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## Air Travel Made Easier

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*A little planning can go a long way toward making your next flight more comfortable, more affordable and less stressful.*

By: MATT ALDERTON

Alicia Rockmore travels. A lot. She travels so much, in fact, that both the valet parking attendants and the TSA officers at Detroit Metropolitan Airport know her by name.

"It's a sad day when that happens," says Rockmore, who is CEO of Buttoned Up, an Ann Arbor, Mich.-based company that makes organizational products for women. She travels regularly to do product marketing, attend customer meetings, meet investors and visit family. She's all too familiar, therefore, with the headaches—flight delays, long security lines, cramped seating, lost luggage, carryon restrictions—that many air travelers encounter. Her key to survival: She plans for inevitable mishaps, and does her absolute best to avoid them.



So does Rachel Weingarten, president of New York-based GTK Marketing Group and author of *Career and Corporate Cool*. "I think that it's crucial to fine tune your business travel routine," she says. All it takes is a little extra planning and preparation, and the result is a lot of extra time, money and comfort.

### Save Time, Money

If you ask most small business travelers, flying is a lot less stressful on a cheap flight than an expensive one. It pays, then, to keep your costs in check. To do just that, Jim Cohn, spokesperson for Chicago-based [Orbitz for Business](#), recommends that consumers travel during off-peak days and times. "Travel is always going to be cheaper for the most part on Tuesdays, Wednesdays and Saturdays," he says, "and oftentimes you can find better fares late in the day."

Booking your flight early helps, too. "In most cases, booking in advance will help you find a better fare," Cohn says. "If you don't have to go non-stop, sometimes making a connection will get you a better fare, too."

Price isn't always important, though. Scott Eblin, executive coach, speaker and author of *The Next Level: What Insiders Know About Executive Success*, generally prefers booking flights according to their schedule, to save time instead of money. "I hate having to rely on the last plane or the next-to-last plane of the day to get home," he says. "You want some wiggle room and some fallback options."

Whether you want to save time or money, consider booking your flights into or out of [alternate airports](#), recommends John E. DiScala, founder of [JohnnyJet.com](#). Doing so can often save you both.

### Be Loyal, Get Status

Rockmore's first priority is neither price nor schedule; it's customer service. "What makes travel the easiest for me is being loyal to one particular airline," she says. That's because airlines reward loyal customers with elite status, and valued customers often get special treatment, including free upgrades, a 1-800 number that works, extra frequent flier miles and, in some airports, access to express security lanes.

If you don't already have status, Rockmore recommends contacting an airline directly with a proposition. "You don't have to wait a year to get status," she says. "Giving an airline a call and saying, 'I'm going to be a frequent traveler, what can you offer me?' is always an option."

Because traveling by air often means spending more time at the airport than on an airplane, Rockmore recommends getting an airport lounge membership. "It's a comfortable place, it's a quiet place and oftentimes they have food and drinks," she says. You can often gain access to numerous lounges using your credit card's travel program—Rockmore uses her [American Express Platinum](#) card—and you can often buy day passes, as well.

If you lack status, or you're unable to kick back in a lounge, DiScala suggests spending your time at the gate schmoozing your flight crew. "Be nice to everyone—especially the gate agents and flight attendants," he says. "Bring them a box of chocolate and watch the doors open for you."

### Come Prepared

Next to aspirin, perhaps the most effective weapon against air-travel aches and pains is information.

"Being an informed traveler is key," says Cohn. He recommends travelers take advantage of resources from airlines, airports and travel brokers like Orbitz, which provides proactive mobile alerts about flight delays, cancellations and air travel regulations via its [OrbitzTLC](#) customer service program.

"Do your research," Weingarten says. "Find out if any laws have changed, what size carryon luggage is acceptable, how heavy your luggage can be—in other words, minimize [surprises] before you even leave your house."

Of course, preparation isn't only about information. It's also about luggage. Eblin recommends both packing and dressing with airport security in mind, and says that developing your own security routine can go a long way toward saving time and sanity. To get through security lines like a pro, he recommends keeping your ID and boarding pass in your pocket; memorizing the TSA's [3-1-1 rule](#) and keeping your Ziploc bag of toiletries easily accessible; bringing a jacket and filling the pockets with your cell phone, keys and PDA; wearing slip-on shoes; and leaving any security-sensitive jewelry or accessories at home.

### Just Relax

Ultimately, having a stress-free flight is up to the passenger, and no one else. "It helps to show up with a reserve of patience," Eblin says, "because you're probably going to have to rely on that."

Rockmore suggests changing your fundamental perceptions about flying; when you approach it as a hassle, it will inevitably be one. "I use [flying] as my time to relax," she says. She brings magazines she enjoys reading and never goes on a flight without her noise-canceling headphones, which help create quiet time even in the most distracting environments.

Other tips for relaxing:

- **Book the best seat.** Aisle seats and exit rows often have the most legroom. If you're traveling with another person, Cohn recommends booking a window seat and an aisle seat, leaving the middle seat free. Middle seats are often filled last, and there's a good chance yours will be empty; if it isn't, you can switch seats with the passenger who's booked it.
- **Bring snacks.** At the airport, buy water and a snack for your flight. If you're stuck on the tarmac for any length of time, you'll be glad you have them.
- **Travel lightly.** Do your back a favor: Either check your luggage so you don't have to lug it through the concourse, or pack a single, compact bag that's easy to wheel or carry.

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