



BUSINESS TRAVEL: BEWARE THE BLUR

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STOLEN MOMENTS

It is a very special thing to witness a group of heads of industry, senior business people usually in suits with serious looks on their faces and serious issues on their minds, coming together at the end of a day to discuss, with palpable excitement, their shopping and sight seeing excursions in Beijing. Now it is time to play, especially after all of the work at the rather intense conference that concluded earlier in the day. And while their left brains were sore, their bodies sleep deprived, their email inboxes bursting with messages, and their flights back to home base were not that far off, still their eyes and hearts were wide open with a wonderful, selfish impatience to explore. They were in Beijing!

"Where did you go?"

"What did you see?"

"What did you get?"

Stories are traded like business tips: Tiananmen Square has at one end a wonderful little pedestrian shopping district that has everything from specially cut Jade pendants (perfect for gifts that can still fit carry-on luggage) and carefully packed ceramic tea sets, to Starbucks and 7-Eleven. The Hongqiao Pearl Market, with its oasis of freshwater pearls, has the ability to turn beautifully composed businesswomen into jewel-shocked children. Choices, choices. Are these trinkets really necessary? Are they worth the trouble to carry home? Actually, whose birthday is coming up? Any thank you gifts needed for people back home watering plants or watching over house pets while they are away? It is a bargain. And, besides, it's good for the tourism economy. Yes, please add in the lovely gift boxed set of hand painted chopsticks. Xie-xie.

Like a window opened in a room starved of fresh air, these moments of local, personal interaction can be profoundly enriching. Why? Because they help orient business people to not only where they are, but who they are. They hit the pause button on the business mind and open up the personal heart. They pause to appreciate the blessing of the here and now.

They break the blur. The blur of business travel - it happens, so easily, unintentionally, yet often inescapably.

PAUSING THE PROGRAMMING

Of the one billion travelers expected to cross international borders this year, millions of these travelers are business people, traveling domestically and internationally, each and every day. Business travel has become a powerful, essential force of productivity, and identity. Not to mention employment and economic activity.

And, of course, a source of entertainment. 2011's film "*Up In The Air*", a movie that makes regular business travelers knowingly smile, still, to this day, causes business travelers to laugh to/at themselves – especially when they catch themselves checking the types of shoes worn by passengers in the security screening lines, before choosing which line to join.

Typcasting aside, the fact remains that business travelers, the 21st Century nomads with notebooks and neatly packed carry-on baggage, have become a source of global progress. The learnings of the losses to business growth when travel is cancelled during economically challenging times are now well understood. Business travel is a critical investment to business survival. Being competitive requires being there.

As a result, for this global community of business travelers, whether those traveling on-going or on occasion, live lives in which meeting requests turn into destinations, agendas turn into itineraries, time zones turn into standard calculations in communications. Have itinerary, will travel. With seemingly effortless efficiency (and often unspoken pride), airports are confidently navigated, lounges are casually entered, hotels are quickly turned into second homes. The business traveler programming, particularly in the case of lounges and hotels, kicks in: stand, scan for where to safely place personal effects (translation: mobile office with toothbrush in tow), locate plug-point, determine method of wi-fi access, open, click, wait for download.

It can all become a blur. Especially when a repeat visit.

This blur can, easily, turn travel from a blessing to a burden.

Which is why it is so important to not just look outside, but step outside.

GETTING OUTSIDE

As much as business travelers are put into the non-'Leisure' segment of the global traveling population, the fact remains that behind the boarding pass of the person who gets a buzz out of the constant business travel, and takes pride in being able to turn anywhere into a mobile office, is a person who also gets tired. It is a person who gets homesick, gets curious, and every once in a while, gets a craving to not just check into the hotel, but also check out what they see outside when gazing out their hotel window.

To have the world as a global office, as a playground of opportunity for business, is also to have the world as a playground for personal exploration, and connection. For some, it is standard practice to occasionally add on an extra day for site seeing and excursions. For others, the switching off is more difficult, as either there is simply no time, or no headspace. In the case of the latter, the blur is understandable. Sometimes it helps to stay focused.

But when there is a moment, even if brief, even if in transit, why not add some colour and texture to the grey area?

It can be so easy, if made easy by the destination's tourism industry.

Leading by example, Melbourne, Australia stands tall as one of the world's most successful business tourism destinations, especially for the MICE (meetings, incentives, conventions and exhibitions) sector.

The success of Melbourne goes beyond having exceptional facilities specially designed for world-class business eventing, and a high-performance team within the tourism authority

focused on maximizing business tourism activity of these high-yield travelers (spend being 5x that of leisure travelers) to maximize year-round tourism economy impact (directly responsible for 22,000 jobs and AUD\$ 1.2billion per annum for the state of Victoria). Success also extends to what business travelers are invited to enjoy of the destination beyond the business meetings and facilities.

As stated by Melanie de Souza, General Manager International Marketing at Tourism Victoria,:

"Conference organisers love Melbourne because it's so easy to get around and most city-based attractions are located within walking distance of the main conference venues. Take the new Southwharf precinct which sits on the Yarra River adjacent to Melbourne Convention Centre, here visitors will get a real taste of Melbourne at one of the many highly rated eateries that have opened up in this hot new dining precinct. World-class Crown Entertainment Complex too provides a quality range of eating, shopping and entertainment experiences all within one glamorous space."

Business travelers battling jetlag, or having been up through the night on multiple-timezone conference calls, and needing a good jolt of caffeine to keep them alert through the day, have a particular affection for Melbourne. De Souza continues:

"Business visitors looking for a caffeine fix won't need to go far in Melbourne. As a city obsessed with finding just the right coffee Melbourne has embraced the 'third wave' coffee trend to the extreme. Visitors can simply follow their noses or take a coffee culture tour highlighting the unique history and some of the quirkiest cafes."

FOLLOWING THEIR FOOTSTEPS

The trick is making it possible for business travellers to feel a sense of place by putting local experiences in a place that runs parallel to the well-trodden path of business travellers. All it takes is a little bit of creativity, and understanding, of these unique travelling types.

In the duty free area, why not create an art gallery to showcase local artists, and ask local musicians to come in to fill the space with the sounds that will warmly echo in the ears of passengers?

In the hotel lobby, especially at check-in points, why not fill vases with local flowers to embed a sight and scent that will always bring guests back, even if only in their mind's eye.

Why not create for guests a menu of 'things to do in an hour or two' – quick trips to local shops, galleries, eateries, localities to break through the blur, planting a seed in their memories and heart:

- local saree stores to see the silks on show;
- local mehndi artists to watch (and maybe have) a henna design done on the palm of one's hands;
- local tea shops to enjoy a traditional tea ceremony;
- local flamenco studios to learn a few steps;
- local sushi bar to learn how to make those so-loved delicacies;

- local souks to learn the spice routes of local cooking ingredients;
- local temples to observe, and feel, the local spirit;
- local cottage industry emporiums to buy some last gifts?

All of these little detours not only make an impact on the time-in-market of a traveler, they also work to magnify the benefits to the tourism industry with local communities.

And as travelers, feel inspired to ask " *why not?*"

If traveling only with carry-on, and the airport is not that far away, why not take a tuk-tuk to the airport instead of a taxi? It is quite amazing just what one sees, smells and hears when buzzing between the hotel and airport.

In the airport terminal waiting area, why not have a local foot massage before the flight? It is wonderfully relaxing, the softly wafting local music banishes the hum of travelers in the terminal, and it is a very a good thing for circulation when heading up to 35,000 feet. DVT (deep vein thrombosis) should always be considered noting the frequency of flights.

And of course, why not ask the world's greatest providers of destination insight– taxi drivers – a bit about themselves, their lives, their latest travels? London cabbies can be the greatest sources of learning, entertainment and holiday envy!

It's all about recognizing the faces, the stories, and the moments, that break down the blur into soundbytes that connect us to the here and now, the who and why, as individuals, not just as ' *suits*'.

Whatever the industry, however business travel purposes may differ, the hearts of business people are the same – they beat, and they feel. The greater the feeling, the happier the beating. And the greater the chance of them coming back, with their loved ones, to play tourist.

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