

than any other carrier,” said Robert Deluce, president and CEO of Porter Airlines. “Business people enjoy travelling when the flight is convenient for their schedule and Porter gives them extensive choices with high frequency and flexibility.”

The majority of flights will operate every 40 minutes on the Montreal route and every hour on the Ottawa route. The schedule changes take full effect May 5.

New normal, cautious optimism: the buzzwords for 2010 and the annual Business Travel Summit

TORONTO — Despite a retail landscape where booking channels seem to multiply overnight, Best Western International senior vp, marketing and sales Dorothy Dowling says chain and consortium bookings are up, while third-party bookings are down at the Best Western chain of properties.



Presenters and organizers gather before the Annual Business Summit in Toronto last week. Seen here are (left to right): Hotel Association of Canada president Tony Pollard; Best Western International senior vp, marketing and sales Dorothy Dowling; vice president of client management for American Express Business Travel, Marcia Van Frederic; Troy Rutman, director of external communications at Best Western International; and Bryson Forbes, travel blogger for Best Western’s travel expert blog Youmustbetrippin.com, and moderator of the event.

“We believe very strongly in travel agents. They offer significant value to customers,” said Dowling.

Speaking at last week’s Annual Business Travel Summit led by Best Western with input from American Express Canada and the Hotel Association of Canada, Dowling added that following

a flat finish to 2009, forward bookings for Best Western are up, most recently with a 17% increase last week. “A lot of people held back from travelling last year but they have to be out there for their customers,” she said.

Last year’s economic challenges actually helped Best Western in a way,

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she added. In an effort to drive down travel spend, travellers who might not normally book with the mid-market chain did – “and they liked what they saw.”

The U.S. hotel industry is still having a tough time, with 20 to 25% of properties expected to “turn their keys back to the bank in 2010”, said Dowling.

The situation for Canadian hotels is not as grim, despite a \$4 billion loss for the industry in 2009 and a drop in

average occupancy from 63% to 58%, said HAC president Tony Pollard.

As reported in its 2010 Canadian Travel Intentions survey released last month, expected business travel is up 3% from last year (while expected leisure travel is down 4%).

Looking ahead through 2010 and into 2011, Pollard says he expects to see growth, with a one or two point increase in the 58% occupancy level, as well as increases in rates and RevPar. “They won’t be significant spikes, but

they will go up,” he said. “I’m optimistic. Things certainly can’t get any worse.”

Pollard spoke out about the airport security fee, saying all Canadians, not just airline passengers, should shoulder the cost for the country’s security in the air.

Meanwhile “it’s sickening” that 2.5 million Canadians are bypassing Canadian airports altogether, as reported in the Feb. 18 issue of Travelweek, he said.

Canada’s travel deficit with the U.S. has climbed from \$1 billion in 2000 to \$14 billion.

Travel spend and loyalty programs are coming under increasing scrutiny, said Marcia Van Frederici, vice president of client management for American Express Business Travel, and “customization is huge. You can’t do a cookie cutter program at all in our industry.” She sees more of a focus on ROI for travel and meetings (with growth in “travel meeting alternatives” like virtual meetings), leaner travel budgets and a traveller-centric road warrior “who needs more information on the road and the ability to do things instantly.”

HAC tracks use of loyalty programs and has seen an increase on both the corporate and leisure sides. “In 2006, hotel loyalty programs were important to 25% of business travellers. This year that number is 44%. Leisure is less but still rising, from 19% in 2006 to 26% now,” said Pollard.

Dowling said Best Western saw double-digit redemption in its loyalty program last year. The program offers both hotel and airline components “and we saw a double-digit decline in the airline program – they’re moving more to the hotel side.”

One week to go for WestJet’s Sean Durfy

CALGARY — Despite the latest executive shake-up and a turbulent launch for its new reservations system last year, WestJet is still on track “to be one of the most successful international airlines in the world by 2016,” said past CEO Sean Durfy.

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