

# GLOBAL TRAVELLER

FINANCIAL TIMES **SPECIAL REPORT** | Monday March 29 2010

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Physicist and television presenter **Brian Cox** faces extreme conditions  
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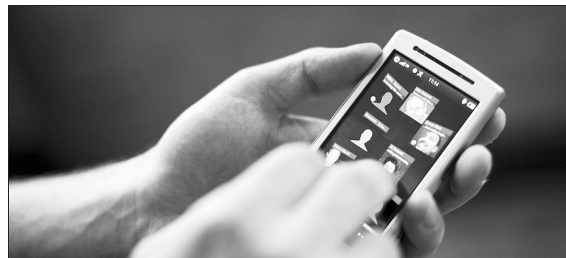
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INSIDE The US reconsiders its unfriendly image ● PLUS Jim French of Flybe

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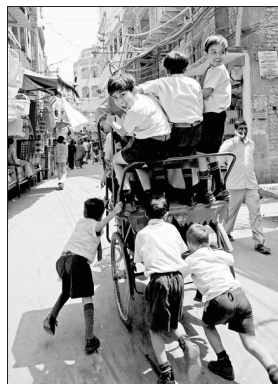


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Front Page illustration by MEESON

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# Massive PR campaign keeps BA on top - just

## Agenda: BA strike

The airline used every tool to win hearts and minds, writes Roger Blitz

British Airways' rivals have been merrily taking advantage of the misfortune of the strike-hit UK flag carrier by advertising their services as safe, strike-free havens.

"Avoid the strikes this spring and fly Virgin Atlantic," BA's most bitter enemy chirped on its website. "Flight cancelled? Need a lift?" asked bmi in newspaper advertisements. "You keep us flying," intoned an Emirates Airlines piece of marketing.

All competition is good news for the business traveller, whatever the circumstances. But as BA counts the cost of the March strike action by its cabin crews, is this a time merely to try out products of BA's rivals or are more permanent moves away from the "world's favourite airline" being contemplated? The impact of the strike on the short-term and long-term behaviour of business travellers will be the airline's biggest concern.

Nigel Turner of Carlson Wagonlit Travel, the travel management company, says: "If you're going to a business meeting and know you've got to be there, the reputation of the airline is crucial. You are going to think seriously about who you're going to buy the ticket from."

BA has been working assiduously to prepare for this strike to protect its core market, the business traveller. Aircraft from other carriers, including BA's partners in the One World Alliance, have been chartered to honour the bookings of BA customers.

There have been efforts to keep members of its executive club programme happy, such as ensuring that they keep their loyalty points even if their flights are cancelled, or if they re-book, and providing tickets on the

Heathrow and Gatwick Express routes.

BA has been running a campaign to the end of March allowing passengers booking Club World return flights to upgrade to first class, although the airline says that this was coincidental to the strike action.

"From a customer perspective, at a premium level they will be well looked after," says Bob Atkinson of travelsupermarket.com, the price comparison website.

"From a travel management perspective, BA will have courted those people in order to keep them."

But the real work has gone into a mass information campaign to keep corporate customers, travel management companies, and others dealing with BA, up to speed on developments before and during strike action.

"We do an awful lot of tactical work with business customers," says Amanda Allen of BA.

The airline has gone all out to win the PR battle, and has used every media device at its disposal.

BA has updated the public on flight changes, cancellations, reinstatements and other developments through its website, its Twitter pages, and through social media sites such as Facebook.

BA has updated the public through its website, its Twitter pages and through social media sites such as Facebook

By the end of the March 20-22 strike, it had resorted to newspaper advertising only once – on the day before the strike.

Willie Walsh, BA's chief executive, has filmed interviews produced by BA's PR machine that have been streamed on to YouTube.

"Everyone is focusing on the customer," Ms Allen says. "It is about making sure they get what they need and getting it in a timely fashion. Travel management companies would



Cabin fever: the picket line at Heathrow airport

Andy Rain

make it very clear if we weren't getting information out to them in as many ways as we can."

Evidence available from the March 20-22 strike suggests BA was also working to minimise the bad publicity that tends to come when people's travel plans are wrecked. Gatwick appeared to have operated normally for BA, enabling it to run its long-haul flights, thereby sparing the company too many uncomfortable headlines of families losing their holidays of a lifetime.

Ms Allen says she has not come across any evidence of BA losing business because of customers steering clear of the airline. She attributed that to BA's contingency planning and PR operation. "If we were to make mistakes, people would ask questions," she says.

But she acknowledges that BA's worries about losing business travellers have been eased by two of the three March 20-22 strike days taking place at the weekend.

Paul East of FCm Travel Solutions, the business travel division of Flight Centre Ltd, says it had not

come across a large percentage of business travellers affected by the strike.

"We usually handle about 18,000 BA tickets a month, and only some 1,200 were affected during the strike," he says.

It may be a different story if the second strike, scheduled over four days from March 27, proceeds as planned.

Mr Turner says he believes BA was coming through its latest crisis better than he had expected. "They are winning the PR battle," he says.

"But in this strike, there isn't anyone who is a clear winner."

His view is shared by Jim French, chief executive of Flybe, the regional low-cost airline in which BA has a 15 per cent stake (see interview on Page 6).

"The strike is a tragedy for all concerned – BA, the staff and the country," Mr French says. "The concern of the British public and of politicians, and some of the things that have been said make one mindful of 20 or 30 years ago.

"Please let this not be a return to the bad old days."

# US must try harder to shed unwelcoming image

## Soapbox ROGER DOW

For more than eight years, leaders in the US have attempted to create a more secure air travel system to facilitate the identification and capture of those who intend harm.

During this period, we have witnessed changes to the US entry and air travel process that have bolstered our ability to assess more accurately potential threats.

The failed attempt on Christmas Day to bring down a Northwest Airlines flight bound for Detroit is a vivid reminder, however, that the security process remains vulnerable.

Staying focused on tight security must remain a top priority, but our approach has resulted in many unintended consequences that create unnecessary hassles for the millions of travellers who fly every day to, from and within the US.

Taking a decisive first step toward addressing

The failure to keep up with the rest of the world has cost the US \$509bn. There's no telling how much it cost our reputation

these challenges, the US Travel Association is convening a bipartisan panel of America's foremost experts on aviation and security to make recommendations on how to achieve "frictionless security" at our nation's airports.

The goal of the panel is to seek ways to maximise security while minimising the burden on travellers, rather than continuing to assume that the current screening system is the best we can do.

The blue ribbon panel will provide a fresh evaluation of the US air travel security system, exploring new technologies and best practices from around the world.

Participants will think beyond what the process looks like today, understand the dual need for security and efficiency, and have the best interests of travellers at heart, including their reasonable concerns about privacy and time.

The implications for the

US are enormous, both in economic terms and for our reputation. It is no secret that the perception is widespread that we have created "fortress America". This sense of mistreatment and confusion over our entry process has cost the US dearly.

In 2009, global international tourist arrivals were nearly 200m more than in 2000, according to the United Nations. Despite this boom in international travel, the US welcomed 2.4m fewer overseas visitors last year than it did in 2000. Had the US kept pace with the growth of international long-haul travel, America would have welcomed 68m more visitors during the past nine years.

A recent analysis in conjunction with Oxford Economics estimated that the failure to keep up with the rest of the world during the past decade cost the US \$509bn. There's no telling how much it cost our reputation.

Unlike virtually every other leading country, the US has not had a federally backed promotion and communications programme to send welcoming messages to the world inviting it to visit.

Most recent figures from the UN World Tourism Organization suggest that Greece spends \$151m, Mexico \$149m, Australia \$113m and the UK nearly \$90m annually. About 80 countries earn more than \$1bn every year from international travel and tourism. In an attempt to make the US more competitive with these countries, President Obama this month signed into law the establishment of the first US promotion and communications programme aimed at foreign travellers.

The Corporation for Travel Promotion will be run through the US Department of Commerce. Among the benefits of the programme will be the ability swiftly and effectively to help travellers understand changes to US entry requirements and processes.

It will take some months to create a board of directors and staff, collect funding and begin communicating to key markets, but even as the Corporation for Travel Promotion gets up and running, the blue ribbon panel for air travel security will be meeting and preparing

recommendations. The goal is to provide US policymakers with a roadmap to achieving an effective aviation security screening process, and provide travellers with the confidence that today's

system can be replaced with a secure and efficient model for 21st century travel.

Roger Dow is president and chief executive of the US Travel Association



Heightened security: police officers in a terminal at JFK

AFP

## BUYING A NEW AIRCRAFT ISN'T FINANCIALLY IRRESPONSIBLE. RULING IT OUT IS.

Admittedly, money is harder to come by these days, but when the air is cleared of hyperbole and rhetoric, a persuasive case for business aircraft emerges. For starters, we are currently experiencing historic low rates for quality borrowers. And, with commercial air travel becoming less viable every day, the competitive advantages of a business aircraft become even more apparent, and quantifiable. History shows seven out of ten companies bold enough to invest during a downturn hold onto their market gains when the economy recovers. Leaving only one additional statistic to ponder: Cessna has more repeat customers than any other aircraft manufacturer in the world. All of which is why buying a Cessna today may be the most prudent business decision you will make this year.

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# Physicist seeks quantum of comfort

**Frequent Traveller**  
**Brian Cox**

**Seb Morton-Clark** hears why loyalty cards make a big difference

**K**idnapping, acid caves, military escorts, insect-infested jungles and sub-zero nights spent sleeping on glaciers do not usually appear on the job description for particle physicist.

But Brian Cox, a professor at Manchester University and scientist on the large hadron collider at Cern in Geneva, has found himself in some extraordinarily extreme environments of late, thanks to his additional role as a television presenter. And the pace of his curious travels has been incessant: "Last year was almost totally taken up with filming for the current *Wonders of the Solar System* series on the BBC," says the 42-year-old Royal Society research fellow. "We started in March and worked through to December – about 180 days of filming, all of them abroad."

Luckily, Prof Cox is something of an expert when it comes to travelling in comfort. "My frequent-flier card is my most valued travelling possession," he admits. "You can use the lounges and you feel safe in the knowledge that if a plane is delayed, you can get the next one – it's brilliant to be at the top of the list." He is the owner of a Star Alliance gold card – rewarded by Lufthansa after com-



**Brian Cox: 'You want that sort of clichéd, ruthless Germanic character to run an airline'**

muting between Germany and the UK to study for his PhD in Hamburg. "I've had it for a decade and I'm never giving it up."

He is also a silver member with One World, but, he laughs: "Even at that level, I get a bit twitchy and worried that I might not be treated well."

"It's not the safest place in the world either [British diplomats had been kidnapped in the same region in 2007] so we had a band of armed guards too."

Back in the capital, however, the scientist was pleasantly surprised. "Addis Ababa was green and verdant, not like the image you remember from Live Aid. It also has one of the most amazing hotels: the Marriott there is like a little city – lots of shops and really

"We were flown in by military helicopter – the only other way to get there takes four weeks in four-wheel drive jeeps. We were dropped off and left for four nights with plastic boxes filled with warm, chlorinated water.

Other daunting locations included the Cueva de Villa Luz – acid caves in Mexico, where the crew had to dress in protective clothing and gas masks. But for Prof Cox, it was a threat of a different sort that preyed most on his mind: "I find jungles unpleasant," he admits, "I don't like being bitten by mosquitoes."

A four-day shoot on an Icelandic glacier without hot water and battling with blizzards also required a strong constitution. But experiences such as these help to confirm for the professor what his pri-

good restaurants. For the business traveller, it's a wonderful hotel, but it's obviously not a fair representation of the real Ethiopia."

And his luggage? "I'm quite a minimalist. Everything I take is the smallest it can be. My laptop is a MacBook Air, I have the smallest washbag and smallest deodorant. I prize things that are small and do their job."

For a scientist who specialises in the minutiae of the universe, you wouldn't expect anything less.

orities are when back in civilisation – a transition made all the more easy with his Priority Club platinum card.

"Bathrooms are very important to me. Especially after you've been in a tent for three days on the edge of a volcano. Room service is also essential at the end of a long shoot," he says.

When flying, he remains a Lufthansa stalwart: "You want that sort of clichéd, ruthless Germanic character to run an airline. Their hubs – Munich and Frankfurt – are also some of the best. If I have to connect, I'll do it through one of those two, as it just works all of the time." In terms of business class, he gives first prize to BA, but also cites United Airlines' offering on the 767. For economy, he recommends Air New Zealand.

As a self-confessed technophile, he always has his laptop and phone with him. "I carry a Nokia and use their Gizmo VoIP [voice over internet protocol]. You can call anywhere in the world for 2 cents an hour.

"My biggest gripe is roaming charges. When you can use wifi, which is everywhere – even in the middle of Ethiopia – how can mobile phone companies still charge £1.50 a minute to call the UK from America?"

And his luggage? "I'm quite a minimalist. Everything I take is the smallest it can be. My laptop is a MacBook Air, I have the smallest washbag and smallest deodorant. I prize things that are small and do their job."

For a scientist who specialises in the minutiae of the universe, you wouldn't expect anything less.

## Flight data text alerts strive to stay on message

**Business class**

**Roger Bray** on the mobile technology that tries to keep its users out of queues

The business traveller at Helsinki airport faced a sudden problem.

The carrier he had booked with had run into air traffic congestion, its aircraft were out of position and his flight had been cancelled.

An alternative departure was available with another airline, but by the time he reached the front of the check-in queue it was likely to be full.

Help, however, was a phone call away. He contacted his organisation's travel management company and they jumped the queue for him, quickly booking a seat.

All very efficient. But need he have been queuing at all? Surely, in this age of

instant communication, his airline could have sent an automated SMS text alerting him of the cancellation and perhaps let him stay in his office or hotel and avoid waiting at the airport?

Events this winter demonstrated the potential value of such up-to-the-minute information. First, a failed attempt to blow up a US-bound aircraft prompted additional airport security checks; then the most disruptive snow in parts of Europe for more than a half century played havoc with schedules.

Updates are now available from a plethora of sources – ranging from smart phone applications to travel management companies. But few, if any, provide the sort of comprehensive intelligence a traveller needs to get out of a hole and back on track, so the question lingers whether travellers are prepared to trust them without cross-checking with the airline itself.

Some airlines send delay

and cancellation alerts to mobiles or laptops; some do not. Those that do are unlikely to suggest switching to an alternative carrier. And what happens if a later message, crucially amending the first alert, fails to arrive? At least one airline urges recipients to double-check with its website.

Some carriers use third-party service providers, but warn the airline will not accept liability if information is inaccurate.

Passengers on airlines belonging to Star Alliance, for example, can choose to receive texts that can also be sent to a second person such as a secretary. But the Alliance adds a disclaimer stating it "will not take responsibility for the accuracy or timeliness of the information sent to you".

British Airways' passengers can sign up for text alerts when they book. But the alerts are primarily service messages, such as reminders that online check-in is open. A repre-

sentative says: "You might get notice of a cancellation but while we sometimes warn customers of a significant delay we don't usually send alerts when flights are held up. It's partly an issue of bandwidth.

"There could be a delay receiving texts, particularly if we have to send a large number. Generally, we

'Nearly every piece of data was entered by a human and, therefore, subject to error'

ask passengers to check BA.com."

Some websites offer to provide alerts covering a wide range of airlines. They are generally reliable, but can be a little US-centric. This is because a readily available source of delay data is the US Federal Aviation Administration.

David White, business development vice-president of Flightstats, based in Portland, Oregon, says his company, which sends alerts direct to travellers and via corporate customers such as travel management companies, draws its data from a wide variety of sources.

FAA information has limitations, he says. It does not include gate changes, for example. Flightstats decided to build a system capable of "intelligently aggregating" data from multiple sources including airlines and global distribution systems. "When we can find no other source, we scrape websites."

He says: "We provide flight status information on more than 6,000 airlines worldwide. The breadth of our coverage does vary by geography, but across the developed world it is the best available anywhere," he says.

"Our North American coverage is almost 100 per cent of regularly scheduled commercial flights. For western

Europe, we are able to track and accurately report status on more than 85 per cent of the flights operated by the top 40 airlines serving the region. And our coverage continues to improve."

But, says Mr White, "we've found no source to be 100 per cent accurate or reliable. Nearly every piece of data was entered by a human and, therefore, is subject to error. So we live by the 'trust, but verify' creed."

Perhaps it will always be so. Bill Brindle, business technology and distribution director of travel management company HRG, uses Flightstats for its alert service, but says he does not believe text updates will remove the need for phone contact with companies such as his in the near future.

"I never say never. But at times of weather disruption, the telephone still kicks in significantly because the traveller will probably want to be rebooked anyway."

# Explore good Gallic food or grand Mughal tombs

**Business hubs**

**The best of the world's busiest cities**

## Paris

**How to get there**

Charles de Gaulle airport, known by the locals as Roissy after one of the communes in which it is situated, is the main gateway to the capital. Once futuristic, now a sprawling mish-mash of buildings, the airport has been the centrepiece of a much-needed investment programme by Aéroports de Paris that also runs Orly, the second Paris airport.

Given a choice, fly to Orly because it is much quicker to get out of than CDG. A taxi from CDG is about €60 and should take about 45 minutes to the centre of town, though longer and more expensive if the traffic is heavy. Otherwise the high speed RER train is usually efficient and the Roissybus will drop travellers off at the Garnier Opera house in the city centre.

**Where to stay**

Paris is smaller and easier to get around than you might think, so even if you have back-to-back meetings at La Défense, the soul-less business district at the city's north-west edge, it is worth staying in the centre to enjoy its beauty. The city's top hotels have recently been allowed to call themselves five-star – previously the official

classification went no higher than four-star luxury. These include the Ritz, the George V, the Meurice and the Plaza-Athénée, the last two being part of the Dorchester group. All are within a stone's throw of each other, including the Crillon on the Place de la Concorde. Apart from the large luxury groups and workaday business hotels, Paris also has a large number of boutique hotels. The Duc de Saint Simon is a small hotel peppered with antiques quietly located in the otherwise bustling St Germain district on the Left Bank. The Hôtel Montalembert is also in St Germain and is still a favourite of the design crowd, while the Hôtel de Sers, with its cool modern interiors is close to the Champs Elysées. The most talked about newish arrival is Mama Shelter, a Philippe Starck-designed establishment in the impoverished but bohemian 20th *arrondissement* near the famed Père Lachaise cemetery, which has picked up business hotel awards.

**What to do**

A walk along the Seine will take you close to many of Paris's most famous sites, including the Louvre, the Musée d'Orsay, the Quai Branly, the beautiful Ile St Louis and the Institut du Monde Arabe, which has a wonderful view from its top floor Lebanese restaurant and terrace. The Café Marly is in a wing of the Louvre and cannot be beaten on location; eating on the terrace on a fine day is very pleasant. If the weather is good, a boat trip along the Seine has its attractions, but for those who prefer walking,

in the capital, the latest addition being the Bristol in the swish Faubourg Saint-Honoré close to the Élysée Palace, which has an internal garden. The 114 Faubourg is a less expensive new dining area in the same hotel. The Michelin guide also lists relatively inexpensive restaurants and is well worth looking up for a place to eat in your part of town. For steak and chips, Le Relais de Venise, known as "L'Entrecôte" offers a no-choice simple menu with a signature sauce. It is always packed. The original is at Porte Maillot with more comfortable offshoots in Saint-Germain and Montparnasse. The latest trendy restaurants include La Sociéte, designed by Christian Liaigre for the Costes family, Derrière in Le Marais, which is like dining in a private apartment, and KGB, or Kitchen Galerie Bis, an Asian fusion restaurant on the Left Bank.

**Where to eat**

A walk along the Seine will take you close to many of Paris's most famous sites, including the Louvre, the Musée d'Orsay, the Quai Branly, the beautiful Ile St Louis and the Institut du Monde Arabe, which has a wonderful view from its top floor Lebanese restaurant and terrace. The Café Marly is in a wing of the Louvre and cannot be beaten on location; eating on the terrace on a fine day is very pleasant. If the weather is good, a boat trip along the Seine has its attractions, but for those who prefer walking,

nothing beats tramping around the streets of the city, especially in Saint Germain or Le Marais, the city's gay district. If you do not have the inclination or the time to visit a big museum, Paris has plenty of small gems, including the Musée Rodin, the Musée Guimet dedicated to Asian art. The Musée Cognacq Jay has paintings by Boucher, Chardin and Fragonard in a 16th century townhouse and is a stone's throw from the Place des Vosges, Paris' oldest square. For shopping, visit Colette, the recently redesigned store on the Faubourg Saint-Honoré, while Merci on the fringes of Le Marais, has everything from beautifully-designed kitchenware to clothes and a good café. It also gives all of its profits to charity.

**Scheherazade Daneshkhu**

## New Delhi

**How to get there**

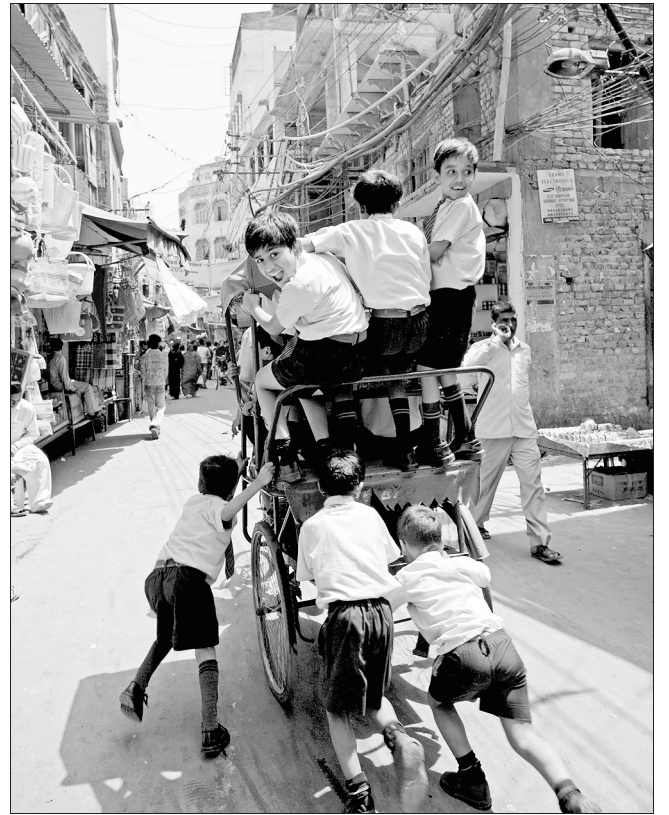
Travellers arriving at Delhi's airport are met by efficient immigration officials, a marble-floored baggage hall and an arrivals' duty free selling some of the most competitively priced whisky in the world. An airport metro link is not expected to be open until the Commonwealth Games in October. But such are the ambitions that the city plans a central flight check-in service at Connaught Place in the centre of town – similar to that operating in Hong Kong. In the meantime, taxis, limousines and hotel pick-ups are on offer. A taxi will cost about Rs260, while a limousine will cost about Rs4,500. Pre-arranged hotel pick-ups are often free. For taxis, go to the pre-paid kiosks, such as Easy Cabs, once you are clear of customs. Delhi's roads are often congested and first impressions are usually of a confusing melee, but a ride to the centre of town or a five star hotel can take as little as 30 minutes.

**Where to eat**

India is home to one of the world's most distinctive cuisines. You can seldom go wrong with north India's dal makhni, chicken tikka, paneer, rice and breads. Most chefs are accommodating of the western palate and will tone down the spiciness of a dish on request. Restaurant 1911 on the air-conditioned verandah of the Imperial Hotel and 360 at the Oberoi are elegant places that offer both Indian and western cuisine. Both hotels have smaller Italian restaurants more suited to private conversation. For Indian cuisine outside of hotels, some of the best establishments are Punjabi by Nature in Vasant Vihar, Gunpowder in Hauz Khas

**Where to stay**

There are two very popular luxury business hotels both run by the Tata Group: the Taj Mansingh, near the Lodi Gardens, and the Taj Palace in the diplomatic zone of Chanakyapuri.



**All aboard: a cycle rickshaw in Delhi's backstreets**

These have a near monopoly on business seminars and conferences, and are popular meeting grounds for India's business community. For a more historical feel, the Imperial Hotel on Janpath, near Connaught Place, is hard to beat. Purpose-built in 1936, it has prisms of the British Raj era lining its rose-scented corridors; lawns and a large swimming pool that plays music underwater. What the Imperial has in history, the more modern Oberoi, close to the Delhi Golf Club and a stone's throw from Khan Market, has in sleekness. The Maurya Sheraton in Chanakyapuri, which offers one of the best breakfasts in Delhi, is also favoured. For those seeking a more discreet stay, boutique hotels are sadly slow to develop in Delhi. A guesthouse, such as 27 Jor Bagh, or smaller hotels in the Sunder Nagar enclave, have a distinctly three star quality about them.

**Where to eat**

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village and Karim's kebab house in Old Delhi. For those seeking non-Indian food, there is Amici (Italian) and Side Wok (south-east Asian) in Khan Market and the Middle Eastern fare of Fez in Chanakyapuri's Malcha Marg.

**What to do**

Try to avoid the hottest months of May, June and July. The heat can be stupefying. Delhi is abundant both in history and contemporary life. If on a short trip, prioritise a visit to Humayan's Tomb and Mahatma Gandhi's house, a drive past the Edwin Lutyens-designed seat of India's government and a walk around the Mughal tombs of Lodi Gardens. If you have an afternoon to spare – and stamina – visit the Red Fort, the Jamma Masjid and markets of Old Delhi. These are best approached by metro to avoid the traffic and, once at Chandi Chowk, toured in a bicycle rickshaw. If you have an entire day, take the early morning Shatabdi Express to Agra. In a little over two hours you can be walking around the Taj Mahal, visiting Akbar the Great's Mughal capital of Fatehpur Sikri and having lunch in an outdoor pavilion at the Oberoi's Amarvilas hotel. One of Delhi's finest treats is a walk around the magnificent Mughal Gardens at the president's residence (only in February). Shopping is also excellent, best experienced in Khan Market or Connaught Place. Shoes are handmade speedily in Connaught Place, while fine City-style shirts can be purchased from clothes retailer Zodiac.

**James Lamont**



**City sickers: enjoy the beauty of central Paris and still make back-to-back meetings**

## Central venues benefit from frugality

### Conferences

Good connections and facilities are business winners, says **Jill James**

Next time your company organises a conference, you could find it happening much closer to home.

With pressure on managers to find cheap and accessible destinations, it is no surprise that many are opting to stay at home.

Alison Smith, director of business development, UK and Ireland, for Carlson Wagonlit Travel, says: "We are currently seeing a move to keep meetings and conferences within the country where most of the client's delegates are resident.

"This means they can use public transport or drive to a location close to their homes, or use low-cost domestic flights or rail if they have to travel some distance."

The less central a European city is, the harder it becomes to entice potential organisers

Ms Smith says venues have become very competitive in their pricing. When flight costs are factored in, keeping an event "in-country" is often the most cost-effective option.

The most popular UK locations last year were Manchester and Birmingham, according to Ms Smith – both easily accessible by rail and air – accompanied by deals such as discounts on food and drinks, extra meeting rooms and wifi.

However, when delegates are more international, the in-country option becomes less attractive. Clients look for cities with a large number of airline route options and places where venue pricing has remained at – or been reduced to – a reasonable level during the recession.

That is why Paris, London, Amsterdam, Madrid and Barcelona have always been the staple European locations for conferences. An expanding low-cost carrier flight network ensure these cities are easy to reach and relatively cheap.

Eastern European destinations, such as Prague, Budapest and Warsaw, have provided tough competition, but flight connections are not always as good.

Scandinavian cities have been competing too, but the less central a European city, the harder it becomes to entice potential organisers.

Germany, which has one of Europe's most developed meetings and conference markets, has worked hard on building a value-for-money image.

Lutz P Vogt, managing director of the German Convention Bureau, says the country ranks top in categories such as ease-of-travel and standard of living. A good business climate, security, high per-capita GDP and cutting-edge infrastructure also play a big role.

"These are important requirements for mastering the current crisis and to emerge from it with new strength," he says.

Collating information on venues uses valuable resources. This is where hotels with specialist information systems score. Maritim Hotels, a big conference facility provider, says its web-based information system provides user-friendly assistance to simplify planning.

LeRoy Sheppard, director of sales, UK and Ireland, for Maritim Hotels, says there are excellent deals to be negotiated if conference organisers "have the opportunity to be flexible and change dates or locations to take advantage of venue availability".

He adds: "Changing location does not necessarily mean a big upheaval. It can be changing from one hotel to another within the same city."

Mr Sheppard says the company has seen a marked increase in enquiries for hotels and convention centres outside the eurozone, citing Sharm-el-Sheikh in Egypt, Belek in Turkey and Malta. However, he says the eurozone still offers excellent value.

Kevin Iwamoto, vice-president of enterprise strategy for StarCite, an online global meetings company, says businesses are taking a good look at costs, with many looking at multiple sourcing not only of hotels but cities.

In the US, he says, meetings spending has risen at destinations such as Oklahoma City and Detroit, while in Europe, cities such as Lille and Bristol are benefiting.



Jim French: 'We are not in the business of flying routes in the hope that people will relocate to use them'

## Flybe to the moon – and to a host of satellite cities

### CEO interview Jim French

Roger Blitz talks to the head of a more frilly no-frills airline

For someone who runs an airline, Jim French does very little flying. "I tend to go by train up to London," says the chairman and chief executive of Flybe, the regional low-cost airline based in Exeter in south-west England. "Any flying I do is long-haul, which is very rare."

Mr French's train trips to London are frequent however, and likely to increase. Flybe is heading for a stock market flotation – a question of when, not if, he says. "We constantly watch the market and watch the business. When the time is right, we'll go to the market," says the 57-year-old Scot who this year marks 40 years in aviation.

Flybe itself is eight years old, its name taken from British Airways, which was formerly Jersey European. Nearly 70 per cent is owned by the trust of the late Jack Walker, the British steel magnate. Other shareholders include British Airways and staff.

Mr French owns a 7 per cent stake. It is positioned somewhere between the big flag carriers and the no-frills operators – aimed at the traveller of necessity

who wants a convenient location for a short-haul trip at a price that is sensible. The aim is to make Flybe Europe's biggest regional airline.

Business people all over the UK know Flybe, which last year flew 7.3m passengers. Its reach takes in Kirkwall in the Orkneys to Newquay in Cornwall, as well as destinations in 11 continental European countries, plus Ireland, the Isle of Man and the Channel Islands.

"Our market is a regional focus. We are almost like a bus service in the sky," says Mr French. "We have very retail-oriented branding, highlighting the benefits of the routes we fly and the prices we charge."

Flybe's response to the recession, which saw it lose two-thirds of its pre-tax profits in 2008-09 in spite of a 6.8 per cent rise in turnover, has been to reduce capacity on routes rather than cut the routes themselves.

"We have a very high frequency operation. On over half of our routes we were flying four times a day, but we can have a high impact on cost reduction by going from four routes to three," the chief executive explains.

"Over 60 per cent of our costs are operating costs, so we have a very resilient model where we can adjust our capacity to meet reduced demand without undermining the core

product of the destinations served."

The chief executive is not shy in claiming a role for regional airlines in the development of regional economic growth. Just as shipping companies helped with the growth of port cities such as Liverpool or Southampton in the industrial revolution, so regional airports are stimulating local economic prosperity, he says. "People relocating to these regions see a bigger range of air services."

But does Flybe set up routes to reflect economic

Regional airports are stimulating local economic prosperity

activity or to try to stimulate it? "We're not a social service, that's the government's responsibility. Clearly we do some experimentation. We can take a risk on a route to regional France. But we are not in the business of flying routes that cost us £10m in the hope that people will relocate to use them."

Mr French believes Flybe is in a desirable position regarding its relationship with business travellers. "In some regards, the leisure traveller is more demanding than the business traveller; they are expecting more," he says.

"The business traveller is looking for convenience, frequency, flexibility and reliability. Safety, of course, is paramount. I believe we're getting to that holy grail."

What differentiation there is the business traveller will find on the ground, through perks such as executive lounges. But even then, he adds, it is highly questionable whether business travellers will pay for a substantial premium product.

As for the threat to aviation from a revitalised rail network, something that could undermine regional operators such as Flybe, Mr French is sceptical. "There is a case for high-speed rail transit, but it is very market-specific. I don't think you'll get a London to Edinburgh high-speed service in the next five years, I don't think it's a threat at all," he says.

"There won't be a Manchester-to-Humber link or Norwich-to-Bristol. I can see routes radiating into and out of London. But I don't see anyone who has a high-speed rail link idea running from region to region. Most politicians understand that is the case."

Although Mr French could do with a few more rail options for getting between London and his Exeter HQ. "I would love to see some competition for South West Trains," he says ruefully.

## A not so transparent debate

### The Big Story Body scanners

Roger Blitz reports on the world's latest anti-terrorism tool

The Pope thinks they are a bad idea, civil liberties groups complain of an affront to human decency, while travellers and taxpayers are moaning about the hassle and the cost.

Airport body scanners, using X-ray beams to create the body's reflection on a monitor, were always likely to be introduced to a chorus of disapproval – and so it has proved.

"Invasion of the body scanners" has been an oft-used rejoinder of headline-writers, as passengers were confronted with a perceived new burden to their experience of flying.

Since the attempted Christmas Day bombing of a Northwest Airlines flight from Amsterdam to Detroit, when a Nigerian tried to set fire to explosives strapped to his thigh and groin, governments have been rushing out orders for the see-through imaging devices to be installed in international airports.

The US Transportation Security Administration has not exactly sped along with implementing body scanners in airports. In three years it had installed 44 units in 21 airports.

But this month, it announced a roll-out of new installations, including Los Angeles, San Diego, Fort Lauderdale-Hollywood and Oakland. It plans the deployment of 450 units this year, and wants about the same number next year.

By the end of 2014, 1,800 scanners will be operating in US airports.

The TSA insists that the devices use very low radiation levels, that strict safeguards are in place to protect passenger privacy and ensure anonymity, and that the system is efficient.

Body scanner screening is optional. Passengers who decline will be subjected to a physical pat-down.

"We are enhancing our capability to detect and disrupt threats of terrorism across the nation," Janet Napolitano, the US homeland security secretary, said this month when announcing the latest roll-out of airport scanners.

In the UK, the government ordered scanners to become operational at Heathrow, Birmingham and Manchester airports at the beginning of February, with



Inside out: a passenger en route to the US from Paris gets the treatment

### In the eyes of the law

You arrive at the airport, check in and find yourself confronted for the first time with a body scanner, writes **Roger Blitz**. So what are your rights?

First, says the US Transportation Security Administration, the screening is optional. But those who decline to be screened will have to stretch out their arms and legs and be subjected to a physical pat-down by a security guard.

If you agree to be screened, the security officer will ask you to step into and out of the scanner, assume different positions and remain still for a few seconds. This officer will not have access to the image of your body

captured by the scanner, which is transmitted on to a terminal in a remote location viewed by another officer. All facial features are obscured, so that officer cannot identify you. And all recording equipment is banned from that location.

There is no system for storing your image, printing it or transmitting it. Once you are cleared to proceed, your image is automatically deleted.

But human rights organisations question the legality of body scanners. The UK's Equality and Human Rights Commission said last month there was little clarity from the government about

how passengers are chosen, and there are few safeguards in place to prevent discrimination.

Lawyers for the EHRC say their use amounts to an invasion of privacy and is contrary to human rights and data protection laws.

"While it is true that the image is not thereafter retained by the authorities, and that it is destroyed and rendered irretrievable after this process has been completed, there is retention for the brief time required for analysis, with this examination being conducted by a human staff member, not a machine," the lawyers said.

The UK's Equality and Human Rights commission last month questioned whether the scanners were in breach of human rights law.

UK ministers acknowledge that it is impossible to guarantee the scanners would be 100 per cent effective.

But for all the arguments pouring in against the use of body scanners, politicians point to a succession of polls suggesting the public is not so anxious about their widespread use.

For example, one survey carried out by TripAdvisor, the travel advice website, showed 78 per cent were comfortable with their introduction. Business travellers are among those taking a relaxed view, according to Stewart Harvey of Hogg Robinson Group, the UK-based global travel management company.

"Most travellers seem happy with the introduction of the new body scanners as long as they improve safety

'It is far from clear whether this technology would have foiled the Christmas Day attack'

for all passengers," he asserts.

"Our clients are just accepting that the scanners are a part of the journey now and many see them as a natural progression in anti-terrorism technology. If they are used as part of the solution, along with intelligence and passenger profiling then they are a good thing."

Nigel Turner of rival travel management group Carlson Wagonlit Travel says there were always concerns about anything that added to queuing. "Most people are OK with these things so long as it doesn't add ridiculous times to getting through airports," he says.

The unknown quantity is the potential impact on travel costs. Body scanners do not come cheap – at about £100,000 a unit – while the Government Accountability Office in the US estimates extra staffing costs of \$2.4bn to operate the scanners.

The Canadian government has already set hares running by introducing a surcharge to pay for scanners and other security measures, adding an extra C\$9 to an international flight.

Mr Turner says: "I could see this being a trend."



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