

Taking Care of Business...Travel

THE EXPERTS TELL YOU HOW TO SKIP THE HASSLES.

The 40-minute delay waiting for your bag at the airport carousel. The garbled directions that find you wandering around an unfamiliar city in your rent-a-car while clients wait. The wrenched elbow from lugging a "carry-on" bag the size of a small automobile. None of these is necessarily a disaster by itself. But combined together, travel problems add stress to your business travel, potentially putting you off your game when you need to be your best.

While some difficulties are unavoidable—you have no control over snowstorms—you can greatly improve your chances for a productive journey by taking some simple steps. "The number-one problem is not leaving enough slack time between items on the schedule," says veteran road warrior Ed Perkins.

Perkins, a syndicated travel columnist and author of *Business Travel When It's Your Money*, says business travelers try to optimize every dollar by squeezing too many items into each trip. "They schedule themselves right down to the second. If anything doesn't go properly, it can throw off the whole day's agenda," Perkins says. If your itinerary looks tight, eliminate two items from the list, he suggests.

Mike MacNair, president and CEO of MacNair Travel Management in the Washington, DC area, rarely misses a plane by getting caught up in the security line. Before going through the checkpoint, he stows his belt, keys, and anything else that could set off the buzzer in the front pocket of his carry-on bag. After he and the bag get through the checkpoint, he replaces his belt and retrieves his keys.

"Why put your belt on at home only to

take it off at the airport?" he asks. "This way, I'm the fastest one through the line."

MacNair and Perkins also suggest:

■ **Follow that satellite.** Heated seats and souped-up sound systems may be frivolous extras for rental cars, but satellite navigation systems are worth their weight in gold. "They really work," Perkins says. Also, you should review your driving directions with someone at your hotel who lives in the city. They'll know about any temporary construction or other impediments.

■ **Travel light.** Everything gets easier with less to haul around. If you travel frequently to the same city, develop a relationship with one hotel. "More and more hotels will clean your clothes for you and hold onto them for your next trip," MacNair says. If you're making a presentation that requires voluminous handouts, don't have them printed in your own city, suggests MacNair. If they're not security-sensitive, e-mail the documents to a copy store in the city you'll be visiting. Better yet, have them delivered to where you'll be giving your talk.

■ **Avoid tight connections.** If the airline ticket representative gives you 20 minutes to change planes in Chicago, that's a recipe for a missed flight. See if they have another flight that will put some padding into the layover, Perkins suggests. In fact, Perkins says he no longer travels the same day he has to do business, if he can avoid it. He prefers to arrive the night before, foot the bill for a hotel, and do business refreshed in the morning.

"Scheduling a meeting for the morning you arrive on the red eye is asking for trouble," Perkins says. ■

Crisis Averted

Returning from Costa Rica, Mike MacNair was supposed to change planes in Miami. But the airport was bedlam and he missed his connection. A harried airline official said he might have to wait two days for an open seat.

MacNair, a travel professional, made some phone calls, and found a flight from Fort Lauderdale the next morning on the same airline. The airline at first said he'd have to buy a new ticket if he switched airports—and a one-way, last minute seat could cost \$1,000 or more. "I knew my rights," he says. "They were responsible for getting me home." When pressed, the airline relented and honored the ticket.

What if this happens to you? After years of cutbacks, airlines are thinly staffed in customer service, MacNair says. You must be firm. Also, terms vary widely among carriers and ticket types, so develop a relationship with whomever books your travel and they will provide you with aid and a knowledge of your rights at crucial times.

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