Sleepboxes at airports? Why trains are best in Europe, high-speed rail expands except in U.S.

by CHARLIE LEOCHA on NOVEMBER 20, 2011

Is Sleepbox the right solution for weary business travelers?

We’ve heard of tiny hotel rooms showing up in the middle of London and New York, but now sleeping cubes are being introduced to airports as a place to catch a few winks between flights. Who knows? This idea might catch on if the price isn’t too high.

The first notice I took of these stylish pods was at Moscow’s Sheremetyevo Airport. Although the ones I viewed in the terminal are only demos at this point, I have no doubt business travelers will soon start seeing them in many more places — and not just at airports. The Sleepbox brand also is targeting railroad stations, city centers, shopping malls, and other public facilities.

As IT World explained about Sleepbox, “Sheets are changed robotically. Each pod provides personal work space, with a table for your laptop and electrical outlets. It also includes sound alerts, a ventilation system, TV, Wi-Fi, luggage space.” The hostel version, such as the model unveiled in Moscow, adds a bunk bed and fold-up desk. These cousins to the micro-hotel are meant to be coin-operated, and should rent by the hour or in 30-minute cycles.

Don’t Fly – Why trains are the best way to travel overseas

This Forbes writer claims that taking the train is the best way to travel when crisscrossing Europe. For a single traveler, he is absolutely correct (unless you have to make your way to out-of-the-way locations). But for groups of three or four, a car is the best way to go in my opinion.

The single biggest advantage of train travel is that it goes from city center to city center, without the need to arrive over an hour early, which in many cases can save you 2-3 hours of travel time (and taxi expenses) before you even count the travel itself. This is especially true because in both Europe and Japan, airports are often located far outside major cities, and in cases like London and Paris, a cab from the airport can take an hour and cost upwards of $75 – each way. Arrive by train however, and you are instantly downtown, often within 5-minutes of your hotel. Additionally, unlike at home,
many major European airports are served directly by inter-city trains, so it is entirely possible, for example, to land in Paris, board a high-speed train right at Charles DeGaulle airport for Lyon, a popular destination known as the culinary capital of France, and be in the middle of that city an hour and forty-five minutes later – not significantly longer than simply getting into Paris during rush hour – and much easier and faster than renting a car and driving.

**High-Speed Rail expands everywhere (except the U.S.)**

High-speed rail is expanding across the world, even with public funding problems, but it appears at a standstill in the U.S. even after billions in seed money spend by the Obama administration.

The number of countries offering high speed trains is expected to nearly double over the next few years, according to new research by the Worldwatch Institute for Vital Signs Online.

Today, 14 countries offer some sort of high speed rail system as an alternative to automobile and plane transportation. By 2014 experts say high-speed trains will be operating in nearly 24 countries, including China, France, Italy, Japan, Spain, and hopefully the United States.

“The rise in HSR has been very rapid,” said Worldwatch Senior Researcher Michael Renner, who conducted the research. “In just three years, between January 2008 and January 2011, the operational fleet grew from 1,737 high-speed trainsets worldwide to 2,517. Two-thirds of this fleet is found in just five countries: France, China, Japan, Germany, and Spain. By 2014, the global fleet is expected to total more than 3,700 units.”

France in particular accounts for about half of all European high-speed rail travel. HSR reached an astounding 62 percent of the country’s passenger rail travel volume in 2008, up from just 23 percent in 1990, thanks to affordable ticket prices, an impressive network, and reliability