



Well I Did It Jessica Pettitt

Well I did it. I didn't consult the tri-fold emergency card. I didn't check for a parachute. I just sat in an exit row and nodded my head yes. I quit my full-time job to take my side job of speaking and consulting full-time and become a warrior of sorts. I jumped, leapt even, into an unknown culture of professional travelers and landed with just a little bit of turbulence. My landing at "Road Warrior" island has allowed me to see several things that I didn't notice when I was just a leisurely traveler. There are also some observations that carry over while observing the "Tourist" that still hold true. The following are my stories and thoughts and I do not hold American Airlines responsible anymore so-than the individuals involved.

I first would like to briefly examine the "Tourist" species on this island. This tried and true specimen personifies all that embarrasses the "Traveler" and should be discussed as a foundation. The "Tourist" appears to save up money and time to go a "big trip" as a once in a lifetime experience. This pressure to be the best trip seems to motivate the tourist to get the most for their money and develops into a strict itinerary involving complex checklists of sights, sounds, and attractions. The tourist may travel alone, as a gaggle of historic associates, or in a herd of genetic relations. The tourist seems to assume that everyone involved with each item on the checklist are aware of the arrival and departure schedule. This assumption leads often to frustration, impatience, and an overwhelming feeling of lateness. The tourist may very well be disappointed that the things appear different, strange, odd even, and can only be explained by justifying the familiar. The tourist can be an excellent source for maps, directions, and particularly obscure facts about major sites of the destination. It is with great caution that I choose to interact with members of this species. I also admit that I rarely interact with what may appear as the tourist pack leader and really aim for the slower younger members at the back of the pack.

When living overseas during my Peace Corps service, I became aware of the "Traveler." In contrast to the tourist, the traveler seems to have lower expectations that home comforts will follow them to their destination. A traveler may have an itinerary, travel in groups, or alone, and may exhibit disappointment and frustration. However, I find that

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the traveler is more likely to want to explore the new location, meet new people, try new foods, and stumble through new languages as part of the experience. The traveler may also learn of new opportunities and change plans, volunteer to be bumped from a flight for future travel vouchers, switch seats with other passengers, and may be more likely to have a less formal or an inefficient air about them. Due to unforeseen circumstances and at times planned detours, the traveler is generally good for stories, artifacts, and tasty morsels from the corners of the globe. I have found that as a traveler, if interacting with the tourist, there are times when I would take hotel recommendations down to mark areas where I didn't want to go near as I was aiming to avoid the tourists while traveling. It is important to note that the traveler may be a type of hybrid of sorts with many biodiverse anomalies that need to be taken into consideration as one decides to approach a member of this species.

Lurking in executive lounges, convention center meeting rooms, and hotel gyms is the "Road Warrior" species. The road warrior may have tourist or traveler roots and can immediately join either group. The road warrior is a complicated beast of knowledge, access, and privilege and can comfortably maintain conversations with the tourist pack leader as well as kick back with the traveler and exchange stories. There is even frequent conversation between road warrior packs and individual road warriors. Road Warrior packs seem to come from the same region or commerce community while the individual road warriors may represent a region or commerce community serving as a delegate of sorts. I am more of a "lone wolf" road warrior representing myself in all regions and I also still actively claim a traveler identity. Lone wolf road warriors may need to socialize with the other warrior types, travelers, or tourists and others may need to reenergize by being alone and quiet. Personality differences in the road warrior classifications range widely. I find that the Road Warrior, if open to conversation, is a great source for gadgets, tools, technological advances, and efficient knowledge of all things related to the art of travel. A road warrior is a professional with no boundaries, fewer lines, less peanuts, and many more perks. These perks are earned and deserved by many. When contemplating interaction with the road warrior species be mindful of boarding times, gaps you may be leaving in a line by talking to members of the pack, etc. Moreover, I would warn you to be prepared for the elevator speech. The members of this species have crafted powerful answers to small talk conversation starters. If you find the answer interesting and ask for additional information, remember you may be speaking to a

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professional speaker like me. Know also, that the road warrior can make it very clear that they are not interested in conversation with you. One last warning about the Road Warrior – never stand between a road warrior and an electrical outlet at a gate!

So, with the tourists, travelers, and road warriors navigating ticketing, baggage check, security, restrooms, shops, gates, seating on planes, overhead bins, connections, delays, cancellations, upgrades, drink service, emergency row responsibilities, and turbulence, there is bound to be a clash of some sort. This is where those college sociology and anthropology courses come in handy – empirical observation and qualitative data. I'm going native. I am taking my traveler identity and diving into the Road Warrior culture. I am new to this community and am learning quickly that I have a lot to learn. Being a Road Warrior is only part of this anthropological set of observations. It just isn't that easy. It is like expecting your luggage to be the first on the carousel, or the expensive weekend carry on bag to fit easily in the overhead bin, or that the driver of the shuttle actually knows where the address is that you need to be dropped off at... see it just isn't that easy. Being a full-time road warrior includes the land, air, sea, and then there is the ritualistic wrestling match between miles, stars, vouchers, and points. The traveling public seemed to catch on to not meeting your party at the gate. I even remember taking flights in Texas where passengers traveled with shotguns upright between their legs during hunting season. The airports have gone non-smoking. There are computers at ticketing where you can expedite check-in where you will need to know your own name, confirmation code, or final destination. Yes, you must disrobe down to the bottom layer of clothing (note not down to undergarments) and take off your shoes. Just go ahead and take out any and all electronic appliances and put them into a tote tray similar to my elementary school days mailbox. This is just the starting point for cultural norms of traveling.

It's not my fault!

I would recommend taking out the electric toothbrush as well – be proud of your dental hygiene! These things may seem basic and obvious, but not everyone travels often. Most importantly (prepare yourself to read this following sentence twice for more impact) anything not 100% solid like hair products, lotions, toothpastes, deodorants, creams, liquids, spray cans, must be screened. You are also limited to a certain amount

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of non-solid objects per passenger. This is what I learned; take a quart size zip top plastic bag. (This is bigger than a sandwich bag, but not the bigger freezer bag.) Cram in as much as you possibly can into that zip top bag. A road warrior has to be prepared for everything, so I have learned to include in my zip top bag medicine, eyeglasses cleaner, bandages, cotton swabs, facial tissue, and other similar items. Note, these items are possibly solid in form, but travel together with my other questionable toiletries. I keep them all together and “refill” when I am unpacking after each trip. When packing, this one quart size bag goes into my carry on bag. This way I can use my traveler skills and volunteer to be bumped for vouchers and still be able to brush my teeth. I am also prepared for weather delays, mechanical issues, or missed connections. Each passenger is allowed at maximum two carry on bags. I think of it as a work bag and a personal bag. I also pack an empty tote bag so that in emergencies, I can consolidate my personal items into one carry on in addition to my lap top bag. Wear slip on shoes that you can walk briskly in without breaking an ankle. When going into the security line, throw away all beverages in bottles or cups and put your wallet, change, pocket contents, cell phone, etc., into your carry on so that you don’t beep. Remove top layers of clothing for screening. Keep your identification and boarding pass (make sure it is the correct departure city if you have multiple boarding passes) out and ready for review even as you walk through the security screening machines. Think this is tough?; try doing this with children, strollers, car seats, wheelchairs, crutches, or walkers.

Have some perspective as well when going through security. Also, remember, once you have gone through security, you may not have time to exit again and return through the line in time to get your flight. You must check in from home, at an airport ticketing computer, curbside, or with an agent to get a boarding pass. I recommend doing this no later than an hour in advance. The plane will board half an hour before take off or earlier. Be at the gate ready to go. I have seen a great number of gate agents feel bad that they have given away passenger tickets to stand by flyers. Remember, whatever the situation, if it isn’t your fault, it is still your responsibility to plan ahead and know the culture. Lastly, recognize that most people, whether tourists, travelers, or road warriors are traveling because they have a destination for pleasure or work. Very few people travel on airplanes because they are procrastinating mowing the lawn or folding laundry. Most people will have a place they need to be that isn’t that particular line or gate. Ask yourself if you have done everything possible to speed up the process and, if not, accept

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responsibility for this error, learn from it, and move on to the next battle. Other folks have time, money, and protocol restraints too.

Heaven and Hell

Once you get on the plane, please remember that the aircraft is now an assortment of the tired and weary, the anxious and nervous, and the frustrated and impatient tourists, travelers, and road warriors. This includes the airline staff and passengers. Road warriors and airline staff are at work and have stuff to do. Travelers have signed off, turned off, unplugged, are ready for an adventure, or may be returning hesitantly to the rat race after many hours of no sleep, weeks of new foods and limited showers. Tourists may need a vacation from their vacation, aloe for sunburns, and an audience to show their pictures and videos. Check your seat number before you step onto the plane and then move into the row as quickly as possible so as to not create a traffic jam behind you. If I am putting one of my carry on bags in the overhead bin, I put it across the aisle from where I am sitting this way I can see it from my seat. Roller board suitcases go wheels first to save space. Whatever you want to access while in your seat carry in your arms as you get on the plane so that the rest can go above or under your seat quickly. The stuff in your arms can go in the pocket in front of you. Do not use the space beneath your own seat as this is for the person behind you. If there isn't a row in front of you everything must go above. Flight attendants do have limited closet-esque type spaces and will do what they can as quickly as possible to help you store your stuff. Checking baggage at the gate may also be a possibility. If you go with this option, you just have to remember to get it when you get off the airplane. With all of the rushing and quickness, I would like to state that everyone with a ticket and a seat assignment is going to get on the plane and the plane is going to take off at the same time for everyone. You rushing around will not make the plane take off faster. The only thing that makes a plane take off faster is each passenger tucking their carry on stuff safely out of the way, sitting down, and buckling up quietly. Another good idea is to pretend there is someone in every seat even after the plane is in the air. This way you are less likely to forget stuff in other seat pockets. Most importantly, you need to be aware that someone may be sitting behind you or in front of you. In front of you means that when you are taking stuff in and out of the pocket you are digging into that person's spine. Behind you means that extra 15 degrees you get when you recline your seat is chocking that person. Do three inches really make

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that much of a difference? I don't know very many people that fit nicely into any airplane seat for even short flights. So relax, rub elbows with your neighbor, literally, practice those fun in your seat exercises and deal with it. If this is really too much to bear, get up and walk the aisle (assuming the seat belt light is off). Some of these planes are bigger than my apartment when I lived in New York so take a stroll. I am amazed that the super tall folks, big athlete types, and us larger people, rarely are the ones that complain about being uncomfortable. We know it is going to be tight – so should you.

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