

INTERNATIONAL
Herald Tribune

Your trip doesn't have to be all business

By Sharon McDonnell

Tuesday, October 16, 2007

As work is increasingly making inroads into leisure time, many business travelers are finding ways to turn that equation around - combining their travel for work with time for cultural and historical sightseeing.

"Cultural tourism can be an extension of business, it's not just fluff," said Patricia Martin, a marketing consultant and author of "Ren Gen: Renaissance Generation."

"Today," she said, "a person's knowledge is the new currency, and travel and cultural experiences are two of the most enlightening things they can do, enabling them to bring new information and insights into the workplace."

Her book describes the rise of what she calls the "cultural consumer," who joins book clubs, attends concerts and possesses a renewed enthusiasm for learning, largely fueled by the Internet and a convergence of business with the arts, education and entertainment.

Joyce Sensmeier, a vice president at Healthcare Information and Management Systems Society, a trade organization, is one of those cultural consumers.

When she traveled to Brisbane, Australia, in late August to attend the World Congress on Health Informatics, it was her first visit to the country. So she tacked on five extra days before the five-day conference to attend a symphony concert of "Carmina Burana" by Carl Orff at the Sydney Opera House and a behind-the-scenes tour of the opera house. She also visited museums, art galleries and the Royal Botanic Gardens.

Sensmeier said she took her husband, an organist, along on the trip.

"He doesn't really like that I travel about 40 percent of the time, and I miss him," she said. "This was a great opportunity to include him, and he used frequent-flier miles awarded from my previous travel, which made the trip more affordable."

If her business trips resemble vacations, the reverse is true as well. She always brings her laptop, cellphone and BlackBerry on vacation. "It's really helped me to stay connected without having to be totally immersed in work," she said about her BlackBerry.

The majority of adult U.S. travelers (81 percent) have included a cultural or history-related activity while traveling, according to a 2007 report by the Travel Industry Association, while 62 percent regard learning about other cultures as important when they travel.

Almost one in four of all trips in the United States in 2005 included a cultural or historical activity, the survey also found, and those travelers spent considerably more per trip on average, and stayed longer, than those who did not.

At home, a typical American adult attends an average of 1.9 cultural events a month, and for college graduates and adults earning at least \$75,000 a year, the number is slightly higher: an average of 2.1 and 2.2 events a month, a survey by the Wallace Foundation found in 2004.

Tom Ingrassia, owner of a talent agency in Holden, Massachusetts, said he and his wife accompanied a client who is a classical organist on a three-day concert tour in Denmark and Sweden, and extended their stay for a three-week tour of both countries.

Ingrassia said they toured the Hans Christian Andersen Museum, Tivoli Gardens, Frederiksberg Palace and Viking burial grounds on an island in the Stockholm archipelago.

"It's soul-satisfying for me, especially because my background is in history," Ingrassia said. "Even if you're on a very focused business trip, I feel you need to see a little bit of the places you're visiting. It keeps me fresh and alive."

As a business owner, he said he had control over his time and schedule, but even during his 25 years as a college administrator, he always tried to reserve personal time.

"After umpteen hours a day sitting at student recruitment fairs and conferences, I knew I could look forward to seeing a museum afterward."

Mary McDonald, a management consultant with her own practice based in Austin, Texas, has managed to combine Oktoberfest festivities in Munich with a business meeting in Stuttgart, three hours away, and a visit to the Louvre in Paris with a meeting in Montpellier, a five-hour drive away.

She once added a week of sightseeing to a three-day business trip to Hong Kong for a telecommunications client.

When about to travel to a destination for the first time, McDonald said, "I try to make it more interesting, and consider what will appeal to me intellectually and emotionally."

Once, after a three-day meeting in Las Vegas, she explored Zion National Park and the Grand Canyon with her husband and two children for 10 days.

When Joachim de Posada, a motivational speaker and consultant with offices in San Juan, Puerto Rico, and Miami, was invited to Taiwan by the International Trade Institute to discuss his book, "Don't Eat the Marshmallow Yet! The Secret to Sweet Success in Work and Life," he asked that a guide meet him on his 6 a.m. arrival.

After breakfast and visiting his host's office, he was given an early tour of Taipei, including a museum as it opened for the day.

A diligent student of delayed gratification, de Posada postponed the nap he ordinarily would have taken after he arrived early in the morning. "Instead of going to my hotel to rest for my speech at 4 p.m., I wanted to see the sights," he said.

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