

Travel Tips from Alan's Forums

Alan's Forums, owned by "The Million Dollar Consultant™" Alan Weiss, is an international web destination where successful consultants from around the globe discuss marketing, ethics, fees, methodology, and scores of other topics. One of the most popular, as you might expect, is travel. Herein, then, the top tips from the gang at Alan's Forums on everything from laptops to limos, carry-on to concierge. This list was compiled by Forum member Donna Walsh and beautifully designed by Linda Popky and Stever Robbins.

If you'd like to join Alan's Forums, and interact with the "rock star of consulting" himself, as well as 500 other top consultants, visit <http://www.Alansforums.com> for information and registration.

QUICK TIPS

Go First Class

- Travel first class and get boarding passes in advance.
- Join all relevant air clubs and use their rooms—clubs will cost less than \$1000/year.
- Stay at the best hotel, in the nicest room, you can afford.
- Use limos, arranged in advance, not cabs.
- Use the concierge for all local needs, including restaurants.
- Treat yourself constantly. Buy things.
- Tip everyone generously.
- Remember: first class tickets cost almost the same as full coach; upgrades are readily available for frequent fliers.

Be Prepared

- Never schedule a tight appointment or connection.
- Deal with email morning and evening.
- Make sure your laptop and cell phone batteries are fully charged. Bring extras if possible.
- Take a couple of great books.

- Print out your boarding passes a day in advance using online check-in.
- Never book the last flight of the day.
- Have a great travel agent or put the OAG (Official Airline Guide) on your laptop or both. You'll be able to get flights easily when there are delays, over bookings, etc.
- Expect flight delays, especially during the summer. (Storms can wreak havoc.)
- Keep a 3-outlet converter in your carry-on. When flights are delayed and everyone is vying for the same outlets to plug in their laptop, you'll be able to plug yours in and maybe even make a couple of friends.

On the Road

- Be warm and friendly to the front desk staff at the hotel as well as gate agents. You'd be surprised how often they'll upgrade you if you're personable.
- Always ask airlines and hotels for an upgrade if needed. Don't worry about being embarrassed -- the answer was already "no" before you asked anyway.
- Use airlines/hotels/car rentals exclusively whenever possible. The loyalty you can create can make a difference in your travel.
- Always pay for extra travel insurance, unless you can reserve with a credit card that provides its own insurance.
- Do not pay the extra insurance fees on car rentals. This is a waste. Most decent auto insurance policies cover you for rentals. Many credit cards also cover this feature.
- If you go to the same place frequently, use the same limo service and driver.

On the Fly

- Airplane window seats are better than aisle seats, as long as you don't require frequent bathroom trips and aren't bothered by the surroundings.
- Invest in noise-canceling headphones. And, if you purchase the amazing Bose headphones, they come with the little gadget that plugs into the airline sound system and allows you to use your own headphones. Quite a treat.
- Avoid red-eye flights anymore.
- Buy a good roll-aboard that you can carry on.
- When you get to the airport, ask the gate if an exit row seat is available.
- Get to know the restaurants at each airport.

Pack Smart

- Wear low maintenance travel clothes. Easy on/off shoes, no excessive metals on belts, wrinkle resistant clothing will make travel easier.

- Use carry-on. Keep liquids small or use the hotel amenities.
- Put toiletries in a fold-up or roll-up so you can just hang it up instead of having to pack and unpack all of your little bottles.
- Buy a bundle of the same socks. You will always have a match.
- Use dry cleaning plastic for clothes you don't want to wrinkle.
- If you use the hotel iron, check the bottom of it before using.
- Both MBT and Dansko now make stylish comfortable shoes that are great for travel.

Be Smart

- Try not to walk anywhere alone.
- Drink plenty of water.
- Carry a phone card in case there is poor cell phone reception.
- Arrive early or depart late and combine with some life balance moments. Take time to sightsee or visit local museums.
- Post your request for suggestions on a trusted forum such as this one and you'll be amazed with the ideas you will gain for your trips!

PACKING LIST RECOMMENDATIONS

Create a personalized packing checklist. Keep it updated and print out a new copy each time you pack. Some of these items are particularly useful during the flight (see list on next page).

Small Messenger Bag

Depending on the other bags/luggage you're carrying, consider getting a small travel messenger bag like this (see <http://tinyurl.com/yszkaab>). They're great for organizing and carrying all the small things you need to easily access during various stages of travel (see the packing list suggestions above for some ideas).

Before you get to the security line, place your belt and ALL the stuff out of your pockets, except ID and boarding pass, in the bag. It's much easier sending the bag through the x-ray than filling up plastic bowls and returning everything to your pockets. Unless you're using a computer in-flight, the bag can hold everything you really need during the flight, and it will easily fit in the seat-back pocket or under the seat in front, leaving plenty of room to stretch out your legs. Women call this a purse.

Packing List

☐ Shoehorn	☐ Priority envelopes	☐ Charged iPod + cable	☐ Sign for eyeshade: "Do not wake for food."
☐ Checks	☐ Printed one-sheets	☐ Travel converter	☐ Pre-measured instant oatmeal & powdered milk, bananas, Splenda
☐ Ethernet cables	☐ Lots of plastic folders	☐ Treo + charger	☐ Moisturizer (cabin air is very dry)
☐ Hand sanitizer	☐ Small notebook (e.g., a Moleskin reporter's notebook)	☐ Workout clothes and sneakers	☐ Compression socks
☐ Dental floss	☐ Books	☐ Swimsuit, goggles, cap, stopwatch	☐ A "lights out" sleeping mask
☐ Water in a bottle	☐ Wallet	☐ One valid ID in each bag, and photocopies of all IDs in each.	☐ Mack's silicone ear-plugs for sleep
☐ Lip balm	☐ Credit cards	☐ Nailbrush	☐ Cell phone
☐ Pens and highlighter	☐ Keys	☐ Nail file	☐ Mints
☐ Sharpie	☐ Paper union card	☐ Tweezers	☐ Tickets/boarding pass
☐ Post it pad	☐ Paper with all travel details	☐ Makeup	☐ Copy of hotel reservation
☐ Press kits	☐ Schedule	☐ Pearl earrings	☐ Copy of map from airport to hotel
☐ Envelopes	☐ Phone#, addresses, and files you'll need at your destination	☐ Small foldable rain-coat	☐ Headphone
☐ Labels	☐ Computer (fully charged)	☐ Superglue	☐ Glasses
☐ Return labels	☐ Cable for computer (in Ziploc bag, easy to grab and toss into suitcase)	☐ Masking tape	☐ Belt
☐	☐	☐	☐
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MISCELLANEOUS MUSINGS

Send it FedEx

For longer trips that require a larger suitcase, I also like Alan's idea to Fed-Ex luggage to the hotel instead of checking bags. Have a FedEx account pre-set up for sending things back and forth. You can do this all online and have them pickup at the hotel front desk without paying extra fees to the hotel.

Let Someone Else Drive

At first it felt like splurging to have someone come pick me up and take me to the airport. This has been the absolute best thing I've done. I cannot tell you how much simple relief I got after crazy traveling trips to have a driver waiting at the curb, taking my luggage and then sinking back into the leather seat of the Town Car as he drove home. And, most of the time it's actually cheaper than paying to park my car at the airport!

That Feels Good!

This is my quirky recommendation: Some airports have massage bars. I arrive with enough time to have a half-hour chair massage before boarding my flight. It's relaxing, counteracts the anxiety of airport rushing and dealing with lots of people, and I always feel better. Even under the best travel circumstances, I find all the jostling, hotel beds, etc., take a toll on my body. I really look forward to the massage when I know I have a trip coming up.

Time Your Travel

Personally, I like to travel in the middle of the day, effectively "wasting" an entire day per leg. I found the wear and tear of getting very early or late trips, with the additional stress of any connection you might miss, to be inefficient. What I do instead is travel at my leisure (driving as little as possible myself), take extra good care of myself, make sure I have access to business lounges, and grant myself some downtime on top of that. Why? I take study material I'm working on with me, my (lightweight!) laptop, and I find these moments extremely inspirational. I get good ideas for papers I am writing, I reflect on my business and life, and find these 'lost' days to be my most productive in terms of important but not urgent activities.

Try the Train

My "ultimate" goal in traveling is to use my time efficiently, not to get to my destination quickly. I lose the most time in "interfacing" (making connections), so I focus on alleviating that difficulty. As an example, on the East Coast I travel by Acela Express (even from Washington to Boston), never by plane. The front Business car is quiet (First class isn't!!), and I don't mind bringing my own food.

Treat People Right

If you are coming and going to the same hotel, one simple tip that has worked well for me is to smile at the hotel front desk folks and be cordial. There are generally the same 2-5 people working the desk, and after you keep appearing on a regular basis they'll get to know you and provide nicer rooms, cancel without fees, or handle your future bookings. Plus, it's nice to have a familiar smiling face when on the road. Unfortunately many business travelers seem to feel the need to abuse customer service staff.

Get the Points

Also stay at a hotel chain that has hotels you would likely use on vacation, etc. and join their point program. I particularly like Starwood (Westin, St. Regis, W Hotels, Sheraton, etc.).

Valet Parking

My airport offers valet parking. It's only a two-minute walk to the terminal and you never lose your car. The drive to the airport is 30 minutes consistently, and I find it easier than getting a hired car.

If the Shoe Fits...

Always bring a shoehorn, plastic is best, and keep it in your briefcase. When you take your shoes off during long trips your feet swell, and you don't want to ruin your shoes or break a nail trying to get your shoes back on. It is also a big help after you pass through security. I zip mine out and put my shoes on without crushing the backs.

Don't Leave Home Without It

One of the benefits of American Express Platinum is a virtual travel agent (if I may use that term) to set up flights, respond to flight cancellations, etc.

I don't use Platinum day-to-day, but for the extraordinary: Getting a free companion first class ticket, securing a special suite in a hotel, getting into a restaurant that "has no openings," etc. I also know that if I merely say "I want the best suite in the finest hotel in St. Bart's," I will get it without doing any other work or checking. All Platinum room reservations come with amenities, such as late checkout, free breakfast or lunch, etc.

A Vote for Orbitz

I've been doing a fair amount of traveling recently and found that Orbitz and the like are great for inexpensive, static situations (I'm going to Grandma's on this date and plan to come back on this date) but are time-consuming to use and not really set up for last minute business schedule changes.

Make the List, Check it Twice

Before I travel I make a list of all the clients/contacts I may want to call and write down their names and phone numbers on a card I can keep in my pocket. That way when I'm in the limo, driving, hanging out at the airport, etc., I already know who I want to call and I don't have to go fishing around in any system (electronic or paper) for their number.

I'm in Your Neighborhood

Review your clients / prospects list, send them an email letting them know you are visiting their city, suggest you get together to catch up and share with them some of your clients' most successful best practices.

Longer but Fewer Trips

One- or two-day trips are as much hassle as week-long trips - in some ways, even more. You have as much down time at airports, etc., even if the flight itself is very short. Bring enough things to do (work or personal) to make the time valuable. I also enjoy the chair massages where possible, but if you don't have time for that, find other ways to make the time pass usefully. If possible, make one 3-day trip rather than 2 one-day trips.

No Plane, No Pain

Whenever possible, avoid airports entirely. The train is definitely a great way to go on the East Coast, and there are none of those air traffic delays either.

TSA Tips

When you do need to fly, be VERY nice to the TSA (Transportation Security Administration) folks. Smile at them and make eye contact. My experience is that they will then be at least cordial to you.

Files on the Go

Bring a small USB flash drive with you; they're really cheap these days. This makes it easy to get documents printed/copied, etc., at the hotel's business center or the local FedexKinkos. Also, FedexKinkos has an online utility that allows you to send a document right from MSFT Office to a local Kinkos for printing.

Fuel for Thought

Take the advance fuel purchase option on car rentals. Much easier than searching for a gas station for a fill up, and significantly less expensive than having the rental people fill it for you. If you intend to use more than 1/4 tank of gas, it's worth it. If you think you'll use less than that, then why are you renting the car in the first place? Use a cab or limo to get you back and forth.

Off Airport Parking

For short trips, I actually prefer taking my car to the airport, because it gives me more flexibility. However, I have a preferred off-parking vendor and I am in their frequent traveler program. They take me to/from the terminal and when I get my luggage, I call them. They have the car ready to go for me when I arrive at their location, the charges have already been put on my credit card, and they put the luggage in the car for me. They have also reserved space for their frequent travelers on holidays when other places are full. If you have to drive to the airport, find someone like this. NEVER park in the airport's long-term parking lot. You will drive around for hours in their bus while they hit every single stop in front of you.

Play Favorites

Find car rentals, hotels, airlines, etc., that suit you, then give them your business so you get special service and they get to know you. If you expect to be going to one place on a regular basis, ask for the manager on your first trip. Tell them you expect to be coming to their location regularly and ask what they could do for you as a regular visitor. This will give them a heads-up that they should take good care of you. If they don't, go somewhere else. If you expect to be coming back very soon (like within a week), ask them if they can store some of your stuff so you don't need to carry it back and forth.

Bags are Packed, and Ready to Go

Buy travel "stuff" and keep it packed and ready. This includes small sizes of toothpaste, shampoo, etc., as well as other things that might be helpful for you, such as travel chargers, headphones, etc. Keep these ready to go so you don't have to go looking for them. Ziploc bags are your friend. I always have a couple of extras of various sizes in the bottom of a suitcase. You never know when you need them.

Snack Well

I pack a few of my favorite tea bags, healthy snacks (energy bars), etc. This prevents me from indulging in the overpriced mini bars and hotel breakfasts.

It's a Small World

Buy little refillable bottles from a camping store like REI or EMS for things like hair gel, etc. It's not really to be frugal as much as it is so that I can quickly refill essential toiletries from the big bottle at home without constantly worrying about running through the little travel bottles that are saving us from the terrorists (I think?). You can see through them and know when you're low.

Make the Cellular Connection

Invest in a cellular modem for your laptop. Just about all of the major carriers have them w/rebate specials. Saves you from searching for Starbucks and other hotspots while you travel and makes you productive on a laptop no matter where you are. The monthly charge is not much more than a T-Mobile account.

Treo Power

Actually, this is another reason for a Treo. (I'm sure other smart-phones can do this?) My 700p connects to my laptop as a broadband modem (via a utility called PDAnet), and does it quite well, nearly full broadband speed.

Bluetooth

On the modem thing, if you're so inclined, most GSM (Global Systems for Mobile Communications) phones (i.e. T-Mobile and Cingular) with Bluetooth can act as a modem if your laptop has Bluetooth and you have data service on your phone. It's a little nerdy to setup, but one less gadget to carry and lose, and you don't need another monthly fee from your carrier.

Staying Calm, Cool and Collected

I bring knitting with me on all of my trips. The rhythmic, repetitive activity is very calming and relaxing. Combine that with my noise-canceling headphones and my iPod, and a cross-country plane trip is practically a meditation retreat. It also gives me something to do in the evenings away from home. As a bonus, any other knitter seated in the waiting area will notice and ask about my project, creating wonderful moments of spontaneous connection. Simple patterns are best. And circular needles don't get lost underneath the seats.

USEFUL LINKS

The Philadelphia Inquirer Travel section had an interesting article re: perceptions of American travelers in other countries. The article referenced a resource, World Citizens Guide. You can download a free abridged version for Americans traveling abroad. You can also sign up for a "soon to be available" travel guide for Business Travelers. The first 30,000 copies will be free. After that the guide will be available for a modest fee.

Here is the link: <http://www.worldcitizensguide.org>

For international travel, buy an ID & boarding pass holder:

http://www.ebags.com/travelon/id_and_board...fm?modelid=9546

Essentials for safe, comfortable and easier travel (includes travel checklists)

<http://www.christinecolumbus.com>

World Clock (Time zones worldwide): <http://www.timeanddate.com/worldclock/>

Universal Currency Converter: <http://www.xe.com/ucc/>

Do not look back on happiness or dream of it in the future.

You are only sure of today; do not let yourself be cheated out of it.

— Henry Ward Beecher

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