

# North America Bathroom News November 2009



International Market Strategy

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## USA: BRG CONSULT Services Overview

BRG CONSULT is an international strategic market research consultancy specialized in the building products industry and related markets since 1971. Our company has over 35 years experience of these markets in more than 50 countries, both through multi-client research programmes and single-client consultancy projects.

BRG CONSULT's studies cover all building products segments, with a particular specialization in the heating and bathroom products markets, in which sectors it has become the world's leading research and consultancy company.

BRG CONSULT additionally conducts ad hoc projects for clients within the industry who require consultancy on a specific topic. These single-client projects are perfectly tailored to the clients needs and can cover any building product segment, any strategic market issue, in any country, as BRG CONSULT's international team has the resources, ability and experience to adapt to these needs.

BRG CONSULT's areas of expertise include:

- Market Information and Analysis
- Forecasting
- International Company Profiles
- Online Database and Other Electronic Information Services
- Market Strategy Studies
- Acquisition Screening
- Market Entry and Export Development Studies
- Commercial Due Diligence Projects.

Source: BRG CONSULT NORTH AMERICA



## USA: Economy Snaps Long Slump

30 October 2009 -- The U.S. economy expanded in the third quarter after shrinking for four consecutive quarters, marking an apparent end to the worst recession since World War II. But the recovery is expected to be slow and painful, as companies shed jobs and credit remains tight.

Gross domestic product expanded at a 3.5% seasonally adjusted annual rate in the quarter ended in September, a rise that leaned heavily on government spending. Some of the largest components of growth came from spending on cars and house building -- two areas propped up by federal programs.

Without stimulus programs such as "cash for clunkers" and a first-time homebuyer's credit, "real GDP would have risen little, if at all, this past quarter," Christina Romer, president of the White House Council of Economic Advisers, said in a statement.

President Barack Obama warned: "We have a long way to go to fully restore our economy."

The economy's performance nonetheless sent stocks soaring just shy of the 10,000 level. The Dow Jones Industrial Average closed up 199.89 points, or 2.05%, to 9962.58, its biggest one-day point gain since July 15.

An end to the recession -- that is, a sustained halt to the decline in economic activity -- wouldn't immediately lift the fortunes of the nation's 15.1 million unemployed. But it is the first step on the path to recovery.

Thursday's report on GDP -- a broad measure of the economy that sums up all the goods and services produced in the U.S. -- frames an economy that has started to emerge from the recession. The housing market is at or near a bottom, economists say, and metrics from manufacturing output to consumer spending have recovered from the deepest levels of the downturn.

Still, with so much of the growth relying on government spending -- and many of these programs either expired or expiring -- it is unclear if consumers and businesses have regained the strength to propel the economy on their own. Businesses remain cautious, and U.S. households are still burdened by a mountain of debt, two factors that have many economists predicting growth will slow considerably in the coming months.

Indeed, economists warned that the third-quarter figure overstated the strength of the underlying economy. Of the 3.5% growth, about one percentage point came from sales of motor vehicles and parts. Auto sales were accelerated by the "cash for clunkers" trade-in program.

Without government support, GDP growth "would have been a much less inspiring number than it was," says Alan Levenson, chief economist at T. ROWE PRICE. Still, "we're not going to keep growing at 3.5%, but we're going to keep growing."

Private residential investment, of which home building is a big component, surged 23.4%, the first increase since the last quarter of 2005. That accounted for half a percentage point of GDP growth. The category was puffed up by home builders who rushed to finish new houses before the expiration of the federal government's \$8,000 tax credit for first-time home buyers.

Companies also reduced their inventories at a much slower rate than in the previous quarter, when



businesses were slashing their stocks to cope with falling consumer demand. In the tricky accounting of GDP, a slower reduction of inventories contributed nearly a full percentage point of growth, but the gain from inventories is likely to lessen over the next few months.

While businesses have started to recover from the deep drops during the recession, many don't expect demand to rocket back to pre-recession levels. The tepid pace of recovery, combined with productivity increases that make it possible for businesses to handle more demand with fewer employees, is a big reason why firms have continued to shed employees even as the recession abates. The Labor Department reported Thursday that last week, initial claims for unemployment insurance fell by 1,000 to a seasonally adjusted 530,000.

GAYLORD ENTERTAINMENT CO., an owner and operator of big convention hotels such as Opryland Resort and Convention Center in Nashville, Tenn., has seen convention bookings improve from the depressed levels of last year. But improvement is relative in this economy. The company's cancellation and attrition rate peaked at about 17% in the first quarter of 2009 and fell to 14% in the second quarter. The company says it expects attrition to keep improving in the third quarter.

"The decision makers around meetings are very cautious about the future and aren't yet ready to take on the risk of signing up for much bigger attendance," says David Kloeppel, the company's president and chief operating officer.

The beginnings and ends of U.S. recessions are declared by the National Bureau of Economic Research, a nonprofit research group that defines recession as "a significant decline in economic activity spread across the economy, lasting more than a few months." The group says the current downturn started in December 2007, and it isn't likely to declare an end for some time. Still, Jeffrey Frankel, a Harvard professor and a member of the NBER's Business Cycle Dating Committee, says the recession is likely over.

"My best guess is that we will end up declaring the trough [of the recession] was in the middle of the year sometime," he said.

The Federal Reserve's preferred measure of inflation -- the price index for personal consumption expenditures, excluding volatile food and energy prices -- slid to 1.4% annual rate from 2.0% in the second quarter. The subdued price increases give the central bank the leeway to continue priming the economy with interest rates of near zero percent.

Source: The Wall Street Journal



## USA: Fed Chief Says Recession Is 'Very Likely Over'

15 September 2009 -- The Federal Reserve chairman, Ben S. Bernanke, said Tuesday that it was "very likely" that the recession had ended although he cautioned that it would be many months before unemployment rates would drop significantly.

"From a technical perspective, the recession is very likely over at this point," he said, adding that "it's still going to feel like a very weak economy for some time, as many people will still find that their job security and their employment status is not what they wish it was."

The cautiously optimistic assessment came at the conclusion of a speech by Mr. Bernanke at the Brookings Institution on the anniversary of the market crisis that was precipitated by the collapse of the investment bank LEHMAN BROTHERS.

Mr. Bernanke said the consensus of forecasters was for moderate growth for the rest of this year and next, particularly as credit markets thaw, consumer confidence takes time to heal, and the federal government begins to unwind a series of federal spending and lending programs intended to mend the economy.

Business cycles are officially dated by a committee of economists at the National Bureau of Economic Research. The committee often spends many months sifting through economic trends before declaring the beginning and end dates of a recession.

For policy makers in Washington the more significant question than the actual date of the end of the recession will be when to begin unwinding the myriad of lending programs that were hastily created in response to the crisis.

Officials at the Federal Reserve have already begun to think about that question. Mr. Bernanke and other top officials, including the Treasury secretary, Timothy F. Geithner, have warned that winding down the programs too early could lead to another round of problems.

Historians now generally agree that, during the Great Depression, the early withdrawal of government programs in the 1930s led to deeper economic problems throughout that decade.

On the other hand, waiting too long could fuel significant price increases and lead to a return of corrosive levels of inflation.

During his speech, Mr. Bernanke repeated his broad defense of the extraordinary rescue efforts by the central bank, the United States government and other foreign powers over the last year.

"Without these speedy and forceful actions, last October's panic would likely have continued to intensify, or major financial firms would have failed, and the entire global financial system would have been at serious risk," Mr. Bernanke said. "We cannot know for sure what the economic effects of these events would have been, but what we know about the effects of financial crises suggests that the resulting global downturn could have been extraordinarily deep and protracted."

Source: New York Times



## USA: U.S. Economy Started to Grow Again in Third Quarter

29 October 2009 -- For the first time in a year, the United States economy grew, the Commerce Department said on Thursday. But even if a recovery is technically in the offing, job-seekers likely will not begin to feel the benefits for months to come.

Gross domestic product expanded at an annual rate of 3.5% in the three months ending in September, a significant spike from a relatively shrunken base. The economy had contracted at annual rates of 0.7% and 6.4% in the second and first quarters of this year, respectively.

Robust government spending, exports, consumer durables — buoyed by auto purchases Congress's now-expired "Cash for Clunkers" program — and housing helped finally push the measure into positive territory.

Thursday's report will likely provide ammunition to both advocates and opponents of additional federal spending to stimulate certain parts of the economy, as mutually reinforcing pessimism among consumers and employers continues to fester.

On the one hand, the poor job market is discouraging Americans from increasing their spending by too much. Consumer spending on nondurable goods like food and clothing, for example, increased just 2% in the third quarter of this year.

And likewise, stagnant consumer demand and withering consumer confidence have left companies wary of hiring more employees — or, for that matter, taking any expensive risks. The jobless rate reached 9.8% in September, its highest rate in 26 years. According to Thursday's report, business investment in structures fell 9 percent in the third quarter.

Such forces may pressure Washington to look for targeted interventions into the labor market, in addition to last winter's broader \$787 billion stimulus package, which continues to work its way through the economy. Proposals on the table include another extension in unemployment benefits and various job creation programs.

Inventory rebuilding is one bright spot in Thursday's report, as it indicates businesses may rev up activity in the coming months to replenish stockroom shelves.

"Everybody had been dealing with a just-in-time status quo," said Sandra Westlund-Deenihan, president and design engineer for QUALITY FLOAT WORKS INCORPORATED, a plant in Schaumburg, Ill., that manufactures metal float balls and valve assemblies. "They were living off inventories they'd built up over the last several years. Now they've drawn that down and reached a point where they may have to have it ready and back on the shelf again."

Like many American manufacturers, Ms. Westlund-Deenihan says international business has helped keep her company afloat. United States exports overall grew at an annualized rate of 14.7% in the third quarter. "The exports have helped fill in the gap," she said. "The weakened has dollar really helped us." Stock futures rose nearly 1% on the news.

Source: New York Times



## USA: Existing-home Sales Rise 9.4% to 5.57 Million Pace

Oct. 23, 2009, Washington -- Home buyers rushed to take advantage of an expiring tax credit, driving resales of US houses up a record 9.4% in September to a seasonally adjusted annual rate of 5.57 million, the highest in more than two years, the National Association of Realtors estimated Friday.

"Sales surged" in September, said Lawrence Yun, chief economist for the real estate trade group, who gave much of the credit for the increase to the federal government's \$8,000 tax credit for first-time home buyers.

"The tax credit is inducing buyers back into market" and helping to stabilize prices, Yun said.

The real estate trade group has been lobbying Congress to extend or expand the subsidy, which expires next month. To qualify, the sale must be closed by Nov. 30. The credit will be responsible for about 350,000 additional sales this year, the NAR has estimated.

"The foundation for the eventual recovery in the US housing market is being laid," said Millan Mulraine, an economist for TD Securities.

However, economists questioned just how sustainable the pace of sales will be. "The entire ballgame right now is an extension of the credit," wrote Dan Greenhaus, economic strategist for Miller Tabak & Co.

"Our view is that near-record affordability and falling inventory -- down sharply again in September -- is pulling people into the market, not just the tax credit," wrote Ian Shepherdson, chief US economist for High Frequency Economics.

First-time buyers have accounted for about 45% of sales this year, according to a survey of buyers conducted for the NAR. In September alone, first-time buyers accounted for 31% of sales, according to a survey of real estate agents.

Sales as tracked by the NAR are up 24% from January's bottom, and are up 9.2% compared with a year ago. Compared with the peak exactly four years ago, sales are down 23%.

The increase to a 5.57 million pace was larger than the median forecast of economists surveyed by MarketWatch, which looked for a smaller gain to a 5.38 million annual rate from a downwardly revised 5.09 million in August.

The median sales price fell to \$174,900, down 8.5% in the past year. That's the smallest year-over-year price decline in more than a year.

Most sales were at the bottom of the market, with 21% of homes selling for less than \$100,000, and another 49% costing between \$100,000 and \$250,000. Only 8% of sales were more than \$500,000

Given a chance, the tax credit will put a floor under prices, Yun said. "As long as home prices continue to decline, I just don't see how the economy can recover," he said.

However, extension of the credit ran into a roadblock on Thursday, when the Treasury Department's inspector general testified that a significant number of claims appeared to be fraudulent.



The housing market is also being propped up by the Federal Reserve's purchases of nearly \$1.5 trillion in mortgage-related securities, accounting for about 80% of the market. The Fed has said it would slow its purchases and end them by next March.

### Details

The increase in sales helped shrink inventories. The number of homes on the market fell 7.5% to 3.673 million, representing a 7.8 month supply at the September sales pace. That's the lowest inventory-sales ratio since March 2007. The inventory figures are not seasonally adjusted. Inventories usually decline in the autumn.

The inventory data do not include the so-called shadow inventory of homes being held off the market by banks that have foreclosed, and by home owners who want to sell but who are waiting for a better market. The shadow inventory has been estimated at 5 million or more.

Distress sales, including foreclosures and short sales, accounted for 29% of sales in September.

Sales rose in all four regions, with gains of 13% in the West, 9.6% in the Midwest, 9% in the South, and 4.4% in the Northeast.

Sales of single-family homes rose 9.4% in September to a seasonally adjusted annual rate of 4.89 million. Condo sales increased 9.7% to a 680,000 adjusted rate.

Source: [www.marketwatch.com](http://www.marketwatch.com)



## USA: U.S. Home Remodeling Recovery Began in Second Quarter 2009

Oct 8, 2009 - There was a second-quarter increase in remodeling activity in certain regions of the United States for the first time in more than a year, according to RemodelorMove.com's U.S. Remodeling Activity Report for the second quarter of 2009.

Last week's report, a sampling of U.S. remodeling permits, showed the value of remodeling projects in the U.S. increased in the second quarter over the first quarter of 2009. The size of these projects is the most notable change—the average expenditure by homeowners in the sampled regions for permitted remodeling projects was more than 20% greater than spent in the same quarter of both 2007 and 2008.

The report's authors said, "It is exciting to begin to see consumer confidence returning to remodeling. This increased activity was not surprising, however, as predicted by the Spring 2009 Remodeling Sentiment Report, which reported a 5% increase in the number of homeowners who reported they were likely to remodel in the next 12 months."

The research shows that recent government stimulus packages, rebates for energy efficient remodels, and steep reductions in overall remodeling costs have encouraged many homeowners to begin remodeling projects in the second quarter of 2009 that were previously on hold. These incentives and discounts, as well as price reductions from contractors hoping to keep workers busy, have resulted in a combined reduction in remodeling costs of approximately 20% compared to similar projects in 2006.

Source: [www.appliancemagazine.com](http://www.appliancemagazine.com)



## USA: Copper, Steel, Aluminum Prices On The Rise

20 October 2009 -- Construction costs, which had been relatively low for much of the past year, are beginning to climb at an increasing rate, signaling the end to the "limited-time" sale for construction, according to a new analysis of the latest producer price index released by the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics.

The analysis by Ken Simonson, chief economist for the Associated General Contractors of America, found significant upward movements between August and September 2009 in the prices of copper (10% increase), aluminum (2% increase) and steel (3% increase). All three products are essential components for the vast majority of construction projects. Simonson added that since the prices were collected a month ago, copper, aluminum and diesel fuel have moved to multi-month highs.

"The days of construction estimates coming in 20% under estimate may soon be coming to an end," Simonson reports. "These figures serve as an important reminder that governments and developers looking for a good deal on construction should act quickly before having to pay significantly more for their projects."

Prices for other significant construction materials also rose in September as compared to the previous month. The cost of plastic construction products rose 1.2%, the cost of prestressed concrete products by 1.5%, and iron and steel pipe and tube by 1.2%. Some construction materials prices did continue to decline, such as gypsum (down 1.2%) and plywood (down 0.3%).

Simonson said the producer price data serves as a reminder that "private owners and public agencies should accelerate any plans they have for construction to take advantage of materials costs that remain generally below year-ago levels but which are rapidly reversing their slide."

Source: Plumbing & Mechanical



## USA: EPA Releases Draft Showerhead Specification

12 October 2009 -- The U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) recently released the draft of its WaterSense specification for showerheads (<http://epa.gov/watersense/pp/showerheads.htm>).

The WaterSense draft specification for showerheads sets the maximum flow rate at 2.0 gallons per minute (gpm) at a flowing pressure of 80 pounds per square inch (psi). As with all WaterSense specifications, the draft showerhead specification includes performance criteria to ensure that consumers will not have to sacrifice water coverage or spray intensity in order to achieve water savings. EPA worked with a variety of stakeholders to develop these criteria so that showerheads can be independently tested and certified for both water efficiency and performance.

Showering accounts for approximately 17% of residential water use in the U.S. The average household could save more than 2,300 gallons per year by installing high-efficiency showerheads. Once this specification is finalized, consumers will be able to renovate their bathrooms with a full suite of WaterSense labeled products including toilets, faucets and showerheads.

Source: Supply House Times



## USA: CAROMA Waterless Urinal Approved for City of Los Angeles

15 October 2009 -- The City of Los Angeles has approved the H2Zero waterless urinal by CAROMA for use in all buildings. The H2Zero urinal utilizes breakthrough technology to use zero water for optimum performance and water conservation.

The vitreous china urinal addresses key challenges that have been associated with other waterless urinals, including performance, operation, odor management, durability, and waste build-up, ensuring a consistently superior product. The H2Zero's unique patented cartridge technology does not use an oil-based seal, as traditionally used in waterless urinals. Within the cartridge is a Bio Fresh deodorizing block that is activated during use. The Bio Seal allows urine to pass through the seal freely, eliminating unnecessary waste build-up within the cartridge. The Bio Seal, which lasts up to 10,000 uses, also acts as a one-way airtight valve to seal the cartridge from the drainage system.

As urine flows into the cartridge and around the Bio Fresh deodorizing block, heat from the urine activates and emits a lemon fragrance. The urine then flows through the Bio Seal valve and into the drainline. The Bio Seal closes, protecting against back-pressure situations. This operation guarantees superior performance and hygiene.

"For more than three decades, CAROMA has been a leader in designing advanced technology for the bathroom, and the H2Zero waterless urinal is one example," states John Karas, North America Product Manager. "The H2Zero can save the City of Los Angeles millions of gallons of water per year through replacing older, water-consuming one gallon urinals. In addition, the unique technology in the H2Zero minimizes service required and manages odors and waste build-up, unlike other waterless urinals currently on the market."

To service the urinal, the H2Zero's cartridge tool is used to remove the grate and access the internal components. The Bio Fresh deodorizer and Bio Seal can then be removed and replaced as required. This touch-free tool ensures no direct contact with the replacement components, and no special disposal method is required.

For more information on the H2Zero and other CAROMA high efficiency products, email [info@caromausa.com](mailto:info@caromausa.com) or visit [www.caromausa.com](http://www.caromausa.com).

Source: CAROMA USA



## USA: ELKAY acquires SSP INC.

27 October 2009 -- ELKAY MANUFACTURING has acquired SSP INC., a leading fabricator and importer of stainless steel commercial kitchen products primarily for the foodservice industry. SSP is well known in the foodservice segment of the commercial market where ELKAY is actively expanding its presence. SSP is headquartered in Spokane, Wash., with operations and distribution facilities in the Pacific Northwest and Ohio.

According to Jack Krecek, vice president of the ELKAY Plumbing Products Division, Commercial Business Unit, SSP has been in business for 23 years, with a wide-ranging commercial product line, and well-established customers including nationally recognized retail and institutional foodservice establishments.

The SSP independent rep sales force brings vast experience and impressive qualifications in the foodservice equipment channel to the ELKAY family, noted Krecek. "The SSP product line, combined with the experience and relationships of these important rep agencies will accelerate the rate at which we intend to grow sales in this market," he added. "We are committed to meeting our strategic objectives by providing comprehensive, delivered solutions which help serve our customers in a broad array of commercial business segments. The SSP business model complements ELKAY's existing Commercial Business Unit and opens doors for ELKAY commercial cabinetry, case work, commercial faucets and natural stone countertops.

"The SSP product line also supplements and expands ELKAY's existing line of Custom, Institutional and Scullery [CIS] products, creating opportunities to better serve our current plumbing wholesale channel of distribution."

Over the next few months, ELKAY will be working to integrate SSP into its Commercial Business Unit. Going forward, SSP will be officially known as ELKAY SSP LLC.

Lovon Fausett, former owner of SSP INC. and now vice president-business development and operations for ELKAY SSP LLC, said, "ELKAY brings extensive manufacturing experience and resources to the SSP business which will enable us to provide more value to our customers; from manufacturing to marketing, we see numerous opportunities to substantially expand SSP products and services."

Source: The Wholesaler



## USA: WATTS WATER Posts Lower Q3 Profit

28 October 2009 -- Plumbing products supplier WATTS WATER TECHNOLOGIES INC posted a lower profit, due to a steep slump in sales across its key markets North America and Europe, according to analysts.

For the third quarter, the company reported net income of \$3.4 million, or 9 cents a share, compared with \$16.7 million, or 45 cents a share, a year ago. Excluding items, it earned 31 cents a share. The company said the results included a net after-tax charge of 16 cents a share related to footprint reduction and restructuring programs.

Sales fell 18% to \$303.8 million. Sales in Europe and North America fell by 20% and 16%, respectively.

Shares of the North Andover, Mass.-based company were down more than 5% in trading after the bell. They had closed at \$30.61 Tuesday on the New York Stock Exchange.

Source: Reuters

## USA: WINWHOLESALE named to InformationWeek 500 list

29 October 2009 -- WINWHOLESALE INC., one of the nation's largest distributors, has been named to the 2009 INFORMATIONWEEK 500, an annual listing by INFORMATIONWEEK magazine of the nation's most innovative users of business technology. It is the second consecutive year WINWHOLESALE has been named and was 173rd on the list.

The 2009 INFORMATIONWEEK 500 companies were announced recently at an awards ceremony during the INFORMATIONWEEK 500 Conference in Dana Point, Calif.

WINWHOLESALE was recognized, in part, for developing and implementing a new sales commission calculator and analytical tool. The tool uses an open source Web application server to provide a base solution that works with the company's data warehouse to calculate sales commission payments and provide an analytical capability. The company also launched Web-based access for customers to view invoices.

"Recognition by INFORMATIONWEEK reflects the continuous improvement and innovative thinking by WINWHOLESALE's IT team and employees across the WIN Group of Companies," said Steve Hagen, WINWHOLESALE chief information officer. "The IT team has partnered with employees in business units and local company operations to implement many successful and creative ways to serve our customers better while increasing WINWHOLESALE's success."

Additional details on the INFORMATIONWEEK 500 can be found online at [www.informationweek.com/iw500](http://www.informationweek.com/iw500).

Source: The Wholesaler



## USA: REED CONSTRUCTION DATA Files Corporate Espionage Lawsuit

9 October 2009 -- REED CONSTRUCTION DATA (RCD), a leading construction information provider and a wholly-owned subsidiary of REED ELSEVIER, today filed suit in federal court against MCGRAW-HILL CONSTRUCTION DODGE, a unit of THE MCGRAW-HILL COMPANIES, INC. The suit charges that DODGE has unlawfully accessed confidential and trade secret information from RCD since 2002 by using a series of fake companies to pose as RCD customers.

The lawsuit, filed in the U.S. District Court for the Southern District of New York, seeks an unspecified amount in lost profits and punitive damages, trial by jury, and injunctive relief as a result of DODGE's misuse of RCD's proprietary construction project information.

The complaint charges that DODGE hired consultants to subscribe to RCD's confidential data under the cover of fake names and companies. DODGE then allegedly manipulated the information to create misleading comparisons between DODGE's and RCD's products and services in an effort to mislead the marketplace.

The complaint cites eleven counts of misconduct by DODGE, including fraud, misappropriation of trade secrets, misappropriation of confidential information, unfair competition, tortious interference with prospective economic advantage, violation of New York's general business law, violation of the RICO Act, RICO conspiracy, monopolization, attempted monopolization and unjust enrichment.

"MCGRAW-HILL DODGE has used our information to deceive and confuse the market about RCD and the data we offer," said Iain Melville, CEO, REED CONSTRUCTION DATA. "This was an attempt by DODGE to force RCD out of business and obtain a monopoly over the construction data industry."

The New York office of international law firm TROUTMAN SANDERS LLP filed the action, led by partner William N. Withrow, Jr.

"DODGE's behavior violates a significant number of laws and codes of business ethics," said Melville. "Seven years of such practices is no minor offense. It's clear that these violations must be addressed with swift and just redress."

For more information, visit [www.reedconstructiondata.com/mhcdodgesuit](http://www.reedconstructiondata.com/mhcdodgesuit).

Source: Reed Construction Data



## USA: In Praise Of Jet Lag

1 October 2009 -- I was in Tokyo a couple of weeks ago. After clearing customs in Narita, I did what I normally do when I get to Tokyo. I did something really stupid. It has become a little ritual of mine, though I mix it up to keep myself guessing.

Sometimes I leave my wallet on an airport chair. Or I buy a ticket for the wrong train, heading away from the city.

This time, I got my exchange rate mixed up and tried to extract \$15,000 from several wisely unwilling ATMs.

Luckily I never got the cash, or I'd probably have found a way to leave a fat wad of yen on a chair somewhere.

Later, at dinner, as I was nodding off into a tumbler of Yamazaki whiskey, my friends said what people usually say to me in Tokyo and elsewhere in the world: "You haven't adjusted yet. Your body is still on New York time. For you it's yesterday."

When you travel a lot, you get used to people always reminding you what time it is for you. As if everyone can peer inside your brain and read a little personal clock there that shows all the data about why exactly you're feeling sluggish, the time of your last meal and which side of the bed you woke up on. And the diagnosis is always the same.

Driving the rental car the wrong way out of the airport? Jet lag! Wandering the streets hungry at 4 a. m.? Jet lag! See, it's okay. The world understands why you're lost, cranky, distracted or dyspeptic (or, as happens more often than we'd like to admit, all of the above). Your clock just needs resetting.

And I know the world is basically right. My readings are haywire, my compass is off, night is day. I'm either alert at the wrong time, or not at all. Scientists even have a nifty name for this condition, desynchronosis, which makes it sound like a medical disorder of some kind even if it's simply a natural response to being suddenly plopped down far from home. We are all governed by circadian rhythm, or a 24-hour cycle that tells us it's breakfast time in our home continent even though the sun is setting before us now. But I'm not quite ready to attribute the condition entirely to something as banal as my scrambled sense of time.

After all, anybody who's seen me dance at a wedding knows my rhythm isn't great under the best of circumstances. And where are these experts when I feel exhausted at home?

How to explain my general habit of working in the middle of the night, eating at the wrong hours and dreaming all day about naps? With 24/7 media overstimulation coming at me from every corner of the planet, do I really need a jet to throw me off my sleep schedule? Trust me, you can forget what day it is even without a passport.

And why do we insist on blaming the flying itself? Sit me upright in an easy chair for 13 hours, replay the Bourne trilogy three times, ply me with gin-and-tonics and let me doze off with my chin tucked into my clavicle.... I'm pretty sure I'd wake up feeling weird without ever leaving my living room.

The main thing, though, is this: Tokyo is really far away from New York. Thousands-and-thousands-



of-miles far away. Around-the-bend, other-side-of-the-world far away. And when I get there—when I finally arrive and somehow restlessly fumble my way out of Narita and into that big, overwhelming city—I experience the rush of displacement all over again.

Tokyo is thrillingly, exhaustingly, wonderfully foreign to my everyday life. Sure, part of the reason I'm at Tsukiji market at 5 a.m. on my second day there, watching men cut up giant tuna and looking forward to my beer and sushi breakfast, is because my body just won't let me sleep. But it's just as true to say I'm awake because I'm so excited to be here. Giant tuna! Homicidal motorized carts speeding everywhere! Beer with breakfast!

I say, enough with the whining: It's time to give jet lag a second look. Yes, it's sometimes inconvenient to feel grouchy or lost or incoherent, but that lost feeling is a significant part of travel, a reminder that distance is real, that miles aren't just something we tally up in our frequent-flier accounts. Sitting at home at the computer, soaking up the news from a TV, it's easy to believe that the world is small. But it doesn't feel small when you're out in it. This, it seems to me, is one of the profound gifts of being alive now: the ability to get up and go everywhere, to experience the world in a kind of rush that previous generations couldn't have dreamed of. We should savor that rush, take it in the way a dog sticks his head out a car window and feels the wind in his face. A sense of dislocation comes with the territory. Indeed, it's part of the fun.

I'd go so far as to say that an essential component of my love for Tokyo is the simple fact that I always feel so gloriously messed up and out of my element when I'm there. The world is big, and frankly, it should wear us out to try taking it all in. We should be righteously freaked out by all the traveling we do. We should be dizzy with awe that these big planes deliver us to faraway places, and at the wonders that we find there. And while I'm all for making it to meetings on time and not drooling in public, maybe we shouldn't try so hard to fix the unfixable nature of living in an exhausting time.

Everyone's got a cure, of course, a pill, a routine, a bit of trusted quackery that promises to take the edge off, knock you out in flight, get you on your feet when you land, uncramp your muscles, march you through customs, order room service and tuck you in at night (see *Time Bandits*). Admittedly, I long considered Ambien a trusted friend, until the time I woke up from my slumber on a long flight and, in a zombie state, punched up *You've Got Mail* with unidentifiable subtitles on my personal in-flight entertainment system. What kind of friend lets you do that?

Recently I got a press notice about a British juice drink called Mile High. It modestly claims to eliminate "any negative side effects of frequent flying and long haul travel such as fatigue and nausea" through the power of antioxidants. Not having joined the Mile High drink club, I can't say for sure, but my guess is what causes fatigue isn't oxidants but lack of sleep.

A scientific journal from the International Society for Computational Biology reported recently on tests to fight jet lag by exposing test patients to "interventional light stimuli." By the time I got to the end of the article, my eyes were strained and my head was throbbing—not unlike my response to a typical transatlantic red-eye. I wouldn't be surprised if scientists do someday manage to alter the body's rhythm with light—I've heard the same technique works wonders on egg-laying chickens, to say nothing of marijuana plants—but flashing lights on and off during sales meetings might not be quite what it takes to close a deal. So, no thanks. While science chases a cure, I'll stick to wandering around gaga before passing out cold and sleeping dreamlessly through the night.



Returning from Japan last month, I was in New York for a couple of days before flying down to Louisville, Kentucky, then over to London and around the north of England, back to New York and on to Denver. To see these cities in these quick flashes in less than a month made me light-headed. I was struck by a kind of geographical dizziness. Staring out the window of a shuttle bus from the Denver airport heading to Boulder, I had strange, dreamy notions. Hey, I didn't know they had Chuck E. Cheese's in Yorkshire...I wonder if the big mouse talks with an accent?

Clearly all these time zones had left me more than a little unhinged. But I liked the confusion. It felt like a modern ailment. A little sleepiness, a touch of bewilderment, I realized, even as I nodded off, is nothing more or less than a normal, rational, authentic response to the still-astonishing fact of being flown around the world. To chalk this all up to something as mechanical as the resetting of an invisible clock seemed absurdly reductive, but more than that, it seemed to miss the point of travel altogether. We don't need a cure for jet lag, I thought, my eyes flickering shut as the bus rumbled onto the Northwest Parkway. We need a nap.

*Travel writer Adam Sachs has no idea where he is half the time, but he can usually find out by checking [adamsachs.org](http://adamsachs.org).*

**Time Bandits** – Can jet lag be “cured”? Probably not, but it seems as though everyone has a trick to mitigate its effects.

**Sunshine on your shoulders** – Not only can it make you happy, sunshine can theoretically “reset” your body's clock. It's as easy as going outside.

**Melatonin** – Taking small doses of this natural sleep-inducing hormone may help you fall asleep at the proper time (or, depending on what country you've flown to, it may get you arrested).

**Whetting your whistle** – Stay hydrated by drinking plenty of water and avoiding caffeine and alcohol – which, to some of us, sort of defeats the purpose of vacation.

**Getting in touch with nature** – Some New Age types insist that walking barefoot on the earth or swimming in the ocean can help by “grounding your electromagnetic system.”

**True west** – It's claimed that jet lag is less severe on westward-bound trips. (And just imagine all the frequent-flier miles you can get flying from Chicago to New York via Tokyo.)

**Viagra** – A 2007 Argentine study showed that small doses of the impotence medication helped hamsters recover from simulated jet lag. The effect on their sex lives was not reported.

**Light visor** – Defy darkness and make Trekkies jealous by donning a geeky, programmable light visor that shines bright light on your face in sync with the daylight pattern of your destination.

**Make believe** – Some imaginative fliers claim that simply pretending they're not on a plane lessens the problem.

—Peter Koch