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For an Upgrade, Skip the Vegetarian Meal

By RACHEL SHELASKY
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I'M an entrepreneur in the promotional clothing and products business. That entrepreneurial spirit is in my blood.

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Rachel Shelasky, the founder of Hollywood Fourth, a promotional apparel company, in Carmel-by-the-Sea, Calif.

Q. How often do you fly for business?

A. About twice a month, mostly domestic.

Q. What's your least favorite airport?

A. Miami International, for the simple reason that the air conditioning is freezing there.

Like a lot of people, my great-grandfather came to New York in 1907 and worked as a tailor. He moved to Massachusetts and set up shop with his son, my grandfather. In the 1930s, they formed a company called Hollywood Uniforms, which my dad joined when he came of age. My dad then moved the company back to New York in the late 1990s and I joined in 2007, and started a new division, called [Hollywood Fourth](#). That “fourth” refers to me, as in the fourth generation to be involved in the family business.

I love traveling for business, which is saying a lot because I fly coach. I think airports are magical. You meet so many different people, and everyone has a story. I was in Morocco about two years ago, and on the way back I was delayed in Madrid. I wound up sitting on the floor outside of the airport security area and several other people, mostly business travelers, joined me. We talked about family and love and life. It didn't matter how successful anyone was since we were all just stranded travelers surrendering to the circumstances. I still keep in touch

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Q. Of all the places you've been, what's the best?

A. The South of France, because of its beautiful, refined cities like Aix-en-Provence and sleepy seaside villages. I think I could live there year-round eating only good cheese on fresh baguettes.

Q. What's your secret airport vice?

A. A cup of Earl Grey, a book on Zen Buddhism and peanut butter M&Ms.

with several of the people I met.

Although I use social media to help get the word out about my company, whenever I travel for business I make sure I pass out my business cards. It might sound old-fashioned, but I think meeting people face-to-face is still really important. The first thing I do when I'm someplace new is find a busy street, with a lot of shops and restaurants. Then I take 100 of my business cards and go around and start introducing myself. Earlier this year I went to Miami and walked into a popular chain yoga studio, took a class, and then gave my business card to the person at the front desk. I'm now handling most of their retail. I'm a believer in the power of the card.

When you're responsible for a company, it's important to recharge. But like most entrepreneurs, every trip I take winds up being about business.

Recently, I took a weeklong retreat in California. I hiked and exercised and only ate what was provided. That meant no sugar, caffeine or carbs. The highlight of my day was a slice of apple with almond butter. I was hungry, tired and anxious.

One morning, though, I decided to hike the highest mountain around, which is saying something since I'm terrified of heights. As chance would have it, I was hiking right next to one of the spa owners. We connected and I handed over my business card. I'm now doing all of their promotional merchandise, even though I still hate heights.

I'm a little jealous when people talk about getting flight upgrades. I never get upgraded. On a recent trip to Rome, I was so excited because the gentleman at the check-in counter told me that he could upgrade me to first class.

So I just flew to Rome in my cheap seat and tried to enjoy my vegetables which, at that point, weren't all that enjoyable. I'm not even a vegetarian, and to be honest, I really had a taste for a hamburger.

I couldn't wipe the smile off my face. But then he noticed I pre-ordered a vegetarian meal. He told me because I had pre-ordered a meal, and it didn't matter that the meal was vegetarian, I couldn't be upgraded. I didn't quite understand why the meal couldn't just move to the front of the plane along with me, but that wasn't in the rule book.

As told to Joan Raymond. Email: joan.raymond@nytimes.com

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