



DEALING WITH
THE

HIGH

PRICE OF
TRAVEL

By Jana Stough, NACDA Intern

In the past five years, Americans have been faced with astonishing increases in the cost of travel. Fuel prices fluctuate on a daily basis, never really going down, and hotel rooms and rental cars are not getting any cheaper either. It seems as though no matter how much we try, traveling on a budget is getting more difficult. However, for athletics departments nationwide, sticking to the budget is a necessity. That is why now, more than ever, universities and institutions across the country must weigh all of their options before traveling.

One option for universities is to have their teams travel by motor coach instead of flying. Equally popular is piggybacking men's and women's team travel to avoid an extra trip. Athletics travel is changing, whether it's partnering with travel agencies, establishing alliances between hotel groups, or strengthening relationships among local companies, universities nationwide are going to great lengths to cut the cost of travel.

WHY THE JUMP IN PRICES?

Many people believe high fuel prices are the sole reason for increased travel costs. While the sudden jump in prices are a driving force, there also have been other changes in the last five years that have caused today's high costs. John Anthony, CEO and President of Anthony Travel, cites four major reasons in the increase in travel expenses over the past few years. They are:

- Reduced airline capacity due to smaller planes and reduced number of flights
- Record high percentage of seats filled on planes
- Drastic increases in fuel prices
- Airlines emerging from bankruptcy

Aside from the transportation aspect, hotel and car rental rates have also increased steadily since 2003. Anthony Travel believes this is because of "travel industry supply and demand. The hotel and rental car industries have enjoyed record demand in recent years. Inventory is now being added, especially with new hotel construction, so prices will stabilize for awhile."

With more than one contributing factor to increased travel costs, universities must be familiar with the travel trends of the time. If not, hidden costs and expenses are sure to arise, and while athletics departments are often a major revenue source for institutions, staying within a budget is still important.

BUDGET, BUDGET, BUDGET

While all institutions are faced with the high cost of travel, not all are affected in the same way. "Top-tier" Football Bowl Subdivision (FBS) universities have been known to have athletics budgets exceeding \$75 million dollars, which allows them to deal with increased airfare and padded lodging costs differently. Conversely, most institutions do not have those types of means to work with. However, they still deal with demanding travel schedules which forces them to tackle the challenge of finding discount travel.

Judi Strike, administrative assistant for finance at Mount Saint Mary's (MD), handles all of the team travel and hotel reservations for the Mountaineers' 15 varsity athletics teams. Despite the increases in costs, she notes three things she does when trying to find the best deal.

- We contract all of our bus transportation through one local company, which is also one of our business partners. They price our transportation with a 10% discount for handling all our athletics transportation.
- I also book all of our airfare directly with the group reservations departments at each airline.
- If a team has to travel by air, it still needs ground transportation, so I always get at least two quotes.

Reducing travel costs is also important for athletics conferences, as employees and members are often forced to travel for meetings, events and championships. As a conference, the Wisconsin Intercollegiate Athletics Conference (WIAC) has taken several steps to reduce travel costs for its member institutions. Commissioner Gary Karner notes that the WIAC has "eliminated a number of in-person meetings and reduced the number of days required for selected meetings through the use of conference calls."

Aside from the adjustments made on the business end,

scheduling changes also have occurred in the WIAC to better accommodate travel budgets. "We have saved significant travel costs through creative scheduling, including doubleheaders in men's and women's basketball," Karner said. "We also have reduced travel costs through conference-mandated travel squad limits in football, as well as roster limits in all men's sports. As another cost-saving measure, we conduct a number of joint championships for men and women such as cross country, indoor/outdoor track & field, swimming and diving."

JOINING FORCES

Although scheduling and timing play a large role in reducing traveling costs, teaming up with other companies can be favorable. One popular option is to create alliances between a university/organization and hotel or airline groups.

The Eastern College Athletics Conference (ECAC) recently joined forces with Groopie, Inc. and the Wyndham Hotel Group, which gives ECAC members and fans an online booking engine which features reduced prices for teams and individuals traveling to ECAC Championships and other events. Groopie, which began in 2004, is a leader in online group travel, while the Wyndham Hotel Group encompasses nearly 6,500 hotels and more than 539,000 hotel rooms on six continents.

LEAVE IT TO THE EXPERTS

While all of the aforementioned options aide in reducing travel costs, they still place a majority of the burden on coaches or program assistants. With last-minute adjustments and changes, planning athletics travels can be very confusing and time consuming, which is why many institutions and athletics organizations are turning to travel agencies to arrange the various aspects of their trips. Two of the most popular companies to date are Short's Travel Management (Waterloo, Iowa) and Anthony Travel (South Bend, Indiana).

While Short's and Anthony Travel handle all types of travel, they are unique in the fact that they have specific departments and people that deal solely with athletics.

According to Ryan Dohman, director of business development at Short's Sports and Event Logistics, "It is important to have a travel management company that has the knowledge and experience of moving teams. Anyone can book a single ticket, but it takes a certain skill-set to handle large group movements."

With more than 110 years of combined experience in the industry, Short's has become a leader in athletics travel. In the spring of 2003, the Midwest-based family-owned organization, won a bid to be the lead travel agency for the NCAA and its nearly 90 championships. Short's not only arranges transportation for the NCAA's 60,000-plus student-athletes, but also for the organization's convention, meetings and other business travels.

"Through our relationship with the NCAA, we are able to provide discounts or waivers with airlines, car rental agencies, hotels and motor coach companies," Dohman added. "Teams are also taking advantage of our access to "low fare" carriers in order to reduce their travel costs."

John Anthony of Anthony Travel expanded on these ideas when he said, "By working with a national specialist in sports travel, universities are able to take advantage of the leveraged volume of many more schools than just their own." This allows for things like:



HIGH

PRICE OF TRAVEL

- Airline group discounts beyond those available to the public
- Change fee waivers, to eliminate extra costs to return home early after tournament elimination
- Group desk negotiations, even for smaller groups like golf, tennis and cross country
- Charter access and pricing assistance
- Hotel discount programs
- Bus and car rental discount programs



Gary Karner



John Anthony

Aside from aiding institutions with their services, travel agencies also relieve athletics departments of extra work. As Anthony Travel notes, "By outsourcing the travel function to an agency, athletics departments are able to significantly reduce labor costs. Communication gets streamlined through one source, all travel functions are handled centrally, and coaches can spend more time coaching."

Another added bonus of working with a travel agency is

their state-of-the-art reservation systems. Through using the best technology available, travel professionals can provide their services to clients across the country. In addition, agencies are also able to access nearly every fare or Internet special at the time, allowing them to generate the best possible deal.

Also, there are changes being made in the transportation industry that are beneficial to the consumer. Anthony Travel notes, "Airlines no longer extract the same premium for not staying over Saturday night, so mid-week recruiting travel is



available at lower prices than in the 1990's. In addition, all airline growth in recent years has occurred with low-cost carriers such as Southwest Airlines, Air Tran and Jet Blue, so more routes at lower prices are available."

Another company that is highly involved in athletics travel is Worldtek. With more than 25 years of experience, Dave Smith, leader of the Worldtek Sports Travel Division, plays an integral role in vendor negotiations with air, hotel and ground transportation. According to Smith, "One of the biggest advantages to working with a national travel agency is that you are working with professionals who know the tricks of the

trade. When I am booking team travel it is kind of like we are playing let's make a deal. I say I have X number of people who need to fly here by this time, what can do you for me? This also allows me to go to a different company and say so and so gave me the flight at this price, can you beat it?"

LIGHT AT THE END OF THE TUNNEL?

After researching numerous institutions and travel organizations, it is clear that while travel costs are on the rise, there are things that all universities can do to stay within their budgets.

1. Plan team travel at least six months in advance
2. Better organize individual recruit traveling to avoid last-minute changes
3. Choose alternate airports
4. Be flexible with the travel times
5. Take buses instead of flying when possible
6. Increase the number of athletes in hotel rooms
7. Be willing to travel further for lower hotel rates
8. Fly in and out on the same day when on recruiting trips
9. Fly one way and bus back
10. Book multiple passenger vans

The Road To Success... Begins With Peter Pan!

- America's Highest Safety Rating
- Modern Fleet
- Professional Drivers with Athletic Travel Experience



- Covering the Northeast
- Dedicated Drivers for Duration of Trip
- 24 Hour Dispatch Support

One Call Does It All For Your Team Travel!

Peter Pan
Bus Lines



1-800-237-8747 Ext. 1205
www.peterpanbus.com