

Red-nosed road warriors

Travelers often forget to provide against allergies

By Stephen Whitlock

DILIGENT BUSINESS travelers planning important trips leave nothing to chance. They go over their PowerPoint presentation, check local Internet service-provider numbers, and confirm airline tickets and hotel reservations. How sad, then, that all this scheming and strategizing can so easily be undone by sneezing.

An allergy attack can derail the most meticulously planned trip. If streaming eyes and a runny nose don't ruin your presentation, then the sedating effects of most antihistamines will certainly dull your faculties. The American Academy of Allergy, Asthma and Immunology estimates that hay fever alone costs American businesses up to \$11 billion a year in lost productivity.

During a trip to Asia last year, Valerie Lee, an administrative assistant at Morgan Stanley, suffered an allergy attack that led to a severe respiratory infection. "I

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started sneezing, I couldn't breathe, I started getting weaker, and the dry cough was killing me," she says. "It was a nightmare."

Business travelers often underestimate their allergies,

forgetting that such places as Florida and California have high pollen counts almost year-round, and also that air pollution and forest fires have made Southeast Asia an allergy black spot. "They tend to make sure everything is in place with their business but will overlook health problems," says Dr. Bradley Connor, medical director of New York's Travel Health Services. Allergies are

more than a nuisance, he says. "In certain individuals, allergies can lead to asthma, bacterial sinus infections, and a whole host of other complications."

Before embarking, travelers can check pollen counts at their destination (www.allergy-relief.com or www.aaaai.org) and obtain a non-sedating antihistamine from their doctor. The National Allergy Bureau (800-9-POLLEN) provides weekly updates on domestic pollen counts.



"Many people come in for things like malaria," says Connor. "But it's the more mundane problems that can cause the most trouble." □

Back-to-back attack

Airlines clamp down on cost-saving ploy

BACK-TO-BACK TICKETING means different things to different people. To travelers, it's a convenient, cost-saving loophole. To travel agents, it's a headache. But to airlines it's a scam that needs stamping out.

Here's how it works: Say a New Yorker needs to go to Los Angeles and stay from Monday through Thursday. Without a Saturday stayover, the ticket can be expensive—about \$1,400. Instead, he buys two cheaper tickets, one departing New York on Monday and returning the following week, the second leaving L.A. on Thursday, with a weekend in New York. With a Saturday stayover, the tickets cost only

about \$450 apiece. By using the outbound portion of each ticket, he gets to fly when he wants to and saves \$500.

Airlines, arguing that the practice violates their ticketing regulations, are beginning

"It's the agent who gets in trouble," says Terry McCabe of Stratton Travel in Oakland, New Jersey. She blames the airlines' pricing policy for the problem. "Should you be rewarded for purchasing a ticket a month in advance? Yes. But should you be charged \$1,600 to buy the day you travel? No. Don't punish me for your stupid pricing."

A recent *Condé Nast Traveler* poll of business travelers revealed that nearly one in four have engaged in back-to-back ticketing. The travel manager at one New Jersey health-care company, who requested anonymity, says her firm's current travel policy could not survive without back-to-back ticketing: "The fares would be astronomical," she says. "Buying thousand-dollar fares to go to Chicago would be almost a CFO-level decision." —S.W.

Round-trip: New York–Los Angeles



to clamp down. They are threatening to invalidate travelers' itineraries, delete frequent-flier miles, or demand that passengers pay the price of the costlier ticket at check-in. They've also sent debit notices to travel agents who schedule back-to-back flights, demanding that they cover the difference between the fares.

Ticker Tape Among business travelers, the Japanese are two to three times more likely to drink alcohol when on the road.