

Travel Tips for Conferences

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This is a little companion to the other handout on how to get the most out of conferences. For travel within Europe there is not much to know. A few things that I thought worth sharing concern Visa applications (mostly for U.S. travels, unless you are non-European, but I tend to focus on U.S. travels due to the job market), and generic travel tips that can come in handy.

Visa

- Apply for the visa on time. It gets pretty embarrassing if you have to tell a workshop/conference organizer that you will be missing the event because you didn't get your visa on time. This is particularly important if someone else is paying for your flights/accommodation because then you can make a long-lasting bad impression!
- **IF YOU ARE EUROPEAN FROM AN ESTA COUNTRY: do not travel to Iran/Syria/Iraq/etc.** because you will NOT get an ESTA anymore! You will have to go through the usual visa application process (which takes approx. six weeks). I've seen one junior economist who missed a U.S. workshop because he had an Iranian stamp from two years ago in his passport. If you have to visit any of these countries and you are going to a U.S. conference or the job market later, factor this in.
- If you already have your ESTA and you travel to the U.S. after visiting said countries: I have no idea what happens. My best guess is that if a customs officer sees that stamp in your passport at immigration, they will deny you entry into the U.S. But this is something you should check beforehand.

Your flight

- Mind the layover! Even though some airlines offer such connections, a layover of < 1 hour is very risky. This is particularly true for connecting flights in the U.S. Assume you land in Minneapolis with 50 minutes before your next flight departs to Los Angeles. In these 50 mins you will have to

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- go through immigration. Immigration queues can be very long. My worst-queuing-record is close to one hour.
- go through security again (you need to pick up your checked luggage and check it in again after security, **don't forget this**)
- and if you are unlucky, you might be picked for a random bag check

and all of a sudden you find yourself without connecting flight to LAX because they won't be waiting. If you happen to miss a plane due to a random bag check, the airline will typically book you onto the next flight because that wasn't on you. In all the other cases, you are in trouble.

- Related to this, flying from Birmingham with Aer Lingus via Dublin or Shannon lets you save time. Due to a special agreement between Ireland and the U.S. you can go through immigration in Ireland and on arrival in the U.S. you will be treated like a domestic passenger.
- Pay attention to import regulations! You are not allowed to bring fruits, vegetables, or meat and dairy products to the United States. **If they find any of it in your luggage, you will be fined!** Recently an (American) passenger had received an apple on a Delta flight. She wasn't hungry at the time and wanted to keep it for later. While changing planes to her connecting flight, she got picked by customs for a bag check. They took her apple and gave her a fine of 500 USD. Avoid this.
- Flights from the U.S. to Europe are typically red-eye flights, i.e. overnight, arriving next day. Noise-canceling headphones, eye-mask and travel pillow (especially if you do not have a window seat) can hugely improve your well-being. These items are also useful on the way there because you want to be somewhat alive for your presentation!
- Become a member of one of the airline alliances (SkyTeam, One World, Star Alliance) and stick with their member airlines. There will be a point from which you accumulate serious miles, probably even enough to enjoy frequent-flyer status. This is nice! Even if someone else paid for your ticket, you normally get to keep the miles. Having separate long-haul flights with Lufthansa, Delta, and British Airways (all different alliances) buys you nothing. Membership benefits include: priority check-in, extra luggage, higher chances of being upgraded to business class, etc. depending on the alliance.
- For collecting miles, booking the cheapest ticket (e.g. via Skyscanner) sometimes does not earn any points due to special promotions or arrangements between the airlines and the travel agencies. It's a trade-off.

- It's probably asked for too much to research the aircraft you will be in. However, some airplane types have seats which you do not want to occupy. For instance, rows 20 and 21 in a Fokker 100 are pretty bad. This plane has the engines affixed to the sides of the hull's rear, meaning that a window-seat in row 20 or 21 puts you right next to them. It gets really loud and uncomfortable there.
- Be nice to people all the way through. This is **especially** important when dealing with customs/immigration officers. When you are jetlagged and exhausted from a long journey, it gets easy to brush off others. It comes easy but it's not a great idea. Not really related to anything here, but it fits in the general theme: be nice to people and people will be nice to you. Whether they are potential referees or not, it is always a good idea.

Generic Points

- **BUY HIGH-QUALITY LUGGAGE!** Few things are more frustrating than having to drag a half-dead trolley with broken and/or missing wheels behind you for a 26 hours journey. Unless this is your substitute for a gym membership, luggage is NOT where you want to be tight-fisted with your money. Do some research on what are good items/brands.
- It's worth downloading the offline Google map of the place/city where you will be. Having an approximate clue of where you are is better than having none whatsoever. It also helps to see whether the taxi driver is extorting money from you.
- Is your cellphone working abroad? Check this before. Otherwise try to get a top-up SIM card (you can find these at most U.S. airports, for instance). Also: make sure all your electronic devices are on full charge at the beginning of your journey. Note that some companies provide the opportunity to use your cellphone abroad at no extra costs. Three, for example, has such a deal for almost 70 countries. Unfortunately, they don't have Pakistan/Bangladesh/India/China/any African countries, i.e. popular field-work destinations for development economists. You get almost all of Europe, Australia/NZ, North America, most of South America, and some coverage in other Asian countries.
- If you happen to present on the West Coast, the time difference is substantial. If you have your talk the day after your arrival, it might get messy depending on how badly you jetlag. This is very person-specific but an eight hour difference is unlikely to not affect you at all. In this case, it might be worthwhile to start adjusting your sleeping patterns in the days/week before the flight to soften the transition.

- Pretty much any (non-low cost) airline will stuff you with food on transatlantic flights. This will come to an abrupt end once you get on your connecting flight. Within the U.S., do not expect food. On a flight from New York JFK to Phoenix Sky Harbor I got a 20g bag of almonds. Having small bag of cookies or other non-perishable (no meat or vegetable) emergency food items are a good idea.
- It's a good idea to have a small emergency box in your hand-luggage with
 - some cookies, in case you haven't seen food in a while and everything else is closed or there is just no way of getting something
 - ibuprofen (if that jetlag is too bad)
 - electricity adapters (if you have a long layover in Amsterdam or Paris you will need the European socket)