The Ultimate Business Travel Handbook

The definitive guide to making the most of your time away from the office
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Time-saving hacks for busy travellers

Travelling for work doesn't have to mean breaking a cold sweat while trying to navigate a strange city, already 40 minutes late for your first interview. But it usually does. So, in a bid to decrease your stress levels, we've put together our best time-saving hacks for busy travellers.

Look for a hotel with a work suite

Don’t worry, this isn’t one of those lists that suggests you combine checking your emails with brushing your teeth and add an extra few hours to your working day by avoiding sleep. However, looking for a hotel with a work suite - and great wifi connection - will save you a lot of time. Staying somewhere with a conference room makes it a lot easier to schedule last-minute meetings and having a printer to hand will probably end up saving your life.

Search via address, not just city

Proximity. Every question we’ve ever asked our business bookers about what they look for in a hotel comes back to proximity. It doesn’t matter how great the breakfast, or how friendly the staff, is when you’re on the other side of the city to the conference centre where you’re due to deliver a presentation in 20 minutes. With this in mind, we’ve made sure that address search queries are available for every destination on Booking.com. This helps travellers narrow down a search to even the building number and – hopefully – shaves more than a couple of minutes off your commute.

Check-in the night before

As more business travellers have taken to adding a couple of extra days onto work trips, the benefits of “bleisure” travel are becoming apparent. Taking the opportunity to explore a strange city will make you feel confident navigating while arriving the evening before a conference frees you from stress caused by flights delays. It’ll also allow you to pick the hotel staff’s brains on the best route to your first meeting and the best place to grab breakfast en route.
Pre-book taxis or a car-share

If your company has offices in the city you’re travelling to, make the most of them. Find out if your company has accounts with any of the local taxi firms and car rental companies. This will be especially useful if you’re travelling with colleagues - in most cities it’s difficult enough flagging down a taxi for two people, let alone six. Or see if any of your local colleagues are interested in car sharing.

Avoid rush hour

Most of us are used to navigating – or ideally avoiding – rush hour in our home towns, but a new city can always surprise you. Forget the usual 7am-10am mayhem: In Las Vegas one of the busiest periods is 3.30-6.30pm, Madrid sees a lot of traffic at lunchtime as people travel home for their midday meals, and the busiest London tube lines have 20 times more traffic than the least used lines. Asking hotel staff about the quirks of their city’s traffic flow will save you time and help you navigate like a local.

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A New Approach to Cost-Savings in Business Travel

In order to support commercial success, travel departments are often tasked with trying to decrease costs. Unfortunately, this usually results in a travel programme riddled with inefficiencies and poor standards for employees.

From urging travellers to share rooms to focussing too heavily on negotiated TMC rates, the wrong approach to cost-savings in business travel can have far-reaching consequences.

The link between travel and increased sales

Do you believe that you can have an impact on sales? If you understand the links between travel and sales increases, the business will alleviate short term cost cutting.

Research suggests that the average business will see a $15 increase in sales for every $1 spent on travel. Imagine being in possession of that knowledge as a travel manager, or understanding that cutting travel costs too far has proven to have a negative effect on sales.

By swapping cost for value, you will feel less pressure to cut and be more inclined to drive ROI. And, while the law of diminishing returns certainly applies, by understanding the value of business travel, your organisation can establish the link between spend and increased revenue.

To do this, you need to invest in the link between your travel data and sales data. Join up systems and departments and you’ll see how the travel department can become an extended member of the sales team.

Connecting the investment with the return

Sometimes, it pays to take a broader view. Rather than looking at cost reduction, you should be thinking about how your actions will help build the business.

For example, if you know the target revenue for next year, you can pitch it against the cost of sending people on client-facing trips. This way, travel becomes a true cost of sale; can the same revenue be achieved with fewer trips?

Your business will have a way of calculating the cost of sale, but it needs to ensure travel is viewed as that, rather than purely an overhead.
A New Approach to Cost-Savings in Business Travel (continued)

Two kinds of trip

Investments are typically viewed in one of two ways; either a purchase that will appreciate in value (i.e. shares), or spend on a development that increases the capacity to make money (i.e. new equipment).

Business travel ROI usually falls into the latter category, but just as there are two types of investment, there are two kinds of trip.

Consider the business that sends a team of British network engineers to the USA in order to address an infrastructure issue. Such a cost would be seen as a necessity, but incapable of bringing in more revenue.

However, if they were to instead send a team of engineers who are based in the USA, the cost of travel might be reduced. The spend could therefore be considered an investment, rather than a way of maximising value, and any incremental revenue generated as a result viewed as positive ROI.

Linking travel cost-savings and business strategy

Decisions based around cost-cutting are normally reactive, because they’re only made when a business already has a problem.

Every travel cost-saving measure needs to be connected to the business strategy; costs should only be cut if they don’t support the strategy, and be followed by a proactive approach to redirect the resources where they’re needed:

• Speak with your local teams to identify where trip consolidation is sensible. This will avoid the common error of misinterpreting the link between strategy and travel cost-savings, which usually results in high performance units being starved of resources.
• Provide you with a deep understanding of the costs you control. Just like the head of sales, the you needs to have an in-depth knowledge of the kind of client meetings that can be conducted remotely rather than in person

Travel spend can only be prioritised if your business reframes how it measures travel.

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How to eat well when travelling for work

Healthy eating is usually the first thing to go out the window when travelling, especially if you’re travelling for work. Airport food and conference fare has improved but there’s still a danger of finding yourself in an unfamiliar location, dashing into meetings, fuelled mainly on coffee and vending machine snacks.

This is why we’ve put together our top tips for eating well while travelling for work.

Packed breakfasts and micro lunches

Most hotels offer packed breakfasts now so you can still enjoy some of the buffet treats on the go. You can also take pre-packed micro-lunches with you (three small meals, rather than one big lunch), which will help avoid hunger pangs, indigestion, and the temptation to overeat.

Get a mini-fridge in your room

If you can withstand the siren call of late-night Pringles, get a room with a mini-fridge. Having somewhere to store whatever you picked up at the local bakery, deli or supermarket is invaluable. Or if you want to stick to your normal diet hotel staff are usually happy to empty the fridge before you arrive and then help you stock up on the basics.
How to eat well when travelling for work (continued)

Self-catered apartments for longer trips

If you’re going to be travelling for more than 2-3 days, consider booking a self-catered apartment. Even if the conference or event you’re travelling for provides catering, home-cooked food tends to be healthier than mass-produced meals. Having your own kitchen will also give you more freedom when planning your evenings; whether you want to check out a new city or just whip up a quick bowl of pasta and fine-tune tomorrow’s presentation.

Check out your hotel’s restaurant

If you’re booked to stay near an airport or conference centre you’ll be well set up for work, but maybe lacking for choice when it comes to local eateries. The good news is that hotels - especially those that cater to business travellers - know that healthy, hearty food is just as important as an overflowing breakfast buffet or epic five course dining. Requesting off-menu meals is usually fine (with a bit of advanced notice) and by searching for hotels endorsed for healthy food you can stay close to work and still eat well.

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The Checklist That Will Leave Every Business Traveller Satisfied

There's nothing more satisfying than ticking off the last item on a checklist - particularly when that checklist relates to business travel.

Any form of travel - be it for business or pleasure - relies on a significant number of constituent elements if it is to be successful. There's the documentation you'll need at the airport, the hotel details, foreign currency and lest we forget the passport. Neglect just one of those items and your trip could be ruined. However, for the modern business traveller, it doesn't stop there, because there's another checklist to take note of whose purpose is equally tied to a successful trip. It's a checklist that has evolved over the years and which now looks markedly different from its ancestors.

We're of course referring to the traveller needs checklist, which is designed to leave every business traveller satisfied that relies. In years gone by, it included the absolute basics; a timely flight, adequate hotel and an expense account that allowed for just enough subsistence without any frivolity.

The modern business traveller checklist is thankfully more dynamic and consists of just five requirements:

1) Freedom

Travellers are now inclined to unleash their inner consumer when booking business trips. That means reaching for their smartphone in order to find a hotel that will make them feel at home and provide easy access to local attractions (should they wish to extend their stay, of course).

Being constrained by the rules and regulations of traditional travel policies frustrates the modern business traveller. And this is for a very good reason: they often know of a far more cost-effective route.
The Checklist That Will Leave Every Business Traveller Satisfied (continued)

2) Open booking

Business travellers often know the best hotel at which to stay and the most reasonably-priced restaurants nearby. If they’re forced to abide by rules that dictate specific locations and hotel brands, the optimal trip is unlikely to be booked.

If you’re still unconvinced, research by PhoCusWright discovered that 43% of US travellers will happily step outside of their company's bookings channel if they can find a more convenient way. And why shouldn’t they?

There are a number of reasons business travellers want to book outside of the policy, but they usually relate to nothing more than convenience and a desire to travel efficiently.

3) Connectivity

We’re rapidly reaching an age where the internet is ever-present. It’s simply ‘there’, all of the time, no matter if we’re at home, at work or walking the dog through a remote, muddy field. As a result, business travellers treat fast internet connectivity as a commodity. It’s an intrinsic part of life, and therefore being hampered by poor Wi-Fi is akin to the hotel shower running out of hot water.

Thankfully, speedy internet connections are now available at practically every stage of the travel experience (even if you’re forty-thousand feet above the ground), but any that demand pricey hourly connection fees are to be avoided.
The Checklist That Will Leave Every Business Traveller Satisfied (continued)

4) BYOD acceptance

The Bring Your Own Device (BYOD culture has given many an IT manager multiple headaches, but the desire people have to bring their own smartphones, tablets and laptops into the workplace shows no sign of abating and is just as prevalent in business travel.

Those tasked with heading to foreign shores to meet customers and attend conferences need to be empowered to use their own devices to book travel arrangements. If they’ve installed the Booking.com hotel reservation app on their smartphone, why not give them full, unrestricted access to use it for work purposes if doing so speeds up the process and ensures a cost-effective booking?

With technology moving so fast, few travel policies can keep up. If there’s a better way to book a business trip, the likelihood is the traveller has the enabling device to hand.

5) Minimal red tape

Business travel shouldn’t be hampered by policy and process. Navigating through endless red tape isn’t enjoyable for anyone, and if travel policies can be looked at from a different angle or regarded more as guidelines than hard-and-fast rules, the modern traveller can continue unabated with a better, faster way of booking.

Don’t embark on business travel without this checklist. It’ll ensure a cost-effective trip and will leave both you and the business for which you work completely satisfied.

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