

We assume you won't be in that stressful department store line with the other kids to sit on Santa's lap this year, even if you could still fit. So, here are some tips on making your holiday travels and travails a little more Santa-like and a bit less stressful.



1. If you're going to that department or discount store to buy gifts, of course you shouldn't wait until the last minute. Besides, you can save many wasted minutes if you hit the stores at the right time of day. Write a list of the items you need, find out opening hours and get there when the store opens. This year some will open at 5 am or earlier, so get in and get out before the hordes of families come stomping in several hours later.
2. Now that you know how to use your new-fangled computer and understand the internet almost as well as a 10-year-old, try some of this year's holiday shopping online. If you'll be traveling away from home over the holidays, before you leave home, take some of the stress off your gift-buying chores by doing it online. All department stores and virtually every other shopping source offers online service, which includes arranging for delivery of your gifts on time to almost every corner of the world.
3. If your holiday plans consists of over the hills and through the trees to grandmother's house you go, hit the highways very early, too. If you live in a big city, you know heavy drive time is from 6 to 9 am, and again from 4 to 6 pm. Don't be on the road during those hours. If pre-dawn driving doesn't bother you, the best time to go is between 3 and 5 am. If you don't mind night driving, from 10 pm to 2 am is probably when the roads are also least crowded.
4. If you're flying, consider the off-hours, particularly what airlines call "redeye" flights. They're the ones that take off after midnight. Your sleep patterns may be disturbed, but you'll find driving to the airport, waiting for your flight and your actual trip much less crowded and stressful as the daytime schedules when most people fly.
5. Try skip-the-calendar economy in your travels. Schedule your flights, hotel stays, dining out and other travel plans on days/nights when traffic and prices are at their lowest. For instance, one of New York City's most upscale restaurants gets \$150 a person for Christmas Eve dinner. For the same meal on December 26, the price is \$49. A posh Vegas resort hotel charges \$500 per night for New Year's Eve, but \$100 for New Year's Night. A cruise line hits travelers with

\$1,800 for a four-day Caribbean trip when it includes the same Christmas or New Year's dates. The same cruise in January goes for \$650. You'll also be surprised how airline prices get lower when you book "redeyes".

Yeah, yeah, we know, we know. It just ain't the same when you delay your holiday festivities for even one day. Try it once, and you'll find that kind of penny pinching can add up to many dollars. It can be just as enjoyable, if not much more so. And your bank account will thank you.