

Making the Most of Your Business Trip

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Whether you take regular business trips yourself or you organise them for your manager there are lots of opportunities to get the most out of your time away from both the home and the office. Since launching maiden-voyage.com in 2008, it has been my absolute passion to make business travel both *safe* and *social* for women, however much of what I share with

you here is as easily applicable to men as it is to women.

For many, a business trip is a necessary evil, something to be endured and whilst a budget hotel in suburbia is never going to match up to full conference hospitality in Vegas, my love for travel has inspired me to switch a business trip

into a mini-break when the working day has ended. Those days of spending an evening in a hotel room eating room service and working are long gone.

Safety first

Be it intruders or inappropriate telephone calls to hotel rooms, unwanted attention in the

bar, or more serious crimes such as muggings, robbery or drink spiking, we regularly hear alarming stories from women around the world. Staying in a strange city, perhaps disorientated through jet lag can leave you more vulnerable than you would be on familiar territory but taking some simple precautions and selecting the right hotel can go a long way to keeping you safe.

Preparing to travel

Take a moment to print out your travel itinerary, maps and directions and contact details of people you will be meeting. Keep a copy of your passport and important cards at home in the event of them being lost or stolen this will make it easier to get replacements or have your cards stopped. Leave details with family, friends or colleagues of where you will be staying. Remember to charge up your devices, ensure that you have enabled your phone to work internationally and take the necessary chargers and adapters in your hand luggage. Make sure your contact details are in and on your luggage but use a luggage tag that doesn't openly display your information.

If you are being collected at a busy hub such as an airport, be sure to agree with your driver what ID or correspondence they will have with them. It has been known for illegal taxi drivers to copy name cards.

In the hotel

Whilst serious attacks on hotel guests are very rare, there have this year, been two reported rapes of hotel guests whilst staying in top London hotels, both committed by hotel staff. Our number one rule every time, is to make sure the room has two independent locks, that both work and then keep it double locked all the time you are in your room.

For women and vulnerable guests it should be hotel policy not to allocate a room which is on the ground floor or at the end of a long corridor. Likewise hotels should have no reason

to discuss your room number publicly, it can be discretely circled on your check-in literature and it should be sufficient for the restaurant to ask your name and whether you are a resident of the hotel when you arrive to dine. In both circumstances it's perfectly acceptable to ask for a new room to be allocated.

Out and about

One for the ladies: if you are likely to be doing lots of walking (and airports can be huge), I often wear flat shoes and take my heels in my bag to change into when I get to my meeting.

On leaving a conference, remember to remove any name badges and remove your ID pass when leaving the office otherwise others could feign that they know you.

Be mindful of what information you are sharing about yourself and where you are staying when using your cell phone in a public place. Be cautious about wearing headphones, besides the obvious risk of not hearing approaching traffic, you could leave yourself vulnerable to bag-snatchers.

You will find lots more travel safety tips and advice on maiden-voyage.com

Now have some fun

For me there is nothing better than discovering a new city, so if I'm lucky enough to be travelling somewhere interesting I will often time my meetings if possible so that I can take a weekend before or afterwards to create a real mini break. A self-funded break, of course, but often flights spanning a weekend are cheaper than those taken mid-week and many employers are happy to be flexible if you are travelling in your own time. If extending your trip isn't an option there here are a few tips to help you factor in some leisure time.

Think about the location of your hotel. Aside from booking a hotel in a safe, well-lit area, is it close to the main sights, restaurants or shops?

I like to collect a few international pieces for my wardrobe, items that you can't buy in the UK, so I will research safe shopping areas such as department stores and check for late-night opening before I travel.

Get out your little black book or check your LinkedIn contacts: is there an old friend or ex-colleague you can meet for dinner? Dinner for one can be boring and many people find eating alone in a restaurant uncomfortable.

Online tools such as TripIt allow you to share your travel plans with contacts whom might be free to meet, or for ladies only, you can register your travel dates on www.maiden-voyage.com and meet other professional women for dinner.

For the health conscious, time away doesn't have to mean abandoning your fitness schedule, try and book a hotel with or a gym. Some hotels offer running partners and personal trainers who can accompany you out to a local park. If you are limited on luggage allowance, a swimsuit is nice and light and some hotels offer yoga mats and in-house yoga TV channels.

Time away is also a perfect time to book in for a relaxing massage, or attend to those "maintenance beauty chores", but remember to book ahead, hotel spas often have limited last-minute availability.

Me time

For those with children the allure of a business trip is often to just enjoy some rare time to yourself or simply have a full night of blissful, undisturbed sleep. After a long journey, it's actually quite nice to have a peaceful night in. So even if you do find yourself in a budget hotel in Suburbia, some mini-perfumed candles, essential bath oils, a facemask, indulgent magazine, good book or watching a film on your laptop with treats from the local deli could be a welcome treat.

about the author



Carolyn Pearson is the founding owner of maiden-voyage.com, a global, multi-award winning social network that enables professional women to connect whilst away on business.

maiden-voyage.com is a free resource enabling female business travellers to travel safely and socially through connecting with other women travellers. The site recommends female friendly hotels, travel safety advice, exclusive discounts, offers and events.

Carolyn Pearson will be presenting at the Office* Show in London in October. For full details please visit www.officeshow.com

