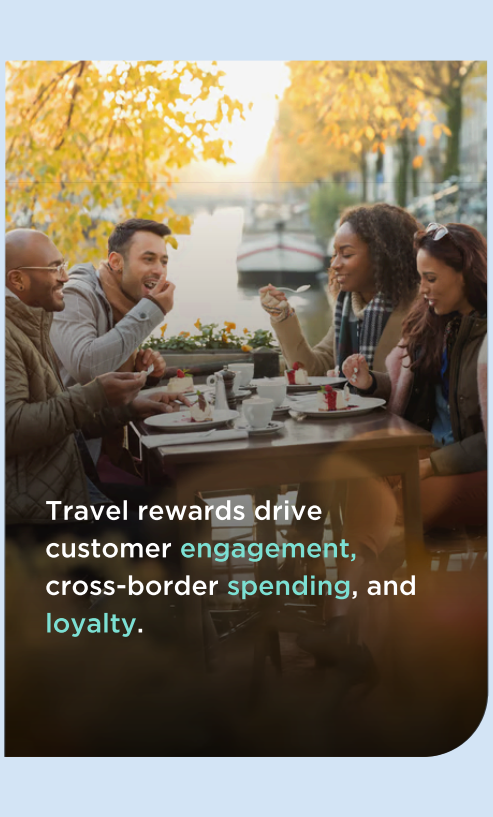
**By implementing a strategic rewards programme that leverages travel as a competitive differentiator, banks can go beyond meeting functional needs to foster stronger emotional connections with their customers.**



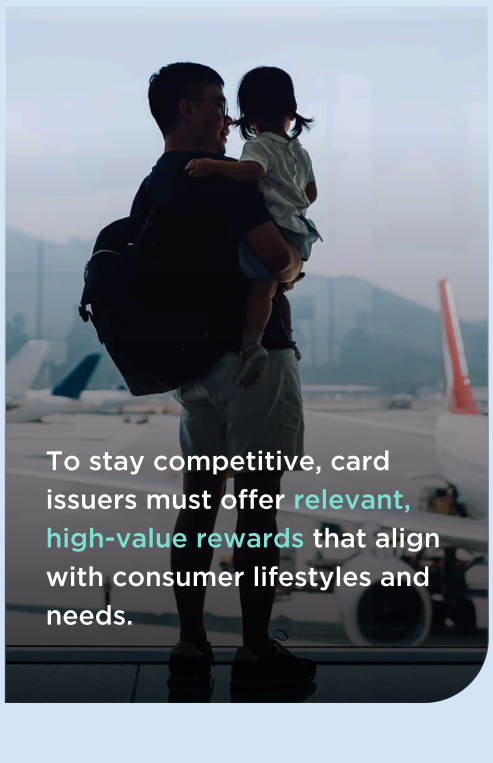
## 4 | TRAVEL REWARDS AND BENEFITS INFLUENCE ENGAGEMENT AND BOOST LOYALTY



Consumers are travelling more and seek card rewards and benefits that enhance their travel experience.



Travel rewards drive customer engagement, cross-border spending, and loyalty.



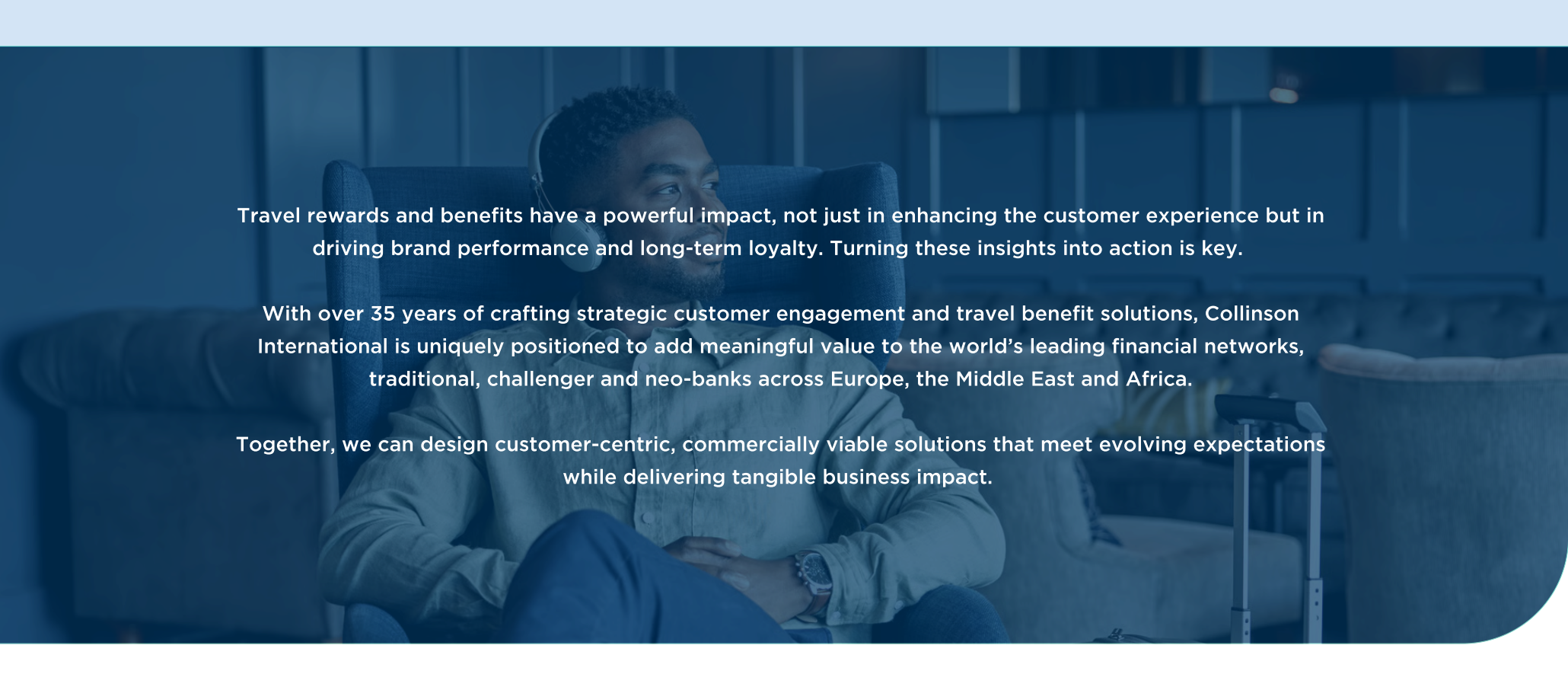
To stay competitive, card issuers must offer relevant, high-value rewards that align with consumer lifestyles and needs.

As global travel surges, our data revealed a 20% month-on-month increase in lounge visits compared to the previous year. But cardholders don't just seek rewards and benefits; they want personalised rewards and benefits that align with their lifestyles and aspirations.

When it comes to the benefits consumers want most from their payment cards, the top five include:

- Airport lounge access (48%)
- Travel insurance (42%)
- Complimentary airport transfers (41%)
- Express security lane access (37%)
- Discounts on airport dining and shopping (37%)

Notably, 45% of travellers say they're motivated to continue spending in order to unlock new rewards and benefits - underscoring the powerful role travel perks play in deepening cardholder engagement.



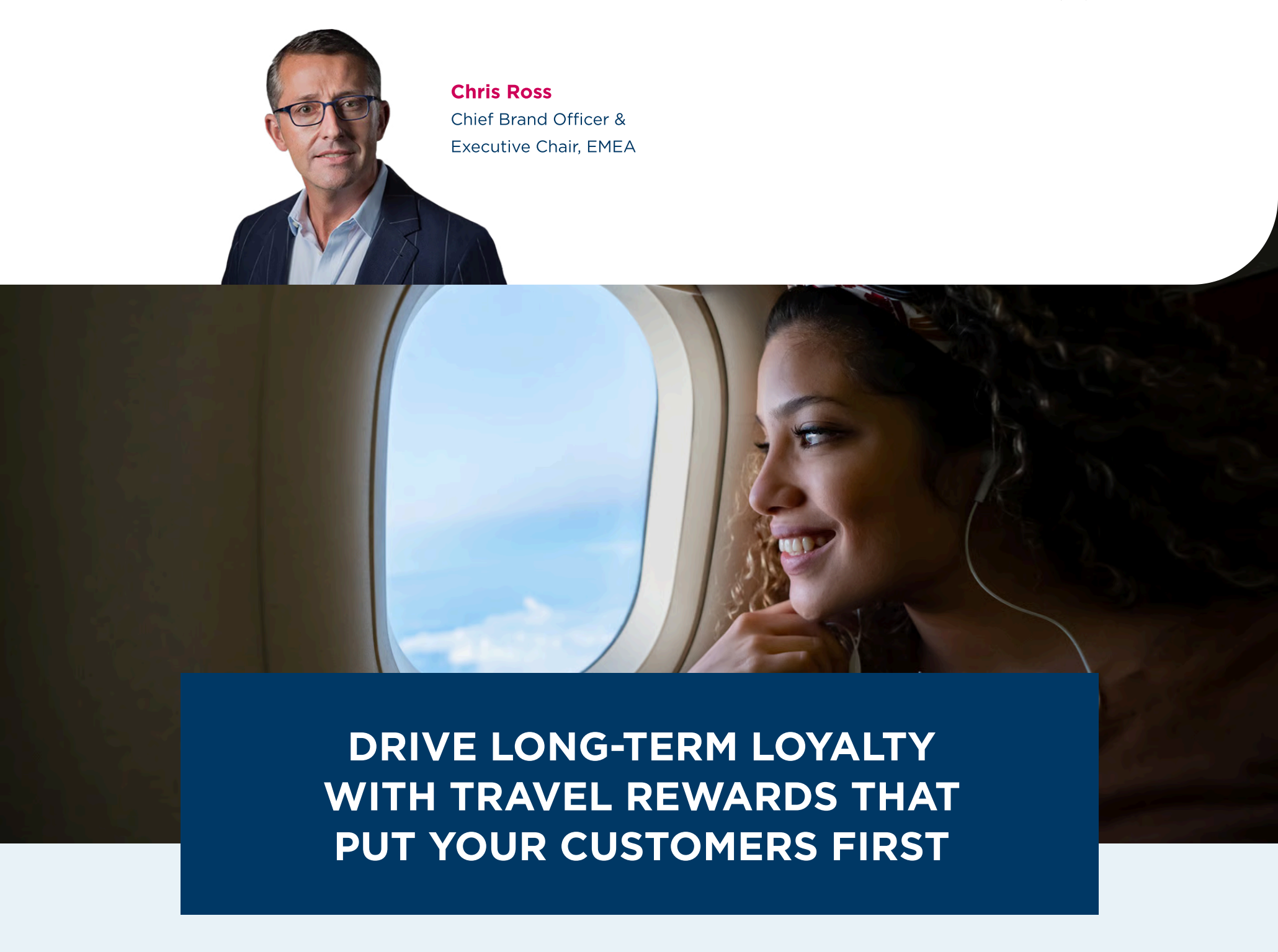
Travel rewards and benefits have a powerful impact, not just in enhancing the customer experience but in driving brand performance and long-term loyalty. Turning these insights into action is key.

With over 35 years of crafting strategic customer engagement and travel benefit solutions, Collinson International is uniquely positioned to add meaningful value to the world's leading financial networks, traditional, challenger and neo-banks across Europe, the Middle East and Africa.

Together, we can design customer-centric, commercially viable solutions that meet evolving expectations while delivering tangible business impact.

> **Our research reinforces the power of aligning benefits with consumer desires. Travel loyalty benefits have become a key driver of loyalty and satisfaction, creating a clear opportunity for brands to differentiate and drive engagement.**
>
> At Collinson International, we understand the evolving landscape and the strategic role of travel benefits in enhancing the customer experience. Our findings reinforce the growing influence of travel-related rewards in cardholder decision making - demonstrating that offering these benefits isn't just about elevating experiences but also about driving transaction revenue.
>
> As competition for customer loyalty intensifies, Collinson International remains at the forefront, shaping the future of travel benefits and experiences and redefining the value of card benefits.

**Chris Ross**
Chief Brand Officer &
Executive Chair, EMEA



## DRIVE LONG-TERM LOYALTY WITH TRAVEL REWARDS THAT PUT YOUR CUSTOMERS FIRST

The findings of this report reinforce a crucial reality: travel remains a dominant force in shaping consumer spending habits and financial decision-making. Despite economic pressures, demand for travel-related rewards and benefits remains strong, with consumers actively seeking payment cards that align with their interests and enhance their travel experiences. As competition in the financial services sector intensifies, issuer banks must evolve their reward strategies to align with shifting consumer expectations.

**By offering tailored, high-value travel benefits, financial institutions can differentiate their card products, increase customer acquisition and retention, and drive higher transaction volumes. The data shows that travel perks not only influence initial card selection but also play a critical role in long-term engagement and loyalty.**

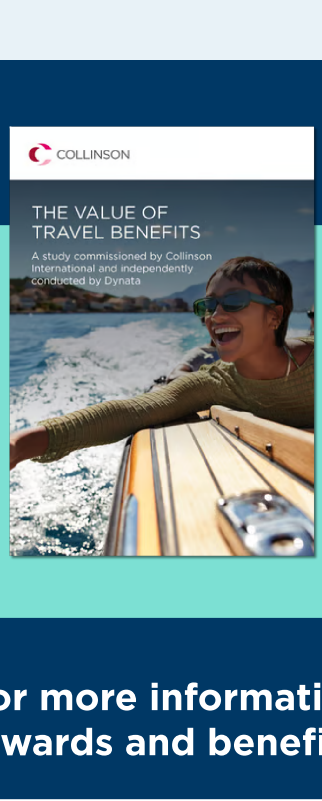
High-earning and frequent travellers represent a valuable opportunity for issuers to strengthen customer relationships and maximise spending potential by offering tailored reward strategies for different customer segments - based on lifestyle, travel frequency, and aspirations.

**As a global leader in travel loyalty and customer engagement, Collinson International is uniquely positioned to help financial institutions design and implement strategic travel benefit solutions. By leveraging our deep expertise, network of partners and brands, consumer insights and data, issuers can align their reward offerings with evolving customer expectations—creating impactful, customer-centric programmes that foster long-term loyalty and sustainable growth in an increasingly competitive market."**

### Survey Methodology

The survey focused on frequent travellers across 10 key EMEA markets who currently hold credit cards, with a median gross annual household income of $86,000 USD. It examined consumer preferences for card selection, perceptions of travel-related benefits, and travel and spending behaviours.

Conducted by Dynata, the survey included 8,128 respondents who met specific screening criteria: owning a credit card or bank account that offers annual rewards and benefits, and having taken at least two flights in the past year. The respondents were demographically diverse—52% male and 47% female—with an average age of 41. Notably, 67% were parents and 78% had a partner.



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**For more information on our travel rewards and benefits portfolio**

**Speak to our team**

### About Collinson International

We are a global, privately-owned company dedicated to helping the world travel with ease and confidence. We work with the world's leading payment networks, over 1,400 banks, 90 airlines and 20 hotel groups worldwide. We deliver market-leading airport experiences, loyalty and customer engagement, and insurance solutions for over 400 million end consumers.

Collinson International is the operator of **Priority Pass**, the world's original and leading airport experiences programme. Travellers can access a network of over 1,800+ lounges and travel experiences, including dining, retail, sleep and spa, in over 800 airports in over 140 countries, helping to elevate the journey into something special.