



**INSTITUTE OF
TRAVEL & TOURISM**

ATTITUDES TO CLIMATE CHANGE: A SURVEY OF TRAVEL AGENTS AND TOUR OPERATORS

PROFESSOR RHODRI THOMAS WITH DIMITRI VANEL



leeds metropolitan university

ITT RESEARCH REPORT SERIES
REPORT 2

Climate change is no longer of marginal business interest. As a consequence, coverage of this and related issues has grown significantly in the trade press over recent years. Travel Weekly, for example, paid very little attention to this matter in 2005 but by the end of 2007 the magazine had carried thirty-four articles during that year. The picture is very similar for the Travel Trade Gazette. This is not surprising; it reflects the importance of the issue and the growing debate in the national media more generally.

Though much valuable research has been undertaken in this field (see research pages of www.itt.co.uk for some examples), little has been done to gauge the attitudes of business operators in travel and tourism. Yet, arguably, these are key players in most initiatives designed to minimise the impact of travel and tourism on the environment. They are certainly recipients of much advice and regulation.

This report presents the findings of a survey of 99 travel agents and tour operators in the UK who were invited to share their attitude to climate change and its implications for the sector. The response rate of 18 per cent is disappointing but not untypical of this kind of research. A short questionnaire was distributed via email to 545 independent businesses. These were identified by purchasing a commercial database. The questions followed in part a survey of businesses across a range of sectors and countries undertaken by Accenture which was reported widely in the press (see, for example, Independent on Sunday, 27th January, 2008). This enabled some degree of comparison between sectors.

The findings suggest that:

- Those operating as travel agents and tour operators do not welcome government regulation as a response to climate change, preferring to adopt voluntary measures. Paradoxically, however, only a third of the firms surveyed feel that travel and tourism businesses have a role to play in controlling global warming.
- More than half of the firms surveyed think that the sector has a 'bad press', even though it is considered by respondents to make no more of a contribution to climate change than many other sectors of the economy. A similar proportion feels threatened by the issue of climate change.
- On the evidence of this survey, most businesses—some 70 per cent—do not know how to respond to climate change. This suggests that a comprehensive knowledge transfer programme relating to this issue might be appropriate.
- Approximately a third of those surveyed claimed that they would be prepared to work for slightly less pay if this were in exchange for more environmentally sensitive business practices. 56 per cent did not consider such a proposition to be appealing.

Regulation or voluntary action?

As Figure 1 shows, there is a fairly even divide between those who believe that the government should take the lead in addressing climate change via greater regulation of travel and tourism businesses and those who believe it should not.

The popularity of the 'hands-off' approach is in sharp contrast to the Accenture survey which found that 80 per cent of businesses surveyed considered it more appropriate for governments to take the lead.

Figure 1 Responses to the statement:

To address climate change, the government should take the lead in regulating travel and tourism businesses

Figure 2 also confirms the orientation of British travel and tour operators towards voluntary measures. That figure indicates that almost half of those surveyed feel that businesses will, themselves, rise to the challenge of global warming without having to be coerced.

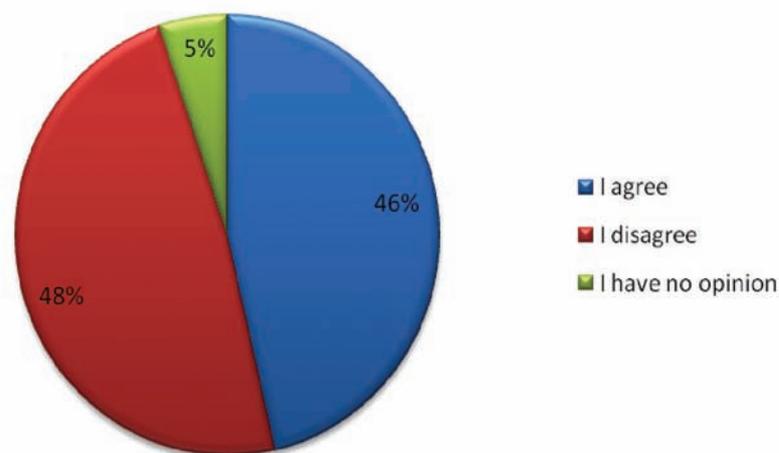
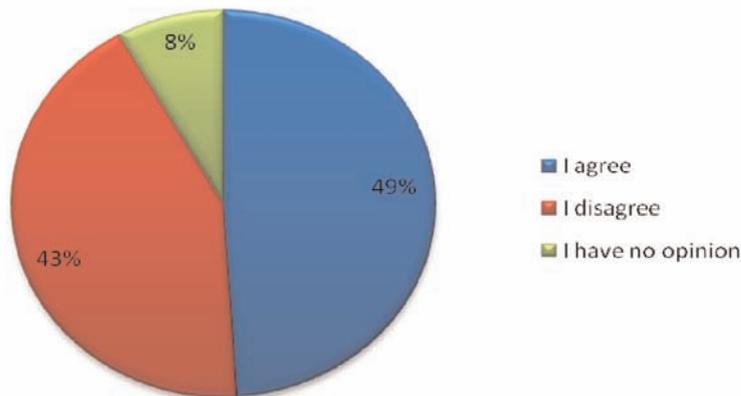


Figure 2 Responses to the statement:

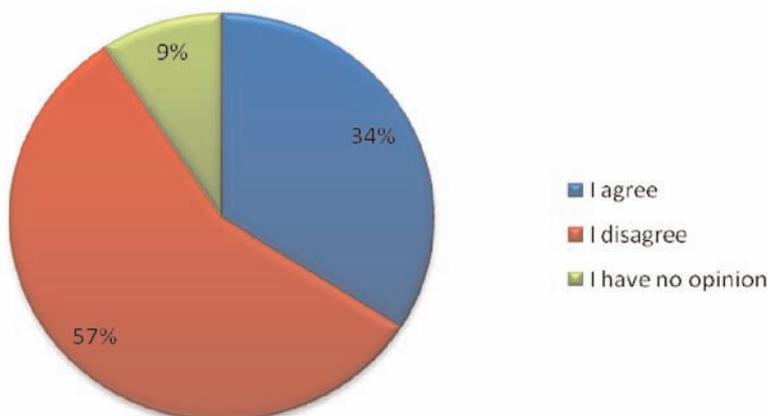
Travel and tourism businesses will respond to climate change without the need for government regulation



Such an interpretation sits uncomfortably with the responses contained in Figure 3. When invited to comment on whether travel and tourism businesses have a role to play in controlling global warming, a surprisingly low number (in the light of earlier responses) answered positively. Indeed, only about a third felt such an obligation, with 57 per cent disagreeing. This evidence is not likely to persuade policy-makers to promote voluntary action. The Accentura study found that some 70 per cent of businesses in their sample felt they had a role to play.

Figure 3 Responses to the statement:

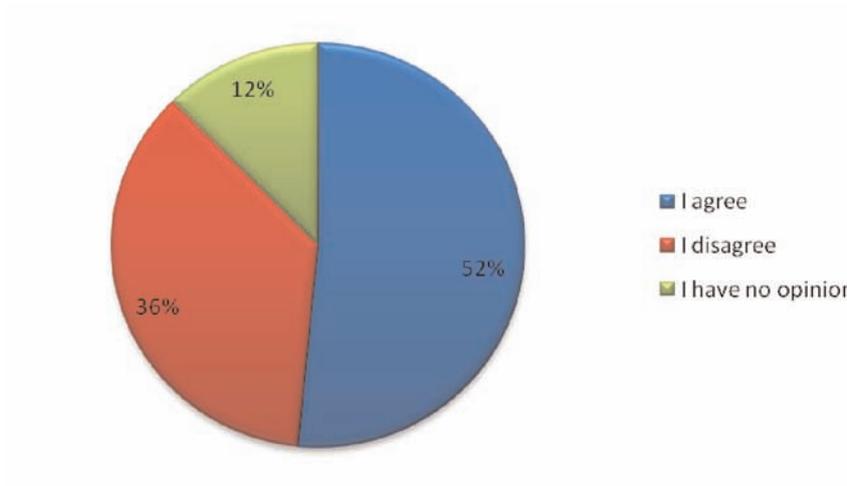
Travel and tourism businesses have a role to play in controlling global warming



Feeling threatened by climate change

Figure 4 Responses to the statement:

Travel and tourism gets a bad press but makes no more of a contribution to climate change than many other sectors of the economy

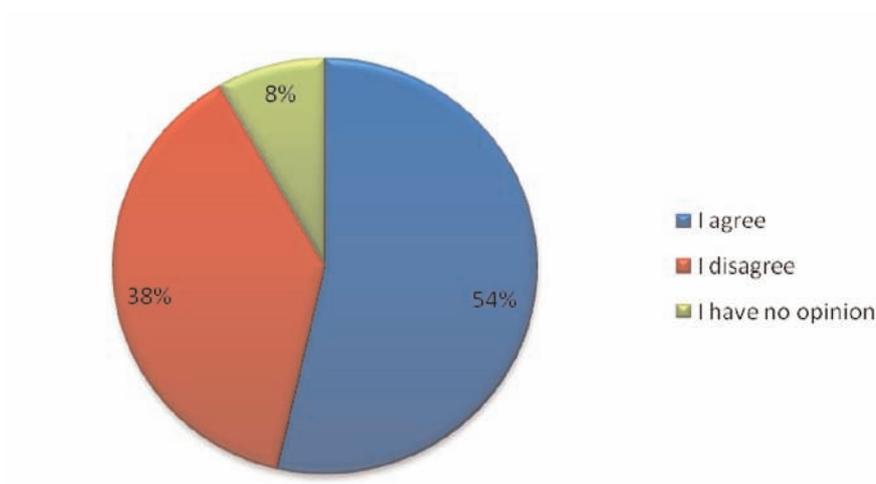


More than half of those surveyed feel that the sector gets a 'bad press' even though it is considered by respondents to make no more of a contribution to climate change than many other sectors of the economy.

In spite of this apparent bullishness, more than half of the businesses feel threatened by climate change, as is revealed by Figure 5.

Figure 5 Responses to the statement:

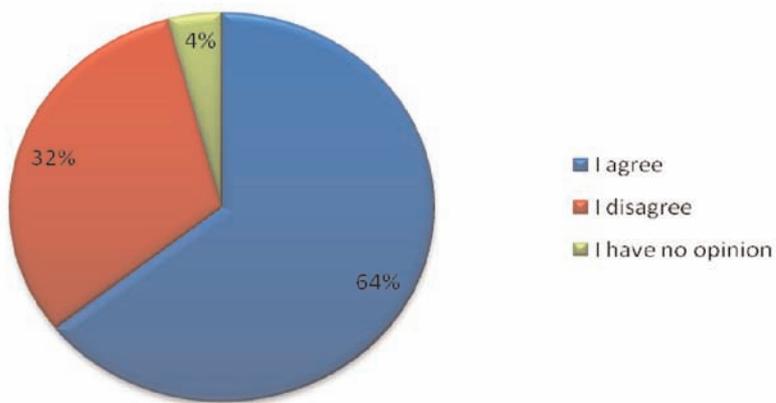
Travel and tourism businesses feel threatened by climate change



In spite of feeling somewhat threatened by the issue, almost two-thirds of those surveyed feel that global warming offers business opportunities as well as threats (see Figure 6).

Figure 6 Responses to the statement:

Global warming presents business opportunities as well as threats to travel and tourism businesses

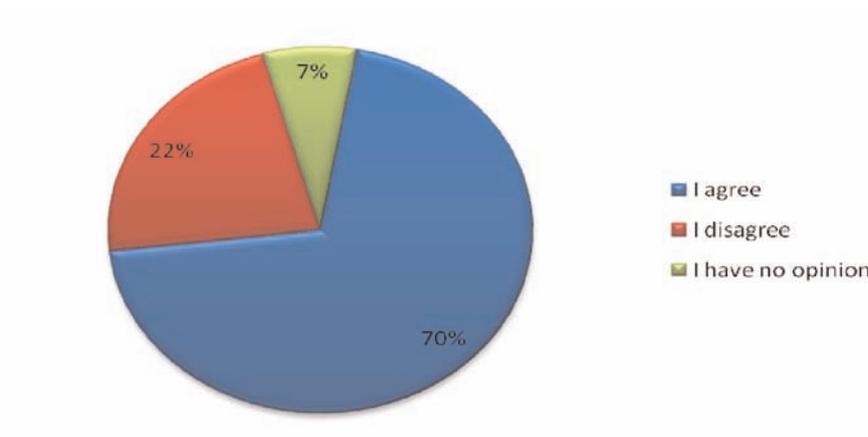


Education not regulation?

As Figure 7 reveals, the results of the survey suggest that some 70 per cent of businesses do not understand the implications of climate change for their business. This suggests that a programme of education and training may be appropriate (and welcome). This is in contrast to the more general Accentura study where the corresponding figure was some 50 per cent.

Figure 7 Responses to the statement:

Travel and tourism businesses do not understand the implications of climate change

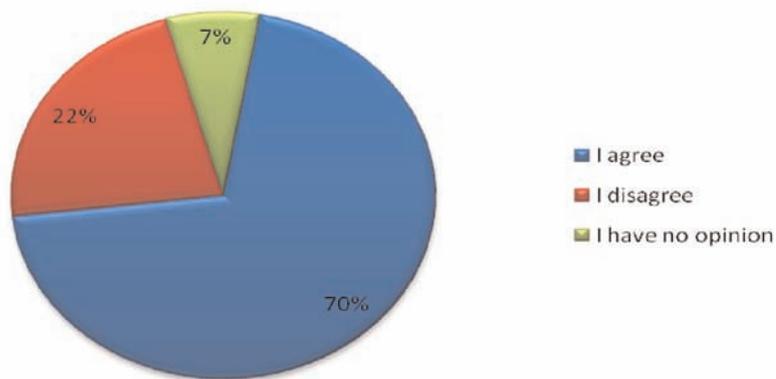


Attitudes to remuneration

It has been suggested that there might be a trade-off between rates of pay and environmental practice ie that employees and business owners might be prepared to sacrifice pay to work for more 'green' businesses. The evidence from this survey is that slightly more than a third of those running the businesses surveyed have such a disposition (see Figure 8), with 57 per cent rejecting such an outlook.

Figure 8 Responses to the statement:

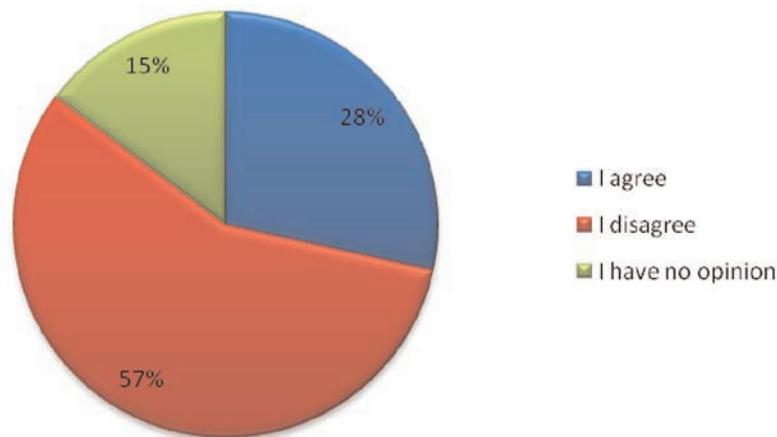
I would be happy to work for slightly less money if it meant working for a company that was concerned about the environment.



It is interesting that when asked to guess the attitude of employees on this matter, the findings suggest slightly less enthusiasm for a trade-off between pay and the environment. As Figure 9 shows, the difference in perception is explained largely by the increase in 'Don't knows'. Given the nature of the question, this is not surprising. Naturally, this issue would be more fully understood if employees were asked directly. Moreover, it must also be noted that there is often a difference between responses to questions such as that posed here and practice.

Figure 9 Responses to the statement:

I think employees in this business would be happy to work for slightly less pay if they felt we were contributing to reducing climate change.



CONCLUDING COMMENTS

If coverage in the trade press is a reasonable indicator, there is a growing awareness among businesses of the importance of climate change. There is, however, a common uncertainty about its implications. In some quarters, there is undoubtedly a sense of feeling threatened and that government regulations are not welcome, even though businesses do not want to take responsibility for controlling climate change themselves. Nevertheless, there remains significant optimism that business opportunities can be created from climate change.

A study such as this raises as many questions as it answers. How can travel and tourism businesses respond to climate change? To what extent can businesses influence the government's thinking on this matter? What organisations are best placed to provide leadership? Some of these questions will need careful consideration and appropriate action in the near future if the sector is to thrive in the face of increasingly challenging conditions.

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