

## EXECUTIVE ESCAPES

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### Leisure extras relieve grind of business travel

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Everyone is working harder than they were five years ago and business travel demands are gnawing away at leisure activities. Thirty years ago, most workers could immerse themselves in 20 leisure hours a week. Today that figure has slumped to 15.

In the United States, there's a growing trend for business travellers to rearrange schedules on the road to accommodate far more exciting diversions than golf and shopping. Last year, close to 70 per cent of American frequent business travellers said they dovetailed leisure activities with business trips, according to a survey by the National Business Travel Monitor. It was a big increase on previous years.

A major factor behind this trend is that the accumulation of frequent flyer points allows spouses or children to join road warriors during or at the end of a trip. But solitary leisure and sports activities - horse-riding, hang-gliding, mountain-biking - are also being squeezed into business trips, especially long hauls of up to two weeks.

**This work and play mindset is already well established in Australia says Max Najar, manager and director of Axis Travel Centre Adelaide. "A few years ago people were reserved and introverted about suggesting leisure add-ons," says Najar. "But now they want us to book short, exciting and riskier diversions, irrespective of age. Category two and three whitewater rafting trips (that is, not life-threatening to anyone who lacks the fitness level of a kung fu movie star) in New Zealand are now being routinely booked by mature business people aged 45 to 60.**

**"The Middle East has become a more popular stopover en route to or from Europe. Many business travellers once limited trips to business basics in Dubai, for example, but now they sign on for two nights in a luxury Bedouin encampment for \$500 a night and upwards. Even conference delegates to Adelaide now book hot air ballooning adventures in the Barossa Valley.**

**"Shopping was about the only leisure activity business travellers to Hong Kong admitted to until recently. Now they want a day or two in Macau or in mainland China. In spite of the economic slowdown, business trips to the US have not slumped. Chopper flights to the Grand Canyon are big business as an escape for Australians doing business on the West Coast."**

**According to Najar, the use of frequent flyer points to "purchase" tickets for spouses is very much an upper management habit - chief executives, managing directors and senior marketing managers. Travel consultants are also piggy-backing on the leisure add-on upswing to market more exotic diversions.**

**"We actively promote side trips like two nights in Borneo to corporate clients going to Malaysia or Indonesia," says Najar. "We even suggest day trips to Disneyland Europe or desert safaris to clients heading for destinations like Paris or Bahrain."**

**"Thailand is the big winner because Bangkok is a major airport hub and the country has a spectacular number of travel trip options in comparison to Hong Kong and Singapore, the other two major Asian airport hubs. Africa has dropped off the radar in the leisure stopover market because it is too expensive in terms of airfares and the land content is mostly charged in US dollars."**