Aging Lifestyles: How to steer clear of airline hassles

by Joe Volz and Kate Bird

We arrived on time with all of our luggage.

It seemed like a travel miracle.

I do a lot of traveling and last year set a record for delayed airline departures and arrivals. And lost luggage was way up, too.

But I have found a solution. I drove.

It might be something you want to consider. As I have grown older, I have developed less tolerance for standing in line and putting up with the annoyance of long waits, particularly in cramped airplanes on the runways. And losing luggage? Forget it. Needless to say, my arthritis doesn't tolerate these conditions either.

Yet, I didn't want to give up traveling altogether. So I have come up with this plan. Call it the senior advantage program. If I am traveling one-way 600 miles or less, I drive. But I do it my way. I don't barrel along the highway nonstop for 10 hours. Not only would my back be stiff as an ironing board, but I would be nodding off at the wheel.

So, I set a limit.

I don't drive more than 300 miles a day before pulling into a bed and breakfast for the night. Bed and breakfasts offer a lot of advantages. No teenagers running around the hallways to keep you up half the night. They are quiet and pleasant. And they are usually in small, traffic-free historic towns. So, the B and Bs become part of the vacation.

And we don't start at the crack of dawn. We wait until after the rush hour-maybe around 10. We stop at dusk. If we haven't made our 300 miles by then, so be it. We're in no hurry. We will take an additional day on the road.

And if we can avoid the superhighways, all the better, even if it does take a bit longer. The operative axiom here is: The amount of speed you incur means you will have an equals an equal amount of displeasure.

Highway restaurants, for example, are generally abominable fast food joints. By heading for the less traveled roads, you can discover a number of charming places to dine.

And, of course, you don't pay any turnpike tolls.

I used to enjoy flying and unfortunately, any trip over 600 miles would be too long-winded by car, so I am still forced to fly since rail travel is so sporadic.

Excuse me if I sound like an elitist, but airlines, since it became cheap enough for the masses, have lowered their standards. More seats have been jammed into the planes. So many planes have been put up into the air that runway and airplane control facilities have not kept up and, of course, elegant dining has disappeared.

You get what you pay for, I suppose. And since airline prices have plummeted, so has the service.

But the one thing we seniors have going for us is that we are not in a hurry - and speed is the only thing airlines have to offer these days that is superior to the car.

Cars, meanwhile, have become more senior friendly-automatic controls, power steering, seats to push back.

So, I don't care if I never see an airport again. Or hardly ever.

Rediscovering America by car is certainly the way to go. Why don't you try it?

E-mail Joe Volz at volzjoe2003@yahoo.com, or write to 2528 Five Shillings Road, Frederick, MD 21701.

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