



Sun November 19, 2006
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Sun, October 29, 2006

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Avoid travel trauma

By Kelley Keehn



I've always prided myself on being a strong and independent woman.

To my shock and dismay, that identity was shattered in part when I travelled by myself for the very first time, at the ripe old age of 31. Previously, I've visited exotic destinations such as Bali and Singapore, yet I was surprised that I was nervous venturing out alone on my cross-Canada book tour.

Never before had I travelled without being accompanied by a man to look after tipping, finding the baggage carousel at a large airport or to look after a hectic itinerary filled with multiple small-city transfers.

Fearing that my laptop - my life, my love - could be stolen, I've been known to go overboard by carting the thing with me everywhere.

As I write in small-town Ontario, a fellow speaker just had his stolen out of his rental car. He left the computer on the front seat, with doors locked. He needed to buy a parking ticket from a machine just feet away. Fumbling for change and a slow four-minute stroll back, he found the car door busted and his corporate life shaken.

So what's a novice executive to do when getting ready for that last-minute trip and remaining safe and sound?

The following are tips and tricks that I've learned on the road from many gracious travellers.

* There's a reason the loud speaker at the airport wails out the message, 'Don't leave your luggage unattended.' This is useful advice not only for the airport. Watch taxis and transfers load your luggage each and every time if you don't want any left behind.

* Just finished a long flight, rushed to grab your baggage and now you realize you need to find a washroom? Use the handicapped stall. Don't trust leaving your bags even for a moment outside the door.

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* If your company has afforded you a hotel budget but would prefer that you cheap out on taxi rides from the airport in lieu of a shuttle, consider bucking up for the ride yourself. Especially if the weather is adverse, you're a woman arriving late at night or have a great deal of luggage.

Many upscale hotels have large front entrances for cabs and car parking, but the shuttles drop off passengers on the street in front of the hotel. The bellmen often cannot see you, so you'll be left lugging your baggage alone for some distance.

* Keep your "do not disturb" sign on the hotel room door at all times. Thieves may be watching you when you least realize it, and a room filled with electronics can be enticing. Never announce that you've left your room by using the "please clean room now" sign. If you need your room cleaned at a particular time, call in to the front desk.

* Take your valuables with you or leave them? It depends on how precious they are to you. If you need your laptop and can't live without it, take it with you.

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* Consider purchasing a small travel bag on rollers. For women, this case is essential because your hands and shoulders are free in case of emergency.

* Business travellers learn quickly that the most important lessons are not looking like you're new to a city and exuding confidence to ward off any would-be thieves or attackers.

Remember to always practice safety first. The extra time and effort is always worth it. Happy trails!

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