

Coping with Delays: How to Relax When Traveling

by Andrew Rosen

The train came to a sudden and jarring halt. I immediately knew this spelled trouble. I had just spent a wonderful weekend enjoying Washington, D.C.'s perfect blend of urbane culture and diverse nightlife. Upon entering Union Station to trek home to New York City by rail, I couldn't help but wonder why I had planned such a short trip; more time was needed to explore the brownstones of Georgetown and appreciate the immaculate polish of the White House.

With a heavy heart, I boarded the train. Destination: Home. And that's when the public-address system crackled with the news of my train's delayed departure.

The good news was that they were allowing us to de-train. The bad news was that my evening was going to be spent waiting for emergency track work to be completed. Isn't it funny how you never want a vacation to end, yet when the option of heading home is taken away, suddenly home is the only place you want to be?

That rainy night, trapped inside the Beltway might have been uncomfortable, but it helped me uncover several ways to embrace *waiting*. The next time you're faced with a travel delay situation, try the following to help maintain your equanimity.

Calm Down

Try your best to clear your mind (a challenge at a busy travel hub!) and take a few deep breaths. The goal here is to engage in tensing/releasing exercises—tightening each muscle group in the body, and then relaxing it suddenly. Start with your face and work down to your toes. Take a moment to acknowledge the difference between the “tensing” state and the “releasing” state. Once you can recognize what tension feels like in your body, you will be able to spot it and alleviate it. I might have looked a little odd performing stretches on a bench in front of Au Bon Pain, but they were closed anyway.

Yes, We Can

Not to get all Tony Robbins on you, but you can use idle time to reprogram your



brain. Work on ending negative internal dialogues by replacing the “bad” thoughts with “good” ones. For example: “At this rate, I'll never get there” becomes “I'll be there before I know it.”

The reality is, a few minutes, or even hours out of your life will quickly be forgotten once they pass. It's like the National Cherry Blossom festival; one moment the flowers are at full bloom—and the next—they're on the ground.

If you get delayed, imagine what the most pleasurable parts of that trip were or will be. Think of that special attraction, delicious meal or beautiful landscape. Focus on that item and mentally play through its intricate details. On that particular evening in our nation's capital, I opted to “see” the drum circle at Meridian Hill Park. The thumping of African percussion is a must on a Sunday afternoon, and if you've got rhythm, you can even beat your own drum.

Take a Cell Break

Most of us are anchored to the technology in our pockets, although we all know that we will definitely feel more relaxed if on occasion we hit the mute button.

Anticipation and stress always accompany the prospect of receiving a call: When the phone rings, we feel we *have* to answer it. It might be a family member or colleague calling with a problem that can't be solved from a train hundreds of


miles away.

It's a good idea to travel with a portable communications device, but sometimes it's nice to utilize its “silent mode.” I turned off my phone in D.C. and didn't turn it back on until we pulled into Penn Station. (Yes, I eventually did make it home.)

Action Concerning Distraction

Distraction is a powerful tool. Know what it is that you want to do if you're stuck for five minutes, five hours or (Heaven forbid) five days. Take an extra magazine, a pad and a pen, a gaming device or anything that will help you pass the time in a pleasurable way. If all else fails, and you're stuck in a place where mobility is an option, take a walk. Most of the 100 shops and eateries at Union Station were closed on this Monday morning, but I was able to walk laps around them.

One of the biggest keys to reducing travel anxiety is being honest with yourself about what stresses you most. Is it missing your connecting flight? Having to rush at the last second? Getting stranded? Take a moment to figure out what's causing the stress and employ measures to quell your fears.

If you have suggestions for how to cope with a travel delay, please share them with us at feedback@aaany.com. 

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