



Toolie's Business Travel Newsletter

September 2005

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Support for Hurricane Victims

A month has passed since my last newsletter and in that time the US suffered another weather onslaught from Hurricane Rita. Emergency preparedness for that storm appears to have been better, but there are still individuals and families who have lost everything. Please continue to support these victims through the charity of your choice. I have added a page on my website containing links to organizations that would welcome your donations for this purpose. Visit <http://www.tooliethetravelguide.com/hurricane.html> for more information.

Develop Your Own Disaster Preparedness Plan

Please also follow through on my encouragement to create a disaster preparedness plan for yourself and your family. I was browsing through the Internet and came across a comprehensive guide provided by the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) that could help you get started. Visit <http://www.fema.gov/areyouready/> where you can download either the entire PDF guide or individual chapters, according to your needs.

Visit My Newly Redesigned and Greatly Expanded Website!

I've been working night and day for the last 3 weeks to complete the redesign of my website, <http://www.tooliethetravelguide.com>. I've changed the font sizes and styles, added new sections to the layout, a menu navigation bar, and featured links to my favorite products and services. You'll also see a catalog of the products I'm working on (mostly marked with a "Coming Soon" icon at this point). I'm continuing to offer live, interactive access through my LivePerson Chat window, so if you see the icon that says I'm online, by all means say "Hello!"

The only things missing on the new site are the extensive Resource pages that I'm building; those will be done in a week or two. I've tracked down as many links as I can find to those products and services I personally use. You'll see special deals from those vendors offered from time to time, so be sure to visit those Resource pages regularly.

By this time next month I will have a full privacy policy available for your inspection. You should know that I do not share or sell my database of email addresses to anyone else.

I've tested this site on multiple browsers as well as 4 of the most popular Windows and Macintosh operating systems. I welcome your comments and suggestions on the site, especially if you spot broken links or problems with the layout.

Toolie's Monthly Travel Tip: The Last Mile -- Planning Helps You Find the Lowest Cost

When high-speed Internet service was being installed in my home town, it took a long time because the "last mile" of connective wiring was not enabled to carry such loads. The phone company said they could send the signal to everyone within a certain radius. Those of us outside that circle would have to wait until the new wiring could be installed.

My recent trip to Portland reminded me of this conundrum: I found myself saving lots of money on my train fare from Seattle, but spending as much as my round-trip fare to get from the downtown area to my hotel. The train took me to the center of commerce, but not to my destination on the periphery. I had to pay extra to go beyond that "certain radius" of service.

Taking the Train: Reclaiming Productive Time

I drive an old car, and its days of long drives on the interstate are over. I had planned to borrow my husband's car to drive to Portland, but when I sat down to figure out how many gallons of gas it was going to take to drive there, I realized that I could take the Amtrak train to Portland about the same price, AND I would recover some precious work time that I needed. I've been pushing very hard to meet a deadline to update my website, and at that point in the decision process, I was trying to find every minute of spare time possible to make the deadline.

I love to take the train -- it reminds me of many happy hours spent gliding through the countryside in Europe on my way to speak at conferences. Taking the Amtrak train between Seattle and Portland probably seems less glamorous, but actually the scenery rivals most European destinations. The Talgo trains that run on this Northwest Corridor route have dining cars and AC power plugs, so I was glad to reclaim a couple of hours of work rather than driving from Seattle to Portland.

Getting To and From the Train

My husband was glad to take me to and pick me up from the train in Seattle, 15 miles west of our home, so transportation involved just the cost of gas, and a little bit of mileage if I felt like tracking it. (I must say that I am paying more attention to the cost of gas now that it's well over US\$3 per gallon!)

To decide how I would get from the Amtrak Station to my hotel in the suburb of Lake Oswego, I pulled out my favorite map program, Microsoft's MapPoint, and determined that my hotel was a mere 10 miles south of town. I could easily take a taxi from the station to my hotel; I knew there would be taxis waiting, and I could just jump in and go.

And then I said to myself the fateful phrase: "After all, how much could it cost???"

How Much It DID Cost

I've said in these newsletters before: I have concluded that it's part of my job to make travel mistakes. Believe me, I don't do it on purpose, but at least I can tell you how to avoid my mistakes. I don't necessarily enjoy this process, and I don't always handle making mistakes very well, but at least YOU benefit from the wisdom of my experience.

Well, listen carefully to this bit of wisdom: if you don't plan your travel -- **all of it** -- you will pay more for it.

All I had to do was to go to the Internet and look for information on shuttles to and from the Amtrak station. I could have found shared ride vans, town cars, and even city busses I could take to Lake Oswego. A simple phone call or an online reservation, and I would have save some money. Why didn't I do it?

1. I was concerned about the arrival time of the Amtrak train into Portland. I've taken that route 3 times now, and each time the train has arrived a half-hour late. I overheard at least 4 cell phone calls around me as fellow passengers on the train read the overhead screen and tried to tell those persons picking them up what time the train would arrive. It's not really Amtrak's fault; the owners of the railroad companies give freight trains priority over passenger trains, and the corridor between the State of Washington and Oregon border has only one track on the bridge across the Columbia River. Consequently, the Amtrak passenger train frequently has to wait until the track clears before it can go the last 5 miles into downtown Portland.
2. If I had arranged for a shared ride van, I would have had to wait for my turn to be delivered to my hotel. As it happened, I was not pressed for time, so that would have been a viable option. I enjoy meeting other travelers and talking to them about travel -- that is often how I find out what they need from me, and frequently where the material comes from for my newsletters and reports.
3. If I had ordered a town car, they would have waited for me, and taken me directly to my hotel, but as I found out later, the cost would have been even higher than what I paid for the taxi.
4. If I had taken a city bus, I could have gotten within a half-mile of my destination, but that would probably have added another 90 minutes to my journey, and that didn't seem feasible. After all, I had taken the train to try to recover some work time; sitting on a bus being unproductive afterwards would have seemed foolish.

What I did think was, "I'll jump in a cab: it'll be right there waiting for me. I'm arriving in the middle of the day so traffic should be relatively light. If the rate per mile is comparable to taxi rates in Seattle (as of the time of publication, about US\$2 per mile), it'll only cost me about \$20-25 plus tips."

I was right about that: I think the total came to about \$27. The irony was, my Amtrak ticket one-way from Seattle to Portland was \$28. I spent almost as much on the last 10 miles of my trip as I did on the first 180 miles. The concept here was that Amtrak could get me to the most desirable part of town. I, however, needed to go beyond that desirable radius.

And Then I Almost Spent More

My mistake would have occurred the next morning. I waited until late that evening to make arrangements for my return trip to the Amtrak station. I called the front desk and asked for a taxi to pick me up and take me to town in the morning.

As I was packing at 7:00 am, it occurred to me that having a taxi take me INTO the center of town at that hour meant that I was going to be in morning rush hour traffic. If I was in a taxi, I would be paying not only the rate per mile, but also a rate per MINUTE if we were stuck in traffic. I began to have flashbacks of an experience I had taking a taxi from downtown Paris to Charles de Gaulle Airport. I watched the meter tick away the last 250 francs I had left in my pocket. I almost had to get out of the taxi before we got to the terminal!!

I got downstairs to the front door early, and I noticed a towncar sitting out front. I shuddered, wondering whether the hotel had called a towncar instead of a taxi, and that's exactly what had happened. I was not very pleasant as I expressed dismay that the hotel had not paid precise attention to my request. The towncar driver was standing there listening to my speech. Instead of giving up on me as a potential fare, he bid a price to me that actually matched what I had paid to the taxi the day before (I didn't tell him that). I realize now that he probably had a good idea of what I had paid – I'm sure he knew what his competition, the taxi, would have charged from that origin.

I was lucky. I was also stuck. I either had to pay what the driver bid, or I was going to have to wait for a taxi, and most likely miss my train. I said "Let's go," and I sat in silence most of the way to the station.

I realize now that the hotel did me a favor by ordering the towncar because I paid the flat rate rather than time plus mileage rates in rush hour traffic. Nevertheless, I was lucky because I believe the driver under-bid his usual rate for that distance. Having researched the towncar rates online when I got home, I realize now that I paid approximately one-third less for that ride that I would have otherwise paid.

Time, Effort, and Money...Again...

So what do we learn from this experience? My assertion that spending Time and Effort on your travel plans saves you Money is true! Remember Toolie's Triangle of Travel Costs? If you've forgotten, have a look again at my July 2004 Newsletter (<http://www.tooliethetravelguide.com/newsletters.html>) for a refresher. If I had spent just a little more Time and Effort on planning that trip, I would probably have saved myself money on those last 10 miles to my destination.

Many people don't bother with mass transit because it doesn't always take them within a reasonable distance of their destination. Sometimes you can control where you stay to take advantage of the lower cost of riding mass transit. In my case, I had to get to Lake Oswego -- I didn't have a choice. My only other option would have been to stay closer to the Amtrak station, but with a 6 pm meeting start time at the hotel, I would still have been vulnerable to a taxi ride in peak traffic to get there on time.

One final note: I probably could have saved the most money by driving to Portland, but the lowered travel stress level and recouped work time was more important to me in this situation. I paid a little more for my trip (mostly because of my inattention), but I got some work done that would have otherwise not been completed. Do remember to balance productivity into your travel decisions. Sometimes that's worth a little extra money you might have to pay.

Oh by the way, I did make my website deadline!

My Travel Guide Plans

The completion of my travel guides is taking longer than I thought it would, BUT, I am beginning the work of hooking up my new website to the Cadmus distribution system. As soon as the first guides are ready, they'll be available for download to Windows or Macintosh laptops, Windows Pocket PC, or as physical books through print-on-demand.

The travel guides are prepared as copy-protected PDF files that can be licensed in bulk. I am also more than happy to prepare a Custom Travel Guide for large events through Event Planners, Convention and Visitors Bureaus, and Corporate Travel Planners. See my website for more information on my consulting services, <http://www.tooliethetravelguide.com/consulting.html>.

Toolie's Travel Plans

I will be leaving on my first of two long trips at the end of next month, touching base with most of the cities on my travel guide list. During the second trip I will be scouting the locations of my next round of travel guides.

Stop by my website, <http://www.tooliethetravelguide.com> and say "Hello." I love to hear from my subscribers anytime!

Very 'Toolie' yours,

Jocelyn Garner

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