

TRAVELER'S GUIDE TO INSPIRED PURSUITS

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Your Travel Dreams



THE READERS' CHOICE ISSUE



Globe-trotter's Little Helpers

Got a long haul in your future? Nod off in the know and leave jet lag behind.

BY ALIA AKKAM

IHAD IT ALL PLANNED. I'D EAT DINNER, wrap myself tight in the blanket, and get settled in with the latest Thomas Friedman book. About an hour before reaching for my eye mask, I'd take a

Tylenol PM, and the next thing you know the flight attendant would be waking me for breakfast. Hours later, still wide awake, we touched down in Paris for the connecting flight to Tunisia. Anticipation of authentic

Recipe for a quick (and restful) trip: Lunesta and your favorite book.

couscous, spicy *harissa*-flavored sausages, and bustling bazaars began to fade into fear

that I'd be too tired to even take a shower and leave my hotel room. Next time, I promised myself, I'll do it right. I'll get a prescription for Ambien.

"Jet lag is an issue because it impacts your vacation," says Dr. Rajiv Narula, founder of International Travel Health Consultants, which offers travelers preventative care before flying overseas. Felt most severely after crossing three or more time zones, the sleep disorder occurs when travel disrupts your circadian rhythm – your internal clock that tells you a day is 24 hours long. What's more, Narula explains, jet lag's strength correlates to the direction traveled: Flying west minimizes symptoms as you gain hours. It's most noticeable when heading due east, when the amount of hours in a calendar day shortens drastically and the loss of precious sleep time – sometimes a full night's rest – means your dream vacation may get off to a sluggish start.

Although travelers ages 50 and older are more likely to feel jet lag, all ages are susceptible to its insomnia, fatigue, and, in more

extreme cases, nausea and headaches. To mitigate this and shorten recovery time (up to a day for each time zone crossed), Narula recommends tailoring activities to your new environment. For example, if you fly from New York to London and arrive at 8 AM, your internal clock thinks it's 3 AM – time to be sleeping. Instead of crawling into those crisp Frette sheets at the hotel, take in Hyde Park, stroll along the Thames, and carry on with relaxed sightseeing in the sunlight, while staying well-hydrated. Go to sleep in

New Mile-High Club
A recent study conducted by the National University of Quilmes in Buenos Aires found that hamsters given Viagra before a simulated six-hour flight east (the equivalent of flying from New York to Paris) adjusted their internal clocks in roughly half the time as those not given doses.



Calm by nature (from top): Lavender and California's state flower, the poppy.

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Coleen Murphy, a naturopathic doctor at Natural Medicine Works in San Francisco, echoes his recommendation, noting that in addition to promoting sleep through all phases of its cycle, melatonin gives you a lift into the next day by assisting hormones needed for daytime activity – something prescription aids lack. As alternatives, she recommends the natural sedative valerian for those who have difficulty falling asleep, the California poppy leaf for people who toss or wake easily (similar to the opium poppy, but with gentle and balancing, rather than narcotic, effects), and perhaps most pleasing of all, a simple massage on arrival: “Research has shown that massage helps to regulate cortisol levels, an important sleep hormone,” she explains. Soothing, widely-available chamomile and lavender teas can also help conquer restlessness.

On my Paris flight, I assumed that passengers sleeping peacefully around me had the foresight to make appointments with their doctors before setting off, but now I wonder how many simply darted into a drugstore to grab a bottle of melatonin as easily as vitamins? From now on, I won't have to miss out on a post-arrival meal. If I do, it's because I'm at the spa. **VL**

the evening, London time, and you'll wake the next morning feeling more refreshed and in tune with the time difference.

According to Express Scripts, Inc.'s annual drug-trend report, consumer spending on prescription sleep aids grew by more than 36 percent in 2006. At his New York City office, where the Poughkeesie-based physician deals specifically with travel health issues, Narula sees many patients seeking remedies for jet lag. He prescribes sleep aids such as Ambien and Lunesta for some travelers and CNN correspondents whose schedules demand they sleep at specific times, but Narula prefers an all-natural melatonin supplement.

“It's a better, safer, cheaper way to go,” he says. “And it works. It may not knock you out as much as Lunesta, but it will make you sleepy. Lunesta and Ambien, they just knock you out no matter where you are and what time it is.”

Gotta Wear Shades

In 2006, doctors at the Edinburgh Sleep Centre released a study that found wearing sunglasses during specific points of your flight and the day of arrival helps adjust your body's clock and minimize the time needed to recover from jet lag.



Z-time: Valerian and (top left) chamomile make safe, sleep-inducing teas.

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