

CWT Podcast episode 7

Return to Travel: What to expect at the airport

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Julian Walker: Good morning. Good afternoon. Good evening. And wherever you are, you're most welcome to join us today. As we look at what travelers can expect from the airport experience, as they start to travel again.

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We are recording this conversation, so we can share it afterwards. And you can also revisit it at your leisure, by any of your favorite podcast platforms and apps. I'm Julian Walker. This is business travel on the fly. And our guest today is Nina Brooks, Director of Security facilitation and it at Airports Council International, or ACI, as it is more often called, the only truly global voice of the world's airports.

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I just before I turn to you, Nina, for those who may need a quick refresher. For almost 30 years ACI has served as a trade association for airports, representing their common interests and fostering cooperation with partners throughout the air industry today.

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Through ACI, the airport community speaks with a single voice, on key issues and concerns. And despite regional diversity can move forward as the united industry. ACI advocates on behalf of airports and helps to develop standards and recommended practices in the areas of safety, security, and environmental initiatives. It also advances and protect airport interest in important policy changes on airport charges and regulation, and provide the platform for pursuing a constructive and cooperative relationship with airline associations governments and regulators.

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ACI also offers its members numerous training opportunities, a customer service benchmarking program, detailed industry, statistical analysis, and practical publications. So for around the next 25 minutes or so Mina and I will take a look at what your travelers can expect as they arrive and leave an airport and how the steps being taken by airports worldwide can help build confidence to travel again, Nina, welcome to the show. It's great to have you here.

Nina Brooks: Thank you, Julian, it's a pleasure to be here.

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Julian : And it's a huge relief to hear you because there's always that nervous silence when I'm working. A double thrill. Thank you very much indeed. So let me kick things off by asking you. So as travel restrictions have started to ease in some of the sort of major business destinations. What are you seeing in terms of an increase in activity at global airports?

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Nina: Yeah, that's a really difficult question to answer actually, to start with a difficult one, the situation is still so different from country to country and from region to region. We are seeing slow steady growth in scheduled capacity as recovery continues. But it doesn't necessarily mean there's bookings for those flights, I think the sustainable demand for seats is still really a major concern.

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One of the biggest blockers to that is quarantine, the impacts of quarantine on business and tourism go way, way beyond aviation. So that's one of the areas that we're really looking for governments to change and change their thinking. As I say, different regions do have different situations. Where quarantine is being lifted, such as in Europe, we are seeing some steady growth. And in Asia, we're seeing we're seeing the biggest amount of growth as well. So as you'd probably expect, domestic growth is much stronger than international, perhaps not surprisingly.

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But it's really going to take a combination of the lifting of those restrictions and a building of passenger confidence to see that return to normal. And it's going to take a while. And obviously then it's going to depend on whether there are second waves of the virus and what we see in terms of that.

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I do acknowledge that, you know, these different restrictions can be incredibly confusing. We hear about bubbles and corridors, you know, countries next to each other have allowed their service between them, and bridges between countries that aren't next to each other. But whereas services allowed according to risk.

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So I think that risk based approach is allowing travel to restart, which is great.

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But it does make things a bit confusing in the short term. So it's just really important that people check before they book refundable tickets, check again before they fly. Yeah, I think we're steadily getting there. But it's gonna take a little while yeah.

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Julian : And then from an airline perspective that, you know, what measures are the airports taking to ensure that business travelers are safe or that they will be safe and instill confidence as they return to travel?

Nina: Sure, yeah. And there's a lot of things being done. And I'll go into that in a bit more detail later. There's been a huge amount of work behind the scenes to try and get some consistency in the approach that not just airports but airports, airlines and governments are taking. So that's really happening at a global level.

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The ICAO didn't have money or you already answered. But ICAO is the UN agency for civil aviation. They've been working with, with WHO, all the international organizations such as us and IATA, towards having some common policies, including coordination, communication, and appropriate health measures, in airports with the airlines and in state. So all of that came together into a task force called the cart. And they produced a framework for the different measures for reducing public health risk for restart and recovery. And then regionally, there are groups such as the AUSA, that are very aligned with what the carts doing. So based on that the baseline really is really practical things like increased cleaning and disinfection, physical distancing, where it's possible, use of face masks, or PPE, where appropriate increases to the fees for hand washing, use of plexiglass screens, such as processes, there's a lot and I have a lot more detail on that. But those are the sorts of things. But then in terms of restoring confidence, I mean, I think the real key is communication, we need to be talking about what we're doing and putting the message out there that the facilities are safe, they have all these additional measures in place, and to let travelers know what to expect. I think there's a lot of uncertainty still. And we need some consistency so that if you are traveling, you know what to expect when you're going to arrive at an airport. So we're encouraging airports to publish as much information as possible on social media and their websites, and so on. But actually, we're also consolidating all of that into a database that will be available to travelers, by the end of the month. So a few more days that there if you're an app or a website, and you know, that's also available for other business users that want to use the information however they need it. So lots of work going on in that area. So really, as I say, I think it's the conference is going to come from, from communication and from experiences.

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And then actually, another thing that we're seeing is also accreditation programs. So we're seeing states that are sort of certifying that their airports airlines are doing the right thing.

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WTTC has a program. And actually we're launching an accreditation on Friday this week. So that we can help our airports understand where they measure up against this global guidance, see how they're doing and then advertise that they are doing all the right things to the traveling public. So lots going on in that area.

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Julian: Any wider?

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Nina: Well, the accreditation is for but the setting information available to the public, obviously, yeah.

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Julian: Just a bit of experience and the confidence that will be being brought back through the communication, but in the physical experience that they will get as they navigate their departure or arrival, do you think that will be markedly different or more like a sort of a cueing with spacing kind of basis?

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Nina: Yeah, I think, well, there's a lot of things being done and some of it you're already seeing in daily life. But I mean, it will depend a little bit on local regulation and and the operation of the airport is going to be very different for Changhi or Heathrow to how it in a very small local airport. But there are some common baseline measures, if you like, that I think travelers can expect to see.

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To put that into context. I thought, maybe if I walk through the travel processes, would that work.

Julian: That'd be great.

Nina: And yeah, I can talk about some of the things sort of step by step as we go through.

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So pre travel, it's recommended that passengers do as much as they can at home. And that's in the global guidance. If you can check in, if you can pay extra baggage fees. If you can even use a

baggage pickup and delivery service, the more that can be done off the airport, obviously it's going to reduce the mixing and the queuing and so on that happens at the airport. So that's the first part.

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On arrival at the airport. In some cases, you may see that access is restricted so that only the traveler is allowed into the airport or perhaps somebody who's helping a passenger with disabilities or an unaccompanied minor. But the idea is to keep the people who don't need to be there out of the airport to have be able to have more physical distancing and fewer people.

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I guess you could look at parking next. In airport car parks often there are buses. Buses will be disinfected more frequently, and it may be the limited number of people allowed on the bus. So if you're traveling at a peak time, just be aware that there may be a longer wait for an airport bus because they are being cleaned and fewer people being allowed on board. So this is sort of things that you see in everyday life.

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Touch lists, parking payment, we're starting to see in some airports, so just reducing the physical touch. And then once you're getting into the terminal, obviously, depending on the regulation, some airports are doing health checks, such as temperature screening.

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What we're really advocating for is if screening has to be done, then it has to be done in a way that is not in the passenger flow, it doesn't create crowds and queues. That should be a walkthrough experience. And it really shouldn't cause delays. So some different scenarios, temperature screening can be done on the move, other different types of screening in a separate area.

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But, you know, it really does depend on the regulation. And it's not something we particularly see as critical, but it is happening in some places. So just to be aware, if you are going to travel, make sure that you know what, what's going to happen when you get into your particular airport.

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Then, the some locations are asking for a self declaration of health, or some certification. Again, it's just a case of finding out what's needed.

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In general in the terminal, there's usually the requirements face covering for masks. Many airports are having health authorities are actually providing the masks or at least they have them for sale if they're not providing them. Lots of extra cleaning and disinfection of touch points. One of the requirements is to have a new plan for cleaning. And it covers all sorts of things like the frequency was used, how it's done, and which which touch points are covered. So very much cleaner environment. Safe sanitary facilities, so toilets more frequent and additional cleaning.

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One way passenger flows where it's possible. So if you've got a very crowded check in area, then you should see some some passenger flows adjusted so that people aren't in close contact.

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Improvements of ventilation. So better air quality and terminal, check to make sure there's fresh air recycling through the terminal.

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And then a lot more communication. So communication, there'll be stickers on floors and signage about physical distancing, face covering, hand washing stations, throughout terminals, so a lot of that.

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Face masks and sanitation kits and vending machines, we're now seeing very commonly. So you know, but not drastically different to what you see in a supermarket. But you know, making sure that all of that is in place.

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So carrying on the check in or bag drop. A lot of airports has implemented touchless processes.

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And if they're not touchless, then very frequent cleaning of screen. So if you're using a kiosk, the screen should be cleaned before the next passenger comes along. And they're touching the thing surfaces.

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I'll talk about future technology a little bit in a minute.

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Plexiglass obviously where human contact is required or things like check in desk.

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And then we've done quite a lot of work around security. So there are a lot of recommendations for security and you will see new procedures for queuing and distancing at the security checkpoint. And perhaps you know, you have parallel divesting and security you might see alternate screens being lanes being used,

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That's really going to depend what the volume of people is. And that's where it starts to get tricky. Physical distancing only works up to a point where you've got, you know, maybe 25-30% of passengers, and then it starts to actually be counterproductive. But we have this layered approach. So you might be asked to divest more. So take off more your watch, your belt, your shoes. And the reason for that would be

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to try and reduce the number of alarms. So you know whether it's a false alarm, because you're wearing a watch or a piece of jewelry and you've had the body scan, you don't want to have to have that face to face contact. So if people divest a little bit more than we can reduce the number of hands searches, the number of pat downs, those sorts of things.

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Trays are being disinfected at security checkpoints.

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And yeah, likely to be able to keep a mask on as you go through security. So I think that covers the security part.

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Sorry, I'm really, show a stop and you can ask any questions about that. And then I carry on.

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Julian: No it's great, there's a number of things that actually, I'm particularly excited about. Less people in the airport star, which will be great, but then that's just me. too much in the old traveler.

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But you don't really think quite how much has to change until you start going through all that sort of things like that. But you know, and some of these may actually stay for the longer term, they may not just be temporary things because they may actually work, you know, air quality in airports, I think would be tremendous. In some Yeah, it's not the case in every airport. But obviously, that helps you with your sort of wellbeing when you're traveling as well. So I think

Nina: yeah, that's right. I think, yeah, we talk a lot about building back better. And I think there's lots of opportunities for that. And it'll be, I think, some of this will be sort of stimulus for new technology as well, which is really exciting that, you know, governments are being encouraged to allow things like automated border controls. Because of this, you know, that's something that we've been trying to get really moving faster, for a long time. So if some good of it, you know, comes from that, I think that's a really great step forward, and then environmentally as well, trying to make sure that we build back greener, so that's really key.

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Julian: Yeah think that will be I think a lot of people will be much more keen on the green element, having experienced the sort of lack of travel and perhaps an environment that shifted a little bit in that perception and the green element, I think they come much more for a personal requirement.

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Nina: Yeah, so shall I carry on, I think I got this until as the far as the departures area.

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Julian: Perfect carry on. There's plenty more to go, come on through.

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Nina: Say, something that I thought was very interesting that we've seen in Munich and some other airports, in the departures area, cashless payment, but also in the the duty free shops, being able to take things straight off the shelf and pay for it at the shelf. So you know, real different way

of doing payments, which I think would be that would be a great step forward, you know, regardless of the touch of this bug, that would be really great.

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So something there in retail, and then once at a gate, you're likely to see new arrangements of seating, the seating has been cleaned a lot more frequently. But then, you know, some seats being shut off so that we can maintain some, some distancing,

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Then to the boarding process.

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Likely to see later call for gate, some airports already do that.

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And sort of leave it to the last minute to announce the gate, I think you'll see more of that because you don't want people crowding in the gate area, really don't need to stand in line for 25 minutes waiting for the aircraft to board. So I think that quarter gate is likely to be later in a lot of cases, then in the boarding area itself, boarding likely to be touchless, where possible. So perhaps scanning your own boarding card through your phone and not having to have something over. And in some cases, we're seeing some interesting stuff around boarding by row rather than zone to try and keep the flow going and make it less of a crowd or getting on at the same time.

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And then of course, disinfection units, hand washing stations around that as well.

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And then finally, at arrival.

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Again, some destinations are doing health declarations, testing. So we are likely at the minimum to be asking questions about how.

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Some have really stepped up like I say automated border processing, testing to reduce face to face contact, I think we'll see more of that. It's what we see at the moment with biometrics and an automated systems tends to be one part of the journey. So one airport and one airline and one government might do the bit of departures. We don't really have it joined up at the moment, I think this will probably help that to move along.

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Also on arrival, physical distancing, masks, all of those things, cleaning of baggage trolleys is a requirement. So making sure that baggage trolleys, the handles were cleaned regularly, cleaning of facilities much more, the same as in the departures area. And then perhaps for your audience, there may be new arrangements for meeters and greeters, drivers limo taxis picking up unlikely to be allowed into the terminal. So probably other waiting areas that passengers will need to find, again to reduce the number of people in the terminal.

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That's fine. Very comprehensive. Thank you very much indeed. So one of the things you touched on was

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so I'm getting some not very good feedback on my line. I hope that's not affecting everyone. The you touched on a couple of things that travelers could probably do to help speed the process, such as wearing less jewelry or requiring you know, thinking more in advance and preparing themselves for a smoother process during it. Do you have any sort of top advice that you could give passengers to be more ameliorative as they go through the environment?

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Julian: I just thought I'd ask because he wrote it.

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Nina: Yeah, no, I think so. I mean, I think the key to it is really check the your journey, look at travel restrictions, look at quarantine, look at the health requirements and what's in place at the airport, departure and arrival and also what the airline requires. So just make sure you're well prepared in those terms.

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We're going to be publishing, as I said, the airport information for the IRS or travelcenters, a great source of information in terms of country updates. So they have a website that shows where travel bans are in place, what the requirements are for the country that you're going to. So yeah, of course, also check with the airline and the airports.

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I would say, bring hand sanitizer under 100 mil, bring a mask or two, might be helpful to bring your own food. I don't, you know, some folks may not have all retail outlets open. So just check that as well. Buy drinks air site. So you know, onboard service might be limited depending on the airline so so have drinks to take on board. And if possible, reduce cabin baggage size because the smaller cabin baggage going through the security checkpoint is going to mean fewer false alarms and fewer hand searches and just alleviating the whole queue. So if possible, that really, that really is a big help. So the main thing is really, that.

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Julian: Thank you for that. And I probably wouldn't be doing my job. If I didn't go for it shameless plug of CWT travel essentials, just while we're talking about places to go for information. So sorry about that, so on

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aren't going to do it. So don't worry about that.

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Sort of where, where travelers can find everything you need to know and all the guidance and restrictions that are in place in a kind of bespoke formatting. So if you've got, you know, you can check it by your nationality, your destination, your departure zone, etc. You put those in, and you can see exactly what you need to be preparing to the search, as I was saying to everyone, it's

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just another place to augment. So very good stuff. Great. And finally, you know, sort of we talked a little bit about the rebound, firstly, of domestic and then short term, and probably by longer haul travel, and how travelers will see that, and you touched a little bit on on the difference between departures and arrivals. Do you think they will become more similar in the way that they do this. And do you think maybe if they're a longer waiting process, or whatever, daytrips are still viable with potential long queues at both ends?

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Couple of questions in there in one.

Nina: No no that's fine. And one other thing, my answer to whether daytrips are viable, I think it depends. I had a conversation with a couple of airports about this yesterday to to get their take on it.

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In theory, it shouldn't be an issue.

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There shouldn't be long queues, you know, we're really trying to avoid queues. But it's really going to depend on whether the origin and destination is doing doing health checks. That's probably the key to it.

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Be wary of quarantine rules. Obviously, that would be a difficulty. But mainly whether there's testing done at the point of departure or arrival. Flying domestically, there's obviously fewer formalities such as customs. You're not going to be quarantined. So that would make the journey simpler. And actually, you know, a major airport that I spoke to yesterday said yeah, it's perfectly feasible. Just check. You know, see what the situation is for your particular journey. But to get on a shorter journey, it should be perfectly possible to do a day trip,

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depending on where you're flying to and from. Yeah, yeah.

Julian: That's good news. Good news. Superb. And in terms of the experience of both ends, do you think there'll be more similar between departures and arrivals for the speed with which people are trying to get to the airports?

Nina: Yeah, I think there's some really interesting stuff happening with with technology.

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I think for now, departures and arrivals. Yeah, I mean, you're gonna see the same kind of cleaning regimes and the same kind of processing.

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But I think you're going to see a lot more automation in sort of customs and immigration than than we have done up till now in some countries that's already in place and has been for a long time for many, many is still very much paper based and the stamp and so on. So I think you'll see more widespread adoption of those types of things.

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But I think you know, like I say, trying to keep the departures and arrivals emptier, improve airflow, improve cleaning, masks, you know that those things should should be in place at both ends.

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Julian: Excellent. Well, looking at the time, and that's pretty much all we've got time for now, I'm afraid. But as always when we speak, it's fascinating and insightful. Thank you so much for joining us today.

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And before everybody goes, for those joining us on the webinar, please can you answer the two polling questions related to this and to future CWT webinars, which will show up once you've exited the screen? So thank you again, Nina. Really great to talk to you,

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And to everyone else for joining us. Thank you. And thank you everyone else for joining us today. And so until next time we meet on the fly, safe travels.