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The Business-Class Nomad

By [CHRISTOPHER ELLIOTT](#)

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Greg Brooks is homeless. Not impoverished, "brother can you spare a dime" homeless, but displaced just the same.

How else to describe a business traveler who spends 330 days a year on the road? During the past 18 months, Mr. Brooks, a transportation infrastructure consultant, has returned to his office in Plattsburg, Mo., an average of only once every other weekend.

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Chris Cummins for The New York Times

Greg Brooks keeps in touch with his wife, Grace, by phone and e-mail while traveling.

"I know which hotel lobbies I can steal a wireless Internet signal in," he said. "I know which airports are likely to make me late and which ones I won't mind being stuck at. I can find my way around like a local. I am very, very good at being homeless."

Many business travelers are discovering the ups and downs of the nomadic lifestyle. No one knows the precise number of these extreme road warriors, who belong to what is informally called the "300 club" (for the

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minimum number of nights they spend away from home in one year). But experts believe that with corporations struggling to compete in a global economy, the number of these well-traveled workers is growing significantly.

"As business travel has picked up again, you're finding more people who are on the road 300 days or more," says Robert L. Jolles, author of "The Way of the Road Warrior" (Jossey-Bass, 2005). "When you're traveling that much, you're in the big league of business travelers. You're beyond executive-platinum level. You're never home."

But a hyperactive travel schedule can strain personal relationships and leave employees feeling fatigued and disoriented. Over the long term, it can dissolve friendships and break marriages apart, specialists say.

"It's a spectacular challenge to balance your personal life under these circumstances," Mr. Brooks, 40, said. He stays in contact with his wife, Grace, by phone and e-mail. Often they end up talking about "the most pointless things imaginable." The idea is to hear her voice, "like cats touching noses," he said, adding, "Being apart from her hurts."

Why does he travel so much? Because that is where the business is. And, he points out, there are fringe benefits to coming home after a long journey. The couple try to make the most of their time together, visiting museums and attending special events. "I'm a celebrity in my own household," he said. "Even the dog thinks I'm cool."

(Grace Brooks has a slightly different take on her husband's frequent trips. She said friends grieve for her and ask how much longer his travels will last. She hopes they will end soon. "Greg gets treated like a big name doing a guest cameo every time he comes home," she said. "That probably needs to end.")

A 300 club membership can be a ticket to a solitary life. "You're always alone," said Kathleen Ameche, author of "The Woman Road Warrior" (Agate, 2005). "You're working all the time. You wake up and you don't know what city you're in. You hope that the name of the city is on the phone, so you don't have to call downstairs and ask, and be embarrassed."

For these very frequent business travelers, there is often little

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or no distinction between travel and the rest of their lives. "I don't have a life," said Dan Poynter, a publishing consultant from Santa Barbara, Calif. Mr. Poynter, who is 67 and single, delegates office work to an assistant but rarely returns to Santa Barbara. "My cat died," he said. "So I do not feel guilty being away from home."

Being away takes its toll, though. In August, four flights he was booked on had mechanical delays. In [Denver](#), an 11 p.m. stopover became an involuntary layover. "The airline told us the hotels were full and invited us to bring pillows and blankets from the plane," he said. "I slept on the airport floor."

While many 300 club members are reluctant to express reservations about their frenetic travel schedules and the effects on their personal lives, they are all but unanimous in one preference: There are many occasions when they would rather be homebodies with ordinary 9-to-5 jobs.

Wendy Cole, a vice president for a hotel chain in [Orlando](#), Fla., said she traveled 200 to 300 days every year and made it back home "a couple of weekends a month."

"I do find it difficult to see my family at times," she said. She has three nieces and four nephews but can count on one hand how many of their birthday parties she has attended. "My sister-in-law did not speak to me for several months after I had to fly out on the day of her daughter's baptism," she recalled.

Because she often flies to vacation destinations like the Cayman Islands and Barbados, most people assume she lives a leisurely lifestyle. "When I meet people who find out I travel a lot, the automatic reaction from them is, 'Your life is so glamorous.'" she said. "They don't understand that I don't sit on the beach with my laptop, sipping piña coladas."

In fact, executives who spend most of their waking hours on a plane describe an almost constant tension between travel and the rest of their lives. Consider Nick Discombe, the president and chief operating officer of [Witness Systems Inc.](#), an [Atlanta](#) software provider. "Extreme international business travel," as he calls it, has been the centerpiece of his life for more than a decade.

Mr. Discombe, who lives in [England](#), is away for 320 days a year, much of that time spent circling the globe - literally. A typical week takes him from England to [Vietnam](#) and [Japan](#),

to meet customers; then to [Australia](#) to visit a regional office; and then back to [London](#) via the [United States](#), where he drops in on the West Coast headquarters.

But Mr. Discombe said he was also aware that his family - he is married and has a 10-year-old daughter and an 8-year-old son - needs him at home. For him to spend time with them, they often rendezvous at a work site. "We'll meet and explore a place together," he said. And, of course, there are weekends - those he can make it home.

But even when travelers come back home, they are not always entirely there. And no wonder. Mr. Discombe has gone several days without sleep - something that has been known to make people feel giddy and hallucinate (although he insists that "nothing interesting or funny happened"). Eventually, though, he gives in to jet lag and exhaustion.

"I have been known to disappear while at a friend's house for a dinner party," he admitted. "Later, they'll find me upstairs asleep in one of their bedrooms or stretched out on the floor in the hall."

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