

## TRAVELER'S TIPS

**At home** we take many things for granted, like that trusty alarm clock or extra set of reading glasses. Indeed, we go about our daily routine with relative ease because we know our way around and we know where things are when we need them.

But with travel everything changes! Nothing's where it belongs! Below are some tips for preparing to travel a long distance away from your comfort zone and a packing list to make our time together as trouble-free as possible.

**Passport:** A passport is required for all international travel by U.S. citizens, and it must be valid for at least 6-months after your return from your destination nation.

**Security:** Make photocopies of your passport, driver's license, credit cards, and bank card, and pack them in a place besides your money belt or pouch. In addition, leave copies of this information with a family member or best friend back home. This precaution was invaluable to me when I had to replace my passport in India. My wife faxed it to me and we were able to expedite the replacement process with the consulate. Also, leave a copy of your itinerary with a family member so that in case of an emergency your family may easily reach you.

**Health:** Start walking, getting in shape now, if you're not already. We'll be on our feet 4-8 hours every day, and it won't be a pleasant experience to sit-out an excursion because you're winded and sore.

No vaccinations are required where we're going, however, it's always a good idea to be up to date on one's tetanus (every 10 years) and to have protection against Hepatitis A and B.

Talk to your family doctor and or visit the US Centers for Disease Control & Prevention: [wwwnc.cdc.gov/travel](http://wwwnc.cdc.gov/travel) for recommended vaccinations and general health care while traveling.

If you take allergy or other medications regularly, you bring an extra supply in case of loss or delay in travel. Be sure that all of your prescriptions are current and contain necessary information in case we need to contact your physician. Also, make copies of your prescriptions in case you need to replace it during our travels.

Bring an extra set of eyeglasses or contacts, if you can. There's nothing worse than being thousands of miles from home and half-blind because one dropped his glasses into the sea!

**Driving:** There will be no need for any of our guests to drive on our tours. However, from time-to-time a traveler will want to rent a moped and ride around a town or island we visit. A motorcycle license is sometimes necessary. However, an auto license is often enough to rent a scooter. An international driver's license application is available through AAA at <http://www.aaa.com/vacation/idpapplc.html>

**Money:** You may need cash for visas and departure taxes, not to mention souvenirs, lunches and half your dinners (on land tours), plus drinks.

Street vendors don't usually accept credit cards. I recommend exchanging at least \$500 at the airport for the currency which will be used at our destination. Exchange banks are also readily accessible Monday-Friday during business hours in all of the cities we visit.

Your credit card will be useful in many settings. However, I recommend checking with your card provider to find out their transaction fee for international purchases (if any). I have three charge cards. For international purchases, one card adds a 3% surcharge for each purchase, another adds 1.5%, and a third card doesn't add a surcharge at all. Go figure! Once you've chosen which card you'll use, call its service center and inform them where you're going and when. This will help prevent the company from blocking purchases you make overseas. Capital One Visa is a card that has no surcharge for international purchases.

Traveler's checks offer a nice, secure form for carrying large amounts of cash. American Express Traveler's Cheques are the most universally accepted. Be sure to get a wide range of denominations, mostly in 20s and less, and write down the check numbers in case you need to report them missing.

A money belt or pouch is absolutely essential. I've always used a pouch. It hangs around my neck under my shirt and it holds my passport and cash. In 30-years of international travel I've only lost my passport once, and it happened because I'd put it into my jacket pocket (instead of close to my heart in my pouch) between flights. It was stolen in a restaurant. I'd left the jacket on my chair when I used the restroom. Oops!

You may use your ATM card for cash in most overseas cities. However, you'll want to check with your bank to find out what the international service fee is. It may cost you \$5 per transaction, or more. My rule of thumb is to bring twice as much cash as I think I'll need (half of it in traveler's checks), at least two charge cards, and my ATM card, which I'll only use in a pinch.

Please note: Many foreign ATM machines will not recognize a PIN number which begins with the number "0." I recommend changing your pin number if this is the case. Also, be sure to inform your bank that you'll be traveling, for how long, and where you'll be, in the event you want to use your ATM or debit card overseas without a block on your account.

**Electric Devices:** Most of your electrical devices made within the last 10 years or so do not need a power converter to operate or charge in countries with 220v. Check the label of your device. It probably reads that it will work on 220v current as well as 110v (in the USA). However, you'll need adapters for the outlets. I recommend at least two, for you might want to charge your camera batteries and your cell phone at the same-time, for example.

Here's a link that might help you with all the info you need concerning electrical stuff and travel: [www.traveloasis.com/world-electric-guide.html](http://www.traveloasis.com/world-electric-guide.html). They sell gadgets, but they also show you what you'll need and what it looks like. And here's another one: [www.conair.com/travel-accessories-c-55.html](http://www.conair.com/travel-accessories-c-55.html)

For things with unusual batteries, bring extras. And for things with fuses, bring back-ups, as they may be tricky and expensive and perhaps impossible to replace overseas!

**Telephones:** International service for cell phones is not cheap. Check with your service provider to find out what your options are. In addition, here are other possibilities: (1) rent an international phone exclusively for this tour; (2) use a phonecard, (3) upgrade your cell phone to one with pre-installed

international service (e.g., some models of BlackBerry); or (4) use Skype. This latter option is the best bet financially, especially if you don't need the internet features provided by a smart phone like BlackBerry.

Please note: I provide telephone service to my travelers at no charge for emergencies.

**Luggage:** I recommend packing everything you need in a carry-on bag and shoulder bag. Here's an interesting link to take a look at: [www.onebag.com](http://www.onebag.com). It'll take you to "One Bag: The Art & Science of Packing Light."

Taking a lot of luggage will burden you and it'll cost you money to check-in. You'll be your own porter, and if you bring too much stuff, after awhile, between flights, buses, hotels, and all, you'll be wishing you had listened to your tour operator. So pack light and you'll love yourself (and me:) later on!

Plan on washing clothes as you go. I recommend buying some shirts and pants made of the quick drying material common among outdoorsmen, as noted below under Clothing.

Shoulder bags can be found with a variety of features which make them theft-proof, including knife-proof linings! These linings are made of a special fabric which can prevent a thief from slitting it open and unloading your valuables as you walk through a crowded bazaar or square. These kinds of bags are expensive, but having one may be a wise investment.

About Packing: Fitting stuff in is always easier if you roll instead of fold your clothes, for clothing is more compact and easier to fit into unlikely locations. A popular way to do it is to pack everything you think you'll need, and then to halve it. And then to halve it again! And don't pack too tightly, but save some room for stuff to bring home.

**Weather:** Check the following link for info about weather during the time of our tour. It'll help you pack: [www.worldweather.org/europe.htm](http://www.worldweather.org/europe.htm)LINK

**Clothing:** Most anything goes in the metropolitan areas we visit. However, for the locals, shorts on men are not very popular except on the beach. Generally, modesty is the best policy. For sacred spaces, like churches and mosques, for everyone, think about covering your shoulders and knees, and women, covering your heads with scarves, in addition. This goes for Eastern Orthodox and Muslim sites. Scarves are often on loan in these locations.

I recommend clothing made for traveling, quick-drying pants, tops, & underwear. Check out REI for the most recent product lines. I like Columbia's Titanium, ExOfficio, and REI's own brand. Most of it hang-dries in a couple of hours or overnight. And remember, you get what you pay for: The better stuff breaths when it's hot, insulates when it's cold, and is comfortable and wrinkle-free.

I recommend NOT bringing jeans and other clothing made of heavy cotton. Or maybe just one pair of jeans, if you must! For they take up a lot of space and up to 2-days to hang-dry. Incidentally, laundry services in most hotels are often outrageously expensive.

To keep your bags light, one strategy is 2 pairs of pants, 5-6 t-shirts, a windbreaker, a hat, and a week's worth of undergarments. Voila! If everything is interchangeable (all of your shirts go with all of your pants), you'll be stylin'!

To save space, try to bring just one pair of shoes and maybe a pair of flip-flops (which might be especially helpful in a public shower or on a beach). We'll walk a lot and so sneakers or walking shoes would be appropriate. Personally, I prefer really good running shoes. Even if you don't run these are great because they have excellent support and can be worn every day without causing muscle fatigue. But make sure you break them in! Blisters are a traveler's worst enemy.

**Stuff to Pack:** What do I need to bring with me to survive? The answer is, very little! Here are some suggestions for items you might bring along. The rule of thumb is to not bring anything you could buy for cheap at your destination (and then discard after you use it).

REI and other sporting goods stores are great places for travel supplies, even if you're not a mountain climber or fisherman! Below are some things for you to consider. Many of them may be available at discount stores like Target:

- Backpack (a great alternative to a suitcase!)
- Fanny pack
- Inflatable neck rest pillow
- Packing squares (small zippered bags for dividing up your clothes in your luggage; they keep clean & dirty clothes separate and make things easy to pack & find)
- Camera & camera bag
- Clothing (see above)
- Hat (one that crumples up real small is great!)
- Wash cloth – MSR quick-dry microfiber towel and other similar products dry very fast (Please note that towels will be provided in the hotels, but a wash cloth is unlikely.)
- Metal mug: It will never break, it can be used for bailing out a boat (just kidding), it can be a receptacle for that large frightening insect, and, best of all, you've got something to drink from in a pinch. Note that metal is necessary if you're going to use a portable heating device (for a plastic mug will melt...I know, good thing I pointed that out :)
- Portable water heating device (I bring instant coffee and tea bags to brew when it's too early to get something from the breakfast bar in the lobby and I need a mug of my favorite beverage)
- Clothesline: 12-16 feet with suction cups and/or clips on the ends (clips are more dependable)
- Money belt or pouch
- Mini-sewing kit
- Mini-first aid kit
- Water bottle

- Food (energy bars and snacks are great on those long bus rides & flights)
- Travel alarm (Do NOT depend on your cell phone clock! Unless you buy international service, it will be useless as a clock.)
- Electrical outlet adapters
- Sunscreen
- Roll-less toilet paper (one roll should do it) (You can slip the roll out yourself (takes up less space this way) or buy it pre-slipped from REI et al. From time-to-time this might come in handy if you have to use a public facility and it's short on supplies. It's not likely, but it can happen.)

**Other Stuff to Pack:** Besides what's listed above, here's a list of stuff you might want to cart along with you. But be sure to chant the following words as you pack, "Less is better!"

#### Books & Stuff

- Bible (We'll be doing Bible studies all along the way.)
- Travel books
- A novel for those times when you can't sleep & nothing's open
- Address list for postcards you'll send during your travels
- Paper & writing utensils

#### Personal Care Stuff

- Accessories for flying: ear plugs, eye covers, sleep mask, inflatable neck pillow, motion sickness meds, sleeping pills
- Extra set of eyeglasses or contacts
- Sunglasses
- Toiletries
- Mucinex (If you snore and if you have a roommate, consider this purchase. This is an over-the-counter expectorant which will help your roomy get some sleep!)
- Sleeping pills (These may be helpful if you want to sleep on a long flight, but can't otherwise.)
- Laundry soap
- Drain hole cover (These are often missing in hotel rooms; a cover is usually better than a plug as the drain hole sizes vary from place-to-place.)

## Clothing & Stuff

- The usual pants, shirts, undies, socks
- Pajamas
- Swimming/beach clothing
- Sweater or windbreaker (Check the weather for our destination using the link above.)

## Gear & Stuff

- Camera: If you're shooting digital, bring an extra memory card just in case you fill up or lose the first one. And bring extra batteries! If you use special lithium cells, replacing them in another country may not be possible. If you're old school, bring twice as much film as you think you'll need, avoiding the purchase of film overseas. It's expensive.
- Chargers: Cell phones, cameras, electric razors, etc. all have their energy supply centers which you don't want to leave home without!
- Pen flashlight (Will come in handy for getting around in your room in the dead of night or reading without waking up your roommate.)
- If we were going on a rock climbing expedition, this list would be longer. But we're not! The goal for gear is to bring stuff that helps you to achieve your objectives in your travels. What do you need? Not much, so keep it light!

**Shutting Down Your House:** Leaving our homes for an extended period of time always involves a few essentials to minimize surprises upon our return.

- Stop mail and newspaper delivery
- Pay-up all of your bills which will come due while you're away
- Suspend online business accounts such as Ebay and Amazon
- Get coverage for your pets and plants from a friend or service provider
- Turn off the lawn sprinklers, if possible
- Turn off the pilots for gas appliances
- Turn off your computer and unplug stuff that can burn your house down if it's shaken up by an earthquake or another disaster (My iron turns ON when it falls on its side! Yikes!)
- Turn off your home's heating and cooling systems
- Pull the drapes
- Close and lock all of the windows

- For your car, roll-up the windows and lock it, not leaving any valuables out in the open if you park it outside
- Consider a time-controlled on/off switch for a lamp in your home
- Tell your best neighbor that you'll be gone so that she can help you keep an eye on your place for unusual activity
- Do NOT broadcast to everyone on your social network(s) (e.g. Facebook, Twitter) that you're out of town and that your house is unoccupied!
- Get a house-sitter, if possible.

**Flying & Luggage:** Rule of Thumb: The following items should **NOT** be placed in checked luggage but should be kept with you in your carry-ons: medicines, jeweler, cash, insurance information, official papers, electronic devices (video cameras, laptops, rechargers, cell phones, iPods, etc.), in general, any valuables or fragile items.

**Duty-Free:** The general rule is that all tax-free liquid items purchased at airport duty-free shops must be in a sealed, special plastic bag with the receipt. Do not open the sealed bag until the final destination. Otherwise, the content of the bag may be seized at the security check point. Check with our carrier for special details.