

▣ Rick's Tips for Frequent Business Travel

To Stay at My Best

It doesn't help my family to return from every trip ready to collapse. I do the following things to try and maintain my health and energy:

- I try to stick to a routine while on my business trip. Jet lag causes me to awaken very early but I use that time to exercise to counteract heavy meals and sedentary days. I also try to walk outdoors in the sunlight as much as possible to adapt to local schedules.
- Return flights can be 12 hours or more, in coach class. On the plane, I cocoon in my own world with
 - Music. Mp3 players are ideal. I love my iPod (a gift from my family – and to think I was skeptical at first of this new fad). I cram it full with music, video clips, games, podcasts and lots of family photos.
 - Headphones, preferably the noise canceling variety. I'll either listen to my iPod or to nothing at all – don't underestimate the level of background noise – and silence is calming after all the stimuli at the airport and in the airplane. I also use eyeshades when I'm ready to sleep—they look funny but they make a huge difference.
 - Paperback reading materials (I don't have a Kindle—yet...). I try to balance serious fiction, detective novels, history or current events, and self-help — it's hard to predict my mood so I take as many as my carry-on allows.
- I stick to a coming-home routine that includes immediate unpacking, a refreshing nap and a shower, then a special dinner at a favorite restaurant where the family catches up on news.

To Stay Connected

- I phone home, often. A cell phone from the US must be enabled (and capable) of working overseas; check with your provider. Or purchase a local phone along with a SIM chip. A viable alternative is to bring a phone card. You can buy a “virtual” phone card on the internet for \$20, and it works well in an endless list of countries. I developed a ritual with my daughter where we talk while she waits for the bus in the morning.
- There are also internet phone services such as Skype or Windows Live Call. All it takes is a microphone, speakers and an internet connection and you can call home (or at least another computer) for free, and with no time limit. As a bonus, you get very decent video imaging when you hook up an inexpensive web cam.
- When time differences preclude calling, I use email to exchange information and photos. I taught my daughter to scan and attach her homework so I can help her long distance. Opening a direct dialogue with your kids through email, IM or a social networking site can really enhance your relationship, especially in the challenging teen years.

- I have my family suggest books and load music onto my iPod. This gets me to open myself up to things I wouldn't normally choose, and gives us a lot to talk about as I work my way through their favorites. In return, I find interesting books for them to read about my travel destinations.
- When I have time to shop for souvenirs, I bring home multiple, inexpensive items that my daughter can give to her girlfriends and teachers. She loves that I acknowledge how important her friends and school life are to her, and she learns about new cultures through the items.

To travel on business when you have a family is to always feel torn between two worlds. Such are the demands for us in corporate America today: we must have a presence in overseas markets to survive in this global economy. However, you can use strategies to merge those worlds at least some of the time. The key is to balance a reasonable amount of structure in your traveling life with the flexibility to adapt to new cultures and experiences. See you at the airport!