

# Itineraries

The New York Times

## ON THE ROAD

### New Directions From the AAA: Go to the Web, Then Print

By JOE SHARKEY

YOU remember all those predictions about how technology was going to usher in the paperless office?

Never happened. There was a time when I bought paper by the ream. Now, to feed the sturdy Hewlett-Packard LaserJet 1200 on my desk, I buy paper by the case.

So it was with some skepticism that I considered the online improvements that AAA, the automobile club, is promoting for its Web site, [www.aaa.com](http://www.aaa.com).

For example, you can now get that familiar, handy TripTik — which in print is a custom spiral-bound booklet divided into various sections of your journey — online. In seconds, I ordered one for a 2,500-mile road trip from home to Tucson. It was 23 pages.

"We're bringing the tradition of our books and maps and directions to the Web site," said Jan Coyne, the director for geographic information systems for AAA.

"So we have our tour book and TripTik content on line. It's pretty much the same experience you would get if you walked into one of our branch offices."

Except that it is immediate and does not require a trip to a branch office.

Also, the online information is available to nonmembers, who just have to type in a ZIP code.

Now I have belonged to AAA since high school, and kept my memberships up as much for the free maps and guides as for the protection of emergency roadside car service. Those free fat guide books and folded paper maps are very useful on a road trip — and I'm happy to say that AAA, despite its stronger embrace of the Web as a way to distribute information, has no plans to fix what is not broken. It doesn't see the end of print.

"Research finds that typically people want to do online planning in advance," Ms. Coyne said, "but once they get in the car, they still want that guide or map."

"We still distribute 25 million tour books," said Jeff Zimmerman, the director for travel information and publishing operations.

"And more than 38 million sheet maps," Ms. Coyne said.

That's each year. For business travelers, services like AAA have become more important as more of us drive, rather than fly, on trips of 300 or even 400 miles. While most business trips have always been done by car, the exodus by fed-up fliers has put even more busi-

ness travelers behind the wheel.

Air travel this summer is going to be more grueling than ever. There are fewer domestic flights and fewer seats on those flights, and planes are taking off more full than ever. There is no slack in the system, so instances of planes full of people being stranded on ramps for five, six or more hours are increasing. Over all, delays are mounting.

According to the annual forecast of the Travel Industry Association, leisure travel is expected to increase 1.4 percent this summer — but business travel is expected to be up 3 percent over last summer. Those projections include trips by automobile, plane and train.

Suzanne Cook, the senior vice president for research at the association, said there was no way to quantify yet how many business travelers were switching to cars.

"But for the short business trip — going to the airport, flying to a nearby city and flying home — certainly the car becomes more attractive," she said.

Despite gasoline prices at record levels and higher hotel rates as occupancy increases, Ms. Cook said there was a "renewed enthusiasm for travel" this summer. She said the industry figured that gasoline prices would settle in at an average of about \$3 a gallon this summer, and travel would not be markedly curtailed unless gas hit \$3.50 a gallon.

As to hotels, "any of your major destinations are going to be crowded this year," she said.

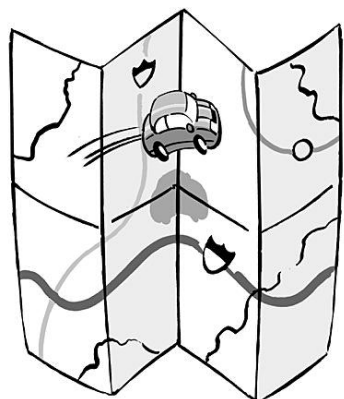
All indications are that business travelers should plan ahead even more than they usually do. That brings us back to AAA's redesigned Web site.

The site includes all of the detailed print information AAA gathers and updates each year. But online data distribution becomes far more convenient than books in planning a trip.

"We have a full-time staff of 65 tourism editors" who travel around inspecting hotels and restaurants on unannounced visits, Mr. Zimmerman said.

The AAA's tour guides — online and in print — cover 6,500 destinations and list 32,000 hotels and motels; 28,000 restaurants (those with four or five stars get annual visits); 15,500 attractions; and 21,000 events. The guides also offer various discounts, which are available only to AAA members.

Users can also get alternate route information, obtain trip itineraries and make direct bookings online. And they can look up the current price of gas at about 100,000 service stations, which is going to be handy.



Chris Gash

## Meet Your Clothes at the Hotel

Growing Interest in Services That Ship Luggage Separately

By JANE L. LEVERE

The luggage shipping business has found a convert in Murray Grenville, who runs an investment valuation company in New York and has not flown with bags on business trips in almost a year, even when he goes to the West Coast.

Mr. Grenville, the chief executive of the Sterling Valuation Group, estimates that shipping his bags ahead saves him 60 to 90 minutes on each flight. Not only that, he said, there is little risk of lost or misdirected luggage. "I get off the plane and right into a car," he went on. "I can go straight to a meeting without my bags; I don't have to go to my hotel first. And it's an easier travel experience because I don't have 60 pounds of baggage to pull along."

A small but growing number of executives are using such services to ship bags ahead when they travel on business. These services — some originally created to ship vacationers' sports equipment like skis or golf clubs — are proliferating. And variations are springing up, like companies that operate "virtual closets" for travelers. These companies store and maintain customers' clothing and other possessions and ship them to their destination, then return it all to storage once the trip is over.

Although the concept of luggage forwarding dates back at least a decade — one of the first companies, Luggage Express, started in 1996 — it will no doubt continue to gain popularity as air travel becomes more difficult.

With last summer's adoption of new restrictions on liquids that can be carried onto flights, some travelers who previously did not check bags are now doing so. This appears to be placing more pressure on the airlines. According to the Bureau of Transportation Statistics, American airlines reported 8.02 incidents of mishandled luggage per 1,000 passengers in the first quarter of this year, up from 6.24 incidents in the period last year. For all of 2006, the airlines reported 6.73 incidents, which was itself up from 6.64 reports in 2005. The bureau defines a mishandled bag as one that has been lost, broken into, damaged or delayed.

What may also help the luggage shipping services are the fees some carriers are charging to check bags. British Airways, for instance, announced in February that it would simplify its previous fee structure and allow economy-class passengers starting their trips in the United States to check free two bags, each weighing a maximum of 23 kilograms (about 50 pounds). Business- and first-class passengers who begin their trips in the United States can check up to three bags, each weighing up to 23 kilograms. But the airline is charging £120 (about \$236) for each additional checked bag, or for any overweight checked bag.

The carrier's policy for passengers who begin their trips in Britain and are not taking trans-Atlantic flights is even more stringent. (Fees are discounted 30 percent if prepaid online.)

John Lampl, a spokesman for British Airways, said the new charges would be fully phased in by early October. He said the fees were intended in part to safeguard the "health and safety" of British Airways baggage handlers.

Spirit Airlines, a low-fare carrier based in Miramar, Fla., will start charging travelers to check bags next month — \$5 a bag if the payment is made online and \$10 a bag if it



Erik S. Lesser for The New York Times

Katherine Johnson, the founder of CarryOn, at the company's headquarters in Gainesville, Ga. CarryOn stores customers' clothing and then ships it ahead when they travel.

is made at the airport for a maximum of two bags. The cost of checking additional bags will be \$100 each.

The baggage shipping companies — which include Luggage Express, a subsidiary of Universal Express, based in Boca Raton, Fla.; Luggage Concierge in Hawthorne, N.Y.; Sports Express in Houston; First Luggage, based near Heathrow Airport in London; and Luggage Forward, based in Boston — generally operate the same way. Customers book their services either by phone or online; the

### Capitalizing on the appeal of never having to lug a bag through the airport.

companies then ship the bags via Federal Express, United Parcel Service or other freight forwarders, then track them and confirm their arrival at the traveler's destination. Rates vary according to the amount of time required for delivery and the destination.

Last week, Luggage Express quoted a \$305 rate for round-trip overnight delivery of a 50-pound suitcase from New York to Los Angeles, while Luggage Forward's fee was \$622. First Luggage quoted a rate of \$258.65 one way, or \$517.30 round trip, for a 50-pound bag going from New York to London; it said the trip would take 48 hours each way. Luggage Forward said its quickest service from New York to London would take two to four business days, while service in the other direction would take three to five business days, with a round-trip delivery fee of \$738.

All the shipping companies say demand from business travelers and others has grown significantly in recent months, particularly since the Transportation Security Administration imposed the new liquid carry-on rules.

Richard A. Altomare, chairman and chief executive of Universal Express, said that business at its subsidiary, Luggage Ex-

press, had grown about 20 percent a month since August. Gideon Kasfiner, chief executive of First Luggage, said the number of pieces of luggage shipped by American customers had tripled in the last year, while Aaron Kirley, a co-founder of Luggage Forward, said its gross revenue in the first quarter of this year was half of its gross revenue for all of 2006.

Discounted rates are probably stimulating some of the business. First Luggage gives a 5 percent discount to British Airways passengers, while Luggage Forward introduced a deeply discounted rate last summer that guarantees delivery in the continental United States in five days. This discounted rate is usually less than half the rate for guaranteed overnight luggage delivery.

Although one "virtual closet" company, Garde Robe of New York, was started in 2001, others have begun offering such services only recently. These include FlyLite, which is based in Reston, Va., and has storage sites in Boston, New York and Reston, and CarryOn, with a storage site in Gainesville, Ga. All three companies photograph customers' clothing and other possessions, and display the photos in the customer's password-protected online "closet."

None of these services are especially cheap. Garde Robe, for example, charges a minimum of \$350 a month to store 50 garments, including 10 pairs of shoes and one box of accessories or toiletries, plus additional fees to ship and clean these items. Gary Schechner, a Los Angeles-based marketing and advertising consultant who once worked with Katherine Johnson, the founder of CarryOn, said he now flew with only his workout clothing. Everything else is shipped ahead by CarryOn.

William Behn, a single father who lives with his three children in Atlanta and works for a staffing and accounting consultancy, said he used FlyLite when he travels to Washington on business.

"As a single dad, I've got a million things going on," he said. "I get a huge sense of relief and comfort knowing that at both ends of a trip I don't have to pack and unpack."

## ON MAY 30, THE YANKEES WILL PLAY IN A DIFFERENT PARK. BRYANT PARK.

Come to "Pinstripes in the Park." A free outdoor viewing of the Yankees @ Toronto game in Bryant Park.

On May 30, you can catch the Yankees game right in midtown. Join the fun starting at 5:30 p.m. in Bryant Park. The first 3,000 fans to arrive will be given limited edition Pinstripes in the Park blankets. There will be ballpark food and concessions, beer gardens, and an autograph session with Yankees legends. Then, at 7:05 p.m., the YES Network will broadcast the Yankees at Toronto game on a giant screen. In between innings, there will be chances to win free trips on Continental—the airline still stepping up to the plate with things like pillows, blankets and meals at mealtime. So come on down to Bryant Park on May 30 and watch the game.

YES



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