

# Overseas Travel Checklist & Tips

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## Prepare Your Documents

- Make sure your passport is valid for 6 months past your return date (many countries require this).
- Make two photocopies of all your credit cards and your driver's license and passport. Keep a copy at home. Take a copy with you and carry separate from the originals.
- If you will be driving in Italy, get your IDP (International Driving Permit). I advise this for all other European countries, but in Italy it is required by law. Check with your Automobile Association for more information.
- Get all your booking documents organized for the trip. I make a file folder with all my documents for each booking and keep them in the order we will need them.
- Print out the information from your country on what to do if your passport is lost or stolen:
  - US State Department (Lost and Stolen U.S. Passports Abroad)

## Make a Very Detailed Itinerary

- I write a complete itinerary with all the addresses, directions and contact numbers that I will need for every place I am going. This way you will always have all the important information you need in one place. Be sure to carry this with you at all times (do not put in checked luggage).
- Give a copy of the itinerary to each person traveling with you and leave an abbreviated copy for the person who will be looking after things for you at home.
- Before you leave home, email yourself and all of your travel companions a copy of your vital information such as rental property address, whom to call, where to meet. Make sure this email is kept on your email server (don't download it to your computer) in case you need to find an internet and look up the information.
- Go to [www.viamichelin.com](http://www.viamichelin.com) or another trip planning website and print out driving directions for all your main drives for the trip. Do this as backup even if you have a GPS. Always have good driving maps with you. I always buy my maps when I get to Europe at a local gas station. They are much more detailed and you can narrow down to the area you are traveling.

## Before You Leave - Reconfirm Everything!

- A couple of weeks before you leave reconfirm all your travel arrangements.
- Call the airline 72 hours in advance to make sure your flights have not changed, to verify your seating and request any special meals.
- Email, phone or fax all your hotels and vacation rentals to confirm your dates. Remember that some businesses do not check their email every day. If you do not get a reply in two business days, phone or fax them.

## Odds and Ends not to Forget!

- Arrange care for your pet, lawn, and plants
- Let the neighbors know that you will be gone and for how long
- Put your lights on timers to make your home look lived-in
- Make sure your bills are up to date. (I have automatic bill pay)
- Have your newspaper discontinued
- Have your mail held
- Make copies of your passports, itineraries, vouchers, etc, along with the numbers to call in case your credit card is lost or stolen (see below)
- Send a copy of your itinerary, including hotel phone numbers or websites to your family and interested friends

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## Money Matters

- Prior to departure be sure to call your credit/debit card company(s) to advise that you will be traveling outside the US. Check the expiration dates on your card(s) to ensure it is valid at least one month beyond your travel dates. This is a good time to ask about foreign transaction and ATM withdrawal fees (explained in the next two points).
- There may be an international transaction fee (1-4%) charged for some credit/debit card purchases made outside the US. A few of the cards that don't charge fees are Capital One, Hyatt Visa, British Airways Visa Signature, Chase Sapphire Preferred, Marriott Rewards Premier, Priority Club Select Visa, Continental Presidential Plus, American Express Platinum and Centurion cards.
- When you use a foreign ATM you may be charged a withdrawal fee, but you will get the bank exchange rate. Cash will be in the local currency. Ask your local bank if they have a "corresponding" bank partner abroad that will not charge fees for ATM withdrawals. Also, inquire about any daily withdrawal limits.
- To use ATMs abroad you may need an international PIN number. Check with your bank prior to traveling.
- In Europe, most automatic machines (i.e. parking meters, highway tolls, ticket kiosks, etc.) no longer accept US credit/debit cards unless they're imbedded with a chip. The same is true for some smaller merchants and restaurants, and the list continues to expand. For these transactions, and similar situations, it is recommended that you have euros on hand.
- The best location for exchanging US currency into foreign currency is at a local bank.
- Cash advances against a credit card result in higher (and immediate) interest rate charges. We recommend using your debit card or a pre-paid Visa travel money card.
- Think about starting your trip off with some local currency in hand. Many US banks allow you to order currency online and have it shipped via FedEx.
- Traveler's checks in foreign or US currency are not recommended as they are not widely accepted and difficult to cash.
- Mexico is no longer as lenient in accepting US dollars. When using dollars south of the border, one is limited to \$100 in purchases at stores and can exchange no more than \$1500 a month. Credit/debit card purchases are not affected.

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## At The Airport:

- Make sure to reconfirm your flight 24-hours in advance before going to the airport.
- Arrive at the airport with plenty of time to relax after checking in for your flight. Allow 2-hours prior to your departure time and more time certainly would not hurt.
- Upon check-in for your flight you will need your passport
  - \* All necessary documents for minors traveling with you (make sure that your travel professional has all of the details so that they can advise you of exactly what you need).
  - \* Your flight confirmation
  - \* Proof of immunization (if required by the country that you are visiting)
- Make sure that you personally check in each piece of luggage with the counter agent and confirm that they are checked through to their final destination or if you have to claim them along the way and recheck them. Do not allow anyone else to check them for you.
- Present the necessary documents for your flight(s) and reconfirm the boarding passes with the counter agent making sure that you have received all boarding passes for your flight.
- If you are boarding in a country outside of the United States, you will need to clear immigrations on the way to the departure gates. You will need to present your passport and boarding passes. In some countries you may be required to go through an interview with immigration officials, or if you are singled out for a secondary inspection, as well. Don't worry about this, as it is just a precaution.
- Once you have your luggage receipts and boarding passes returned by immigration, proceed to the security check point and be prepared to present your passport, and boarding pass to be processed through the security checkpoint. Again, you may be singled out for a secondary search that may include being manually searched and your carry-ons completely inspected.
- NEVER act in a defensive or aggressive manner during any of the above processes. NEVER joke or give any of the people in charge of the processes a reason to single you out. Many vacations have been ruined by folks taking offense to the processes and thereby being delayed and missing their flights.

## Arriving At Your Destination:

- Once you arrive at your destination you will be deplaned and ushered into Immigration. You will need to present your passport and allowed to enter the country.
- You will then proceed to luggage claim where you can then claim your luggage. Make sure that your luggage has not been tampered with and if you have placed anything of value in your luggage, be sure that it is still there.
- You will then be required to go through customs to exit the baggage claim area. You will be provided with a customs declaration form on your flight. You will be required to submit this form to the customs official to clear customs
- NEVER try to take undeclared items through customs. If you are singled out for a secondary search and they are found you may be deported right then and there, or worse.
- **Staying Safe:** Once you enter the main terminal at your destination, do not respond to people asking if you need a taxi, transfer, tour guide or any other service. If you are being met for a transfer to your hotel you will see them waiting for you with your name on a sign. If you are going to negotiate for a transfer to your hotel, most airports will have a taxi stand or queue that you should use. NEVER respond to someone offering you a service after approaching you.

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## GOOD TO KNOW BEFORE YOUR GO

### EUROPEAN HOTELS

Europe's hospitality industry is centuries old and its hotels often reflect the varied traditions and standards of their respective countries. While comfortable, be prepared for differences and do not expect European hotels to be the same as home. Single rooms in European hotels are often smaller than in USA hotels. Also, when booking a triple room, the third bed may be a rollaway cot.

In most European countries, including a continental breakfast is the norm, consisting of tea/coffee, rolls and butter, jam/marmalade; some may include an assortment of cheese and luncheon meats.

### HOTEL CHECK OUT

Each time you check out of a hotel, check your room prior to leaving. Open every drawer, look under the bed and door, including the bathroom. The return of items forgotten is nearly impossible.

### SUGGESTED TIPPING WHILE ON YOUR OWN IN EUROPE

TAXI FARE ON METER 10 - 15%

RESTAURANT - TOTAL BILL 10 - 15% (if not already included, check the menu)

TOUR DIRECTOR/MOTORCOACH DRIVER \$2.00 PER PERSON/PER DAY

LOCAL SIGHTSEEING GUIDE \$2.00 PER PERSON

### PASSPORTS

Carry your passport with you at all times to ensure against loss or theft in hotels. For added protection, keep a photocopy of your passport in your suitcase. Also, please send me or a family member a copy of your current passport so that if you have a loss you can contact them and they will fax a copy to you.

Note: Don't be alarmed if the hotel asks for your passport. Hotels are sometimes required to hold your passport overnight to comply with local regulations. You should ask when you could expect it returned.

### PHONE CALLS

Almost all hotels will add a service charge to the cost of any phone calls you make from your room. This charge can be high, especially for international calls. It is always cheaper to use public telephones, pay phones or an international calling service such as AT&T USA Direct. Also, many countries now sell calling cards. I have found them to be very economical and easy to use. If you purchase your phone cards in the U.S. make sure you contact the phone company, before you leave, to find out what the dialing access codes are for each country you will be visiting.

### ELECTRICAL VOLTAGE

Electrical currents vary in Europe. Some appliances have dual voltage, but if not, it is suggested that you carry a converter for electric shavers, traveling iron, hair appliances and other small appliances. Also, pins, holes and plugs differ everywhere, so it is best to have a universal electrical travel adapter before you go to prevent accidents and damage to your appliances.

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Note that laptops and cell phone charges will require a different converter than what you would use for a hair dryer. Please check the converter to be sure you have the correct one for your appliance. Otherwise, you risk frying your appliance.

## **PACKING TIPS**

Make sure you have your medications packed in your carryon bag in case your luggage is delayed. Keep all copies of prescriptions, tickets, passports, etc. separate from originals in case of loss. Keep these types of important documents with you or in your carry-on bag - do not pack these in your luggage in case of loss.

Make sure your toiletries are packed in your checked luggage. (You can only take items that fit in a quart sized, zip-lock bag and contains less than 3 oz each of liquid, in your carry-on)

Remember to pack warm clothing, particularly if you are traveling to alpine regions. Weather in Europe, especially in the mountains, can be colder than most people think. Check the weather channel or newspaper to see what conditions to expect.

Rather than bringing one umbrella to share it is better for everyone to have his or her own fold up umbrella. If the rain occurs with mild weather it will eliminate the need to carry a raincoat.

Wear comfortable clothes, which are mixable with other pieces. Remember that your clothes are new to the other people on the tour who have never met you before. Mixing and matching helps to pack light. If you wear clothes that you are comfortable in you will be more relaxed. Men only need one tie and women one dress or skirt if you plan to dine in more upscale restaurants.

There is nothing worse than aching feet at the end of the day. Make sure to bring a pair of comfortable, broken-in shoes for daytime walking. In many cities in Europe, parking is restricted, and you may have to walk several blocks to see the major sites. Remember, when you visit museums and other sites of interest, you will be on your feet for long periods of time.

Washcloths are not standard in most hotels in Europe. Cut an old bath towel from home into squares to use as washcloths. When done with them you can just throw them away.

Pack the right attitude - try to forget about the stock market and other news at home; try to make your vacation the experience of a lifetime.

## **LEAVE YOUR JEWELRY AT HOME AND STAYING SAFE!**

Unless you absolutely need your jewelry for some reason essential to your trip, leave it all at home. Wearing your \$20k Rolex in most countries is an invitation for disaster. Ditto for that beautiful 2 cwt. diamond ring. Leave it at home and save yourself the potential for a lot of grief, or worse.

Only carry what is absolutely necessary while traveling. Leave your real wallet and other valuables at home and only carry your "travel wallet". Your "travel wallet" should contain a copy of your passport and driver's license, an ATM card, your insurance information, your contact information and enough cash for a 48-hour period. Most important is to carry an "In Case of Emergency Contact" card with critical contact information on it. Your travel professional should be the #1 contact, as they can immediately go to work to resolve whatever problem has arisen.

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Be aware of your surroundings at all times and remember that as a tourist, you make the most desirable target for crime that there is. Even if someone is caught red handed, they know that it is highly unlikely that you would show up at a hearing to testify. By not wearing or carrying anything valuable worth stealing, you have eliminated 99% of the risk.

## Important Links for International Travelers

<http://www.tsa.gov/traveler-information> - This is excellent information for international travel published by the TSA. It gives detailed information on all aspects of international travel. Check with the Transportation Authority to read the regulations for carryon items.

<http://www.cdc.gov/travel/page/survival-guide.htm> - Great information on staying healthy and safe while traveling internationally.

[http://travel.state.gov/travel/tips/tips\\_1232.html](http://travel.state.gov/travel/tips/tips_1232.html) - Tips for Traveling Abroad is an excellent site for preparing for your vacation.

[http://travel.state.gov/travel/cis\\_pa\\_tw/tw/tw\\_1764.html](http://travel.state.gov/travel/cis_pa_tw/tw/tw_1764.html) - This is the State Departments travel warnings site. Be sure to visit this site right before your vacation to see if anything has changed that might affect your trip.

<http://www.cdc.gov/travel/page/vaccinations.htm> - Center for Disease Control list of vaccinations needed by country.

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## SURVIVING THE RED-EYE

As a rule, carbohydrates make you sleepy; proteins and fats keep you awake. Bananas and milk are especially effective sleep-inducers.

### Alcohol and caffeine

If you're trying to sleep, neither alcohol nor caffeine help the cause. Avoid both.

### Water

Water helps the flier's cause in all cases. However, if you're trying to sleep, chugging a quart of water just before takeoff is going to require a mid-flight trip to the toilet. Moderation is the answer here; drink enough water to stay hydrated, but not so much that you're traipsing up and down the aisle of the plane all night. One of the best ways to overcome jet lag is to stay hydrated during your flight.

### Layovers

Eating is not advised, (see above) but you should drink plenty of water to stay hydrated. My approach is usually to brush my teeth, then head toward the gate, sit near a speaker or the agent, wrap my luggage handle around my wrist or ankle, and put my head back and try to sleep some more. You might ask a gate agent to make sure you don't sleep through the flight departure.

### Skip the Movie

Most movies won't put you to sleep, but rather keep you awake. Pass on the headphones, and close your eyes.

### Sleep Aids

An eye mask, inflatable neck pillow, ear plugs, and other devices can help the cause greatly. Don't worry about looking funny; bloodshot eyes at your morning meeting look much worse.

If you can fall asleep without the use of pharmaceutical sleep aids, you'll be much better off upon your arrival, as drugs can cause lingering drowsiness or sluggishness that make it hard for your body to reset its internal clock. Gentle aids, such as the motion sickness treatment Dramamine, can dramatically assist you in falling asleep, however, if you have serious difficulties sleeping on planes.

### When You Arrive

#### Raise the window shade when the plane lands

On an west to east flight, that first burst of light will have you blinking hard and miserably, but it will help mightily to reset your internal clock. The last few minutes of shuteye aren't worth stumbling off the plane into an unfamiliar airport before you wake up.

#### Reset your watch

You need to start living by your new time zone. Reset your watch before you get off the plane. In fact, I prefer to reset my watch immediately after I board the last leg of my itinerary, as arrival times are always published in the destination time zone, and I know how long to my destination if I wake up and check the time. This can permit me to grab a few extra precious minutes of sleep.

#### Begin your day with familiar routines

Rather than indulging your body's clock, live by your watch.

If it's 7AM after an eastbound flight, have breakfast, coffee, whatever you usually do at 7AM. Grab a newspaper if you typically read one every morning. You probably won't feel hungry yet, and the coffee might not go down as smoothly, but soon enough you'll be glad you're on schedule.

If it's 2AM after a westbound flight, head straight for your hotel or home and go to sleep.