

Tips On Trips

Following Advice From Savvy Travelers

(NAPSA)—Whether they're on the road for business or pleasure, novice trip takers could benefit from the advice of seasoned travelers such as Ryan Bingham, a character played by actor George Clooney in Paramount Pictures' recently released film "Up in the Air". The film, directed by Jason Reitman, is a compelling story set within a world of frequent travelers.

"When I traveled constantly for work, I found that there was something intriguing about a life on the road—you find a subculture of people who spend countless hours on planes and in hotel rooms and turn travel into a sport, often solely for the thrill of it. The main character in 'Up in the Air' is one of those passionate travelers, and travel is a powerful setting for the story," Reitman said.

Not everyone can have the travel perks that come with Bingham's millions of frequent-flyer miles; however, travelers looking to get the inside scoop on how to travel well can go to Web sites such as FlyerTalk.com to listen to what the community of real-life expert travelers is saying.

"Many people who are looking to plan a trip often don't realize that with a little online research and a few phone calls, they can find ways to make their trips more convenient and affordable," said FlyerTalk.com blogger "Canarsie." "Traveler blogs are a great place to find and share hints on how to get the most out of frequent-flyer miles or find a hotel."

Here are a few tips from well-traveled bloggers that may help:

• **Find Out What's Free**—Ask the hotel concierge or look at the local papers to find out about free concerts, free days at museums, street fairs and the like.

• **Prepare For Your Arrival**—Use the Web to prearrange for comfort foods, bathrobes, birthday balloons or even an extra refrigerator to be waiting in your hotel room such as Hilton Hotels' Requests Upon Arrival service. You can create your own personalized experience before leaving home.

• **Call the Hotel Before You Travel**—Speaking directly to



In the movie "Up in the Air," George Clooney plays a savvy frequent traveler who calls Hilton his second home.

someone who is an employee at the hotel property at which you are staying may yield unpublished or unadvertised information, such as special discounted room rates, amenities or promotions. It does not hurt to ask, and you have nothing to lose.

• **Airport Parking**—Use an off-site airport parking lot instead of the parking lot on the airport grounds if you plan to drive your car to the airport. Off-site parking lots are often less expensive and have free transportation for the short trip between the parking lot and the airport. To reduce the cost of parking further, many off-site parking lots have coupons on their Web sites. Some even offer free amenities such as drinks, newspapers or bonus miles or points.

• **Drive Smart**—Check with your insurance agent to see if your current plan covers auto rentals. If it does, save yourself the cost of the insurance at the rental counter. Also, check with the financial institution that issued your credit card to find out if rental car insurance coverage is part of the cardmember benefits.

• **Remain Loyal**—Follow the path of Ryan Bingham in "Up in the Air" by using loyalty programs. Hilton HHonors, one of Bingham's preferred travel programs, helps him bypass hotel check-in lines and enjoy special amenities, such as upgraded rooms, complimentary breakfast, executive lounge access, or bonus points.

• **Get Out Of Line**—If you're traveling internationally, the U.S. Customs Global Entry program could allow you to bypass lengthy passport-processing lines. Participants who are preapproved by Customs and deemed "safe travelers" can instead quickly be processed through kiosks that scan fingerprints and passports and ask customs declaration questions.

• **Don't Part With Your Pet**—Some hotels let guests bring certain pets along so you save the cost of a kennel—and you and your furry friend may have more fun, too.

• **Leave The Laptop**—If you'll have access to a computer at your destination, use your MP3 player, iPod or flash drive to transport files from your computer. That way you can save the trouble of carrying a laptop on trips and unpacking it at security checkpoints. Also, many hotels have business centers that are equipped with computers, printers, telephones and office supplies.

• **Book Early and Save**—Check with your hotel to see if it offers deals when you book in advance. Some chains, such as Hilton Hotels, offer advance-purchase rates that let travelers save up to 20 percent off of the best available rate when they book ahead of time. Taking advantage of these offers can be a smart way to cut costs if you have a set travel schedule or plan to host standing annual, quarterly and/or monthly conferences.