

TOP TEN TIPS FOR SANE BUSINESS TRAVEL
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SYNOPSIS

For many of us, preparing for a trip means buying a new bathing suit, selecting a good book, and stocking up on sunscreen. Unfortunately, preparing for a business trip requires a bit more planning and effort. In this article, legal technology consultants Pat Nemish and John "Tim" Mellitz share their top ten tips for business travel, leading to happier, more productive, and efficient executives in the field. Learn everything from how to pack your socks to where to find WiFi hotspots – and remember to always travel light and pack right! This article contains 1,501 words.

INTRODUCTION

Some of the following tips may seem obvious if you're a seasoned traveler, but you'd be surprised how many people don't take the time to prepare for or research their destination. Technology today enables you to take your office on the road. One or more of the following "gadgets" have now become essential tools of communication depending upon your responsibilities: portable computer, cell phone, PDA (Personal Digital Assistant), wireless adaptor, telephone headset, microphone, and a flash drive. Optional items might include portable scanner, portable printer, hotspot locator, portable GPS (Global Positioning satellite), a digital recorder, an iPod with your favorite music, a movie CD to view while relaxing, and a digital camera.

Following these few suggestions can help make your next trip a safe and enjoyable one, as well as add value to your next travel experience.

1. IDENTIFY HOTSPOTS PRIOR TO YOUR TRIP.

Locate them at airports, Internet cafes, business centers, private clubs, office parks, train stations, rest areas, health clubs, convention centers, restaurants, etc. USA Today has a Web site <<http://usatoday.jiwire.com>> that lists thousands of locations.

2. PACK ITEMS OF CONVENIENCE.

Take a flash drive containing the data you need for your meeting, i.e. outlines, notes, and presentations. You can buy one with a gigabyte of memory for about \$20. This device holds as much information as 1389 floppy disks, and is equivalent to one million pages of single-spaced text!

3. DON'T WASTE YOUR RESOURCES ON THINGS LIKE CAR RENTALS.

Renting a car costs money and time. Select a hotel that's a short cab ride from your business destination. It's usually much easier to let someone else do the driving when you're in an unfamiliar city or location.

4. CALL YOUR HOTEL AHEAD OF TIME.

Call the hotel in advance and ask about complimentary airport shuttles or other transportation options. You may also want to ask if they will provide personal items such as an iron, clothing steamer, and hair dryer. If so, you'll have extra room in your luggage for other things. If you're into fitness ask about their exercise equipment, pool, and spa offerings.

5. TRAVEL LIGHT.

Bring one suit and several pieces to change its look. Men can wear the same suit with varying color shirts and ties. Ladies can create several different outfits from just one skirt, one jacket, a pair of coordinating pants, and a few blouses.

6. PACK RIGHT.

Carry convenience items and commodities such as film, camera batteries, and toiletries so you won't need to purchase them at hotel shops -- at twice the price. Pack clothing that resists wrinkling, such as polyester blends, wool blends, microfibers, silk, and rayon. Avoid packing 100% cotton or linen when possible. Roll clothing into cylinders when packing. It takes up less space and it will help prevent wrinkles. Also, roll socks and underwear and stuff them inside your shoes. Not only will it take less space in your luggage, but it helps keep your shoes from getting crushed.

7. CHOOSE A SUITABLE HOTEL.

Not every hotel caters to business travelers. Some hotels are simply geared for leisure travelers, and place a higher focus on different features than those in a business hotel. Below you'll find two important features of a great business hotel:

-- Location: Hotels situated near an airport or located in a city's business district usually cater to business travelers. Airport hotels rarely offer much on scenery, but they make up for it with convenient location. Many recruiters typically schedule interviews in airport hotels for this reason. It is easier to fly in, meet several candidates, catch up on work in the business center, and fly back out.

-- Internet Access: Most hotels offer some form of Internet access whether it's use of the business center's computer, high-speed access in the room, or wireless hotspots.

8. DOCUMENT EXPENSES.

How you document your expenses depends on the reason for documenting them. Are you seeking reimbursement from your employer? Does your employer require receipts to substantiate credit card charges? If self-employed, you may only need receipts for cash expenditures such as tips, public transportation, etc. Keep in mind that IRS requires business purpose documentation for meals and entertainment expenses (your credit card statement may not suffice). Have a single place to store receipts such as a wallet with dividers, or a pocket in your luggage.

9. BE STREET-WISE AND SAFE.

In the current world climate, it is more important than ever to stay safe while traveling on business. Whether you're traveling abroad or simply to another state, you should do your homework to maintain safety. There is nothing more de-motivating than to get mugged before a big presentation or to get held up on your way to an important meeting. Keeping your head up and avoiding eye contact can make you appear more native and more assured of your surroundings. Thieves and scam artists tend to look for easy targets. Make it hard for them by looking confident. Secure your wallet, and avoid inherently dangerous areas whether it's the Combat Zone in Boston or Pigalle in Paris.

10. ASSESS YOUR COMPUTER NEEDS.

But what about productivity? After all, isn't that what business travel is all about? Of course, a laptop computer seems the obvious solution. Just look at the people line up to board the plane. Everyone has a computer, right? Not!

If you take a count you'll discover some business travelers don't carry the "ubiquitous" computer. In fact, the higher up the corporate ladder you go, the less likely you will find a 'puter totin' exec. The same is often true of senior partners, high profile litigators, and other attorneys who delegate tasks that call for computers. That doesn't mean that these Luddites can't benefit from some sort of modern technology. But they should ask themselves two questions:

Do I Need a Laptop?

How do you use automation, or computing power when you are not traveling? Many lawyers only need to review their e-mail, consult their calendars, and lookup names, addresses, and phone numbers. These lawyers can easily get by with a Palm or Pocket PC device, a smart phone, or the computer at the business center in their hotel or an internet café. In fact, these activities are almost universal, and probably represent the most popular uses of computing power.

However, some travel objectives are so focused, and the facts and concepts involved are so internalized by the traveler, that a computer would seem completely redundant. Only when a trip is "project oriented," and requires access to more information than the traveler can internalize or memorize does a computer become necessary. For some individuals, if the only project active at the time is the subject of the trip, paper reports may suffice.

More often than not, however, the traveler's responsibilities extend beyond the purpose of the trip, and only a computer can provide him with the information and tools he or she needs to stay on top of the work load.

Whether working on multiple products of one's own, or reviewing the work of others, the traveler will need access to one or more of the following:

Office data

Documents

Reports

Internet resources, including:

-- Research sources

-- Blogs

-- Listservs and discussion groups

-- Remote access to one's own office network

-- Data exchange

What Type of Laptop Would Work Best for Me?

Once you've concluded you need a computer, which computer to buy becomes the issue. Besides price, you must determine the features of and benefits afforded by different types of computers.

Some considerations:

-- How often do you travel on business?

-- Can you afford two computers ... a desktop computer at the office and a notebook computer on the road? Or should you buy a single "Desktop Replacement" portable computer, and use it both in the office and on the road?

-- Will you need battery power much of the time? Should you carry a spare battery?

-- How large a screen will you need? Or how small a screen will you tolerate?

-- Will you need portable peripherals, such as a battery or USB-powered printer, or a portable scanner?

-- How is your typing? Will you be more productive with a full-size keyboard?

-- How often and how far will you need to carry the computer? How much weight should you give weight?

-- Will WiFi networks provide sufficient access to the Internet?

-- If traveling by automobile, bus or train, will you need a broadband communications card, (sometimes called an EVDO card). These are available only from certain providers, such as Sprint, and require a subscription for access to the Internet at a cost of about \$60.00 per month.

-- Will you ever require an internal modem? If so, do you know your destination city's local access number for your service provider (ISP)?

CONCLUSION

Addressing the issues raised in this article will truly prepare you to focus your undivided attention on the purposes of your trip. Business travel can certainly be hectic but organization and preparation makes your travel experience more enjoyable, productive, and less stressful.

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