

Travel Tips for Event Professionals

By Traci Browne

I've been traveling to a lot of trade shows and conferences lately, and I think I've finally got this travel thing down. I just wanted to share a few tips to make a rather unpleasant experience just that much more bearable.

TSA Pre✓® (and for international travelers Global Entry)

The TSA Pre✓ application costs \$85 (non-refundable) and lasts for five years. This allows you to go through a special TSA security line where you don't have to take off your shoes, empty your luggage of approved liquids, take your laptop out of your bag and take off your light jacket or sweater. I've timed it and even when there are several people in line it takes, on average, 5 minutes to get through security.

To find out if the airlines you frequently travel on and the airports you fly through are part of the Pre-check system go to the [TSA site](#).

While everyone else is stuck in the cattle chutes, you, my TSA Pre✓ friend, will be in the party line with all the other "cool kids". In pre-check travelers are smiling, and the TSA agents are friendly. Your blood-pressure will immediately drop, and it sets your trip off on the right note.

Bonus: If you are a smoker and you find yourself catching a connecting flight, your life is about to change. Just got off a four-hour flight and only have 30 minutes before you have to board that next flight? That's plenty of time to go outside, smoke, and get back through security and to your gate with time to spare. Just make sure before exiting the terminal that the airport and gate you are in does, in fact, have pre-check. **Note:** *My friend just gave me a heads up that the fee for TSA Pre✓ is going up at the end of the month (February, 2015), so you might want to fill out that application right away.*

Checked Luggage

I always check my bags. I know this is the opposite of what many frequent travelers do, but I swear to you, it's worth it. If you've checked in and printed your boarding pass (more on printing your boarding pass later) prior to leaving for the airport, it won't take long to go through the baggage check process. Usually, there is a separate line at check-in for those who are only checking bags. I find it even faster to use the curbside check-in and it only will cost you a few extra dollars to use that service. (Don't forget to tip...as a matter of fact...give them a five dollar bill and tell them it's to make up for the jerk who didn't give them anything).

Now I can saunter through the airport carrying only a handbag that can hold my laptop, iPad, and other essentials. I am free to wander and roam (and I have time to do this because I got through security in five minutes). I can get a cup of coffee and not worry about spilling it because I'm pulling my carry-on bag behind me.

Bonus: Are you boarding in the B group and sitting in the front of the plane? Again, your blood pressure stays low because you're not stressed out about overhead bin space. You can saunter

onto the plane, plop down in your seat and tuck your bag under your seat. Now sit back, relax and silently chuckle to yourself as you watch self-important people try to find room for their giant carry-on bag.

Gate Check

Can't convince you to check your luggage? Trying to save the \$25 or \$35 checked bag fee? I really think you should try it at least once and see if you enjoy your unencumbered experience better, but some people are resistant to change.

Fine, pack that carry-on full of your stuff and drag it through security, and through the airport, and suffer 2nd degree burns when your coffee is jostled when your shoulder bag shifts and coffee spills onto your hand. Struggle to get into a bathroom stall and straddle the toilet just trying to close the door.

When you get to the gate, volunteer to have your bag gate-checked. I have not been on a single full flight where they were not begging people to do this.

Now, you've gotten rid of your bag; it didn't cost you a dime to do it.

Bonus: Most gate-checks will deliver your bag back to you when you exit the plane, and you don't have to go to baggage claim to retrieve it.

Printed Boarding Pass

I know we live in a mobile world, but I still prefer to print my boarding pass. Have you ever watched people using their mobile boarding pass? They hold up the entire line trying to position it just right so it will scan properly. Those of us with printed passes sail right through.

Those of us with printed passes also do not have to worry about dead batteries on our phones or dead zones with no reception if using the web link to our boarding passes. We don't have to keep our phones out when going through security, just a little slip of paper and our driver's license or passport. Lost the piece of paper? No problem. They will print another one for you at the gate.

Bonus: No one is giving the big sigh or glaring at you for being a dolt when you struggle to line up your phone with the scanner. (That person giving the big sigh and rolling her eyes is probably me.)

When things go to hell...smile.

Brandt Krueger wrote an excellent post about this, so I won't go into detail. You're better off reading [**his thoughts, "On Being Nice..."**](#). I read this a few weeks before a rather lengthy trip with several stops in several cities over a two week period. During one leg of my trip, everything went awry. Flights were delayed, flights were missed, flights were re-booked, and hotels were needed. It had all the makings for an exasperating experience to be sure. Not this time, though.

I channeled my "inner Brandt" at the first sign of trouble. I took a deep breath and put on a big smile and waited in line for help and advice from the gate agent. She couldn't do much, but she

did what she could. I smiled at the person making my coffee. I smiled at the person checking me out when I bought my gum and magazine.

Before I knew it, my attitude caught up with my face, and I was feeling relaxed about the whole thing. Delays are certainly a pain in the butt, but it's better than being in a plane crash, so I figured I was in a pretty good spot all-in-all.

As I pressed on through what would have been a very long, stressful day, I kept smiling, being super friendly and polite to everyone I came in contact with. I made it my job to make the airline personnel, who were getting abuse from everyone else, smile.

Bonus: What did I get out of it? Did Karma open up a seat in first class at no charge? No. I still missed flights, I still was delayed, and I still had to find a crappy hotel for the night. But it didn't ruin my day. I wasn't stressed out. All in all, it turned out to be one of my more pleasant travel experiences.

Nervous About Takeoffs?

I have no idea how I discovered this little gem, but don't look a gift horse in the mouth. After all the times I've flown, I refuse to become complacent about the wonder of flight. I pity those who've become so jaded and whiny about the experience.

After one particularly bumpy flight, as everyone was waiting to get off the plane, the person next to me said, "That was the worst flight ever." I replied, "I'm pretty sure the worst flight ever is one where you crash and die. We just flew through the air at 300 mph and managed to live through it. Don't be so cool you can't appreciate that."

Despite my wonderment, I still get a bit nervous during take-offs. Until I hear the three dings that indicate we are at 10,000 feet, I am a bit stressed out. What has helped tremendously with this is the ability to now use small portable devices during takeoff. I find that cranking up the volume on my favorite music helps.

Bonus: I discovered that the Talking Heads live version of "Burning Down the House" (Stop Making Sense album) is the perfect takeoff song. If you start the song just as the plane is driving down the runway, the drum solo kicks in just as the wheels are leaving the runway. An exhilarating experience to be sure.

Those are just a few things I've found work for me.

Traci Browne is a trade show and conference consultant with over 15 years working in the industry. She has been an exhibitor and an expo owner. Now she consults for trade show and expos on attendee and exhibitor experience. She's spoken at many of the industry's leading conferences including, PCMA, IAEE, Exhibitor Show, Business Marketing Association, and association and corporate events. She is a frequent contributor to print and online publications including Trade Show News Network, Convene Magazine, Exhibitor Magazine, Event Tech Brief, Cvent Blog (Award winning corporate blog 2013), Plan Your Meetings, and IAEE.

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