

travel

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Save Time and Money on Your Next Business Trip

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Five money- and sanity-saving tips from travel maven Christopher Elliott.

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Travel takes a lot out of the typical traveler, including time, money and precious energy. For vacationers, the investment is worth it: At the end of a long, expensive, tiring flight is usually a wealth of fun and relaxation, happy memories with family and friends and—at the very least—a good swimming pool.



For business travelers, the rewards aren't always so sweet. Crossing the country in pursuit of the next big sale is hard work, after all. And if you ask syndicated travel columnist [Christopher Elliott](#), host of *What You Get for the Money: Vacations on Fine Living TV Network*, it's certainly no holiday. A rewarding business trip, he says, is therefore not only profitable, but also short-lived.

"A successful business trip is one that's over," says Elliott, who is also ombudsman for [National Geographic Traveler](#) magazine.

Of course, before business travelers can come home, they must first leave town. Elliott offers these five tips for surviving when they do. Keep them in mind to make your next business excursion as fast, as affordable and as painless as possible:

1. Remember: There's no place like home. When you're traveling on business, according to Elliott, always keep your eyes pointed toward home. "Business travelers just want to get to their destination as quickly as possible, get the job done and get back home with minimal hassle," he says. "So anything that shortens the trip—or the pain—is given a high priority for the average road warrior." If you're prone to home sickness on the road, consider bringing a piece of home—photographs, for example—with you on your trip. And don't forget to call home often, as staying in touch can keep you sane when you find you're missing your son's baseball game for yet another meeting in Dallas.

2. Treat convenience as king. When you're on the road, train yourself to remember the old adage, "Time is money." "Time savings is far more important than money savings," Elliott says. "I think that's why airlines can get away with charging four times as much for a last-minute ticket, or one without a Saturday night stay—because they know business travelers will pay."

Luxury, adds Elliott, is meaningless for business travelers, so if you're going to splurge, he recommends throwing down for plane tickets that will get you home faster rather than another night at a more expensive hotel. "Business travelers are less price-sensitive than leisure travelers, and shouldn't splurge for the same things that vacationers would," he says. "The only amenities that matter are those that lessen the inconvenience of being on the road." Worth paying for, most regular travelers will agree, is anything that will lessen the headache of travel, such as a hotel with free Wi-Fi, or cab fare that saves you the hassle of having to rent a car.

3. When you can, plan. Unlike vacations, business meetings are often last-minute affairs. An emergency in New York. A hot sales lead in Phoenix. A trade show opportunity in Las Vegas. By definition, business travelers must travel where their business is—and when their business is. The result can be a hefty bill each month on your corporate credit card.

Because last-minute travel is almost always to the detriment of your company's bottom line, Elliott recommends planning business trips as far in advance as possible. "Travel companies—especially airlines—charge a premium for so-called 'walk-up' fares," he says. Booking travel early, then, can make your trips more successful financially as well as strategically.

4. Shop for "opaque" fares. If you must travel last-minute, Elliott recommends booking your travel via Web sites such as [Priceline](#) and [Hotwire](#), which specialize in "opaque" fares—named as such because you can't see the fare prices up front—and often offer distressed inventory at reduced rates. "Airlines sometimes offer last-minute fares on their sites, too," he says. Web sites are a good place to find car rental discounts, too, as are rental companies' 1-800 numbers. The best place to find a last-minute hotel deal, though, according to Elliott? "Frequently, you can find a better hotel rate just by asking at the front desk," he says. "If the hotel isn't full, you might be able to get a reasonably good deal."

5. Do lunch, not dinner. To save both time and money when you're traveling, Elliott recommends you do a business lunch instead of a business dinner every time. "Business lunches are better than business dinners," he says. "Often, it's the same entrees but at almost half the price. Plus, there's usually less drinking, and more business gets done." Also, doing a business lunch means that you can arrive in the morning and fly out in the evening, without having to spend the night

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