



## Tips for Innovative Meetings and Events (T.I.M.E.)

Topic: Fight or Flight: Travel Stress

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### Welcome

The meeting experience for your participants begins before they ever walk into the meeting site. The "meeting" begins the moment your participant leaves their home or office and doesn't end until they return back.

Here's a perfect, albeit personal, example: I just finished a flurry of personal travel. My description of my trip to Cedar Point in Sandusky, Ohio is not complete without mention of the flat tire and the 10+ roller coasters we rode. The same holds true for meetings. People view their meeting experience as including the travel to and from.

This issue of T.I.M.E. doesn't hold all the answers but does offer some tips, resources and advice on limiting the amount of stress associated with traveling to and from a meeting.

Sue

[Sue Tinnish](#)

PS I am always available to talk about my experience on the Magnum XL or Mean Streak roller coaster, for any coast buffs. Yes, it is true, Brittany and her adventures keeps me young!

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### Look of Stress

Long delays and canceled flights...traffic jams...inclement weather... harried personnel...crowds ...all these factors affect how people will answer the question, "How was the meeting?" And yet, seemingly, we have very little control over these elements. This issue of Tips for Innovative Meetings looks at the impact of travel on the meeting experience.

Consider the many ways that your participants experience stress. Professor Irwin Sarason and doctoral student Jonathan Bricker identified 10 significant causes of air-travel stress:

- Late arrival/departure
- Missed connecting flight
- Waiting for car rental/hotel/airport shuttle
- Waiting for car rental/hotel/airline check-in
- Wrong directions
- Baggage hand-inspected
- Crowded plane
- Got lost
- Trouble finding the gate
- Lost baggage

In addition, I add to the list:

- Ground transport to airport
- Airport security and check-in lines
- Difficulty sleeping
- Disruption of home routine
- Disruption of work routine
- Additional high-intensity work periods while travelling
- Unusual routine (health, food, and sleep)
- Unknown customs/protocol

For the people organizing the meeting, they experience all that stress and more! The meeting planner must also consider:

- Air Transit
  - Fares: The legacy airlines (American, Continental, Delta, Northwest, United, US Airways) could attempt another fare increase, after successfully rolling out a fuel surcharge, an airline expert warned just last week. According to Tom Parsons, CEO of Bestfares.com, a \$5 fare hike launched by American Airlines last Wednesday was matched by the other legacy carriers. Further attempts to raise fares could come as early as this week, Parsons predicted.
  - Threat of bankruptcy: US Airways Group Inc. has filed for bankruptcy protection for the second time in two years.
  - Convenience (fewer flights, fewer direct flights): United reported that it is

cutting many US routes and increasing its international presence.

- Impact of travel related problems on contracts: What is the impact on all your contracts of "curtailment of transportation"?
- Weather: The recent rash of hurricanes in Florida and the southeastern United States shows the radical impact of travel on meetings.
- Contingency plans: All these additional "stressors" add up to the need for your and all your supplier partners to have good contingency plans.

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## Down the Stress

However, there are some steps you can take to minimize the impact of travel stress on your meeting, conference or event.

- Evaluate your group. There is a vast difference between seasoned travelers and less experienced travelers. Consider how your groups' age will affect their travel experience, expectations and ability to cope with the stress.

Inexperienced travelers will benefit from reviewing travel tips. The Transportation Security Administration (TSA) site contains information about airline travel and security. Beginning September 20, 2004, the TSA implemented new passenger screening procedures that will increase the use of explosives trace detectors, expand the use of manual pat-down searches, and give screeners more latitude to refer individuals to secondary screening. [www.tsa.gov](http://www.tsa.gov) Additional sites that contain worthwhile information for travelers and cover air travel, car travel, cruises, and international travel include: [www.tips4trips.com](http://www.tips4trips.com) or [www.freetraveltips.com](http://www.freetraveltips.com).

Experienced air travelers are notorious for cutting their schedules close. When something goes awry, their stress level can skyrocket. Airlines generally recommend that you arrive one to two hours before departure for domestic flights. Note that most airlines consider you to have "arrived" at the airport when you reach the check-in counter area and not just reached the airport property.

- Plan your agenda with an eye toward travel-related stress. Distance, time zone differences, traffic, and delays can affect people's mood and exhaustion levels. Research conducted by Alertness Solution suggests that just a few lost hours of sleep combined with travel can significantly lower productivity. The study indicated travelers who consider themselves highly or extremely productive on trips are generally 20 percent less productive on the road.

Avoid planning offsite events on arrival days. Let attendees get settled into their accommodations. Allow them time to adjust to the pace of the program.

Participants perform best during midday, not early morning, which is typically thought of as the most productive part of the day.

At the end of a program, people will be eyeing their watches as they mentally and physically prepare to depart. Do not place important information during this part of the program. End on an upbeat note with wishes for safe, smooth travels.

- Serve as a calm source of information. While for large groups you cannot check all the potential details, be aware of overall weather patterns and travel challenges. The website at [www.fly.faa.gov/flyfaa/usamap.jsp](http://www.fly.faa.gov/flyfaa/usamap.jsp) contains a map with an overview of delays and conditions at airports. The terrorist threat advisory is shown on the Homeland security page at [www.dhs.gov/dhspublic/](http://www.dhs.gov/dhspublic/).
- Make contingency plans. Think about the unexpected and develop backup ideas for your group.
- Establish requirements for special needs early. Contact airlines, hotels, and other suppliers early about extra luggage, meals, wheelchairs, children, pets or other special requests.
- Verify directions. Verify that your venue's website has directions on the site. Make certain directions are easy to follow and correct. Verify that the destination is available on popular sites like mapquest.com, mapsonus.com or mapping services powered by Yahoo or MSN.
- Take extra care for international travel. International travel can be exhilarating and extra stressful. Prepare your participants (and their partners) for international meetings and conferences, even if they are seasoned travelers. Provide them with all the information they will need about travel arrangements, time zones, medical support, money and local customs. You can access maps and layouts of foreign airports at [www.freetraveltips.com](http://www.freetraveltips.com). Domestic airport information is available at the same website.

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## The Seasoned Traveler

Even the road warrior can benefit from these tips:

1. Assume you're likely to encounter travel obstacles and challenges. Adjust your attitude so that these inconveniences don't hi-jack your plans or cause you undue stress.
2. Before traveling, scan your documents (passport, itinerary, identification and vaccination card) and send them to yourself at your email address. In case of a problem, you can print them almost anywhere in the world.
3. Dress for security. If you are flying, avoid wearing shoes, clothing, jewelry, and

accessories that contain metal.

4. Pack for security. At airport screening checkpoints, put metal objects in your carry-on bag. This includes jewelry, loose change, keys, mobile phones, pagers, and personal data assistants (PDAs).
5. A great site for tracking flights is [www.virtuallythere.com](http://www.virtuallythere.com). The Flight Tracker shows the progress of flights and their real "wheels up" time. This website is useful for gaining an accurate picture of arrival times. It also is helpful to check the status of your plane on its inbound flight - before the same plane carries you to another destination to determine if there will be delays.
6. Place identification tags in and on all of your baggage. Don't forget to label your laptop computer. These are one of the most forgotten items at Screening Checkpoints. Do not put your home address or first name on identification tags.
7. When you first arrive at your hotel room and before you throw down your bags and collapse exhausted, take a moment to look back out into the corridor and remember where the fire exit is (in this hotel!). And - if you're exiting your room during a fire alarm, remember to take your key with you. You may need to get back in if your exit is blocked by fire.
8. Protect against Identity Fraud by insuring that credit card receipts in restaurants do not indicate your complete credit card number. Most establishments now only print the last 4 number. If the entire number is showing, scratch out everything except the last four. The restaurant's POS system already has the information so they don't need it.
9. For international travel, create a medical ID Card. Record your age, blood group and other relevant medical details. Laminate this information if possible. This will help you in the event of a medical emergency. Include a contact person and telephone number among the details.

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## Unseen "Stressors"

There are three unseen stressors worth also considering:

1. Allergies
2. Partner Stress
3. Loss of Productivity due to Sleep Loss

### Allergies

Traveling is very difficult for people with allergies. The hotel industry is beginning to recognize the need to cater to the 70 million Americans who have allergies. Some hotels make allergy-friendly amenities available on request while others are converting rooms to so-called green rooms that nearly eliminate allergens.

One version is a "green" room outfitted with devices that prevent allergens on several

levels. Three years ago Atlanta-based America's Best Inns & Suites began requiring franchisees to convert at least 10% of their rooms to Evergreen-brand rooms, a trademarked system of air and water filters. There also are Pure Allergy Friendly Rooms, an allergen-resistant hotel room system. Developed by a Swedish inventor of a duct cleaning system for cruise ships, the Allergy Friendly Rooms system includes an air handling unit, chlorine-filtering showerhead, air purifier and ionizer, and a patented vacuum cleaning system that maximizes the removal of dirt, bacteria and mold.

## Partner Stress

Spouses left at home when their partner travels frequently on business may suffer from increased stress-related mental and physical conditions compared to those with non-traveling spouses, according to researchers. Investigators studied health insurance claim records for spouses of employees and compared the frequency of filed medical claims as well as the diagnoses recorded on these claims between spouses of frequent international business travelers and spouses of non-travelers. Both male and female spouses of frequent travelers filed claims for medical treatment at about a 16% higher rate than spouses of non-travelers. Reported treatment for psychological conditions was greater in the group with traveling spouses, and stress-related psychological disorders were three times more likely to occur in those whose spouses traveled frequently.

## Productivity

Travel-related stress presents risks to employees and organizations for increased illness and healthcare costs and compromised work effectiveness.

One source of lost productivity is caused by the loss of sleep. In a recent online CNN poll of nearly 700 people, 80% said they have problems sleeping when they travel. U.S. National Business Travel Monitor found that 51% of 2,500 executives on the road said they did not get enough sleep on business trips.

Psychologists have now developed two phrases for travel related sleep problems: the "first night effect" occurs when trying to sleep in an unfamiliar environment. Then there is the "on-call effect," which is caused by the constant worry that something will disturb your sleep -- such as anxiety over hallway noise, a call from the boss or the hotel wake-up call.

Sleep expert, Mark Rosekind, president of Alertness Solutions, found in a 2003 study that travelers start out in the hole because they sleep less the night before a trip and that, on average, they get about an hour's less sleep than they think they do on the road.

The problem has led to a series of lodging industry programs to make rooms more sleep friendly.

"The fundamental value we provide is a place to sleep," said Kevin Kowalski, vice president of brand management for Crowne Plaza Hotels. While the comfort of the bed is important, it is but one factor in the total environment of noise, light and other factors. "We're focused on corporate meetings," Kowalski said. "We want to make sure our business travelers and meetings participants are fully capable, ready to go and charged up." Crown Plaza, in consultation with Michael Breus, a sleep expert who co-founded Atlanta-based Sound Sleep LLC, is nearly finished with a "Sleep Advantage"

program for all of its properties in the United States, Canada and Mexico. The rooms involved have not only been given new beds, with sheets and blankets in calming colors but also have soft night lighting, a sleep kit including ear plugs and an eye mask, drapery clips to keep out slivers of light and a compact disc with natural sounds designed to promote relaxation.

In addition, at least one floor in each hotel is designated as a "quiet zone" for Sunday through Thursday nights. To reduce anxiety about possibly oversleeping, guests are also told their room is free if they fail to get a requested wake-up call.

Sheraton Hotels & Resorts said last year that it was spending \$75 million on more than 70,000 new beds in 200 properties across North America. The Hilton chain offers "Sleep-Tight" rooms with a Sony "Dream Machine," black-out curtains and other comforting accessories.

Other hotel chains offer solutions to sleeping away from home:

- Westin's Heavenly Bed
- Radisson's Sleep Number bed
- Hyatt Hotels' Grand Bed
- Hilton's Suite Dreams
- Marriott Hotels and Resorts' Marriott Bed

The take-away: Don't underestimate the ways that people are impacted by being away at meetings. Consider your participant's comfort when selecting a site. Allow time for them to connect with family and friends who are back home.

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## Ready for a Fight or Flight?

Ready to win the "Fight or Flight" battle? I have assembled these resources for you.

Most of the books below deal with travel stress. And the last two address the stress accompanied by international travel when you are unsure of the protocol of the country. Recently, the Thai government announced it will ban foreigners from the kingdom who break serious cultural rules as laid out in an official etiquette book. The ban and booklet were a result of a row caused by recent controversies such as the movie *Hollywood Buddha* which depicted the film's director sitting on top of a Buddha head, according to the *Nation* newspaper. Thailand's foreign affairs ministry agreed to blacklist foreigners from entering the country as a punishment for previous indiscretions. "If some foreigners still behave with malicious intentions, Thai Buddhists should denounce these people or not allow them to enter the country," Ministry of Culture Deputy Permanent Secretary Kla Somtrakool said. Kla said the booklet would be distributed to hotels, travel agencies, airline booths, consulates and immigration offices and added that foreigners who made mistakes unknowingly should be forgiven. (from a USA Today online post 9/13/2004). Be prepared!

Use the following links to explore these resources:

[Arrive in Better Shape](#)

[Travel Fitness](#)

[Kiss, Bow, or Shake Hands](#)  
[Do's and Taboos Around The World \(Do's and Taboos Around the World\)](#)

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Freebies: Humor & Tips

**FREEBIES: Stretch your Way out of Stress**

However you travel -- by plane, car, boat or train -- there's no escaping lots of sitting. To avoid back, neck and leg pain, practice dynamic sitting -- a way of sitting that allows your bones, instead of your muscles and ligaments, to support your body. To sit this way: Slightly arch your lower back and distribute your weight evenly over your pelvic bones. Don't cross your legs. Keep your shoulders and abdomen relaxed and slightly arch your neck.

**More FREEBIES** International meetings have more challenges. If you are interested in more forms of travel stress and ideas to combat it, click here [I'm not in Kansas](#) or send an email to stinnish@ameritech.net.

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Future T.I.M.E.

I will be attending ROI Certification™ — The Complete Impact Measurement Workshop, a 5 Day Workshop offered by the Jack Phillips' Center for Research to provide hands-on measurement experience. Selected by Meeting Professionals International, I will learn how to enhance program results, measure the contribution of programs, and calculate return on investment (ROI). In turn, I will be one of the facilitators leading MPI's ROI II Platinum series programs in 2005.

I will be speaking at the following conferences:

[Minneapolis Chapter of Meeting Professionals International, February 2005](#)

[South Florida Chapter of Meeting Professionals International, February 22, 2005](#)

I love to see familiar faces in the audience. Please come and see me!

I would really appreciate it if you would forward T.I.M.E. onto your colleagues, associates, and clients. Just press the forward button at the end of the newsletter.

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T.I.M.E. Gone By

If you are interested in past issues, please e-mail us with the month and topic and we will send you a copy of that newsletter. Here's what is included in past issues [Back Issue Request](#):

May 2000: **Teambuilding** and (Freebie) New York Times Reprint On Teambuilding

June 2000: **Green Meetings** and (Freebie) Resource List Of Exercises

July 2000: **Values** and (Freebie) Meeting Analysis

August 2000: **Minimum/Minimal Meetings** and (Freebie) Web Winners

October 2000: [Evaluations](#) and (Freebie) Sample Evaluation Questions  
November 2000: [Politics](#)  
December 2000: [Toys](#) and (Freebie) Brainstorming Ideas

January 2001: [Sales, Award Presentations](#) and (Freebie) Sales Tips  
February 2001: [Change](#) and Communicating Change and (Freebie) Change Bombs  
March 2001: [Open Space Technology](#)  
April 2001: [Adult Learning Styles](#) and (Freebie) Learning Style Questionnaire  
May 2001: [Trade Shows](#) and (Freebie) Trade Show Timeline  
June 2001: [Emotional Intelligence](#) and (Freebie) EI Quiz  
July 2001: [Presentation Tips](#) and (Freebie) Speaker Introductions  
August 2001: [Ice Breakers](#) and (Freebie) Resource List  
September 2001: [Facilitation](#) and (Freebie) Problem Personalities In A Meeting  
October 2001: [Humor](#) and (Freebie) The Benefits Of Laughter  
November 2001: [Customer Care](#) and (Freebie) Complaints  
December 2001: [Slack](#) and (Freebie) Quiet Time

January 2002: [Teambuilding Options](#) and (Freebie)  
February 2002: [Promotional Products](#) and (Freebie) Case Study  
March 2002: [Multicultural Communication](#) and (Freebie) Multicultural Meeting Tips  
April 2002: [Outdoor Learning](#) and (Freebie) Justification Checklist  
May 2002: [Budgets, June, June, and ROK](#) and (Freebie) Budgeting Beyond Excel  
June 2002: [Creativity](#) and (Freebie) Building the Case for Creativity  
July 2002: [High Touch Technology](#) and (Freebie) Personal Technology Tools  
August 2002: [Economic and Business Cycles](#) and (Freebie) Investment Strategies for meetings  
September 2002: [Successful Environmental Factors/Conference Centers](#) and (Freebie) Learning Environments  
October 2002: [Return on Investment](#) and (Freebie) Balanced Scorecard  
November 2002: [Incentive Meetings](#) and (Freebie) Forum Synopsis  
December 2002: [Resource Recap](#) and (Freebie) Resource Lists

January 2003: [Everyday Meetings](#) and (Freebie) Meeting Quiz  
February 2003: [Diversity](#) and (Freebie) Survey Results  
March 2003: [Problem Solving](#) and (Freebie) Techniques Illustrated  
April 2003: [Marketing: Pre- and Post- Event](#) and (Freebie) Blogs  
May 2003: [Entertainment](#) and (Freebie) Storytelling  
June 2003: [Balance in Meetings and child caret](#) with (Freebie) Child Care at Meetings Tips  
July 2003: [Mobile Events](#) with (Freebie) Sponsorship  
August 2003: [Last Minute Ideas](#) with (Freebie) Audience Participation  
September 2003: [Training Meetings](#) with (Freebie) Kirkpatrick Challenge  
October 2003: [Unique Venues](#) with (Freebie) Experiential Checklist  
November 2003: [Data, Information and Number Crunching](#) with (Freebie) European Privacy  
December 2003: [Deja View](#)

January 2004: [Branding](#) with (Freebie) Identity vs. Brand  
February 2004: [Audio Visuals](#) with (Freebie) Speaker Guidelines  
March 2004: [Networking](#) with (Freebie) Networking Ideas  
April 2004: [Strategic Budgeting](#) with (Freebie) Budgeting Ideas  
May 2004: [Sensory Meetings](#) with (Freebie) Music's Impact  
June 2004: [Board Meetings](#) with (Freebie) Litmus Test

July 2004: **Leadership** with (Freebie) Best Meeting Leadership Behaviors  
August 2004: **Barrier-free Meetings** with (Freebie) Avoiding the Digital Divide  
September 2004: **Time Management & Meetings** with (Freebie) More Timely Tips

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