PREPARING FOR
INTERNATIONAL TRAVEL

A Guide For Smart Women Who Travel Infrequently
## CONTENTS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Topic</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Introduction</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Checklist For Getting Ready For International Trips</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Travel Insurance</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Passports, Visas, and the Trusted Traveler Program</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Passports</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>If you are getting a passport for the first time</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>If you need to renew your passport</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Expedited Renewal</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Visas</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Trusted Traveler Programs</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TSA PreCheck:</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Global Entry</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Buying Airplane Tickets:</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Do It Yourself</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Know when to buy airplane tickets</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>We have several favorite websites to look for plane reservations</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Social Media options</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Travel Agents</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Money: Credit Cards and Cash</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Credit cards</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cash</td>
<td>17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ATMs</td>
<td>17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Changing U.S. dollars:</td>
<td>19</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Adventures in Good Company, Inc

Preparing for International Travel, 2017
Staying In Touch While You’re Away ........................................................................... 19
  If you have a GSM mobile phone ............................................................................. 20
  If you don’t have a GSM mobile phone ................................................................. 22
  Texting ......................................................................................................................... 23
  You have a phone or laptop with wireless capability ............................................. 24
Health Concerns .......................................................................................................... 26
  Travel Vaccinations .................................................................................................... 26
  Drinking water ............................................................................................................. 27
  Reusable Water Bottles ............................................................................................. 28
  Keys to Safe Water and Hydration ........................................................................... 29
Electrical Adapters and Converters ............................................................................ 30
  Adapters ....................................................................................................................... 30
  Converters .................................................................................................................... 31
Packing for International Travel ..................................................................................... 31
  Trekking/Hiking poles ............................................................................................... 34
  Choosing Trekking Poles ......................................................................................... 34
  Getting Trekking Poles to your destination ............................................................ 35
How To Make A Long Flight More Enjoyable ............................................................... 36
Once You Get to Your Destination ............................................................................. 38
Useful Websites and Apps .......................................................................................... 40
  Websites ....................................................................................................................... 40
  Free or Low Cost Apps ............................................................................................... 41
INTRODUCTION

We love international travel! And we think it is well worth the preparation and any challenges. Getting ready to go, however, definitely can seem a bit overwhelming if you don’t travel frequently, and particularly 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 E-book with a checklist and suggested 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. The information we provide is based on countless websites and our own experience but any inaccuracies are our own.

We have aimed this E-book for the occasional leisure traveler who lives in the United States. 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 out in the world.
# 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
- Set up an “Alert” on kayak.com or whatever website you use to start monitoring airfares
- Review the fitness requirements for the trip and commit to your fitness plan

## Three Months Before Departure

- If you don’t have a passport, apply for one
- If you do have a passport, check the expiration date – in some countries it needs to be valid for 3 - 6 months after you return. Renew if necessary
- Look at visa requirements and plan to get visa
- Look at health concerns and vaccination requirements
- 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
- If you haven’t gotten your airplane ticket yet, stop putting it off
- 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
- Determine whether you need a plug adapter, voltage transformer, or both
- Order a special meal for your flight

## Two Weeks Before Departure

- Start packing. Your suitcase should be packed at least a week before you leave
- Buy the snacks you know you’ll miss; remove any excess packaging.

## One Week Before Departure

- Call your bank and let them know when and where you are traveling
- 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 separate 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 electronic gadgets, gadgets, toiletries, etc.
__ 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

**ON DEPARTURE DAY**

__ Double check the location of your ticket, passport, money, and credit cards, as well as copies of important documents before you leave home.  
__ Leave plenty of time to get to the airport

**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 travel insurance 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 totally worth it. If you’re OK with that prospect, and if the likelihood is small, then maybe it isn’t necessary.

*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 travel insurance:

- 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 just 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.

PASSPORTS

A U.S. 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. In addition many countries require that you have one or two blank pages that can be stamped.
The U.S. offers:

- **Passport Book**, needed for all international air travel,
- **Passport Card**, which is less expensive than a passport book, but can only be used to re-enter the United States at **land border crossings and sea ports-of-entry** from: Canada, Mexico, The Caribbean, and Bermuda. The **passport card** cannot be used for international air travel.

For detailed instructions, look on-line at [https://travel.state.gov/content/passports/en/passports/apply.html](https://travel.state.gov/content/passports/en/passports/apply.html)

There is a “passport wizard” that helps determine your costs and process. Or call the State Department Passport Office at 202/647-0518.

### IF YOU ARE GETTING A PASSPORT FOR THE FIRST TIME

- **You must sign and submit your passport application in person.** You can find the nearest location at [http://iafdb.travel.state.gov/](http://iafdb.travel.state.gov/). For many people this will be their local US Post Office.
- Allow at least 6 weeks for regular processing or 2-3 weeks for expedited processing (for an additional $60 fee.)
- Fill out DS 11, the passport application form. You can get this from your local US Post Office, a passport agency, or on line at [http://travel.state.gov/passport/forms/ds11/ds11_842.html](http://travel.state.gov/passport/forms/ds11/ds11_842.html).

### YOU WILL NEED TO BRING ALONG WITH THE FORM:

- **Proof of US Citizenship.** For most people this will be a certified birth certificate (Note: a copy is not sufficient.)
- **Proof of identity**, including a Driver’s license, government or military ID, or a Naturalization Certificate.
- **Photocopy of your proof of identity** on 8.5 x 11 white paper.
- **One passport photo.** Have this taken at a place that advertises passport photos; some passport locations are able to take your passport photo at the time of application. 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: [http://travel.state.gov/passport/pptphotoreq/pptphotoreq_5333.html](http://travel.state.gov/passport/pptphotoreq/pptphotoreq_5333.html). We recommend taking a second photo copy with you as backup.
- **The fee is $110 for the passport paid by** personal or bank check; **and $25 for the execution fee**, which can be paid by personal or bank check or cash. Credit and debit cards are not accepted.
IF YOU NEED TO RENEW YOUR PASSPORT

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. Fill out DS 82, the passport renewal form. You can get this from your local US Post Office, a passport agency, or online at http://travel.state.gov/passport/forms/ds82/ds82_843.html. Sign and date each page.

YOU WILL NEED TO MAIL TO THE ADDRESS ON THE FORM

- Passport renewal form
- Your passport
- Passport photo (see item 6 in the list above)
- Check or money order for $110.
- Include a marriage certificate or court order only if your name is different from the one on your current passport.

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.

EXPEDITED RENEWAL

OH NO! I LEAVE IN 2 DAYS AND I JUST REALIZED MY PASSPORT IS EXPIRED. AM I OUT OF LUCK?

Maybe. It all depends on whether you live close enough to a passport agency where you can 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:

https://travel.state.gov/content/passports/en/passports/services/expedited.html.

Contact the National Passport Information Center at 1/877-487-2778 (open 24/7) or online at https://www.passportappointment.us/ to schedule your required appointment. At your in-person appointment, you will need Proof of immediate international travel, the Expedited Fee of $60, along with your passport fee of $110, application, and passport photo.

When you get your passport, make two copies of the face page of your passport.

1. Carry one copy with you on your trip—keeping it in a separate location from your passport.
2. Leave one copy with your emergency contact person at home, to help facilitate replacement if necessary.
**VISAS**

A Visa is a different 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 [http://www.projectvisa.com](http://www.projectvisa.com). You can also look on the internet for the embassies of the countries you will be visiting. Generally 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 administered by U.S. Custom and Borders Protection.

- **TSA Precheck** is an expedited screening program for domestic flights which is currently available at more than 120 airports and for most of the major airlines.
- **Global Entry program** allows expedited clearance for pre-approved, low-risk travelers upon arrival in the United States. Members enter the United States through automatic kiosks at select airports. This is the program most people want and includes TSA Precheck.
- **Nexus** is for travel between Canada and the U.S.
- **Sentri** is for travel into the U.S. from Mexico via land.

**TSA PRECHECK:**

You will 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, US Airways 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 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.

**GLOBAL ENTRY**

This program allows you to skip long lines when you re-enter the U.S. Instead you go to a kiosk where your passport, fingerprints, and picture are electronically compared to what they have on file.

Start your application at the Global Entry website - [http://www.globalentry.gov/](http://www.globalentry.gov/). There you can fill out an online application, accompanied by nonrefundable payment of $100. If the background investigation does not reveal any security concerns or previous criminal convictions, 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 is here [http://www.cbp.gov/global-entry/enrollment-centers](http://www.cbp.gov/global-entry/enrollment-centers)). You schedule your interview at the same website, which may take months before an appointment is available. During the in person “interview” you will be asked whether you travel for business or leisure, have your picture taken, and give a digital copy of your fingerprints.

You will be electronically notified when your application is accepted. At this point you can start using the entry kiosks at any airport where the program is active (which is most of the major entry airports). Your membership is good for 5 years, after which you need to reapply. You will receive a Global Entry card in the mail which is good only at land border crossings, not used for international air travel.
BUYING AIRPLANE TICKETS

DO IT YOURSELF

Many people nowadays buy their own airline tickets online. We think there are some compelling reasons to consider using real live travel agents which we’ll describe later. That can be more expensive, though, so we’ll start with some advice on how to buy your own tickets.

WHEN SHOULD YOU BUY AIRPLANE TICKETS

Unfortunately, there is no definitive answer to the best time to buy. Recent analyses by ticket sellers have come up with different conclusions about the best day, how far in advance etc. The truth is that 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.

- 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. Be aware that prices are often at their highest 350 days before departure, so don’t book too soon. If the price doesn’t come down or goes up and stays up for several days, we buy three months before an international trip or six weeks before a domestic 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.
The exception is if it is a popular destination at a popular time of year, for example the Caribbean in February, Florida during Spring Break, Europe in July, or home for the holidays. In this case you should definitely book early while there are still lots of seats, particularly if you are flying from a small airport, or on a route with limited competition. As planes fill, prices will go up.

If the news is bad, the cost of flights will drop. We hate to say there is a silver lining in any country's misfortune, but word of a terrorist attack or new disease (e.g., the Zika virus) will cause airlines to drop their prices. And consolidators who have bought up tickets in advance have particular urgency to unload their inventory.

Our Favorite Websites to Look for Plane Reservations

What makes booking flights so challenging is that price is often not the only consideration. You may also want to consider time of departure and arrival, duration, and connection time. You might be willing to spend $75 more for a flight that doesn’t leave at 5AM, only takes 6 as opposed to 16 hours, and leaves you adequate connection time. The best websites allow you to consider all those options quickly.

Our two favorites are actually travel-specific search engines, meaning that they search a variety of different sites including the major airlines (except Southwest). You may find different prices and flight combinations on different sites, so it definitely is worth checking more than one.

Google Flights [https://www.google.com/Flights/](https://www.google.com/Flights/)

This is blazingly fast and has a clean and simple interface that makes it simple to sort through all your options. The earlier versions didn’t have filters, but you can now filter by number of stops, price, airline, time of arrival and/or departure, and duration. 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!!

A word of warning: It 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." It often seems accurate but sometimes not (like an American flight that was $10 more expensive and 30 minutes longer was listed over its Delta counterpart.) You can still see the other options so just be sure to look.

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

**KAYAK.COM**  **HTTP://WWW.KAYAK.COM/**

Kayak also 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. In addition to searching airlines, it searches other websites such as Priceline and Expedia, so you can see any special deals they might be offering. They also have “Hacker fares”, fares that are constructed from several different airlines, as well as fare alerts for specific routes. only shows you flight pairs, so be sure to set the filters that are important to you. Otherwise you might like that 8 hour flight on the way there but not be so crazy about the 18 hour flight on the way home. Choosing your flights leg by leg may take a little more time, but you don’t waste time looking at flights you wouldn’t seriously consider.

**SKYSCANNER**  **HTTP://WWW.SKYSCKER.COM**

If you are flying internationally, or one option is to see if there is someplace you can get to more cheaply (e.g. a hub city like London Heathrow or Frankfurt) 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 [www.skyscanner.com](http://www.skyscanner.com). It is also the best website if you are flying within a foreign country. 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. 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. Skyscanner also includes travel consolidators, with sometimes dramatically lower prices.

Skyscanner shares Kayak’s drawback of only showing pairs of flight options. However it was recently bought by C-Trip, China’s premiere flight booking engine, and it may well improve rapidly.
**TIP: DELETE YOUR BROWSING HISTORY:** If you go back to a website that you have been looking at, delete 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 give 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 it’s 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 who have 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.

**Why use a Travel Agent:**
- 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. On-line 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.

➢ Saves you time. Instead of you spending hours trying to figure out the best flight/price combination, turn it over to a travel agent.

➢ Saves you 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: CREDIT CARDS AND CASH**

When you travel internationally on an AGC trip, most of your expenses are paid upfront; however, you will need some money for items not included in the trip fee. There are several ways to pay for things on international trips, but **Travelers’ Checks are no longer recommended** because they are increasingly difficult to use; frequently, the only place you can use them are banks.

The best way to deal with money will partly depend on what countries you’re visiting. For example, we generally recommend using credit cards, but there are still places, especially small towns, where credit cards are not widely used. In these places having cash, usually in the country currency, is key. If you’re on an Adventures in Good Company trip, we’ll provide recommendations specific to your destination.

**CREDIT CARDS**

We recommend using a credit card as much as possible during overseas travel because of:

- **Safety** (you’re not carrying large quantities of money)
- **Convenience** (you don’t have to worry about finding a bank)
- **Efficiency** (you get a 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 case or fraudulent use, you’re only responsible for a small part of the bill.

➢ **Be aware that many credit cards charge a 1 – 3% foreign transaction fee** (FTF). For a list of cards that don’t, visit this website: [http://www.cardratings.com/best-credit-cards-with-no-foreign-transaction-fee.html](http://www.cardratings.com/best-credit-cards-with-no-foreign-transaction-fee.html). For the occasional leisure traveler, we recommend getting a Capitol One credit card. They are the only credit card we know that is widely accepted, does not charge an annual fee (some versions do, but some don’t e.g. the Capital One VentureOne Rewards), and does not charge an FTF.

➢ **Always notify your credit card company** about when and where you’re traveling before you leave (or your transactions may be declined.)

➢ **Copy the loss or theft phone number**, or take a picture of the back of the card, and keep it in a secure location, separate from the card.

➢ **Europe uses a more secure credit card system called “Chip and Pin,”** Instead of a swipe and a signature, you use a pin number with the card that you insert into the reader. If you still have a swipe card, it 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.

➢ **Always choose the local currency** when you are given a choice between charging it in US dollars or the local currency because 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 cash you need depends on where you are traveling and what you are doing.

**ATMS**

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 (they almost all are – look 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 store and you can go to the bank if you have a problem, ie the machine “eats” your card. Avoid “independent” ATMs, which have high fees and may try to trick users with “dynamic currency conversion.” They are labeled with names such as Travelex, Euronet, Moneybox, Cardpoint, and Cashzone.

**To get cash from an ATM, you will need the PIN associated with the card.** Memorize this 4 digit number and/or keep a backup in a separate location from the card.

**Withdrawals are dispensed in local currency** and are debited from your account in U.S. dollars based on a favorable exchange rate.

**If your card doesn’t work:** Try a lower amount; the ATM may have a withdrawal limit; try a different ATM; or try later. Your card’s 24-hour withdrawal maximum is based on U.S. time, or your bank’s network may be temporarily down. If your card does not come out of the ATM, DO NOT reenter your pin; go to the bank associated with the ATM for assistance.

**Do not use your credit 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.

**Avoid currency exchange kiosks at airports.** Unfortunately many European airports have cut a deal with the foreign exchange folks and now the ATMs are operated by them instead of real banks, giving you the same hideous exchange rates.

**Before you arrive, go online with worldwide Mastercard or Visa locators to determine the ATM situation at your arrival airport, or near your hotel.**

**MasterCard/Cirrus/Maestro ATM Locator**  
**Visa/PLUS ATM Locator**

If you absolutely need to have cash in the local currency when you first arrive (e.g. to take a taxi to your hotel) and there is no bank ATM at the airport, look at the cost of arranging $20 to $50 in arrival currency through your bank or credit card for delivery before you leave home. Or, at the least, withdraw just enough money to get to your hotel and find the nearest bank ATM once you’re there.

**Always call your bank before you leave home** to 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 your bank charges 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.

**CHANGING U.S. DOLLARS:**

We do not recommend bringing a large amount of cash or travelers. You will generally get a poor exchange rate in foreign banks for both travelers checks (not recommended) and U.S. dollars. However, it is a good idea to have an emergency fund of $100-$200 U.S.

- If you need a small amount of local cash (less than $50) it may be easiest to ask your hotel or a local bank to exchange some dollars.
- **In some places, only crisp, new U.S. dollar bills are accepted** and getting change for large bills is difficult. Before you leave home, get a variety of new, small denomination bills from your bank to ensure you have what you need when you arrive.

**STAYING IN TOUCH WHILE YOU’RE AWAY**

The options for staying in touch on an international trip are as varied as traveling style.

One option is let everyone know that you will be out of contact for the length of your trip. Many people find that being away from contact with their everyday life allows them to be more in the present and to return home feeling truly refreshed. You can always leave the numbers at hotels where you’re staying if there’s an emergency. Or if you’re on an AGC trip, you can give out the emergency numbers we send and tell everyone to use them if they just have to contact you.

But increasingly people are opting to stay in touch while they’re away, so here are the options and the questions you need to answer to sort out the best choice for you.

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 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**

There are two options if your phone is GSM:

1. **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 often 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 won’t have access to Wi-Fi where you’re traveling.

If your phone company doesn’t have a plan you want to use, 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 plan to check email** (outside of Wi-Fi) 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 you 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.

2. **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. You can purchase prepaid international and country-specific SIM cards from websites such as Telestial 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. Be sure to keep your original SIM card to use when you get back home.

**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

1. 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 in the U.S. as they are dual-band phones compatible with other countries, but not what the U.S. uses. You can buy/lease one on-line 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 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 Telestial) 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.
USE A 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. A word of caution: try to avoid using the phone in your hotel room unless you have an international calling card and your hotel doesn’t charge for toll-free numbers or the calling card has a local number. Otherwise the charges are often sky high.

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/free option is WhatsApp.** The major limitation is that you and the person with whom you want to communicate both have to have the free App installed on a Smartphone. But if you do, then both domestic and international texting is free when you are connected to Wi-Fi.
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 available on both laptops and smartphones. Skype users can talk to each other for free, can use video if you both have cameras, 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 make it a more attractive option.

Other options for free video calls are Facetime, if you and the other person both have an IOS device; Facebook video if you’re friends on Facebook; 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 any time, 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 hideously expensive.

**Pros:**
- It’s easy and inexpensive or free
- The connections are great quality when 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. The only caveat is people will not be able to reach you until you are connected to wireless.

GOOGLE FI

A new option that has become available in the last year is Project Fi on a Google phone, sometimes called Google Fi. In brief, Google developed a cellphone technology that automatically switches between Sprint and T-mobile cellular systems and wifi systems, which keeps the cost down on a monthly basis. The cost is $20/month for unlimited calls and texts, including international texts. You also pay $10/month for 1 GB of data - **and the cost is the same whether you use the data at home or abroad.** If you don’t use the entire gigabyte, there is a refund. If you aren’t a heavy user of cell data, your typical monthly cost,
with taxes and fees, can be under $30. When you travel internationally to 120 countries, the cost to call either inside the country or back to the U.S. is $0.20/minute over cell networks. Over WiFi the cost is free to call the U.S. and ranges from 0.01 - 0.80/minute to call from one country to another or within the country – but if you have wifi, you can change to Skype which is always inexpensive.

Are there downsides or things to consider? Yes.

- Because the service depends on specific technology, you have to buy a compatible phone: Nexus 5X, 6 or 6P.
- It only works on TMobile and Sprint networks, so if you live somewhere that Verizon is the only provider, the technology doesn’t work.
- If you’re a big data user and you have a great data package, or if you have a family package with multiple lines, it might be cheaper to stay with what you have.
HEALTH CONCERNS

Whole books are written about international travel and health. In this section we address two common issues: Travel vaccinations, and drinking and water.

TRAVEL VACCINATIONS

One of the most common questions is which travel vaccinations you should get. You might think there are clear answers about this question, but not even the experts agree. Ultimately you have to determine the risks of both getting and not getting a recommended vaccine and then decide on your own tolerance.

There are 2 issues related to what vaccines to get:

1. Which vaccinations are required for you to enter the country? Find the answer on the CDC website (http://wwwnc.cdc.gov/travel)
2. Which vaccinations would you be smart to get? The CDC site also has information on recommended vaccines and tons of other country-specific health information.
3. Where is the best place to get your vaccines? Your primary health care provider or a travel clinic? We recommend to check into both options in your area. Some insurance providers have their own travel clinic https://wwwnc.cdc.gov/travel/page/find-clinic/

It's the recommended vaccines 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.

AGC 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 about vaccines:

- 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?
AGC EXAMPLE: Let’s consider the always recommended Hepatitis A and B vaccine. 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, a vaccine for rabies is recommended for some countries; the main purpose is to buy you some time before you get more definitive treatment. If I were going to live in a rural area in a developing country, I would seriously consider it. However, for a three week trek, unless there was an epidemic, I personally wouldn’t bother, especially since it is a series of three shots over 27 days.

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 trade-offs as you make at home – cost, convenience, recyclability.

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 trade-offs are more complex.

In most developing countries, water in plastic bottles is found pretty much everywhere. 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 buying bottled water is the easiest way to get drinkable water.

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. In more remote communities or areas without vehicle access, disposing of your waste can be very 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.
REUSABLE WATER BOTTLES
With advance planning and some practice, however, you can completely eliminate the need to buy water in plastic bottles. Because you are unlikely to find what you need once you are in country, you need to plan in advance. As part of your trip preparation, bring:

1. **Reusable water bottle(s) from home**
2. **Water treatment system appropriate for your trip**
   
   There are basically three options:
   - **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. You’ll 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.

   - **Steripen** is an ultraviolet handheld, battery operated 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, and you can consecutively purify more than .75 liter, transferring to another container.

One caveat for all of these treatment methods is 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 our 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. See the web links in the Resources section for more info.

**KEYS TO SAFE WATER AND HYDRATION**

- Take the time to research your options before you leave home.

- AGC’s hotel and/or local partners may provide drinking water that you can use to refill your usable bottles.

- On the trip remember to start each morning with a full water bottle and bring what you need to resupply with you during the day.

- Ultimately, your highest priority is to be adequately hydrated; 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!
ELECTRICAL ADAPTERS AND CONVERTERS

On your trip, when you want to charge your camera, phone, or other device, or use an electric appliance from home, you need to be prepared for the difference in:

- **Shape of the electric plug** – you will need a plug adapter
- **Electric Current Voltage (V):** American appliances run on 110 volts, while many international appliances are **220 volts**. Today’s electronic gadgets are "dual voltage," which means they work on both American and European current. If you see a range of voltages printed on the item or its plug (such as "110–220"), you’re OK. Some older appliances have a voltage switch marked 110 (US) and 220 (Europe) — switch it to 220 as you pack.

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

ADAPTERS

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 they 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.
CONVERTERS
Most US and Canadian small appliances and electronics operate on 110v-120v. In most other countries, they operate on 220v-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) have a dual voltage range of up to 220v and therefore can be charged/used without the converter. To check, 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 you will need a transformer to use abroad in 220v countries.

Once you know that you need a converter, select it according to the wattage rating of your appliance (volts x amps = watts). For a hairdryer - something that surges when you turn it on - you want a converter at least double the wattage rating.

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 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 to stay organized while you’re on your trip.

1. Take as little as possible. Over packing 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 have a big, heavy suitcase; and every time you have to get that suitcase upstairs, you regret it. But that isn’t even the biggest problem with over-packing. 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 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.
   - **You’ll have time to buy anything you realize you need.** 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 take it out. 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.
   - 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 when you are actually there, after about 5 minutes you’ll be glad your packing list reminded you to bring gloves, a warm hat, and some fleece.

   You might start to keep your own packing list that you can update and refine over time.

4. **Plan to carry-on essential/irreplaceable items.** Think carefully about what you’ll pack in your daypack or other carry on, including items that you cannot easily replace if your luggage is delayed or lost.
   - **hiking boots/shoes** (if you’re going hiking),
   - **medications/first aid,**
   - address and phone number of the lodging at your destination, along with important trip information (itinerary, confirmations, contacts),
   - **clothing appropriate to the weather at your destination,** ie fleece jacket (which also makes a comfy airplane pillow) or short sleeved shirt, so you don’t have to go into your suitcase in the airport.
   - Small toiletries: Toothbrush, lip balm, lotion,
   - **An extra set of active clothing**
5. **Put everything out so you can see it all before you pack anything.** This helps to assure that you don’t double pack or miss anything. Plus it gives you the opportunity to reconsider one more time whether you need something.

6. **Apply the principles of lightweight backpacking to suitcase packing**

   - **Mind set 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 sometime is the hardest step!

   - **Divide everything into 3 piles:** One pile is the must-haves (Essentials on our AGC packing lists; not the optional items). The second pile 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, **consider if there is 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 lighter fleece jacket in place of a heavy wool sweater.

   - **Choose items that have multiple functions.** A lightweight rain jacket also serves well as a windbreaker. A down sweater in a long narrow stuffsack works as a pillow on the airplane or for lumbar support on bus rides. Convertible pants zip off into shorts or capris. Anything you can wash that will dry overnight serves the work of 2 items. A buff can be used as hat, headband, or high fashion.
Learn from your experience!! 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.

TREKKING/HIKING POLES

AGC is a huge fan of trekking poles for any hiking or backpacking trip. We have found that with few exceptions, women love them once they get over the initial awkwardness of using something new. Hiking poles make a huge difference, particularly for women with any knee issues.

CHOOSING TREKKING POLES

There are so many different trekking poles with widely varying prices, from the ones at discount stores for $13 to poles by Leki or Black Diamond for $150. So 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 use them for another 10 years, your investment is only $15/year.

However, for the more casual hiker, that price may be too much. If you want to give trekking poles a try, starting out inexpensive is fine - even ski poles will work. And you can learn from other women on your trip about what they like and why.

When purchasing trekking poles, we recommend the following guidelines:

- **Height of the poles can be adjusted** - practice adjusting the height so you feel comfortable with the mechanism. There is a new type of pole where the pieces are shock corded together like a tent pole. While convenient for travel, the lack of adjustability makes them unsuitable for mountain hiking.
- **Upright handle** (as opposed to cane-like)
- **Wrist straps can be adjusted**
- **Poles can be folded or taken apart in 2-3 pieces to fit into luggage.** (Be sure to practice adjusting and taking them apart and putting them back together at home, before your trip.)
More expensive poles have some additional attractive features:

- Light weight – which makes a difference over miles of hiking
- Collapse or fold into smaller pieces
- Are easier to adjust
- Ergonomically correct handles
- Better wrist straps. Good, adjustable, supportive wrist straps, that allow you to snug your hand up to the grip, are essential for proper use.
- Anti-shock -- they give a little when you lean on them; some women love this feature, while others don’t like the feel – personal preference.

GETTING TREKKING POLES TO YOUR DESTINATION

Basically you have three choices:

1. **For international flights, we recommend putting 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. **Fold or pull your poles completely apart and put them in your carry-on luggage.** The main drawback to this is that TSA may or 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. Many of our guides have carried-on poles this way and haven’t been stopped. But if knowing you could be is going to make you feel super nervous, don’t bother trying it.

   If you are ok with the risk, leave yourself enough time to go back to and check them through if you’re stopped. The advantages are that your hiking poles will definitely get there and it won’t cost anything. The downside is that you could get stopped and
have to go check your bag. Or worst case, you could lose your poles if you can’t check them in a connecting airport where you have to go through security again.

Flying internationally, your likelihood of being stopped at security, particularly as you are leaving a foreign country to come back to the U.S., is much higher. Again, since one checked bag is still free on most international flights, it is safer to plan on putting them in your checked bag.

3. **Send them ahead to your destination**, either by U.S. 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.

### 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.

1. **Choose your seat carefully. Upgrading to economy plus** may well be worth it. If you don’t want the extra expense, look at [http://www.seatguru.com/](http://www.seatguru.com/) before you choose your seat – it will help you avoid that console that takes up even more foot space.

   **Aisle versus window seat?** A window seat means you have an opportunity to see out the window, have the wall to lean against, and nobody will be climbing over you. However, you'll need to climb over someone else when you go to the lavatory. Remember, on long international flights, it is recommended to stand up and move every few hours to avoid circulation problems.

2. **Scope out available better seats** (e.g. a row of 3 seats that are all empty) as you get on the plane and prepare to move there as soon as the plane door is closed – or sooner if you don’t mind moving if the rightful owner shows up.

3. **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.
- Bring your own snacks or food, especially fruit and low fat snacks.

4. **Drink water -- Carry an empty water bottle with you through security and then fill it before you get on the plane.** 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 blah that is so common. This occurs not just because you are drinking less, but because the air is drier because it is dehumidified so that it weighs less (and thus saves fuel).

5. **Avoid alcohol** (for dehydration reasons) and have juice instead.

6. **Wash your hands often with soap and water.** Use hand sanitizers/sanitizer wipes as a back-up when soap and water are not available. Also, keep your nails clean, and avoid touching your eyes, nose, and mouth. Consider wiping the drop-down table with a sanitizer wipe before using it.

7. **Control your 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 signaling to chatty seatmates that you want privacy. If you don’t want the bulk of the headphones, there are earbud types that work well too. 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. And 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.
8. **Stay warm.** No matter what the outside temperatures, wear layers and 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.

9. **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.

10. **Take drugs.** Taking an aspirin an hour before you take off to help prevent DVT (deep vein thrombosis). 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 likes Ambien makes the flight go faster and arrival fresher.

---

**ONCE YOU GET TO YOUR DESTINATION**

**Combat Jet Lag**

A long flight across several time zones is challenging. It may be tempting to take a long nap or just go to bed when you arrive at your destination, but the fastest way to combat jetlag is to get on the local schedule as soon as possible. If you have access to your room, take a 20 minute nap (or none at all), then get up and shower, and start exploring your new surroundings. Stay up through dinner and get up at your usual time the next morning. It's a tough day but you'll feel so much better the next day. Again, a sleep aid may be helpful for this.

**Eating Like a Local**

While North Americans have been taught that a hearty breakfast is important, for many European countries breakfast is a coffee and a piece of toast or a pastry. This is less of an issue in hotels that offer buffets (and many hotels outside North America include breakfast in their price) but if high protein breakfasts are important to you, be sure to bring some cans of tuna and/or peanut butter.

All the southern Mediterranean countries (e.g. Italy, Spain, Greece) are known for eating large dinners late i.e. 8 to 11 pm. There are restaurants that cater to North American travelers and open earlier, but the food and experience aren't nearly as authentic because
they are also catering to what they imagine are North American tastes. If a large meal late at night doesn't work for you, try eating a larger lunch and then know you'll be pushing away a half filled plate at dinner; share a dinner meal with a friend; or, depending on the restaurant, bring a plastic sandwich box and put your leftovers there to eat the next day. Don't expect traditional restaurants to serve you dinner when you wander in at 6, any more than Spaniards can expect a U.S. restaurant to serve dinner at 11pm. If this is potentially an important issue for you, make sure you know what to expect and how to prepare for it before you go.
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:**  
http://www.kayak.com (best interface and most flexible options)  
https://www.google.com/flights/ (fastest and cleanest interface)  
http://www.skyscanner.com (includes all those low cost airlines the other sites don't)  

**Hotels and car rentals:**  
http://www.trivago.com/ (a search engine for hotels, compares prices across sites for the same hotel)  
http://www.priceline.com (regular prices, option to bid for undisclosed hotels)  
http://www.booking.com  
http://www.hotwire.com (discounted hotels but you don’t which until you buy)  

**Alternative accommodations:**  
http://www.hostelworld.com (hostels)  
http://www.airbnb.com (other peoples’ houses for money),  
http://www.couchsurfing.com (other peoples’ houses for free)  

**General advice and ratings:**  
http://www.tripadvisor.com  

**Travel stores:**  
http://www.magellans.com/  
http://www.rei.com (also has lots of 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:
TripIt

XE
Currency converter, current exchange rates