



ATTORNEYS ON THE GO:

SMART TRAVEL TIPS

BY PHILLIP M. PERRY

Cramped airline seats. Long car rental lines. Congested expressways. Lost hotel reservations.

Yikes! It's a litany of horror familiar to any traveling legal professional. And there's more to come: Despite the growth of electronic communications, we're hitting the road more often for client calls and legal conferences. Maybe we've given our minds to the information superhighway, but our bodies still belong to the concrete toll road.

So is there any way of making these trips more pleasurable? If the experiences of veteran travelers are any guide, the answer is yes. Consider this article a kind of "Baedeker" for lawyers and legal staff who travel.

Administrators Play Key Role

The offerings and policies of airlines, hotels and other entities change so rapidly that no organization that has employees who travel can keep up with them all. That's where the legal administrator comes in, serving as a valuable gateway of information, according to Yvonne J. Roper, Office Administrator for the Washington, D.C., branch of Littler Mendelson, the largest U.S. employment law firm. Roper describes herself as a troubleshooter who tries to anticipate and address problems before they occur.

"Many airlines have recently changed their policies on ticket reimbursement for cancellations or flight changes," she says by way of example. "Sometimes, if you don't make your flight changes in a timely fashion, you lose your money. In many cases you can make changes, but there is a fee involved. So I try to tell the attorneys in advance what to expect."

Roper also keeps the attorneys informed as to what to expect in the security area, and reminds them to get to the airport in enough time to allow for security delays, so they don't miss a flight.

Such information is particularly valuable, says Roper, when attorneys place Internet orders with unfamiliar or rarely utilized airlines. Indeed, orders placed over the Web pose special challenges: "From personal experience, I know that problems can occur when using the Internet," says Roper. "One time I placed a ticket order for my own flight that way and never received an e-mail confirmation. I found out too late that a ticket had not been issued."

Travel Agents Can Help

If the Internet can create as many problems as it solves, is there a place for the old-fashioned human touch? That is, for the travel agent? Roper says there is. "You deal with someone who is responsible and to whom you can go if something doesn't work out." This is especially the case for agencies with which a law firm has a continuing relationship. Such agencies will often negotiate with airlines to minimize losses when an attorney changes travel plans at the last minute.

Realistically though, a growing number of attorneys are becoming computer savvy. That means they like to ferret out good flight deals on their own. That's the case at Wessels & Pautsch, a labor and employment law firm based in St. Charles, Illinois. This firm now has 21 attorneys in six offices in five states.

"When I used a travel agency to book tickets there was someone who would operate as an advocate for us," says Geraldine B. Reed, the firm's Administrator. "She was great with last-minute adjustments. Sometimes it would appear that no flights were available for a last-minute trip, but she would work and get us something."

That kind of service is no longer available now that the attorneys prefer to place their reservations on the Internet. Now when lawyers need to make last-

minute cancellations, they give their tickets to Reed, who adds them to her tickler system. "I keep my ears open for travel plans and keep reminding the attorneys that they still have an outstanding ticket for a certain city," she says. "Ideally we hope for a situation where the attorney is going to go to that same city before the ticket expires."

Speaking of computers, Reed also finds herself helping the traveling attorneys avoid the stress that results from computer problems on the road. "I try to make sure their computers are up and running satisfactorily," she says. "We outsource the computer work, and I make sure they know how to get in touch with the computer person. I also make sure they know how to dial into the servers and that they have enough back-up batteries."

Successful traveling seems to be more an art than science. Legal administrators may want to pass along the following tips from individuals who have found smart ways to make their travels less stressful and more productive:

- Joseph P. Harkins, a partner in the Washington, D.C., office of San Francisco-based Littler Mendelson travels thousands of miles every year.
- Michael J. Lotito, partner with San Francisco-based Jackson Lewis, has logged hundreds of thousands of miles on airlines during the past 25 years.
- James Feldman is a Chicago-based speaker who, as "Doctor Travel," gives seminars on "The Cure for the Common Trip."

Get enough rest.

Travelers don't rest. That's bad. Traveling is wearying enough without making matters worse with sleepless nights. A tired, worn-out feeling is not the best state of mind for anyone who needs to think fast — the attorney faced with a round of depositions, the administrator opening a new branch. "As a litigator, no matter how much advance preparation you do you still have to think on your feet," Harkins says.

So how does he stay alert? "Maybe the best piece of travel advice I have

ever been given is this: Bring your own pillow," he says. "To get a good night's sleep it's essential that your head be comfortable." The best pillow to travel with, adds Harkins, is the one you use at home. His own pillow, for example, is about two inches thick — far thinner than the typical four- to five-inch-thick varieties found at hotels.

And one more thing: Go easy on the partying. "Do not go about town," says Lotito. "You are tired. You need to get up early, have a tough meeting, go to the airport and do it all over again."

Learn to fly.

- *Make friends with airline personnel.*

Good friends help each other. Harkins and Lotito emphasize that smart travelers will develop good bonds with airline personnel in the travel clubs. "These individuals can often come to your assistance in last-minute ticket changes or tracking lost baggage," says Harkins. "It pays to 'work the room.'"

"Do everything you can to make those people know you are their friend," says Lotito. "It's not hard to do. Say hello. Thank them. Bring in a cake or a dozen donuts. Do not ask for anything. They will respond to you so favorably you cannot believe it. Take an interest in them as people and really care about them."

- *Don't cut connections too close.*

Get where you are going the night before so you don't get stressed about being on time. "Especially as a litigator, the last thing I want to do is be worrying about logistics," says Harkins.

Avoid costly glitches by scheduling buffer time between your flight and your meeting. "If I have a morning meeting, I avoid taking the last flight out the night before," says Feldman. "If the flight is delayed or canceled I can still make my meeting."

- *Get the best seats.*

"Call the airline and ask them to send you the seating charts," suggests Feldman. "Most will do so at no charge." With some airlines — Delta is an example — you can choose your seat online. Many decisions about seating

positions have trade-offs. For example, while exit rows usually have more legroom, in some cases the seat arms do not go up so you have less sprawl space. If you take aisle seats you will have more legroom and can more easily get up and down — but be aware you are more likely to get bumped by attendants and other travelers as they walk the aisle. Some travelers get aisle seats near the front, because it's quicker to get up and get off at arrival. On a night flight, take a window seat so you have more room for your pillow.

Avoid the row immediately behind the bulkhead, which is the upright partition that separates sections of the plane. There's less room to store your gear and often less room to stretch your legs.

- *Keep hold of the good stuff.*

Don't check the materials you need for a meeting or presentation. The chances are too great of losing luggage.

Keep your valuable materials with you in a small carry-on. And make sure that bag is small — airlines are getting tougher about the size of luggage you may take aboard. Some even have metal templates through which your carry-on must fit. Prior to your trip, call the airline to get their maximum luggage dimensions. When measuring your luggage be sure to include the wheels.

If a flight is really full there may be no room for your carry-on, even if it is under the maximum size allowable. In such cases the crew may check your luggage bag after you board, so be prepared for this possibility by packing a plastic bag at the very top of your carry-on. If you need to surrender your luggage, pull out that plastic bag and load the absolute essentials that you can hold on your lap or store in a small space under a seat or overhead.

There are some other steps you can take to ensure you will have room for your carry-on. Airlines board passengers by row, so try reserving a seat toward the back of the plane to make sure you will be among the first on: There will be more overhead space available. You can also improve your overhead access by boarding early once you're at the airport.

- *Travel in comfort.*

Keep a blow-up pillow, a sleeping mask and a pair of soft slippers in your permanent travel bag. Catching some shut-eye mid-flight can make up for truncated sleep the night before. And that can make a big difference in your presentation at your arrival city.

Drive, he said.

- *If possible, avoid rental cars.*

"Car rentals all stink and are too expensive," Lotito says. "Try to get the client to pick you up or stay at a hotel at the airport. Get a conference room there for the meeting and have people come to you. Renting a car means you will take

- *Rent from the agency location at your hotel.*

If you travel frequently to the same hotel, you will get to know the car rental agency people, and they will be more lenient with your car return times. Also, you can take the hotel shuttle and the driver will load your luggage, notes Feldman.

Know your inn.

Legal administrators can negotiate with what become firm hotels. These corporate accounts reduce travel stress by eliminating some unknowns. And, if administrators don't create corporate accounts, they can still help. Roper of Littler Mendelson, for example, often calls

"Instead of renting a car, take a town car," says Lotito. "I use Carey all over the United State. [It's] expensive but most reliable. For almost 23 years I have used one service in San Francisco. I am loyal to them and they are to me. Paying the premium is worth it when you live on the road."

another 30 to 60 minutes to move after you get off the plane (assuming you did not check luggage) and a same amount of time to return to the airport."

- *Consider limos instead.*

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- *Don't buy the rental agency gasoline.*

The car will have a full tank when you receive it. Make sure you buy your own gasoline and return it with a full tank. Otherwise, the agency will charge you a big premium for fuel.

- *Don't pay for insurance you already have.*

Check with your current insurance company to see what car rental agency insurance you can decline. In some cases, credit card companies will pay for collision damage: Find out before you travel. The savings can be significant.

branch offices in advance to find out which hotels are closest to the location where a traveling attorney will be working.

- *Cultivate a relationship.*

Get better service by raising your profile with hotels, says Lotito. "Pick the ones you like in a particular city. Go back. Make sure they know who you are. How? Walk into the lobby and give the bellman \$20 for taking you to your room. They will never forget you, and everyone in the hotel will treat you like royalty."

- *Order room service breakfast.*

Avoid having to get dressed up to eat. "Eat a big breakfast," says Harkins. "Chances are that the remainder of the day will be packed, and it will be difficult to find time for lunch."

- *Ask for the right room.*

"Because of the way buildings are made, corner rooms are usually bigger," says Feldman. "I also try to get on the concierge floor. These typically have meal service and complimentary soft drinks."

You need peace and quiet. Ask for a room away from the elevator, on a higher floor, and on the side of the building away from the street. Planning to arrive around 11 a.m.? The hotel may promise you they'll have a room ready, but it's smart to give them a reminder so you won't cool your heels in the lobby. Try calling them sometime after 9 a.m. and ask them to save the first available room. Get the person's name to encourage accountability.

- *Get a suite deal.*

Many hotels have suites that are designed to be roomy enough for business meetings, but offer just a couch and wall bed for overnight guests. Many customers get irate when they get stuck with a room without a traditional bed—but not you! You would rather have the extra room for your business activities.

- *Don't take the minibar key.*

Fed up with downing too many? Turn down the key. "The net worth of the minibar exceeds that of many a guest," quips Feldman.

- *Save money on phone calls.*

Says Lotito: "Do not use the hotel phone. Just don't do it. They charge an arm and a leg. Use your cell phone or get an 800 service. Watch out how long you stay on with the 800 for computer [use]. You may get nailed."

On the tips of their travel.

Here's a potpourri of hotel tips:

- Hang your clothes on the shower rod to steam out the travel wrinkles.
- If you're prone to misplace those plastic security cards that pass as keys today, train yourself to slip them behind the fire exit signs that always seem to be screwed onto the inside of your hotel door.
- No safe in the room? Ask if there's one at the front desk. Emergency back up: Hide money in your shoes in the closet.
- Want to be treated well? Always tip the maid and the concierge. And you'll be more likely to get back any items you may leave in the room on your departure.
- Left some computer gear at home? Guest books often have leather covers

that make great substitutes for mouse pads; hotel towels are usually thin enough to roll up for wrist supports.

- When tracking down a good restaurant avoid asking for suggestions from the hotel concierge, who is often paid by an over-priced eatery for referrals. If the concierge offers to make a reservation for you, that's a dead giveaway.
- It's easy to leave valuable goods behind when you check out. Maids say people most often leave things in three places: on the back of the bathroom door, on the side of the tub and under the bed. So check out these places before you leave.

Get around town.

- *Carry small change.*

No matter where you travel, taxicab drivers will always claim they don't have any change with them and hope you will give them more money. Always carry a supply of small change for this very reason.

- *Hire a private car.*

Given the high cost of taxicabs, it often makes sense to hire a car and driver if you need to travel a lot at your destination city. They have many benefits: They know where everything is so you don't get stressed out in traffic. Having them handy means you won't incur costly delays waiting for a taxi. They have tips for you on local resources. Leave the driving to them and you will be more productive.

- *Have a mailing bag ready for documents.*

Take a pre-addressed mailing bag so you can pack up magazines, documents and other materials that you don't want to haul around with you. Hotels usually have cartons you can use as well, so also carry some pre-addressed postal or overnight-mail labels.

- *Keep receipts in one place.*

How do you handle the dozens of little receipts, notes and business cards you pick up on your journey? Take a tip from Feldman: "I get one of United Parcel Service's International Pouches," he says. "These are zip-lock bags with adhesive on the back. I remove the paper and attach the pouch to the inside of a manila file folder. Everything goes into the bag." When he gets back to the office, Feldman files the manila folder in a drawer for easy access.

There's the lowdown from our high fliers. Take their advice, and maybe your next trip will go a little smoother. ♦

About the Author

PHIL PERRY IS A FREE-LANCE WRITER IN NEW YORK. HE IS AN OCCASIONAL CONTRIBUTOR TO *LEGAL MANAGEMENT*.

ARTICLE SYNOPSIS

EVEN WITH NEW TECHNOLOGY AND SLASHED TRAVEL BUDGETS, ATTORNEYS AND STAFF STILL GET AROUND ON CLIENT MATTERS. HERE ARE SOME TRICKS FOR EFFECTIVE TRAVEL.

Learn More About It

Before your next trip, check out these additional sources of tips. You'll have a less stressful journey... and quite possibly save some money, too.

On the Web

- Fodor's: www.fodors.com/traveltips/
One of the most comprehensive roundups of travel-savvy tips, from dealing more effectively with airlines to tackling car rental agencies, trains and hotels.
- GoPert: www.gopert.com
This site advertises itself as "Your Travel ExPert," and its array of links is truly awe-inspiring. Easy links to the major travel booking sites, 30 airlines, six dozen hotel chains and more than a dozen car rental agencies.
- Savvy Traveler: www.savvytraveler.org
The Savvy Traveler is a public radio travel program

and Web site produced by the people who created Marketplace, the public radio business news service.

- Travel Agents: www.astanet.com
The American Society of Travel Agents maintains this Web site with a searchable database of agencies near you.
- Hotels: www.Hotels.com.
On a budget? Here's a Web site with a search engine for lower-cost lodging.
- Travel accessories: www.jfainc.com/travelitems.html
Travel-oriented accessories, including James Feldman's 288-page book, *Doctor Travel's Cure for the Common Trip*.
- Travel Health Online: www.tripprep.com
Travel health and safety featuring country profiles, health care providers, and preventive measures