

Business trippin'



Making a good impression on your business trip requires a bit of planning

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As a student, you may have travelled the world, sluffing from hostel to hostel in your Octoberfest T-shirt and beer-stained jeans.

But while you may consider yourself worldly, business travel is a whole other animal, requiring clean clothes, a strict itinerary and a completely different mindset.

A little preparation before you go can leave you feeling more confident, says Vancouver-based personal image consultant Kimberly Law (personalimpact.ca).

"Leave nothing to chance. Research ahead of time to have an understanding of the expectations for regional business dress, etiquette, local customs ... weather, etc. Arrive looking and acting like you belong in the situation," she says.

When it comes to choosing your wardrobe for the trip, go conservative and bring a full suit (matching jacket and pants), even if the expectation is business casual.

"This is a show of respect for most situations and cultures," says Law.

Both genders should bring clothing that can be easily mixed and matched, she adds. A woman might bring a three-piece suit (jacket, dress pants, skirt) in a neutral colour. Bring tops that match both the skirt and pants, and that can work alone or under a jacket. Packing another jacket that works with both bottoms and some of the tops can also work well.

If you can, bring fabrics that don't wrinkle easily, like natural fabrics with stretch, or a blend of natural fabrics with synthetic types. In warmer climates, bring light-weight clothing that will keep you from overheating.

When packing a cosmetics bag, it's best to leave the perfume and cologne at home, says Law. "Many buildings and companies don't allow fragrance."

Transfer skin products into travel size containers, but don't bring a product sample if it's one you've never used. "This isn't the time to test new products, just in case you have a bad reaction or it turns out not to be the right product for you."

When it comes to interacting with new people while you're away, be careful how you handle the social time. Bringing up controversial topics is a mistake young professionals tend to make, asking about religion or politics, for instance. Instead, stick to general, open-ended questions, Law suggests.

"Asking about where they're from, the weather, current events that are timely - but not overly controversial - books, movies, sports, etc. Asking about local places of interest and activities such as shopping, museums, historical sites, skiing, etc.," Law says. "Business topics are fine, but shouldn't monopolize the conversation."

Be attentive also to your cell phone etiquette during your trip as well - something newbies tend to forget. "Personal cell phones should be turned off at work. Business cell phones should be used for business calls. Social calls should be avoided at work."