

FINANCIAL REVIEW

Life & Leisure

Armed checkpoints, coups: a CEO's travel adventures

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Alan Manly, chief executive of Group Colleges Australia, doesn't travel anywhere without a wad of cash – in case he needs to buy his way out of trouble. He answers our Traveller Q&A.

First, business or economy?

Business class. This is due to a clause in the verbal "continuance of work agreement" I negotiated with my wife after my 60th birthday. I was to begin enjoying our success and hence started flying business class.



Travel is full of unexpected moments, says Alan Manly. The downside is those teeny hotel shampoo bottles... **Supplied**

Favourite destination?

My second favourite city after Sydney is Shanghai. Driving from the airport after dark, the wide variety of lit rooftops on the modern buildings declares a bold, exciting and creative city.

Favourite airport?

The homogenisation of airports has increased efficiency for weary travelers and killed off individuality. Therefore, my favourite airport is home sweet home: Sydney.

Where would you go with an unlimited travel budget?

Business class around Europe.

Worst place you've been lost?

Not so much lost as missing in action for four days during a military takeover in Sri Lanka in 1993. I was incommunicado as all phones were blocked, so I went on a safari to photograph elephants. Arriving in India, I was tempted to imitate the Pope and kiss the ground.

Best trip ever?

A tour through the Middle East that included Greece, Turkey, Jordan, Israel and Egypt.

Most memorable overseas dining

Eleven Madison Park, New York. The service, food and hospitality were beyond imagination. It's not surprising it's made it to the top five in the The World's 50 Best Restaurants awards every year since 2013, including No. 1 in 2017.

In the suitcase?

Aside from clothes, a big pack of cards. My favourite cards are my APEC Business Travel Card – it allows me to use the diplomatic queues in many Asian countries – and a range of hotel loyalty cards, in the hope of an upgrade. Unless I deem it

unwise, I carry my press pass and Foreign Correspondents' Association card, which allow visits to some interesting clubs.

First thing you do in a new city?

Check out the hotel lobby and the in-house bar. You learn a lot about a place from its patrons, not to mention the possibility of meeting a friendly soul who will tell you the lay of the land.

How do you make the most of a spare afternoon in a strange city?

Book a trip. You see a totally different aspect of a city when you are an ordinary tourist compared with when you are on business.

Who would you most like to travel with and why?

I like travelling with my wife. She provides all the humour I need. Who else would tell me, with authority, to pack my passport, fill in forms, get in the fastest queue and where my seat will be in the plane, and upon arrival will find the limo driver holding a sign with my name on it?

Cure for jet lag?

Sleep on the plane. I can sleep anywhere.

Other travel tips?

Carry cash. No matter what goes wrong, cash is king and you can buy your way out of most things.

Anywhere you'd recommend for a special occasion?

For a relaxing holiday, I suggest a Hawaiian island cruise. One ship I liked was the Pride of America, which happens to be a Norwegian ship. Go figure.

Best overseas purchase?

An expensive three-quarter length suede leather jacket purchased in Pakistan on company expenses during a sudden cold snap. I received many compliments about its style and quality. Sadly, I left it in a hotel in New Delhi.

Best travelling tale?

During my time in Sri Lanka, I was travelling in a car that was stopped at a checkpoint manned by youthful army conscripts. The others decided I was the best one to negotiate with the soldiers. As I opened the boot of the Mercedes that had aroused their suspicion, I felt the muzzle of an AK-47 in my side. I have sometimes pondered what would have happened if I had lost my nerve and run screaming into the jungle.

Best thing about travelling?

The totally unexpected moments that are intermingled with the planned experiences.

Top travel gripe?

Hotel shampoo bottles. Who would design shampoo, body lotion and hair conditioner containers that are all the same size, shape and colour? They all have impossibly small screw tops and the pastel-coloured labels have non-contrasting print that is the same size as the winning conditions on the back of a lottery ticket.

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