

## Tony Dawe asks a business school director what sort of service he seeks

**A**s a person who takes 100 flights a year on average and has done for 15 years, Alick Kitchin is well qualified to talk about the pros and cons of air travel. He spends days on end in the Americas, Asia, Africa and the Middle East in his role as business director of the Edinburgh Business School, one of the largest providers of distance learning MBA programmes in the world.

“With good planning, patience and as many comforts as possible on the journey I enjoy what I do and accept that travel is part of it,” he says.

“If I am on my own, I don’t get fazed; I just get into a routine. That means leaving enough time to make the flight, not arriving at the airport too early or late but with sufficient time to clear security, which has become far more intrusive — for the right reasons.”

He hopes to pass through all the procedures with “good grace and patience” so his pet hate is people who push in at the head of a queue because they are late. “This routine is easier if you check in online and have club membership. The queues are shorter and it is a pleasure to relax in a lounge with a glass of wine. Without this, travelling through the airport is much more draining.”

Kitchin admits, however, that these admirable qualities disappear when he is travelling with Julie, his wife, or his grown-up children. “It is a very different experience. I get into a complete mess, worrying about all the hurdles and missing the flight, exasperating Julie, who says, ‘but you do this all the time’.”

When he reaches the aircraft, he expects to receive clear directions to his seat — an aisle one booked in advance — and to be left alone to read a book or open up his laptop. “I don’t expect the captain to come into the cabin to say hello or stewards to fuss over me,” he says. “I just hope that they will be there if I need some-



**Alick Kitchin talks to a business student during a reception in Dubai**

thing and offer a clear explanation should there be delays or problems.”

On a daytime long-haul flight, his routine is to work for a couple of hours, watch a film and eat some food. He thinks the standard of airline meals has declined and is full of a praise for a bacon and egg breakfast that tasted genuine and not like suet.

# Fast track life of the frequent flyer

has seven regional offices, 28 academic partners who must be monitored, briefed and brought up to date and students from 165 countries. If potential partners in an African country need to be inspected to check if they are bona fide and trustworthy or students in a far corner of the world told of the benefits of doing an MBA, I need to see them.”

Kitchin adds to his travel load by living in a village near Tunbridge Wells, Kent, and commuting from Gatwick airport to Edinburgh when he is not abroad. He worked with the business school in his previous London-based job before taking up the Scottish appointment in 2005.

He adopts the same rules for internal flights as for long-haul ones, arriving at the airport 90 minutes before departure to allow time for delays in parking, the transfer to the terminal and check-in and security queues.

“You cannot arrive any later with check-in closing 45 minutes before the flight time and boarding starting 15 minutes later.”

One statistic he does not have to hand is the number of airports he has



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visited but he says they are all the same these days. “When you landed at Kuala Lumpur or Hong Kong 15 years ago, you knew you had arrived at a special place. But today the airports have become homogenised, boring, with the same shops and facilities and no individuality.”

But his favourite cities do retain their charm. “When you arrive in New York you could not be anywhere else. It is a very buzzy place. Just look out of an office or hotel window in Manhattan and you see you are in a happening city. And I always look forward to visiting Sydney — to sunshine, blue sea and friendly people.”

For a man who travels so much, he has surprising advice: do more travelling. “Instead of taking a taxi to the airport when your business is finished, spend at least half a day getting a little more insight into the city or country to appreciate the culture. You might never go there again.”

“People might ask why I travel so much,” he reflects. “I do a lot on Skype, the internet and by e-mail but, if you are talking to business partners, students or education ministry officials, it is important to develop an element of trust by meeting them face to face.

“The Edinburgh Business School