

[Business Travel](#)

Clear as Mud: Business Travel is Totally Cool, Except for When it Isn't

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After laying low for a while, the **business travel industry** is pushing back against critics who claim that first-class seats and lavish retreats aren't appropriate in the current economic environment. Insurance company AIG came under fire last October for sending executives on a week-long retreat at a luxury resort and spa shortly after receiving relief funds, while auto executives were ridiculed for flying their private jets to Washington for the bailout hearings. With so many people in dire economic straits, it seems tacky for companies to flaunt their wealth these days, but is it fair to single out business travel as an unjustifiable expense? Or is it a cost of doing business that helps the economy as well?

That's what the CEO of **Travelocity** told a Senate subcommittee on tourism last Wednesday. As the *AP* points out, **Sam Gilliland** said that the Treasury Department hasn't done a good job defining acceptable versus unacceptable business travel, and that "meetings, conventions, and incentive travel," were important business tools, and not a frivolous luxury that can be curtailed to no ill effect. Gilliland was joined by five other travel executives, including the chairman of **Walt Disney Parks and Resorts**, who provided examples of how business travel stimulates commerce and keeps people employed during rocky economic times.

Striking a similar tone, the editor of **Elite Traveler**, an in-flight magazine for private jets, caused a bit of a kerfuffle recently when he wrote that the rich should feel no guilt in flying their private jets and spending lavishly on parties. If you can afford it, he argued, there's no reason not to spend it, especially since it keeps an entire industry going.

I'm not exactly sure where the line between appropriate and inappropriate business travel should be drawn. Bailed-out CEO's probably don't deserve the champagne-fueled Jacuzzi romps they're used to, but I'm generally in favor of keeping things moving, and would acknowledge that conventions and corporate retreats are important ways to build a business. And as for those private jet owners, I say keep on flying! Just purchase your appropriate carbon credits, and give me a lift to someplace warm.