

Technology can make long trips enjoyable

We just returned from our trip to Alaska which has been the best family vacation ever. Our two kids were just the right age to appreciate it, the scenery and wildlife were spectacular, and the time away from hot Texas to the cool far north was very refreshing.

Being away from work for nearly two weeks may have been rough on my clients but it was a definite recharger for me. Though I was not billing for a long stretch of time, I was dealing with technology on a daily basis and learned quite a bit handling some digital challenges.

Of course I had to bring my laptop for remote client emergencies, iPhones for my wife and I, iPods for the girls, and my new Nikon SLR D5000 with 8GB of storage for a digital picture journal of the Alaskan wilderness. Before we even left the house I made double sure everything was charged up fully. All those digital devices had rechargers and data cables to be sorted, packed and tracked so I neatly stored all my tech gear accessories in my laptop bag that I carried onto the plane.

Since we were pretty early getting to the airport at Houston Intercontinental (IAH), I fired up the laptop and begin working on my latest semi-secret project which is an application for the



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iPhone soon to be on sale at the App Store of iTunes from Apple. That will be an article targeted in September so watch for it.

When we found our gate at IAH, I sat us near a column that had power so I could plug in my AC power adapter for the laptop. Since I needed Internet access I scanned the air and found the only avail-

able wireless hotspot being Boingo for a price of \$7.25 a day. With our flight to Alaska two hours away from boarding, I signed up, paid, and was online within a couple of minutes.

Just before the boarding call I wandered the shops at IAH with my 8-year old and found two cool things I could not do with out. First was a quick-charge portable battery half the size of my iPhone which provided a quick emergency charge for the iPhone or iPods for \$50. It turned out to be a life saver by keeping the girls' iPods going during some long drives in the rental car.

The other compulsive purchase was a really neat iPod/iPhone music player built into tower speaker system. The manager of the store was a hard seller and talked me into buying it by providing free shipping and 20 percent off. It was waiting for us when we returned from Alaska.

We boarded on time and quickly settled into our seats on the Boeing 757 where we found touch screen LCD monitors built into every seat back. I also noticed 110-volt power plugs under the seats for laptops and other digital devices. That would have been nice to have years ago back in my heavy business flying days.

Continental Airlines has installed an awesome personal entertainment center for each passenger with great LCD screens. We immediately started navigating the choices of hundreds of songs in the music category, numerous games for both adults and kids, dozens of recorded TV shows, and around 40 movies to view.

I had brought two books, a loaded iPhone, and my laptop to keep me busy to quickly pass the flight time but I never touched them. The airline's personal entertainment center built into the seat back directly in front of my paired with the \$1 earphones kept me zoned out the entire flight. I not only watched a couple of good movies that appeared on my personal screen but was able to pause them and set the volume to my personal liking.

The private LCD screens also had an informative flight status display which showed a map with the plane's location, speed, and altitude along with estimated flight arrival times. Whenever the captain or flight attendant would

address the passengers over the intercom, their voices would come over our headsets pausing any movie, song, TV show or game on our display but then pick up where it left off when their talk ended.

Once we got to Alaska and picked up our rental car and I quickly unpacked and setup my GPS. It only took a couple of minutes to type in our first lodging address and I had a clear route displayed on the screen. This eliminated asking for a paper map and possibly getting lost in a strange area.

Upon arrival at our bed and breakfast location I immediately setup the power strip I had packed and connected all of our iPods and iPhones for charging to be prepared for the next day. Of course my wife who planned this wonderful vacation only chose lodging with wireless Internet.

I was able to remote into my home office desktop via LogMeIn.com to check for any critical emails from my clients. Then I checked the battery levels on my new Nikon SLR, the older point and shoot Sony digital camera, and my Sony movie camera all packed in a single backpack. I had emptied out all the previous digital pictures and movies from all those SD cards and internal hard drives before we left Texas.

During the trip I took around 2,500 digital pictures just on my new camera of gorgeous landscapes and wildlife

including moose, caribou, reindeer, puffins, eagles, Dall sheep and even bears. I'll address the intense picture taking campaign in next week's article but the management of all those images was quite a task. My nightmare was for something like theft or hardware failure to cause those pictures to be lost and I'd be heart broken since this was our biggest vacation ever.

Our trip was fantastic with all of our digital toys and tools working flawlessly when we needed them, though we had plenty of downtime from technology. Continental's personal in-flight entertainment systems were a lifesaver for the kids and especially me since I hate flying, even though I've been a pilot since I was a teenager.

Alaska Trivia: Did you know that reindeer and caribou are the same species? The difference is the reindeer are domesticated and they taste good — trust me on that one!

Bottom Line: Even on vacation, technology can make your trip more enjoyable and long plane rides more tolerable.

Next Week's Column: Traveling Digital Photography

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