

Digital Digs 2004 - Getting There

Friday, 18 February 2005

TechTV diehards remember the annual Digital Digs \$100,000 home makeover. There's lots of drama and even more hard work. This year, the hard work started early for the Lab. Getting there proved even more difficult than the makeover itself.

It all started with a couple stupid decisions that snowballed into a travel nightmare. Technology couldn't save us, people couldn't help us, it was blind faith that we would get there one way or another. A simple direct flight to Orlando turned into a 20-hour adventure.

After 10 trips through LAX in that last two months, we got cocky. We thought we had the routine down. Of course, neither of us had flown United nor had we driven ourselves to the airport. We had no idea that the long term parking shuttle doesn't take you to the airport. It takes you to another shuttle instead. We had no idea that cabs weren't aplenty in Los Angeles, waiting patiently for our phone call.

In retrospect, so many things could have happened differently. I didn't need to stay up until 5:00 AM to rip music for the trip. I could have survived with the 700 tracks in my collection, but I got greedy. I could have called a cab the night before. I could have hit snooze one less time. Somebody could have invented an alarm clock that could only be silenced by a complex code that only the clear minded could enter. That woman didn't have to faint at the United counter right at that moment. Alas, we missed the flight and I don't have a good excuse.

Planning on the Fly

On this particular trip, we were up against Mother Nature too. A weather anomaly named Hurricane Jeanne was heading straight for Florida. Orlando International Airport closes to all flights after landing after 6:00 PM, which makes our just departed flight the last until Monday. I'm on the phone to United, navigate through what felt like dozens of automated menu options to finally reach a human being and book us passage to Tampa Bay. It's on the West coast of Florida and should be safe from Jeanne's wrath.

By the time we get to the front of the line again, Tampa Bay is closed. Jacksonville is closed too. That leaves us Atlanta, Georgia as our closest option. My knowledge of American geography hits the wall. Where's Atlanta relative to Orlando? My PDA only had maps of Los Angeles and there wasn't a base map encompassing the United States. I hadn't loaded Mappoint on my notebook either. Damn! With only air miles to guesstimate driving time, we go for Atlanta. Later we learn that Savannah would have been the smarter choice.

Landing a Ride

Before Atlanta, we're connecting through Denver. We hit the ground running, quickly jumping online to reserve a one-way rental from Atlanta to Orlando. Frustration builds as I can't seem to connect to the wireless access point in the airport. Turns out a stupid little application called FreeSurfer is blocking the authorization window. 15 minutes later, I figure it out and finally get a car reserved. Just in time, the plane is boarding for the next leg.

The flight to Atlanta is smooth as is acquiring the rental. Now we drive with only a map up to the Florida state line. Long story short - A Waffle House dinner with six camouflaged members of the NRA, a speeding ticket in Georgia, a brave FedEx tractor trailer to guide us, and breaking curfew to drive around Orlando in search of our hotel. Overhead signs falling, power lines sparking, blackouts following us. It was quite an adventure that finally ended at 6:00 AM.