

International Business Travel – Dos and Don'ts

My first business meeting in a country where English was not the native tongue was in Germany. I was terribly nervous. I didn't know German, and no one was with me that could speak it. I fell all over myself trying to make apologies for speaking in English and not knowing their language.



They brushed it off as no big deal. It turns out that English is widely accepted in Germany as the language of business and most Germans are taught it as a second language throughout their early school years.

So began my journey into the new world of international business travel. I made many mistakes along the way, but eventually I was able to make these trips and hold business meetings routinely without all the drama. I'll spare you the learning curve and share these international business travel Dos and Don'ts with you:

Do use the buddy system. It's very important to have someone with you when you travel internationally. Making your way in an unfamiliar country can be bewildering and is more work than you realize. It usually takes two sets of eyes and ears to do things that you would normally do on autopilot when you're at home.



Do find local help. If you can have someone meet you at the airport, get you settled at the hotel, help you with logistics, and join you for your meetings, then don't pass up the opportunity. It simplifies things greatly. And even though English is the language of business, don't take it for granted. There are important points that will be missed in a meeting just because it's too hard for your hosts to think of the right words to say in English. A helper who knows the language will pick up on this nuance and take the time to get everything on the table and make sure you understand. **Do speak slowly.** You need to slow it down and pause frequently so that your hosts have time to translate in their heads. This way of speaking will feel unnatural, but if you don't do it they will either stop you repeatedly so that they can

catch up, or they'll give up altogether and tune you out.



Don't cram too much into a meeting agenda. You need to cut your expectations in half at least. It takes twice as long to exchange ideas when there are translations going on. **Don't be an ugly American.** Keep the mindset at all times that you are a guest and that their time and company is a gift to you. Try to learn a few phrases of their language for little things like, "thank you", "pleased to meet you", "good morning", and "good bye". Show an interest in their culture and history, and be respectful of their traditions and past. **Do be prepared for culture shock.** Total immersion in another culture will take its toll on you. Between this and the jet lag your mental energy will run out and you will crash hard the first couple nights. Don't be surprised if you are dying for a cheeseburger and all you want to do at night is hiding in your room. But resist these urges and get out and see the world. Your chances to do this are few and far between, and the memories will last you a lifetime.

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