



ADVENTURES IN GOOD COMPANY

PREPARING FOR INTERNATIONAL TRAVEL A GUIDE FOR SMART WOMEN WHO TRAVEL INFREQUENTLY



Adventures in Good Company
Adventure Travel for Women of All Ages

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Introduction

We love international travel! And we think it is well worth any hassle. Getting ready to go, however, definitely can seem a bit overwhelming - particularly if you don't travel frequently and even more when it is your first time out of your home country. The key is to start getting ready early so that you aren't rushed, have time to problem solve anything that comes up, and leave for your trip feeling rested and prepared.

We start this eBook with a checklist and timeline of what you need to do when. Print it out and put it somewhere you can see it easily and often. Cross out those things that don't pertain to you and check off the others as you accomplish them.

This is followed by the 10 topics that we get the most questions about with a different section for each, so that you can quickly find the information you need. The information we provide is based on countless websites and our own experience but any inaccuracies are our own.

We have aimed this for the occasional leisure traveler who lives in North America. The needs of the frequent flyer or the business traveler can be different and different countries have their own requirements for passports and visas, and different resources available. And while we think most of the information is accurate for most countries, countries where tourism is still rare will be different.

You may make some mistakes. Great! You'll learn from them and they become part of the story of your travel. Just remember that the only serious mistake you can make is staying at home when your heart wants to be on the road.

Checklist for getting ready for international trips

As soon as you sign up for a trip

- Decide whether you're going to buy trip insurance and if so, decide whether you want to include Trip Cancellation. If you do, buy it now (page 29)
- Set up an "Alert" on kayak.com or a similar website to start monitoring airfare (page 8)

Three months before departure

- If you don't have a passport, apply for one (page 3)
- If you do have a passport, check the expiration date – in some countries it needs to be valid for three to six months after you return. Renew if necessary
- Look at visa requirements and make a plan to get a visa
- Look at health concerns and vaccination requirements (page 25)
- Look at the packing list. If there is anything you need to buy, start watching the internet and your local stores for sales
- If you're traveling somewhere without potable water, consider your options (page 26)
- If you haven't gotten your airplane ticket yet, stop putting it off (page 8)
- If you have a reading list, start looking for some of the books on it

One month before departure

- Think about if and how you want to stay in touch (page 18)
- Determine whether you need a plug adapter, voltage transformer, or both (page 29)
- Order a special meal for your flight (page 40)

Two weeks before departure

- Start packing. Your suitcase should be packed a week before you leave (page 31)
- Buy the snacks you know you'll miss

One week before departure

- Call your bank and let them know when and where you are traveling (page 15)
- Call your credit card company and let them know when and where you are traveling

- ___ Go to the bank and get a supply of new \$1 and \$5 bills for incidental tipping
- ___ Arrange a stop for your mail and the paper if needed
- ___ Make 2 copies of your passport and the credit cards you plan to take. Leave one set with your emergency contact; put the other in a secure place that is separated from where you're carrying the originals.

One day before departure

- ___ Pack the things you couldn't pack before because you use them daily: chargers for any electronics, gadgets, toiletries, nightclothes
- ___ Put your ticket, passport, money, and credit cards someplace where you can't forget to take them
- ___ If you have an early departure, lay out the clothes you intend to wear
- ___ Take a deep breath, congratulate yourself for being prepared, and go to bed early

Passports, Visas, and the Trusted Traveler Program

Passports

A US passport is required for travel anywhere outside the United States, including Canada, Mexico, and the Caribbean. Passports expire every 10 years and most countries require that your passport be valid for 3 to 6 months after your date of entry. Below is a summary of what you need to do.

Detailed instructions about how to do this can be obtained by calling the State Department Passport Office at 202-647-0518, contacting a third party

passport agency or travel agent, or on the [web](#). It really isn't as complicated as it sounds.



If you are getting a passport for the first time:

1. Allow at least 6 weeks for regular processing or 2-3 weeks for expedited processing (for an additional \$60 fee)
2. Fill out **DS 11, the passport application form**. You can get this from your local US Post Office, a passport agency, or download it [here](#). **Do not sign it.**
3. **You must submit your application in person.** You can find the nearest passport location [here](#). For many people this will be their local US Post Office.
4. You will need to bring **proof of US Citizenship**. For most people this will be a certified birth certificate (Note: a copy is not sufficient)
5. You will also need to bring **proof of identity**, including a driver's license, government or military ID, or a Naturalization Certificate; and **a photocopy** of the same documentation on 8.5 x 11 white paper

6. Finally, you need one passport photo. You can have this taken at a place that advertises passport photos or you can have someone take one with a digital camera and print it out on photo quality paper. If you choose to do the latter, make sure you follow the strict requirements as described [here](#). We recommend taking a second copy with you in case you need to replace it
7. The fee is \$110 for the passport application and \$35 for the execution fee, which can be paid by personal or bank check or cash.

If you need to renew your passport:

1. **You can do it by mail** if your current passport is undamaged, was issued in the last 15 years, and was issued in your current name or you can legally document your name change.
2. Fill out **DS 82, the passport renewal form**. You can get this from your local US Post Office, a passport agency, or download it [here](#). Sign and date each page.
3. Mail it to the address on the form, along with your passport, a photo (see item 6 in the list above) and a check or money order for \$110. Include a marriage certificate or court order *only* if your name is different from the one on your passport.
4. Use a traceable delivery method (e.g. Priority Mail with Delivery or Signature Confirmation) and an envelope that is large enough to fit the application without folding.

Oh no! I leave in 2 days and I just realized my passport is expired. Am I lost?

Maybe. It all depends on whether you live close enough to a passport agency that you can drive there to renew it in person. Your passport can be renewed on the same day only if it was issued in the last 15 years (i.e. it has been expired for less than 5 years). Look up the closest agency on this [website](#). Or call the National Passport Information Center at 1-877-487-2778 where you can make an appointment 24 hours a day. And yes, you will need an appointment.

We recommend that you **make two copies of the face page of your passport**. Carry one copy with you on your trip—keeping it in a separate location. Leave one copy with your emergency contact person at home. This will facilitate replacement if necessary.

Visas

A visa is an additional document that some countries require you to obtain either before entering the country or at the country's entry airport. If you're traveling on an Adventures in Good Company trip to a country that requires a visa, we will send you specific instructions about how to obtain it. A useful website for finding visa requirements is [Project Visa](#). You can also look on the internet for the embassies of the countries you will be visiting. In general, all European Union countries, most other European countries, and some Commonwealth countries do not require a visa from US or Canadian citizens. Most other countries do; some countries require that you obtain a visa ahead of time and other countries permit you to get the visa at your entry airport.

Trusted Traveler Programs

There are several [Trusted Traveler programs](#), all administered by US Custom and Borders Protection. The one most people want, unless you live near a border, is the [Global Entry](#) program. If you live near the Canadian border, [Nexus](#) is the better choice; and if you live near the Mexico border, it's [Sentri](#).

Membership in the program allows you to *skip the passport control lines when you re-enter the United States*. Instead you go to a kiosk where your passport, fingerprints, and picture are electronically compared to what US Customs and Border Patrol has on file.

Membership also makes you eligible for TSA PreCheck, the expedited screening program of the Transportation Security Administration for domestic flights which is currently available at more than 120 airports and for most of the major airlines.

To apply:

1. Start your application at the [Global Entry website](#). There you can fill out an online application, accompanied by payment of \$100.
2. If the background investigation does not reveal any security concerns, you will be invited to appear for a "personal interview". This has to occur at one of 66 enrollment centers in the country; the complete list can be found [here](#). You schedule your interview at the same website.
3. During the "interview" you will be asked whether you travel for business or leisure, have your picture taken, and give a digital copy of your fingerprints. Theoretically they can ask you any question, but generally they don't.
4. You will be electronically notified when your application is accepted or denied. At this point you can start using the entry kiosks at any airport where the program is active, which includes most major airports that offer international flights. Your membership is good for five years, after which you need to reapply.
5. You will receive a card in the mail. This is only necessary to have at land border



crossings as it is *not used at the kiosk*.

The TSA PreCheck program:

You will also be assigned a 9-digit PASS ID. In order to take advantage of the TSA PreCheck program, enter your PASS ID in the Known Traveler Number field in the permanently stored traveler information of all the airlines you use. Currently Alaska Airlines, American Airlines, Delta Air Lines, Hawaiian Airlines, JetBlue Airways, Southwest Airlines, United Airlines and Virgin America are all working with TSA.

Using the TSA PreCheck program allows you expedited screening in a separate line; you don't have to take off your shoes, take your laptop out of your bag, take off your jacket, or put your liquids in a clear bag.

Your PreCheck status is embedded in the bar code on your boarding pass – the boarding pass may or may not say TSA-precheck on it.

This program is not worth the effort and investment if 1) you fly very infrequently; OR 2) the airport you usually fly out of does not have the TSA PreCheck program. It may also not be worth it if it is a hassle to get to one of the enrollment centers.

But there is only one adjective to describe how it feels the first time you skip a long Passport line or a long domestic security line.....GLORIOUS!

Buying airplane tickets: Do It Yourself vs. Using a Travel Agent



Many people buy their own airline tickets online. We think there are some compelling reasons to consider using real live travel agents, but that can be more expensive. So we'll start with some advice on how to buy your own tickets.

In preparing for a trip, knowing *when* to buy airplane tickets is undoubtedly one of the most confusing components. With airline consolidation, elimination of many flights, and increased fuel prices, airline ticket prices have gone up substantially and will likely continue to climb. Airlines have gotten very sophisticated at projecting demand and basing their pricing on that - the cost of your ticket has virtually nothing to do with how many miles you're flying. Of course, no one wants to buy a ticket now to find the price dropped a month later, or to hold off on buying a ticket only to find it much more expensive the next time she looks.

Unfortunately there is no definitive answer to the best time to buy. Recent analyses by ticket sellers have come up with different conclusions. A 2017 study by CheapAir called ["When to Buy Flights"](#) showed substantial variation by international destination. For flights between the US, Canada, Mexico, and Central America, CheapAir found that 70 days prior to departure is the best time to buy. For flights to the Caribbean, the best time is about 207 days before departure. South America's and Asia's cheapest flights should be booked approximately 115 days out whereas you can get the cheapest flights to the South Pacific, Africa, and the Middle East are about 200 days before you depart. For

flights to Europe, the cheapest options will be available 160 days before you fly. However another analysis showed that prices to Europe were best 5 months out, and still a third suggested 10 months. The most likely explanation for these differences is that airfares are so affected by season, by flight origin and destination, and even by how the analyses were done (e.g. available fares vs. booked fares), that reporting averages is almost meaningless.

So what's the verdict? If you are traveling to a popular destination at a popular time of year (e.g. the Caribbean in February, Florida during Spring Break, Europe in July, or home for the holidays), you should start looking six to eight months in advance and you should definitely book early while there are still lots of seats. That is particularly true if you are flying from a small airport, on a route with limited competition, and/or to a place of high demand for your particular departure city. As planes fill, prices will go up. For international flights, the absolutely latest you should buy a ticket is 2 months before your trip and you are unlikely to get the best price if you wait that long. For domestic flights the cutoff is 29 days.

Our approach is to start monitoring fares as soon as a trip is confirmed. We also factor in our time and anxiety level. If we think we've found a good price, we just book it and don't look again. If we don't find a good price, we set up a fare alert. Although fare alerts don't monitor exact flights, at the least they remind us to keep checking the fare. If the price doesn't come down or goes up and stays up for several days, we buy three months before the trip. At the very least, by then we will have had time to adjust to the fact that we are going to pay more than we hoped.

Once we start looking, here are our favorite websites and why. **Note: All the websites we recommend are actually airline consolidator search engines, meaning that they search a variety of different websites including the major airlines** (except Southwest and JetBlue). You may find different prices on them so it definitely is worth checking more than one. At the same time, there are lots of them; these are the ones we look at.

- [Kayak](#): If you are only going to check one site, this is the one we suggest. Kayak has an intuitive interface and many ways to filter results all at the same time - by airport, duration, take off or landing times, layovers, airline etc. If you have lots of choices, Kayak can help you quickly sort through them based on your preferences. For common routes it usually has a Price Predictor, which shows you how low prices have fluctuated over the last 90 days and, based on an algorithm, their best guess whether this is a good time to buy or whether you should wait because prices might drop. You can also set up fare alerts for specific routes, which is a good way to get a feel for price fluctuations if you are not buying now. However, these aren't flight-specific; knowing that the price has gone down \$20 without knowing if it's on the flight you're interested in may not be helpful.

The only reason we look elsewhere is that we've sometimes found better prices and/or flights on one of these other sites.

- [Google Flights](#): This is our new first stop website because it is blazingly fast and has a clean and simple interface. It also gives tips such as being able to save X dollars if you fly a different day. In addition there is a world map on the initial page with prices for lots of destinations based on your departure city and date. Is it that useful to know you could fly to Tromso, Norway for \$1,071 on February 21 from Washington, DC? Maybe not, but it's fun!!

The cons? It doesn't have filters, other than for nearby airports. If, for example, you can't leave until 12pm, there isn't a way to limit your flights to those parameters. It also has a box at the top called Best Flights, about which it says "We chose these flights to give you the best trade-off between number of stops, duration, and price." Sometimes that seems accurate but sometimes not (like an American flight that was \$10 more expensive and 30 minutes longer was listed over its Delta counterpart.) Is there an advertising consideration? If so, you can still see the other options so just be sure to look.

- [Hipmunk](#): Hipmunk has our favorite interface. Its intuitive interface uses bar graphs that allow you to instantly see how long flights are, how many layovers and how long each one is, and what time they take off and land. Another great aspect is the default sort order, which is their "agony index": a combination of price, layovers, and length. This absolutely assures that you don't overlook a much better flight that costs \$10 more but saves you 4 hours of travel time. It may or may not find you the cheapest flight.

So why isn't this our only go to site? Three reasons: 1) it's slow, sometimes mind-numbingly so - although that seems to be improving. 2) There have been several instances where the flight we selected "was no longer available". Really? Why waste our time then? 3) You pick your outbound flight and then you pick your return flight. So you might really like your outbound flight only to find there is no good return flight paired with it. It's still worth a look - just don't spend too much time there.

There are a couple of other websites to consider for specific situations.

- [skyscanner](#): If you are flying internationally, one option is to see if there is someplace you can get to more cheaply and then take advantage of truly low cost carriers. Many of these airlines do not show up on US-based websites so the best way to find out about these fares is with the Europe-based website [skyscanner](#). For example, one of our guides once had a trip to Croatia immediately followed by a trip in Bulgaria. The cheapest flight on conventional airlines was over \$2000. But after finding a cheap ticket to London, she took [Easyjet](#) to Croatia and then to Bulgaria - of course she did have to fly back to London in between, but with a saving of over \$1000, it was worth it. The only caution with this strategy is that your two tickets will not be connected electronically; if you have trouble on one flight you aren't entitled to any help, even if it's the same airline.

If you have a multicity itinerary: For test purposes, we looked at an itinerary that went from Baltimore to Managua, Managua to Madrid, and then back home from Madrid to Baltimore. Using a website that only lets you search leg by leg (e.g. Google flights or

Hipmunk) might take forever as you go down blind alleys on your second or third leg and have to start all over again. This is another case where Kayak really shines as it searches for all 3 legs and presents the options as a package. The best option we found was \$1932 after filtering out flights that took more than 16 hours.

It's also worth taking a look at [Orbitz](#), one of the oldest and largest online booking websites. We have never found it that useful and it is another site where we've had the "flight is no longer available" experience. But you can look at itineraries that involve more than 2 cities. Still, looking for the BWI-MGA-MAD, the only flights it showed from MAD to BWI was on LOT Polish Airlines with a time of 49 hours and 41 mins. And it was more expensive than the one Kayak came up with.

But the winner in the test case? Google flights, which quickly found acceptable flights and was \$1751 because it combined flights on American and United.

One other suggestion here - if you go back to a website that you have been looking at, delete your browsing history first. The websites say that they won't track your activity and show you a higher fare just because they know you are very interested. But honestly, we don't believe it. The last time we returned to a site and only found a fare that was higher than the first time, we deleted the browsing history. When we returned for the third time, we saw the same fare that we had seen the first time. While Google is probably one of the biggest collectors of personal information that exists, the Google chrome browser has easy to use privacy settings and it's simple to delete browsing history.

Social Media options

Having Facebook and Twitter accounts gives you another possibility for finding lower airfares. Follow the major airlines and also some websites that focus on lower airfares, such as [Airfare Watchdog](#)- we just generally like this website including their Facebook page. This particularly works well when your dates are open and you can jump on a

lower fare (Please, let me go somewhere, anywhere!). Many of the lowest fares can be  found this way but they only appear briefly.

But while it can be fun to look for a less expensive way to get somewhere, your time is worth money too. Driving yourself nuts to find the lowest fare may be more anxiety and effort than its worth.



Travel Agents

There was a time when travel agents were paid by the commission they received from the airlines they booked you on. Since the internet revolution and the advent of online booking tools, that is no longer true. Most agents now charge a flat fee for buying your ticket. The good news? Mediocre travel agents have left the business and those that survived are pretty darn good. However, there is no guarantee that the flight they find is any cheaper than the one you can find yourself. So does it ever make sense to use a travel agent these days?



Yes, and here's why:

- If something goes wrong on your flight (either before or after you take off e.g. it's cancelled, delayed etc), **you have an ally**. Instead of waiting until there is an overworked airline employee to help you, call the travel agent you booked with. Online travel agencies (e.g, Expedia, Travelocity) should work the same way but they just don't have the level of personal service. We have had people on our trips whose flights were cancelled that spent days getting bounced around and

waiting for the promised return phone call that never came.

- **It saves time.** Instead of you spending hours trying to figure out the best flight/price combination, turn it over to a travel agent.
- **It saves anxiety.** Especially for flights that are at all complicated, it's really nice to have someone else making sure you don't arrive a day too late or leave yourself too little time between flights.

The bottom line is that using a travel agent for anything other than a very straightforward booking can be the best decision you ever make.

Money and Credit Cards: The many considerations

There are many ways to get money or to pay for things on international trips, but the best two are credit cards and cash. The best way to deal with money will partly depend on what countries you're visiting; if you're on an Adventures in Good Company trip, we'll provide recommendations specific to your destination. However, the following suggestions are generally true.

Credit cards

We recommend using a credit card as much as possible during overseas travel for both safety (you're not carrying large quantities of money), convenience (you don't have to worry about finding a bank), and efficiency (you get a much better currency exchange rate than with cash or traveler's checks). For purchases, you will get the insurance that automatically comes with the card. And if you have a dispute over what appeared on your bill, the credit card company will get involved in the dispute if you have not been able to resolve it. If your card is lost or stolen, you can quickly cancel it; in any case you are only responsible for a small part.

Be aware that many credit cards charge a 1 – 3% foreign transaction fee (FTF). For a list of cards that don't, visit [CardRatings](#). For the occasional leisure traveler, we recommend getting a card that is widely accepted, does not charge an annual fee, and does not charge an FTF.

Do not, however, use your card to get cash advances. No matter how quickly you pay it off, you will pay interest on it for the remainder of the billing cycle. With interest rates on credit cards being as high as they are, you can pay a substantial amount in a short time.

Always notify your credit card company about when and where you're traveling before you leave or your transactions may be declined.

There are still places, especially small towns, where credit cards are not widely used. Always check before you go. And carry some local currency just in case.



Two special considerations about Europe: Europe uses a more secure credit card system called “Chip and Pin”, something that is relatively new to the US. Your swipe card will work in Europe when there is a human there to swipe it, but it will not work with automated kiosks you may see at places such as a train or subway station. If you travel in Europe a lot, look into getting a Chip

and Pin card here.

When you use your credit card in Europe, you are often given a choice between charging it in US dollars or the native currency. Always choose the native currency - your credit card company gives you a better exchange rate. While the difference between 1.03 and 1.06 may not seem like much, it adds up.

Cash

How much currency you need depends on where you are traveling and what you are doing. The best way to get cash is with an ATM or bank debit card, as long as it is part of the worldwide Cirrus or PLUS system (identified by looking at the back of your card). Virtually all major cities have ATM machines and you get the same great exchange rate, called the interbank exchange rate, as you do on a credit card. ATMs associated with a bank will give you a better rate than those you find in grocery or incidental stores.

When you first arrive at an airport

We used to recommend getting money from an ATM at the airport and avoiding the currency exchange kiosks because they give you a hideous exchange rate.

Unfortunately many European airports have a cut a deal with the foreign exchange folks and now all the ATMs are operated by them instead of real banks, giving you the same

hideous exchange rates. So what to do if you absolutely need to have cash in the local currency when you first arrive (e.g. to take a taxi to your hotel)?

- Before you arrive, go online with worldwide Mastercard or Visa locators to determine the situation at your arrival airport. Even if there is no ATM in the airport itself, there may be one within walking distance.
- If not, look at the cost of arranging \$20 to \$50 in arrival currency through your bank or credit card for delivery before you leave.
- At the least, withdraw just enough money to get to your hotel and find the nearest real ATM once you're there.
- Be aware that many airport ATMs will advertise themselves with flashy "No Fees" or "Free Withdrawal" signs. Typically this means that the exchange rate you receive will be worse than other ATMs, making the "no fee for withdrawal" promise not worth it.

Always call your bank before you leave.

- Notify them that you are traveling internationally. If international withdrawals suddenly start showing up on your card and you haven't done this, there is a good chance the ATM will either refuse or eat your card.
- Ask what your daily withdrawal limit is, particularly if you know you will frequently be paying in cash.
- Find out if they charge a flat fee per withdrawal or a percentage of what you withdraw. If the former, take out large amounts infrequently. If the latter, take out as little as you think you will need and resupply as necessary.

If you only need a small amount of cash, it may be easiest to ask your hotel or a local bank to exchange some dollars.

In some places, only crisp new bills are accepted and getting change for large bills is difficult. Going to your bank before you leave and asking for a variety of small denomination bills will ensure you have what you need when you arrive.

We do not recommend bringing either a large amount of cash or Traveler's Checks. Travelers Checks are not accepted in many places, and you will generally get a poor exchange rate for them or US dollars in foreign banks.

Staying in touch while you're away

The options for staying in touch on an international trip are as varied as traveling style. One general rule is that you don't want to use the phone in your hotel room, unless you have an international calling card and your hotel doesn't charge for toll-free numbers, or someone else is picking up the bill. Otherwise here is a guide to help you sort out your choices. First, though, you need to ask yourself- ***do you really need to stay in touch?***

Really? There are advantages to truly being away from contact with your everyday life back home. Or if you're on an Adventures in Good Company trip, just give our office number to your contacts and tell them to call us if they have to get in touch with you.

If your answer is yes, then you need to answer these questions next:

1. Is your mobile phone GSM compatible? The standard mobile-phone network in Europe, and much of the world, is called GSM. Some mobile phones, including most smart phones, use the same GSM technology; others, including many Verizon and Sprint phones, use a system that is incompatible. Within the GSM network, different regions operate on different bands. The United States uses two bands, and most of Europe uses two other bands. A GSM phone that's tri-band or quad-band operates on both US bands, plus one or both European bands so it works well at home and abroad.

2. How often do you travel and why do you want to stay in touch? Do you do a lot of international traveling? Do you want people to be able to call you, or is it just important for you to be able to call home? Do you think you will need to make many calls within the country in which you're traveling?

Having answered those questions, here are the major options for a person who travels for leisure.

If you have a GSM mobile phone

A. Use your own cell phone with or without an International Calling Plan

Most major U.S. phone companies give you the option of choosing a plan that allows you to make international calls for a reduced rate. Each company offers different plans for various prices that work for a number of phone models and in designated countries, so be sure to check that your plan covers the destinations in which you plan to travel. You can turn the plan on just before you leave and have it discontinued as soon as you get back. You might also consider getting an international data plan if you want to send email and will not have access to WiFi where you're traveling.

If you don't have a plan, you can still use your phone – it will just be at a higher rate. But if you don't plan to make calls and just want it for emergencies, you can skip getting a Plan. DO not, however, plan to check email if you don't have an International Data plan – data charges are horrendous.



Pros:

- Your cell phone number will stay the same
- The names and numbers that are currently programmed into your phone will still be available to you overseas without your having to transfer them to another device
- Other than adding an international calling plan, it doesn't take much planning

Cons:

- Per-minute calling rates vary for different countries and even an international plan can be expensive depending on where you're traveling
- You'll be charged for incoming calls, even if you don't answer them. Be sure to tell your friends and co-workers not to call except in emergencies

- *If you forget to turn off data roaming, you may be surprised with huge bills for unwittingly roaming* such as when the phone constantly checks for new emails.
- You have to remember to call the phone company when you get home to discontinue your plan

Bottom line: This is a great choice for someone who does not anticipate making many phone calls and wants to be reachable in an emergency

B. Buy a local SIM card for your own cell phone

Another option is to buy a Subscriber Identity Module (SIM) card to use in your own phone while traveling internationally. A SIM card is the part of a cell phone that holds the identity information and other personal data; if you switch your own SIM card for one that you purchase in another country, you can have all the benefits of a local phone (such as low in-country calling rates and a local phone number) without having to buy a new phone. You can then use an international calling card to call home (see below)

However, the option of replacing the SIM card is only available on unlocked GSM phones and you may not be able to legally unlock it (e.g. AT&T will not unlock the iPhone). You can purchase prepaid international and country-specific SIM cards from Web sites such as Telesial or just buy one when you get to the country you are visiting. You can buy a SIM card at a mobile phone shop, as well as (in many countries) at a newsstand. SIM cards, which generally cost around \$5, come with a European phone number and starter credit.

Pros:

- You can buy additional prepaid credit as you go
- Rather than buying a whole new phone, you can simply buy a SIM card for your existing phone -- which is cheaper and takes up less space in your luggage
- You'll enjoy low local rates for calls within whatever country you're visiting

Cons:

- It may be very expensive to call the United States unless you use an international calling card
- This option isn't available to travelers with phones that are locked or don't operate on the GSM network

Bottom line: This is a great choice if you anticipate making lots of calls in country while you're traveling and have an unlocked phone.

If you don't have a GSM mobile phone

A. Purchase or lease an International cell phone

Another option is to buy or lease an international cell phone for use whenever you are overseas. These phones do not work at home in the US - they are dual-band phones compatible with other countries, not what the US uses. You can buy or lease one online before you go, but it is often less expensive to buy one when you get to your destination country from a mobile phone store. If you don't travel that often, leasing may be a better option. Verizon has leasing options for their customers and there are other companies that also lease mobile phones.

Some international phones use a pre-paid calling card, which you buy when purchasing the phone at the local mobile phone store. You buy a certain amount, and the card has a code you scratch off and enter into the phone when prompted.

Other international cell phones have the ability to switch out SIM cards, so it can be used for more than one trip. You simply buy the local country SIM card (from someplace like Telesial) and put it in your phone. You usually get a prepaid amount of minutes when you buy the SIM card and then if you want to add more, you call a number and can use your credit card. Make sure the phone you buy can be unlocked.

Pros:

- They are pretty inexpensive, easy to come by, and make local calling a breeze
- If you get one with a changeable SIM card, the contacts directory will remain saved on the phone
- You can use it in multiple countries
- People will be able to reach you when you're traveling

Cons:

- You will not be able to use this phone anywhere but internationally, so you end up with 2 cell phones.
- You pre-pay minutes, which expire after a certain period of time (usually a couple months)
- If you are going to different countries and don't buy local SIM cards, rates will be higher once you leave the country where you bought it

Bottom line: Buying an international phone is a great choice for people who frequently travel internationally. Leasing one can be good for people who travel less frequently

B. Calling Card

Buy a pre-paid calling card in the country you are visiting. These are often sold at newspaper stands. The card has a code on it that you enter into the phone every time you make a call from any local landline, payphone, or mobile phone with a local number. Buy from a reputable source.

Pros:

- It takes no advance planning of any type and can be quite inexpensive
- It works for both local and international calls
- An automated voice typically tells you how much you have left on the card before each call
- You can use it with any phone that has low local calling rates

Cons:

- This is for outgoing calls only. You will not have a phone number where people can reach you
- You need to have a phone to use
- Some foreign language automated messages are frustrating to wait through before you can place your call

Bottom line: This is a great choice if you just want to be able to call home occasionally

C. Texting

If you want to stay in touch but actually talking isn't essential, texting may be the way to go. While you pay more for texts when you're traveling internationally, they are still less expensive than phone calls. If you text a lot, consider getting an international long distance messaging package that gives you a certain number of texts for a fixed (and cheaper) amount depending on the carrier.

A cheaper option is WhatsApp. The major limitation is that you both must have the free App installed on a smart phone. But if you do, then both domestic and international texting is free. Alternatively, you can use iMessage for free when you have access to WiFi.

You have a phone or laptop with wireless capability

An alternative to the traditional cell phone call is using a Voice Over Internet Protocol (VoIP) service such as Skype, which connects calls via an internet connection. Skype is often used on laptops and is now available on many smartphones as well. Skype users can talk to each other for free and can make calls to landlines and cell phones at reduced rates. Viber is a more recent competitor to Skype and some find that its greater range of calling features makes it a more attractive option.

Other options for free video calls are FaceTime, if you and the other person both have an IOS device; or Google Hangouts, if both of you are signed up for Google Plus.

With either Skype or Viber, unless you need to be available at all times, you should set your phone to Airplane mode and then turn on the wireless. This will keep you from accidentally getting texts, emails, etc. over a cellular (as opposed to wireless) network, as international data roaming is prohibitively expensive.

Pros:

- It's easy and inexpensive or free
- The connections are great quality as long as you have a good wireless connection

Cons:

- You need a laptop or smartphone with the Skype app
- You need to have a paid or free wireless connection

Bottom line: If you are staying in accommodations with free or low cost wireless, an amenity which is increasingly common all over the world, this is the way to go.

Only caveat: people will not be able to reach you until you are connected to wireless.

Health Considerations

Entire books are written about international travel and health. In this section we briefly address two common issues – travel vaccinations and drinking water.

Travel Vaccinations

One of the most common questions is which travel vaccinations you should get. While you would think this would be a straightforward question with clear answers that everyone agrees on, it isn't. There are 2 issues: 1) which vaccinations are **required** for you to enter the country? and 2) which ones would you be **smart to get**? The first question is easy and you can find the answer on the [Center for Disease Control \(CDC\) website](#). This is also a great source for obtaining information on *recommended* vaccines and tons of other country-specific health information. But it's the recommended ones that might require you to do some research. Should you just rely on CDC or travel clinics? That is definitely an option. But if you do, you should understand that they are both going to err on the side of recommending too many rather than too few vaccines, and travel clinics have a financial incentive to suggest as many vaccines as can be justified. Since vaccines are expensive and not covered by most health insurance, making informed choices is key.

Here's an example. A few years ago as I was getting ready to go to Kilimanjaro, I went to a travel clinic. One of the vaccines they recommended was influenza. I was confused - was there a flu outbreak in Africa? Of course not. It's that CDC recommends the flu vaccine for everyone everywhere. There may be a small additional risk from being on an airplane, but if you don't choose to get one routinely, you may not need to rethink that because you're going overseas.

Here are some of the factors to consider:

- How common is the disease? When was the last case?
- How bad is the disease? Is it treatable once you get it?
- How effective is the vaccine and how often does it need updating?

- Does the vaccine have side effects and how common are they?

Let's consider the always recommended Hepatitis A and B vaccine as an example. I chose to get it because the vaccine lasts forever, it's pretty effective, chronic Hepatitis B is a really nasty incurable disease, and there isn't a high incidence of side effects. I don't plan on exchanging bodily fluids with strangers when I travel, but I am not confident about the purity of the blood supply if I end up in a hospital in a country with a limited medical care system. For me, the benefits outweigh the costs.

On the other hand, rabies is recommended for some countries. Its main purpose is to buy you some time before you receive more definitive treatment. If I were going to live in a rural area, I might consider it. For a three-week trek, unless there was an epidemic, I personally wouldn't bother.

Ultimately you have to determine the risks of both getting and not getting a recommended vaccine and then decide on your own tolerance.

Drinking water

In recent years there has been growing concern over the environmental sustainability of drinking water in plastic bottles. In most developed countries, the tap water is potable (i.e. you don't need to treat it before you drink it) and the decision you make about refilling a reusable bottle versus buying bottled water involves the same tradeoffs as you make at home – cost, convenience, recyclability.

When traveling in developing countries, however, the equation is different. Drinking water may not be potable for travelers, whose intestinal flora differs from that of the local people; or it may not be potable for anyone. In either case, refilling a water bottle from the tap simply isn't an option and the tradeoffs are more complex.

In most developing countries, water in plastic bottles has become ubiquitous. Not only do tourists drink it, but in some places locals prefer it too. The cost is often quite low and

the alternatives require both planning and effort. For convenience, there is no question that this is the easiest thing to do.

However, in most developing countries the infrastructure for the collection and disposal of waste and recycling is severely limited. In cities, trash collection trucks pass through accessible areas 1-2 times per week. However, in more remote communities or areas without vehicle access, disposing of your waste can be challenging. Public garbage cans and other methods of disposal are few and far between, and recycling services are often difficult to locate and available for only a small range of materials. For these reasons, it is not uncommon to encounter trash strewn along the road, in ravines, and in empty lots.

With advance planning and some practice, however, you can completely eliminate the need to buy water. Advance planning is bringing what you need with you, as you are unlikely to find what you need once you're there; the practice is remembering to use it, so you start each morning with a full bottle and bring what you need to resupply with you during the day. What should you bring?

There are basically three options: potable aqua or chlorine tablets, a SteriPen, and the CamelBak Purifier Water Bottle. Let's consider the pros and cons of each.

Potable Aqua or chlorine tablets are an old standby that work well, take up virtually no space in your pack, and are affordable. For about \$8 you get a bottle of 50 tablets, which you use two at a time to clean 1 liter of water. Their only drawback is the need to wait about 30 minutes for the tablets to work. Some people also object to the lingering taste. However, after the tablets have had time to work, the taste can be neutralized with lemon, Vitamin C powder, or the yellow neutralizing tablet that is often sold with the tablets.

The **SteriPen** is an ultraviolet handheld purifier that destroys over 99.9% of bacteria, viruses, and protozoa like Giardia and Cryptosporidium. You simply stick the pen into

the water bottle and wait until the light changes color, signifying that the water is now clean. It is extremely simple to use, effective, and quick. It can also sterilize up to 8,000 liters. The cost varies depending on the model you buy but ranges from \$50 and up. When you consider how many liters it can sterilize, it actually may be cheaper than tablets if you need to use it frequently.

Camelbak All Clear Purifier Water Bottle. This .75 liter water bottle has a UV light built into its cap and sterilizes water in the same way the SteriPen does. Its main advantages over the Steripen are its combination of water storage and treatment, and its ability to be recharged through a mini USB cable or solar charger. It also can treat about 10,000 liters. It both weighs and costs more than the SteriPen, and .75 liters doesn't last that long when you're hiking. Still, for pure ease of use, it may be your best bet.

One caveat for all of these methods- they don't work well when the water is gritty or dirty. While this can be an important drawback depending on your water source, it obviously isn't a concern when you are getting your water from the tap. If your water is dirty, you need a water filter too. A water filter will filter out particulates, but it won't filter out viruses and protozoa, so it is not effective treatment by itself for most developing countries. If you are in a situation where you need to be concerned about both, the GRAYL Water Filtration Cup with the optional water purifier may be your best bet.

Taking the time to research your options before you leave is well worth the time you put into it. Ultimately, however, your highest priority has to be staying adequately hydrated. And if your choice comes down to drinking water out of plastic bottles or going without the water you need, don't give it a second thought!

Links to the companies that design each of the last three are included in the Resources Section for more information.

Converters and Adapters- Your power source

We often get asked if there will be a place you can plug in your rechargeable camera battery or recharge a cell phone or plug in a hairdryer? Even if there is an outlet to plug these electronics and appliances into, you will probably need a plug adapter. You will likely also need a power converter (sometimes called a transformer) if you want to use a hairdryer. What does this mean?

Converters

Most US and Canadian small appliances and electronics operate on 110 volt - 120 volt (commonly depicted as 'v' or 'V'). In most other countries, they operate on 220-240v. This means that if you try to plug your 110v hair dryer into a 220v outlet, it not only won't work, it may blow a fuse in your appliance or in the electrical system. What you need is a three-tier power converter that will transform the 220v to be compatible with the North American current.

However, some US appliances and *almost all electronics (cell phones, iPads, battery chargers)* actually have a dual voltage range of up to 220v and therefore can be charged/used without the converter. How do you know? Look for the voltage rating on your appliance. If the rating says it is 100v - 220v then your product is dual voltage and you do not need a converter. If it says 110v or 120v, then it is a single voltage and will need a transformer to use abroad in 220v countries.

Once you know that you need a converter, your next step is to determine what type you need. You want to select the converter according to the wattage rating of your appliance (volts x amps = watts). A converter that is at least 25% higher than your product's wattage rating is recommended. For something like a hairdryer - something that surges when you turn them on - you want a converter at least double the wattage rating.

Adapters

But remember, this is only half of the equation. What you almost *always* need outside of North America, regardless of the electrical current, is a plug adapter. A plug adapter allows your plug to fit into differently shaped electrical sockets. To make this clear, take a look at one of your charging devices. You'll note that the plug has 2 parallel flat prongs, and these prongs fit into the electrical sockets of your home. In the European Union, the 2 prongs are round; in the UK, they are square and thick; in other countries that can be a combination of different shapes and angles. With a plug adapter, you insert your plug into the adapter and the adapter into the socket; the adapter has the appropriately shaped prongs for different receptacles. Some adapters have prongs for a number of different countries and some companies sell kits with different plugs. The advantage of the former is that you don't have to research which to take. However, they tend to be bulky and with a travel kit, you take just the plug(s) you need.

One thing to note: electrical receptacles and voltage are the same in Canada and Mexico as they are in the US. You will not need a plug adapter when traveling there unless the plug of your electrical appliance has a grounding pin, the big round pin commonly used with power tools but less common with consumer travel appliances.

If you are uncertain about what you need for either plug adapters or transformers, consult your local travel store or one of the websites we list in resources.



Packing for international travel

When you start packing your suitcase, you know your trip is real!! Usually there is a mix of excitement and feeling overwhelmed, especially when it's something you do infrequently. And then living out of a suitcase, packing and unpacking every night, is its own challenge. Here are some tips to help you get there with what you need and stay organized while you're there.

1. **Take as little as possible.** *Overpacking is the single biggest packing mistake people make.* It is easy to think - oh, I'll just throw that in just in case. And pretty soon you need a big suitcase and it's heavy, and every time you have to get that suitcase upstairs, you regret it. But that isn't even the biggest problem with overpacking.

Unless you're going to one place and staying there, you will have to repack during the trip - sometimes, you'll repack several times. The more stuff you have, the longer it takes. Do you really want to be in your hotel room packing when you could be wandering the town square or going outside to look at the stars? If it takes you more than 15 minutes to repack, you've brought too much. Yes, your dinner attire may be a little boring - but it's a small price to pay for the freedom of traveling light.

2. **Pack early.** Having your suitcase packed 2 weeks before you go is not too early; definitely get a good start at least a week before you leave. There are two reasons: 1) you are more likely to pack carefully if you have plenty of time to think about it and you're not just throwing everything in as fast as you can; and 2) you'll have time to go out and buy anything you realize you need but don't have. Are your socks still good? Do you need a new hat? Much better to be thinking about that the week before than the night before you leave.
3. **Follow a packing list.** If you are traveling independently or your tour company hasn't provided a checklist, do an internet search – there are lots of packing lists out there! However you get a packing list, check each item off as you put it in your

suitcase. Make sure to circle items or keep notes of the things that you can't pack yet because you'll need them before you leave, like sunglasses or toiletries.

There are a couple of reasons to follow a packing list. The most obvious is that you are less likely to bring what you don't need and to forget the things you really do. But another advantage is the difficulty in packing for weather that is radically different than where you currently are. If it's really hot where you are, you probably are convinced that you will enjoy being cool, even cold. But that enjoyment won't last if you're shivering or avoiding walking around town because your toes are cold. And because your packing list is reminding you that you need gloves, a warm hat, and some fleece, you'll be prepared. You might consider starting to keep a packing list that you can update and refine over time.

4. **Put everything out on the table before you pack anything.** This helps to assure that you don't double pack or miss anything. Additionally, it gives you the opportunity to reconsider one more time whether you need something.
5. **Think carefully about what you'll pack in your daypack or other carry on.** You don't want it to be too heavy, just for ease of walking through the airport. But for a hiking trip you should always carry your hiking boots because they are the most essential and irreplaceable piece of clothing you have (some people wear them on the plane to save on packing space, but other people find that uncomfortable). Also remember to bring clothing appropriate to where you land- either a fleece (which also makes a comfy airplane pillow) or short sleeved shirt, so you don't have to go into your suitcase in the airport.
6. **Apply the principles of lightweight backpacking to suitcase packing**
 - **Mindset is critical:** you have to *want* to lighten up. Understand that it is a process of continual refinement, one that continues for as long as you travel. Being willing to step outside of that proverbial box can be the hardest step!

- **Divide everything into three piles:** one is the must-haves (what we have on our packing lists, other than optional). The second is those things that might come in handy, such as a 2nd or 3rd dressy blouse (these are usually items on our packing list but more than the recommended amount). The last category are those things that would be fun to take, like that new hardcover book you just bought or a travel Scrabble game (these are generally on our optional list).

Here's where the mindset comes in: take only the first pile!

- Once you have decided what you need, **is there a lighter version you could take?** That can mean repackaging your toiletries into smaller containers so you carry only what you need for the trip. Or it can mean bringing a lightweight fleece jacket in place of a wool sweater.
- Can you **choose items that have multiple functions?** A lightweight rain jacket



Buff



Stocking cap



Wind Jacket



Rain Jacket

also serves well as a windbreaker. A pair of wool socks serve as a backup pair of gloves. Anything you can wash that will dry overnight serves the work of 2 items.

- **Learn from your experience!** During or after each trip, keep lists of anything you really missed having, and everything you brought you didn't really need. Just don't make the mistake of deciding you don't need rain gear because you didn't use it on the last trip.

Travel insurance

Deciding whether or not to get travel insurance can be challenging. We routinely recommend it because we have seen women be disappointed about losing money at the same time they're dealing with something difficult - usually an illness or accident, or the illness of someone they care about. But it isn't cheap and if you don't ever need it, it feels like a waste of money - just like health, auto, or any other kind of insurance.

Really, it's a gamble - one you only win if something bad happens in your life. So the first question you need to ask is whether the prospect of losing money is going to make you anxious. If it is, then the peace of mind that comes with having insurance will be worth it. But if you're okay with that prospect, and if the likelihood is small, then maybe insurance isn't necessary.

However, if any of the following are true, you should very seriously consider getting trip insurance that includes trip cancellation/interruption:

- You have a health condition that could prevent you going;
- You have (an) elderly parent(s)
- You have children with health conditions
- You live in an area that is prone to unpredictable serious weather
- One or more of the above is true for your travel companion

Another option is to buy trip insurance that does not include trip cancellation/interruption, which is the most expensive part of travel insurance. Sometimes referred to as Post Departure Benefits, this abbreviated insurance includes everything else that might occur once you have left on your trip- trip delay, emergency evacuation, baggage loss or delay, medical benefits - for much less (\$35-\$70 depending on your age). We always buy this level for our guides on international trips. You can obtain the price of this on most travel insurance websites by putting in \$0 as the trip cost.

A few other things you should know about insurance:

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- If you are buying trip insurance because of pre-existing medical conditions (yours or your family's) that may cause you to cancel, you usually have to buy it within a certain time of putting your deposit down (and not all policies cover pre-existing conditions so make sure that the one you buy does). Otherwise you may want to wait until the balance for your trip is due as the cancellation fee may cost less than the trip insurance.
- If the trip you bought insurance for is canceled by the tour company, you may be entitled to a refund of the insurance fees – check with the insurance company.
- If you want to make sure your plane fare is covered, you can add that on to your insurance for the additional cost by calling the insurance company. Be aware, however, that the insurance policy will likely only reimburse you for the airline change fee, not the entire ticket. Whether or not that is helpful depends on the likelihood you will be using that airline for another trip in the next year.
- If you have trip insurance and you get sufficiently ill or injured before the trip so that you need to cancel, **go to a doctor as soon as possible**. Of course you don't want to drag yourself out of bed, but the insurance company is not going to take your word that you were sick.
- Travel insurance may not cover situations you think it should, so make sure you have a copy of your policy and bring it with you on your trip.

Bottom line: No one likes to buy travel insurance until they need it. But if you need it, you will be very sorry if you don't have it.



Trekking poles

We offer a number of international hiking trips and we are huge fans of trekking poles for any hiking or backpacking trip. The subject of hiking poles is one we get lots of questions about, the two most common being: 1) what kind should I buy? and 2) can I carry them on to an airplane?

Choosing trekking poles

There are so many trekking poles and such widely varying prices, how do you choose? First of all, if you are an avid hiker and you intend to keep hiking and/or backpacking for years, then the advantages of the more expensive ones are totally worth it. Even if they cost \$150, if you hike for another 10 years, that is only \$15 per year. We have found that with very few exceptions, women love them once they get over the initial awkwardness of using something new. And particularly for women with any knee issues they will make a huge difference.

However, for the more casual hiker, these may not be worth it. Trekking poles vary wildly in price, from the ones at WalMart for \$13 to the \$150 ones made by Leki. For the woman who wants to give trekking poles a try, the cheap ones are fine - even ski poles will work. For less expensive poles, make sure the grip is vertical instead of like a cane - these put way too much stress on your wrist. Also make sure they are collapsible or they won't fit into your suitcase, and 3 pieces are much easier to adjust than two pieces. And while it is a matter of personal choice, many women prefer anti-shock poles (they give a little when you lean on them).



But once you're hooked, there are some important differences that distinguish them. More expensive ones tend to be lighter, collapse into smaller pieces, are easier to adjust, and have ergonomically correct handles. Another major and under-appreciated difference is the wrist straps. Good, adjustable, supportive wrist straps, that allow you to snug your hand up to the grip, are essential for proper use: the thin ones just don't work nearly as well.



Another issue is whether you can pull them completely apart, which is only important if you want to put them in carry-on luggage (see below). All poles will collapse, but most collapsed poles won't fit into carry-ons. If you try to pull the cheaper poles apart, however, you may never get them together again.

Getting hiking poles to your destination

You have main three choices:

1. **Send them ahead to your destination**, either by US post or UPS. The chances they'll get there are quite high. The only downsides are that it takes more



advance planning, costs money, and requires an address you can mail them too.

2. **Put them in your checked baggage.** If they don't fit into your suitcase when they are collapsed, pull them completely apart. Also make sure to cover the tips with duct tape or something to keep the points

from ripping your clothes or suitcases to shreds. The likelihood they will get there is quite high and it takes no advance planning. If you would otherwise not be

checking your bags, then the additional cost on domestic flights is the baggage fee you'll have to pay. One checked bag is still free on most international flights.

- 2. Pull your poles completely apart and put them in your carry on luggage** (if your luggage is designed to fit the requirements of carry on baggage, they will just fit). The main drawback to this is that TSA may not let them through. Technically hiking poles do not fall within TSA guidelines of allowed carry-ons, since they are over 7 inches and have a sharp point. However, many of our guides have carried them on this way and have never been stopped. But it could happen - and if carrying them on is going to make you feel nervous and guilty, don't bother trying it. If it doesn't, then leave yourself enough time to go back and check them through if you're stopped. The advantages are that your hiking poles will definitely get to your destination and it won't cost anything. The downside is that you could get stopped and have to go check your bag.

NOTE: *When flying internationally, your likelihood of being stopped at security, particularly as you are leaving a foreign country, is much higher than when flying domestically.* Since one checked bag is still free on most international flights, it is safer to plan on putting them in your checked bag.

How to make a long flight more enjoyable

For many people, just the prospect of a long flight is enough to deter them from making the international plunge. Unfortunately, there is no way around it, but there are a few things you can do to make it more comfortable and easier to recover from.

- **Choose your seat carefully.** Upgrading to economy plus may well be worth it. If you don't want the extra expense, look at [SeatGuru](#) before you choose your seat – it will help you avoid that console that takes up even more foot space. Then decide on aisle versus window. A window seat means nobody will be climbing over you, but you may need to climb over someone. The major consideration here is how often you think you'll be going to the lavatory. Also, you should scope out better seats (e.g. a row of 3 seats that are all empty) as you get on the plane and prepare to move into it as soon as the plane door is closed – or sooner if you don't mind moving if the rightful owner shows up.
- **Think ahead about food on the plane.** Order a “special meal”, especially one that is low fat. People with special meals are served first and the food is always hot. Cabin pressure is set at a higher altitude than most locations of earth, so fat is harder to digest and you may feel more bloated or more lethargic from heavier meals. Alternatively, avoid airplane food altogether and bring fruit and snacks.
- **Drink water.** Dehydration is the biggest problem on long flights. Not only does it increase the likelihood of blood clots, but it adds to the fatigue and feeling of physical discomfort that is so common. This occurs not just because you are drinking less, but also because airplane air is dehumidified so that it weighs less and thus saves fuel... meaning it's drier. Carry an empty water bottle with you through security and then fill it on the other side.
- **Control your personal environment.** At a minimum, bring ear plugs and an eye mask. Some people swear by noise-canceling, over-the-ear headphones - they take up a little more space but are great for immediately



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signaling to chatty seatmates that you want privacy. There is no better way to make a long flight longer than by being trapped in a seat next to a loud snorer or an incessant talker. Eye masks really do help block out unnecessary light. Another thing to consider is a full-length pillow called a 1st Class Sleeper. Some people find they provide much better back and neck support than a standard airline seat.

- **Stay warm.** No matter what the outside temperatures, bring a fleece pullover/jacket with you. If it's cold in the plane, you'll stay warmer; if it's sufficiently warm, you can use it as a pillow. Another option is to bring a pashmina or sarong to sub for the airline's scuzzy or nonexistent blankets.
- **Stay charged.** If you like traveling with electronics, make sure your smartphone and Kindle/iPad are fully charged and pack a portable charger. There is nothing more distressing than having your battery run down half way across the ocean. Well, actually there are a lot of things that are more distressing, but this one is completely in your control.
- **Take drugs.** Taking an aspirin an hour before you take off to help prevent deep vein thrombosis, or DVT. Some people swear that melatonin helps them get over jet lag faster, other people find it useless. And while some people say you should never take any pharmaceutical sleep aids, others find that a short acting sleeping pill like Ambien makes the flight go faster and arrival fresher.

Useful Websites and Apps

There are so many website and apps! Everyone has their favorites that they use most frequently. These are ours.

Websites

Passports: <http://travel.state.gov/content/travel/english.html>

Visas: <http://www.projectvisa.com>

Trusted Travel Programs: <http://www.globalentry.gov/>

TSA PreCheck: <http://www.tsa.gov/tsa-precheck/>

Credit Cards: <http://www.cardratings.com/best-credit-cards-with-no-foreign-transaction-fee.html>

Health: <http://www.cdc.gov>

- The Steripen - <http://www.steripen.com>
- The GRAYL Water Filtration Cup - <http://www.thegrayl.com>
- Camelbak All Clear <http://www.camelbak.com/allclear>
- TAP (<http://www.travelersagainstplastic.org/>) is an organization that encourages travelers to choose options other than drinking out of plastic bottles

Travel warnings and country specific information: <http://travel.state.gov/travel/>

Airplane tickets:

- **Kayak:** <http://www.kayak.com> (best interface and most flexible options)
- **Google Flights:** <https://www.google.com/flights/> (fastest and cleanest interface)
- **Hipmunk:** <http://www.hipmunk.com> (interesting matrix display with Agony Index)

Hotels and car rentals:

- **Trivago:** <http://www.trivago.com/> (a search engine for hotels, compares prices across sites for the same hotel)
- **Priceline:** <http://www.priceline.com> (regular prices, option to bid for undisclosed hotels)
- **Booking.com:** <http://www.booking.com>
- **Hotwire:** <http://www.hotwire.com> (discounted hotels but you don't which until you buy)

Alternative accommodations:

- **HostelWorld:** <http://www.hostelworld.com> (hostels)
- **AirBnB:** <http://www.airbnb.com> (other peoples' houses for money)
- **Couch Surfing:** <http://www.couchsurfing.com> (other peoples' houses for free)

General advice and ratings

- **Trip Advisor:** <http://www.tripadvisor.com>

Travel Equipment Stores:

- **Magellan:** <http://www.magellans.com/>
- **REI:** <http://www.rei.com> (also sells outdoor equipment)

Free or Low Cost Apps

Learning Languages

- Babbel
- Duolingo

On site translation

- Google Translate (if you have WiFi)
- Word Lens (if you don't)
- Vocre - acts as a personal interpreter

Staying in touch

- Skype
- Viber
- WhatsApp

Packing

- **Packing Pro:** Helps you develop a packing list tailored to your trip

Keeping your trip plans in one place

- Triplt

XE

- Currency converter, current exchange rates