

PLANES, TRAINS and AUTOMOBILES

Whether you regularly travel for business or you're contemplating taking key staff to an out of town conference, the last thing you need is to be bogged down with the detail. **Briar Jenson** canvasses key steps to put the pleasure back into travelling for business – whether it's by air, rail or road!

business travel

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determine if online booking is cost effective, especially for complex itineraries.

While online discounts are available, the time spent sourcing and comparing deals, terms and conditions for both transport and accommodation can be expensive.

As Greg Dixon of Flight Centre's corporate division says: "A non-aligned, proactive travel manager will do all the legwork for you and offer choice."

However, as more efficient websites appear offering the full range of travel services (flights, car rental, accommodation) and web-based comparisons between suppliers, the time factor may reduce dramatically.

Come fly with me

The price competition between domestic carriers makes it hard to know if you are getting the best deal, so always ask for the 'best fare of the day', but ensure the ticket conditions allow the flexibility you require.

Qantas Airways' instant-purchase, flexi-saver fares, while non-refundable, can be changed or cancelled up to the date of departure with a credit for up to 12 months. Combining different one-way

fares (within an airline or across carriers) can also save money.

Virgin Blue is becoming more attractive to the business traveller, with its increased flights, and plans for airport lounges and a frequent flyer program.

Business class fares are deemed not worth the expense for short interstate journeys, unless you have an important meeting straight afterwards. However, they are seen as a good investment for long haul flights, especially now that sleeper seats are available on several international airlines.

Working on the railroad

Only 2.0 per cent of domestic business travellers use rail transport according to a recent Diners Club survey. With the cost of an XPT ticket between Sydney and Melbourne at \$110 economy, \$154 first class and \$231 sleeper, it is understandable that travellers prefer a 1.5-hour flight to 10.5 hours on a train.

Yet trains can be a great way to get around overseas, particularly in Europe.

When travelling by train go for the best class available. Request recliner seats or sleeper compartments for overnight trips.

Travel light as some stations don't have porters or trolleys. Large

Glenn Buckingham is the chief executive officer at the Australasian Business Travellers Association (ABTA), which is a non-profit organisation that offers training for travel buyers. He believes all small-to-medium enterprises (SMEs) should seek assistance in preparing for business travel.

First and foremost, you should start by streamlining your booking procedures.

Choose a specialist business travel agent or travel management company (TMC). Or if in fact you do endeavour to arrange business travel in-house, you must carefully consider the time, resources and expertise it requires.

TMCs, with their global buying power and access to travel clearance houses, will aim for the best deal that meets their client's needs, whatever their travel expenditure, and can compare deals offered between companies of a similar size.

Appoint someone within your company to coordinate all travel arrangements and expenditure reporting and register them with the ABTA.

Of the ABTA, Buckingham says: "It will guide SMEs through the complexities of business travel management allowing them to better understand the industry and how it operates."

Regardless of how you book your travel, it is important to have a travel policy and most TMCs can help you establish one.

If reducing travel expenditure, try to maintain or improve the quality of the travel, as comfort and morale have an enormous impact on performance.

Agent or TMC?

Decide what you require from your agent or TMC. Services range from booking by calling through to a call centre, to direct access to a personal travel manager. Policy control, online booking, 24-hour traveller support and travel expenditure reporting are also options. Check if the TMC is aligned with specific airlines or hotel chains, as non-aligned ones will offer greater choice and note if they require a contract.

Source TMCs through personal recommendations, media articles, the ABTA or the Business Travel Agents Association of Australia (BTAAA). Check they belong to the relevant professional organisations and invite them to submit proposals.

If you want help choosing a stress-free way to manage your company's travel, then engage the services of a business TMC, such as Travelsearch Australasia. It provides independent expert advice on the range of support services available and advises how best to implement them.

Good communication is essential for a successful relationship with your TMC. Ensure they know the details of your travel policy and individual traveller's preferences and give regular feedback on their services.

Book it online

Online bookings by companies increased to 38 per cent in 2002 compared with 24 per cent in 2000, according to a recent American Express Corporate Travel Management Survey. Yet it is difficult to



suitcases will not fit in train compartments and must be left at the carriage entrance.

Sit in a compartment with other people. Keep your bag containing valuables close to your body, especially if you might fall asleep.

In some cities, such as Paris, commuter rail can be the quickest way to get around.

On the road again

Hiring smaller cars can reduce rental costs. Only choose larger cars for groups of people or if you need the power for longer distances.

Know exactly what documentation the rental company requires and make sure you have it with you.

Streamlined check in and check out procedures for regular business customers, such as Avis' Preferred Service Program, means no waiting in queues to collect cars and returning documentation is done in the car park.

Eliminate the stress of driving in an unfamiliar city by hiring a car with voice-guided navigation. Just key in your destination and follow the verbal instructions.

Whether driving your own car or a rental, relieve the monotony of long distance driving by playing your favourite music or talking books you can borrow from the library.

Consider hiring a chauffeur driven car if you have multiple appointments in one regional area, then there is no waiting for taxis between appointments nor reading maps in a rental car.

Some overseas taxis won't allow people to sit in the front, so the maximum number of passengers they will carry is three. If you are travelling as a party of four or more, a limousine or mini-van can be more convenient and economical than multiple taxis.

A place to lay your head

Define your accommodation needs, which may vary with the purpose of each trip and for different people within the company.

Anyone who spends long hours working on documents needs a room with a large desk and good lighting. A business centre may also be important. Those needing email and internet connections should ensure the required facilities are available (and don't forget your cables).

Consider location. Being able to walk to appointments or being within a short taxi ride is convenient and economical. Any saving made on staying at a cheaper hotel further from your work can soon disappear in taxi fares.

Ensure there is a meeting or conference room if you need one. Alternatively, consider a studio room, suite or serviced apartment where one room can be used for appointments. A suite can also suit small working groups of two or three people, though ensure each bedroom has its own en suite.

Decide what services you require, such as early check in, late check out, in-house restaurant, room service or your own kitchen. A gym or pool can be important for long stays. For group meetings check what the hotel offers in the way of team building functions and conference add-ons.

If your hotel room isn't suitable, ask for another one. Rooms next to lifts or restaurants can be very noisy, likewise a construction site outside your window. If you stay regularly in the same hotel, ask to see the different room configurations, then request the one you like when booking.

A bed and breakfast (B&B) with in-house business facilities can be a good choice for solo travellers who enjoy home comforts and companionship over meals.

Avoid prepaying accommodation. If you arrive to find your hotel is being refurbished or is next to a noisy town clock, you want the flexibility to be able to move.

If one hotel chain meets all your needs, then consolidate your business with them for further discounts. Use hotel loyalty programs and check if they link with your frequent flyer cards.

Rewarding weary travellers

Consider rewarding staff for the stress and inconvenience of business travel by:

- ♦ time at a hotel spa or other relaxation facility
- ♦ extended mealtime at a top local restaurant
- ♦ a free day or half-day to explore an unfamiliar city
- ♦ tickets to a local theatre production

Ensure you're covered

Make sure your insurance covers all your needs. As well as appropriate health cover for your destination (which may need to include medical evacuation), consider what other options you require, such as replacement of a stolen laptop or the travel costs of replacing a sick team member. Check if your policy covers terrorism.

Health, safety and security tips

- ♦ Check latest travel warnings from the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade and have necessary vaccinations.
- ♦ Write your company address, not home address, on luggage labels. Record on the inside of luggage as well.
- ♦ Lock luggage to deter pickpockets.

- ♦ Count luggage in and out of taxis, trains, security conveyors and carousels and never leave it unattended.
- ♦ Never leave valuables in hotel rooms. Use the safety deposit box.
- ♦ Don't use 'clean my room' signs as they imply the room is empty.
- ♦ Beware of anyone who bumps you, asks for directions or approaches to beg. They can pilfer your bag or pocket while you are momentarily distracted.
- ♦ Keep a tight hold on your possessions in public transport and wear your backpack on your front.
- ♦ Don't stand in the street reading a map, instead step into a shop.
- ♦ Don't flash wads of cash. Keep a small amount separate for little purchases.
- ♦ Take a medical kit. Include laxatives, anti-diarrhoea medication and prescriptions.
- ♦ Keep an airline motion-sickness bag in your briefcase.

Websites

- ♦ Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade: www.dfat.gov.au
- ♦ Business Travellers Association of Australasia: www.abta.com.au
- ♦ Business Travel Agents Association of Australia: www.btaaa.com.au

TOP 10 business travel tips

ONE Book early to get your preferences. Allow plenty of time to get to the airport or station and to check in.

TWO Have travel checklists so you don't forget things like phone chargers, laptop cables and spare batteries.

THREE Take all travel, accommodation and car hire reservations and confirmations with you.

FOUR Photocopy passport, visas, credit cards and record cheque numbers. Take one copy (separate from originals) and leave one at home. Carry spare passport size photos.

FIVE Take more than one business credit card in case one doesn't work in certain machines.

SIX Join all loyalty programs for maximum flexibility and benefits.

SEVEN Always carry water, a snack and reading material in case of delays.

EIGHT Take an alarm clock for train journeys or long stopovers where you might fall asleep and miss your stop or connection.

NINE Take several pens and keep some handy for filling in forms *en route*.

TEN Stay in touch with loved ones and ring or email them regularly.