

A Guide to Thoughtful Business Travel

- ***View your airline seat as creative space.*** Use your down time intentionally. Spend time in contemplation, creative thought, or reflection. Bring something meaningful with you. Read. Listen. Ponder. Be. Don't squander the opportunity (which is why unless I have an urgent need, I don't use wi-fi on airplanes. 38,000 feet is one of the few places where I can't be reached and can have uninterrupted thinking time).
- ***Capture the unusual.*** Take a camera (or cell phone) and take a photo of one curious thing on each trip. If you have kids, bring these images home (or text them) instead of gifts they don't want. Make it a challenge to photograph the most unusual thing you can find. Or photograph an object or site that means something to a family member. It will show you were thinking of them even amidst your trip.
- ***Send a postcard.*** Pick up postcards along the way or bring some with you. The point is to send a word of encouragement to someone special on your trip. Yes, you'll probably be home before the card, but personal notes are so rare these days that they will be meaningful to both you and the recipient.
- ***Don't check a bag.*** How is this thoughtful? It's actually about not giving it any thought. When your bag is with you, you have less to worry about, you can make connections easier if your flight is delayed or cancelled and you have more flexibility, less waiting and fees and more freedom. That may not add up to more meaning, but it does mean less hassle.
- ***Don't turn on the TV.*** First, the clicker, phone and bed spread are horrendous germ magnets. Second, don't fill your loneliness with more emptiness. Get out and walk or see the sights if safe or read, write, reflect and do all those quiet things you say you have no time for at home.
- ***Pay attention to details.*** Record the small things: décor in your hotel, different clothing styles, interesting signs or buildings, food, even how the light is different than at home. For writers, this is especially helpful for use as details in later works. Capture as much as you can: you may not be back and you won't remember what you don't record in images or words.

- ***Seek out meaningful conversations.*** Some of my deepest discussions have been on business trips with clients or others in hallway chats, breaks in meetings, or at dinner or lunch. Don't just talk about business. In fact, make a point to find out what matters most to them, not as a sales tactic but out of genuine curiosity and presence.
- ***See what you'd never see on vacation.*** Explore the area around your hotel or some place a local tells you about that you'd probably never fit into your pleasure itinerary because it doesn't rate on the tourist list.
- ***Take public transportation.*** It's so easy on trips to get into the cocoon of your rental car or taxi cab. Figure out the metro, subway or bus system. Sure, you don't always have the time but in most places, public transportation like light rail will almost always get you downtown from an airport faster than taking a car during rush hour. Just be aware of safety.
- ***Let others make choices for you.*** When I'm given a choice at a rental car agency I always ask the person to choose for me. Sometimes they are indifferent, but frequently they get excited about a certain vehicle and appreciate sharing their perspective. Same with asking about local restaurants: Don't ask for a good one. Ask where the person would go on a date. The results are far more fun and add meaning for others as well.
- ***Be nice to the ignored people.*** A colleague on a trip with me once said that my tombstone will read, "Tollbooth attendants loved him dearly." That may be stretching it, but talking to those folks, housekeeping staff, the guy at the parking garage booth, the busboy, the receptionist at the client's office and others is very surprising to them. They often do not expect you to genuinely ask them how they are. I always try to thank the person cleaning the restrooms at airports. Try it. You will both be surprised by your effort.
- ***Pursue your interests.*** Find places in new cities related to hobbies or even projects you're working on. Like art? Visit museums, galleries and theaters.. Sports? Take in a game. Hiking or running? New routes await. Cooking? Find a local favorite and talk cuisine with your server or chef. Being from out of town makes these discussions easier since you've come a long way just to

visit them. Bookstores, art stores, local markets, history – whatever your interest, take the breaks between meetings or in the evenings to pursue at least one area of interest on your trip.

- **Add to a collection or start one.** My wife collects smooth stones in a jar and writes on them small reminders of grace and gratitude. So I do what I can to bring her rocks if I'm in a place where I can find them. Each stone now has additional meaning. A collection can be anything you find interesting or appealing. Whatever the collection, finding new items gives you a quest.
- **Try new food.** Actually, I tend to play it safe with food while on a business trip so I stay healthy and alert, but if I have a free evening on my own or even with clients, I try out new, local specialties, highly rated restaurants or my own discoveries. I still remember one of the most unusual but best pasta dishes I've ever had at a little restaurant in Toronto or the most extraordinary Indian food in New York.
- **Give up your preferred seat on a flight.** I've only done this a few times and those were usually instigated by the flight attendant, but recently I saw a man give up his aisle seat to sit in a middle seat so a couple could sit together. He was so gracious that all of us around him wished we'd done it. He added meaning not just to the couple but to all of us there.
- **Take time you don't have.** This is one of the hardest, but sometimes we encounter situations that require more time and attention from us than we feel we have. I've walked people across airports and listened to grieving hotel desk clerks when I needed to be elsewhere. I can't recall what happened in the meetings I was slightly late in attending. But I'll not forget the expressions of thanks from those I helped. Make the time.
- **Put family first.** We make concessions in our effort to balance work and family. However, simple "rules" like avoiding when you can weekend travel or planning around important events for our families pay off. You may be more aware at the time of your boss's annoyance. But that won't matter years later, when your child remembers that you were there when it did.