

Competition Travel Tips

Russ Ebbets, DC

Off The Road Column

One of the great things about running is the opportunity of competition travel. Because of the universal participation in this sport the trips may be local, national or international. That being said there is some necessary planning that had better go into this travel so one's competitive efforts are optimized.

In truth two things need to be done when planning to travel to a competition. First one needs to establish a preparation ritual that becomes repeated event to event. It's strongly suggested creating a permanent list of all the things one needs to bring. One should also dedicate a travel bag that is solely used for travel and keep the list in the travel bag. That way when it comes to packing the whole process becomes almost mechanical.

The second point is to plan your travel bag over a three week period. Admittedly this may seem like a long time but what it will do is allow you to critically think things through, things you need and things you won't. This should also help eliminate the gnawing feeling of "forgetting something" that can accompany a last minute rush packing job.

It helps to lie out the clothing or other personal items in some systematic manner, for instance items used from head to toe. This allows you to visualize what you need. Starting three weeks out allows you to modify your choices for practicality and comfort.

For local trips much of this planning will become second nature but when one makes a national or international trip forgetting something can be both inconvenient and expensive. For longer trips one thing to immediately figure out is how many time zones will be covered. For travel two to three time zones away there will not be much disruption in one's "body clock," but when one travels 6-12 time zones one can expect disrupted sleep patterns and meal schedules. Management and accommodation become the order of the day.

One thing that I have suggested is to wear two watches starting about three weeks out, one with the local time and a second watch with the destination time. This allows one to project how they will feel when they get to their destination. It also helps show that one's mindset is going to have to adapt. If one is accustomed to competing at 6pm "home time" and must travel to a different time zone that requires one to compete at 11pm "home time" there had better be some adaptation.

A final point regarding time, particularly with international travel is to familiarize yourself with a 24-hour clock or military time. Many countries do not use the AM/PM designation most Americans are used to and it would be both embarrassing and inexcusable to miss a competition because of mistaken time keeping.

Below are some other areas that should be considered when traveling:

Water – Always keep some bottled water within arm's reach. The excitement of travel with all the new sights and sounds can distract one from maintaining proper hydration. Bottled water also helps prevent So and So's Revenge. While most countries have sanitation standards similar to the United States it is not your job to experiment, it is to compete. Proper hydration also helps prevent constipation that will creep up on you if you don't maintain proper hydration.

Sleep – When traveling I suggest sleeping as much as possible, at every opportunity. This may not be how you spend your regular days but it will allow you to "bank" some sleep hours. While some may contend the idea of banking sleep and add that you may arrive at your destination sluggish, you will not arrive overtired.

Once at your destination get on their time schedule. Afternoon naps often lead to full-blown sleep sessions so initially resist them. Get up and walk around. Most people have more trouble adapting to time zone changes traveling to the East (i.e. – Europe, London, etc. from New York) than traveling West but when you travel over six time zones in any direction it will require some adaptation.

Food- Prior to one's competition keep it simple. While I fully encourage one to sample the local cuisine of different areas or countries it is best to do so after one has competed. Packing such things as peanut butter, crackers, cheese or some tuna fish may not adequately meet the required four food groups but it will hold you over in a pinch. Other pre-packaged snacks such as power bars or granola bars are also a nice travel treat.

Competition bags – It is a good idea to have a separate competition bag similar to the travel bag with its use solely dedicated to competition items and a list of competition materials all its own. It never hurts to have a few extras in the bag such as safety pins and pliers for the last minute emergency.

Clothes – With the proliferation of the Internet you can find out what the weather is in Timbuktu – now. This greatly helps your planning. Most people pack too much clothing. I've learned to pack three days worth of clothing and then wash what you need. It maybe only a sink wash with bar soap but with clothes semi-clean and dry one can soldier on. Pack an 8-10 foot length of rope for your clothesline.

What good clothes to bring is always an issue. What I have come to do is wear my good clothes as I travel. You can always get them cleaned or pressed what you arrive. Bringing an extra shirt or blouse can add much versatility to one's wardrobe.

Personal hygiene – While the contents of this portion of the travel bag will differ from men to women some common contents will greatly enhance one's transition to an unfamiliar location. Such staples as a toothbrush, toothpaste, hairbrush, razor and shave cream or gel, needle and thread, deodorant, nail clipper or nail file, band-aids, hand lotion, baby oil could all be purchased for less than \$15. and will help normalize things at one destination as quickly as possible.

Miscellaneous – Below are a number of things that have proven to be invaluable and don't take up much space or weigh much. One or two plastic containers with locking tops, a can opener, plastic zip lock bags, rubber bands, plastic ties, a game – preferably one that can be played with others like travel Scrabble or a dice or card game and finally two good books. I recommend lighter reading but also something you can “get into.” Travel affords hours of down time and you'll be surprised that what you might normally read in a week or two will be completed in two to three days. The opportunity to share books will spur conversation that will ultimately make the whole experience more enjoyable.

While travel opportunities are certainly exciting for many change can be intimidating. It therefore becomes of paramount importance to create as many common denominators of home as possible when one travels. The care and attention one puts into packing a travel bag will go a long way towards promoting a psychologically secure environment from which superlative efforts happen. It is a well planned effort that ultimately makes all the time, effort and energy put into any endeavor all the more worthwhile.

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