

Penny-pinching not worth losing sleep

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Business travel on the cheap initially appealed to Liontamer co-managing director Laetitia Peterson. "Then you realise," she says, "actually, I don't like mushrooms in my shower."

In the early days of the fund management business, penny-pinching on travel seemed like a good idea. Peterson and her business partner would stay at the University Club whenever they were in Sydney – until one visit it was closed for renovations. Instead they ended up at the Park Regis Hotel, which turned out to be almost like a backpackers' – and very noisy.

"In the morning we both had red-shot eyes and were stressed out. We dragged our suitcases out of the hotel and went straight to the Westin Hotel on Pitt St."

After that experience (see Q+A), she decided it was worth paying for a decent sleep.

"You know it will be quiet. My husband has taught me that you do have to look after yourself, and it's a fairly small cost to pay."

The Belgian-born mother of two travels frequently for business and pleasure – and with her major suppliers in London and family in Europe it's easy to combine the two. Her 10 and 12-year-old children often travel with her, and trips are planned around the school holidays.

"It gets easier as they get older because they know their way around the plane, especially if you're flying business premium or business class, which we do on Air New Zealand. We almost don't have any bother, they've got the television there, DVDs, music, they can order food whenever they want to, have a good sleep."

It wasn't always so, with Peterson and her husband flying economy or business class with a bassinet in the early days – something which can bring out the worst in fellow travellers, she says.

"[Once] there was an older couple,



Worth the extra: Laetitia Peterson enjoys a cup of tea in Shanghai's Pudong Shangri-La hotel, but her business travel wasn't always so luxurious.

they were trying to upgrade to first class. They were trying to use us as an excuse to get an upgrade, before they even knew if they were going to make a noise or not."

Peterson usually travels long haul twice a year now, and doesn't suffer

nerves at all. It's a marked difference from her first flight to take up a Fulbright scholarship in the United States. "My very first time on the plane, I was 22 and I didn't dare tell anybody. In Europe we had holidays in Spain or France and we took a

train or the car – I never really needed to be on a plane. All of a sudden I found myself more scared about the plane ride than the studies and the new life I was embarking on."

Since then Peterson's career has taken her around the world, living in

New York and London. But she says she's always happy to come home to Auckland. Flying back is a reminder of New Zealand's isolation, "but you get off, and you've got the fresh air and the space and the weather and you think, actually it's not so bad".

Top tip for arriving fresh and ready to go on long-haul flights?

We typically take an evening flight and try to have a good sleep, which is not difficult on Air New Zealand's sleeper seats. I avoid too much alcohol and drink loads of water. I try to stretch my legs regularly as I suffer from back issues. I also always travel in a comfy Juicy Couture outfit and immediately remove my walking shoes and slide into the socks they provide you, as my feet tend to swell a bit on long haul flights. When we arrive, we try to stay up all day, go for a walk in the sun and try to last until at least 8pm before going to bed. We also tend to give ourselves a day or so before we have any business meetings as I do suffer from jet lag. I admire people who can fly for 36 hours and go straight to meetings when they get off a plane.

What are the worst aspects of long-haul flights?

Definitely the jet lag.

Favourite New Zealand destination?

Queenstown. It is very different from Auckland and feels similar to a ski resort in Switzerland or Austria. The atmosphere is very international; the restaurants are superb.

Best/worst hotel experience?

My best memories are still of the Punta Tragara Hotel in Capri, where we honeymooned in 1991. The hotel was designed by Le Corbusier and waiters serve drinks by the pools with white hand gloves. We had hardly any time to focus on our wedding plans as I was in the gruesome training programme at Goldman Sachs and my husband was working in a New York law firm. He was in charge of the honeymoon and as it turned out, it cost him three months of salary at the time. We never regretted it.

My worst hotel experience would have to be the Park Regis Hotel in Sydney. In the early days of our business we were focused on cost-saving. We typically stayed at the University Club in Sydney, but when they did a major renovation and closed for a long period we had to find alternative accommodation. We got on to the Rates-to-Go site and chose a special offer at the Park Regis Hotel. When we got there the hotel looked like a backpackers' lodge. It was clean and the rooms looked acceptable so we unpacked our bags and had a shower. When we got back after dinner that evening the noise hit me and I simply couldn't find any position to sleep. I might as well have slept on the road. The traffic noise was just incredible.

What is the most dramatic thing that's ever happened to you on a flight?

In Japan we were stuck in a snowstorm. The plane could not take off. There was a shortage of de-icers and a war between airlines to get the next one. We got upgraded from business to first class while sitting on the tarmac. We could not leave the plane and watched crew after crew finish their shifts. As I suffer a little bit from claustrophobia this was a pretty dramatic experience. We have not been back to Tokyo since.

Best airport?

I must admit I really like Auckland International Airport. It is clean, has great shopping, the Koru check-in counter is very efficient and pleasant. You always meet people you know at check-in. Then at the lounge, the Koru Club used to offer great back and neck massages for Elite Gold Members. On the way back we just love smelling the fresh air when we exit the airport and the friendly greeting from the Corporate Cab drivers. The duty free shopping is also excellent. There really is no need to stock up on perfumes in overseas airports and lugging them in your hand luggage. We just get everything we need on the way back.

Packing tips?

The best advice I could give is to pack light and ideally only hand luggage, as I did when I last went to Europe. It is difficult to cater for all weather conditions and it is a great excuse to shop! As I can't carry any heavy bags because of my back issues this is very important to me. The flip side is that you need to make sure there are washing facilities at each place you stay or you get into deep trouble having to wear the same underpants twice or inside out.

Favourite overseas bar/eatery?

We have eaten at lots of great restaurants around the world with Michelin stars or well known chefs but there is one place I will always drag friends and family to when I visit my home town of Leuven – the city of Stella Artois – and that is the Metropole on the old square. They serve the best spaghetti in the world and have not changed the recipe in the last 20 years. It was my favourite place as a student when I lived on a small allowance from my parents and is still a must for me. Maybe it is just nostalgia for my birthplace and the good times I had at university, but my husband and children are now also converts.

Worst airline for service?

The worst airline has to be Sabena. They no longer operate under this brand as, no surprise, they went under a few years ago. This used to be the Belgian Government-owned airline. Sabena stands for "Such a Bloody Experience Never Again". The biggest problem with them was the delays. I used to travel back and forth between London and Brussels at least once a week when I was working at Goldman Sachs and responsible for equity derivative sales to Benelux institutions. I soon learnt my nationalist feelings were misplaced and quickly moved to British Airways as my favourite airline. Sabena were totally unreliable.

Favourite international destination?

I like London very much. It is a happening place and so much more fun when you don't have to work there and get up at the crack of dawn to go to the office or Heathrow Airport. We like it so much that we bought a pied-a-terre in London last year in a very touristy location behind Harrods. We hope one day to be able to spend more time there as our base close to Europe where most of my family still live.