

## **A SHORT DESCRIPTION OF BOOK:**

I've been fortunate enough to see many places in the world—more than 70 countries, and counting. Whenever I return from an adventure, there are always questions and more questions about where I was, what I did, what I ate. All of them are logical, intelligent questions, but one of them really stumped me: "Do they have hot water in Europe?"

Now, you have to understand that that question was posed by a college graduate. This wasn't a naïve kid, but it *was* a person who had a fear of traveling.

The next day, I set out to start writing down everything I could think of about travel, because I figured if this college kid had concerns, many others might as well.

The target audience for this "booklet" are high school and college-age students or recent graduates, as well as "empty nesters," those who finally have finished raising their children and now they want to see the world—but they're afraid... of the unknown, of the unimaginable, of themselves.

Let it be known: There are no stupid questions, just stupid answers. I've answered every possible query that has ever been asked of me, in order to embolden more people to venture out and see the world.

"A Beginner's Guide..." is NOT intended as a tome to travel with, but rather a book any red-blooded American—and it IS designed for US citizens, because they're who I understand the best—should read before you leave the comforts of home.

Nothing ventured, nothing gained. And now, to life.

Thom Wise

# TRAVEL 101

## A Beginner's Guide to Fearless Travel

By Thom Wise

### INTRODUCTION:

["Go confidently in the direction of your dreams. Live the life you've imagined."](#)  
Henry David Thoreau

The son of a dear friend knew that I had done a bit of traveling, and he called one day to ask me a few questions. He'd graduated (with honors) from college and was planning on heading over to Europe for the summer.

He had a wide range of questions to ask, most all of them logical and earnest. How do you exchange money? How hot does it get in Greece in the summer? Where's the best place to find women... all the typical, collegiate concerns.

Then, very honestly, out popped this question: "Do they have hot water in Europe?" At first, I thought it was a joke. But I saw he wasn't kidding, and it was everything I could do to not snicker. It was evident this kid was asking me something he genuinely feared. I started writing this book the next day.

The way I see it, if that's the sort of thing that keeps people from hitting the road, then it was a question that needed an answer. I then began asking more people what kept them from traveling, and got a wide range of answers; some naïve, some redundant, but none without merit, and a good many of them based in a fear of the unknown. I'm not here to judge what your fears or concerns might be, but I'd sure like to try and take make your decisions easier.

I've been a traveler all my life. When I was a lad of 11 my parents put me on the California Zephyr train in Denver, bound for the far-away land of Nebraska. Not that Nebraska is the most exotic destination in the world, but it was still the coolest thing I had ever done. All alone, at least for those few hours, I sat and read my book for a bit, and then got brave and headed out for the observation car. Soon after, in the highest act of maturity I could muster, I took myself to the dining car where I ordered off the menu and paid for it, all by myself! That chain of events started a life long love of travel for me, and I've never stopped looking ahead for the next train stop.

Immediately after high school, I eschewed college and headed to Europe instead—those were the days of Icelandic Air, \$165 round trip from New York to Luxembourg with a stop in Reykjavik. (Now they call it a gap year, but that was an unknown phrase to me at the time.) I'll never forget my first night at the hostel in Luxembourg: I was agog at the notion that there were SO MANY nationalities, all in one room. We had Swiss, Germans, English and Australians, and everyone was talking about where they had been or where they were going next.

Even as I heard all of those different tongues in one room for the first time, I distinctly remember the need to have everyone revert to English in order to figure out where to go for dinner—my first glimpse of the reach of the English language. I thought I'd spend three

months on the Continent... and I stayed for eight. I only came home because I ran out of money (what else is new?). Luckily, things haven't changed in many ways for me, except now I try to only come home when I'm ready.

I also believe, very firmly, that Americans NEED to travel more. Every Canadian kid knows the 50 states but, quick, how many Yanks can name even two of the Canadian provinces? We're what you call "ethnocentric," which means that we regard our culture as superior to others. Okay, pride in your country is a good thing, but it's equally important to realize that we are not the only game in town.

More than geographically speaking, it's learning about the rest of the world from the experience that only travel can give. It's about gaining an understanding that we are not (gulp) the only nation that matters, that America is indeed a super power, but that there are other super places.

There's also a long, rich tradition of being "on the road," that started long before the famous Jack Kerouac novel. Humanity has it in our genes to explore, to seek out whatever is on the other side of the mountain or ocean or universe.

I like to ask students, "who was the super power in the 13th century?" It was the country we now call Myanmar. Before them, it was Mongolia and way before them it was Greece and then Rome. Much later it was Portugal, followed by the very quaint jolly ol' England. In other words, super powers come and go. Yes, there might've been a golden time for America insofar as we do retain a high degree of influence over a great majority of the world. For better or for worse, it's our responsibility to bear for the time being. (China, get ready!)

When you're out there being a clever traveler and immersing yourself in the wonders of the world, remember that you're also an ambassador for your home country. We are luckier than most, because we have options. Very few people throughout the world can ever imagine themselves with enough disposable income to travel. They can barely make ends meet, yet alone imagine what it must take to buy a plane ticket and eat in restaurants.

You, by your actions, represent the entire United States. It's your right to travel, but you also have a responsibility to show the rest of the world that you adhere to the Golden Rule: treat everyone as you'd like to be treated.

This book is NOT a guidebook in the traditional sense. It's a primer, a basic course in the "how-to" and "why" of travel. I won't be giving you any specific recommendations on where to travel, where to sleep or where to eat. There are plenty of those books in obscene abundance. Instead, let me try and stimulate your imagination. Let me answer those nagging questions that keep you awake at night. I had the same questions before I left on my first trip.

I wish I had read a book like this.

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## SECTION ONE: BEFORE YOU GO

### 1. THE MYTHS OF TRAVEL

*"Skills can be taught. Character you either have or you don't have."*  
[Anthony Bourdain](#)

If you're one who doesn't or won't travel internationally it's usually for a reason. Who knows how or where it happened, but obviously there was something said or observed that either scared you, or gave you the wrong impression about travel. Too bad, because travel isn't, or shouldn't, be fearsome.

Does any of this sound familiar?

- Everyone hates Americans
- Everyone tries to rip you off
- It's super expensive
- You'll get sick from drinking the water
- They're going to try and kill you
- The food sucks
- They drive crazy
- It's such a bother, everything goes wrong
- You can get put into jail for no reason
- People are rude
- Nobody speaks English

That's a heavy set of presumptions coming from people who have probably never been further than 500 miles from home. I'm not saying that some of that can't be true, some of the time, and in some places, to some people. If you're looking for trouble or trite things to say, you can do that anywhere.

None of those statements are fact. They're called mistruths, urban myths, falsehoods, or legends. Every culture has them, and some people are stupid enough to believe them—but surely not you. You're smarter, savvier and have more common sense. Right?

Don't let a few foolish rumors stop you from doing what could be the best thing you've ever done. See the world. Learn what it's all about from experience, not from hearsay. Empower yourself with knowledge that you've gained for yourself, not from what others have told you, no matter how unwitting or well-intended their intentions.

Sure, travel can be expensive, but there are plenty of ways to go for cheap. Some people do, obviously, have reasons to dislike America, but that doesn't mean they hate all Americans. It can be unsafe in some places, but that doesn't stop people going to New York, or L.A. or Detroit.

People in other countries have developed resistance to germs and microbes in their food and water that can make you sick, but it's always possible to buy or find filtered water.

Foods from strange countries may not be what you're used to, but it shouldn't be dismissed until you've at least tried it. And yes, drivers can be erratic, but have you even been in downtown Boston during rush hour? Coming up with excuses is easy... the hard part is to

try.

Experienced travelers are better suited to handle catastrophic events, to roll with the punches on a more even keel. Americans can easily freak out at the least little thing, while travelers have the equipment and knowledge to deal with what life brings, from something as minor as scheduling changes, up to the major curve balls that life can throw you.

What I mean to say is that you can make of travel what you will. Yes, the world is a crazy place. Throughout history, fear of the unknown has kept some people close to the home fires, while others couldn't wait to get out on a boat and start exploring.

Each day you travel, you'll gain self-confidence and learn more than you'll ever realize. All of a sudden, you'll know what people are talking about when they speak of the Tower of London, the Great Wall or Borobudur. You'll know the difference between a South African and an Australian accent. You'll have actually met a Zoroaster, a Buddhist monk or a Zen master. You'll appreciate the complexities of having billions of people on the earth all trying to get along.

You'll never be more alive than when you travel.

## **2. WHAT TO TELL YOUR PARENTS AND FRIENDS**

*"It's never too late to be what you might have been."*  
George Eliot

Don't lie, that's for sure.

Your parents will worry, and that will be the toughest part to get over. You need to assuage their concerns with lots of reassurances. You'll call home (because it's cheap these days with phone cards and Skype), or you can e-mail from almost anywhere. Insurance companies can guarantee you'll be returned home if anything serious happens, and you'll be sure and leave them with the phone numbers of the State Department's emergency help line.

Map out a route, but counsel them that it could change. Remind them that they were young once, and that it's now time for you to "cut the umbilical cord."

If all else fails, ask them "Don't you want me to be happy?" That one usually works.

Assure them that you know how to manage your money, and that this is exactly what you've been saving for since you started working at Starbucks. Tell them that you'll only be calling them for money if it's an emergency... and mean it.

Part of the act of growing up is being responsible for yourself, which includes learning to be self-reliant and quick-thinking. Be passionate, because travel inspires it.

Your friends might well be jealous, or at best confused. Why would you bother to leave home? What's out there that you can't find here? Are you high? Help lay their concerns to rest as well. And who knows, maybe they'll want to join you along the way.

Or perhaps you're in the position where you have an empty nest, and all the kids are finally gone and you can finally do the traveling you always dreamed about, but now you're terri-

fied. You've been listening to those nightly news shows again, haven't you?

Trust me: Travel has never been more popular, more established or more possible.

A few might understand and even be supportive. They might throw you a going away party, which is probably an excuse to get drunk with you one last time. Enjoy it, and revel in them. Good friends are hard to find and should never be taken for granted. Some will want to hear your stories when you get back, and some of them might even chuck it all and fly over and join you.

Keep all your friends intact, because you can never have too many friends. Then, someday, you might even have the job of introducing your new friends from Sweden with your old friends from high school. That can make for some interesting nights!

#### **SIDEBAR: TRY THIS!**

If you want to simulate what it's like to be in a foreign country, try this: Tune your radio and television to a foreign language station, or rent several foreign language movies and don't look at the subtitles. Of course, you won't follow all that much of what's going on, but it will sure as hell give you a flavor of what it's like to be a bit lost and confused.

Does it drive you nuts, or does it intrigue you somewhat? Can you pick out anything they're saying, just by their voice inflections and hand gestures?

It might scare you a bit, but hopefully it will inspire you to brush up on your high school Spanish, French, German or whatever. Plus, it will help tune-up your listening ear and help train you to listen for words that you do recognize. You might be surprised at how much you can pick up on when you're traveling abroad!

### **3. WHERE TO GO**

*"I travel not to go anywhere, but to go. I travel for travel's sake. The great affair is to move."*

Robert Lewis Stevenson

Think first. Where would I like to explore?

The well-worn paths, the tried and true roads that travelers have plod for centuries? Some "off the beaten" places where fewer people venture? Somewhere no one has gone before?

Perhaps you'll be doing a little of each. All have their advantages and disadvantages. The well-worn paths are familiar for a reason; they've undoubtedly inspired and entertained travelers for centuries, otherwise they'd have fallen off the "travel radar."

At the other end of the spectrum, you'll find the rare "Marco Polo" path, those parts of the world where scant people have ventured. These days those places are few and far between, which isn't to say that they're not worth finding, but more so that relatively little is left wild and unexplored. A little off the beaten path is a sensible, balanced alternative. It's the best of all worlds.

Don't worry that you're not seeing "the next great thing," or that you've missed the boat when it comes to the wherever the hot travel spot of the moment might be. That sort of thing changes from year to year, if not season to season. Besides, who are you trying to impress?

What you do today, and NOW, is the right thing, and the best thing to be doing.

Planning is wonderful, but don't forget that spontaneity is the spice of life. Go where you need to go and satiate your long-held dreams, but don't be afraid to venture down a path that leads to who-knows-where.

Another way to approach where to go is to consider the old query: What's your passion?

Did Greek architecture or Paris in the 1930's ever inspire you? Maybe you're read romance novels that take place in Tuscany, you've dreamt of the Taj Mahal, or always wanted to follow Darwin's path in the Galapagos. Perhaps you're into family genealogy, in which case you might want to take a trip back to the "homeland."

Going someplace because you WANT to is always preferable to going where you THINK you should go. Have a goal, something that means something to you.

If you're really not interested in Spain or India or Kenya, then don't go there. Just because the neighbors or the relatives went there, doesn't mean YOU have to. Besides, places become frozen in time once you've been there, meaning if someone tells you about some "fabulous" place they've been, ask them (politely) when were they there. Chances are it was five, ten or more years ago, which means that the place has almost certainly changed. (Think how much YOUR hometown has changed in that amount of time.) Start thinking about YOUR trip and no one else's.

Hobbies are great travel starting-off points. If you're into mountain climbing or butterflies, chess, antiques or baseball, you can bet your well-earned dollar that there are other people and places in the world that are into the same things. (Not sure? Just google it!)

Perhaps you're a literature freak and want to take a pilgrimage to the land of Sherlock Holmes or Ernest Hemingway, or walk in the footsteps of Edith Piaf or Jim Morrison, or be immersed in the landscape of a favorite film.



Source them out; it could be the best thing you do on your whole trip. Read up online, ask questions from others, read the fine print or stay and watch the credits at the end of the movie. The seeker can always find their answers.

Get some **basic ideas** about where you'd like to go. Then, when you get there, start asking the locals for their suggestions. In addition to the better restaurants, flea markets and art museums, they also can often send you to some great hidden secrets, like a wonderful look-out point above the city, a bike trail or maybe a part of the downtown area that the tourist office doesn't even know about.

That said... remember that the locals generally want you to spend more time in their country vs. the neighboring one, so they can easily fill your head with lots of "must-see" things that truly aren't worthy of your precious time.

I'll never forget an all-day and all-night excursion in Bangalore, India with several Brahmins I'd met. It encompassed an extremely long bus ride followed by an hour walk, all to look at a dancing water and light show that was just slightly underwhelming, to put it mildly ("I stayed an extra day for that?"). Still, I couldn't complain because clearly this was a big deal to them and they LOVED it, so I'd never do anything to dampen their enthusiasm. Keep in the back of your mind that the locals may not be very good at local advice, but they're too embarrassed to say they don't! This is especially true in places such as Asia, India and parts of South America.

In any case, try to get past the "safety zones," those areas where ALL the tourists—the dreaded one-week "vacationers"—go. Sure, you should see Big Ben and the Matterhorn, but the best memories are often the lesser-known, less-visited places. Those are the stories that people listen to when you're back and regaling them at the next holiday cocktail party.

You may soon discover that there's a temptation to stay put once you've found "paradise." An island in the South China Sea is indeed pretty fantastic, and you think that you'll never want to leave. The conflict is that you have the drive to keep going, but the temptation is to never leave nirvana. We should all have such misery. My first stop on Ko Samui in Thailand was one of those places: My cabin, right on the beach, was next door to the best local restaurant and bar (with cold beer, no less) on the island, and I was spending around \$7 per day for room and board (and beers). Yes, that was a tough place to leave.

If a "big" trip sounds overwhelming, you might want to take a short "practice" trip before starting out on a prolonged, multi-month trip. See how it goes for a week or two, get some exposure to the world of travel and then embark on your dream trip. Or, perhaps more accurately, your first dream trip.

Seek places that are different from what you know, what you're completely comfortable with, or where you've been before. That's part of the adventure... it's called Fearless Travel.

#### **4. EASIEST vs. TOUGHEST PLACES TO VISIT**

*"I'll put a girdle round about the earth in forty minutes."*  
William Shakespeare, *Midsummer Night's Dream*

To start your travel engine, begin by thinking about your comfort zone. Where do you visu-

alize yourself, where do you think you'll feel comfortable? For some, it could be a hotel in Paris, for others it might be nothing less than Timbuktu. Start with someplace easy, and then work your way up to the more adventurous locations.

I said I wouldn't give you any specifics about where to go. I will, however, supply you with the following general list of places, going from the places generally considered easiest to navigate to the toughest. Like any guide, this is a subjective list, but hopefully it'll at least get your travel juices flowing.

### *EASIEST*

Western Europe, Australia/New Zealand, Scandinavia, Caribbean, Thailand, South Africa

You can usually find someone who speaks English, people are generally friendly and used to tourists, food is easy to obtain and plentiful, transportation easy and understandable.

### *NOT QUITE AS EASY, BUT DOABLE WITH SOME EXTRA PLANNING*

Eastern Europe, Central America and parts of South America (notably Peru, Argentina, Uruguay, Bolivia), Japan, Micronesia, Philippines

Language barriers are more challenging, transportation can be sporadic, and fresh food gets dicier.

### *TOUGHER, BE SURE TO HAVE YOUR WITS ABOUT YOU*

Asia, Russian countries, China, Middle East, parts of South America (notably Amazonia, Patagonia, the Andes), Cuba, Kenya, Tanzania, Burma (Myanmar), India

Economic and political dangers increase, weather is not as dependable, food often poor quality unless you're paying tourist prices, and transportation is rough much of the time.

### *TOUGHEST*

The rest of Africa, India, Antarctica, any war zone

These can be the most satisfying, yet the most arduous places to visit due to weather, food, transportation, language, health and custom barriers.

The exception to any of this is, of course, is if you're staying in a five-star hotel or going on a first-class safari. Paying top-dollar, Western prices anywhere in the world nearly always guarantees you all the comforts of home while you're overseas.

Just for the fun of it, here are some of the cities generally considered to be the most expen-



sive in the world, compiled from several sources and in no particular order, and most from my own experience:

Tokyo  
Osaka  
Hong Kong  
Oslo  
Stockholm  
Beijing  
Geneva  
London  
Singapore  
Seoul  
Sydney  
Amsterdam  
Zurich  
Copenhagen

Not that you should avoid those cities, but just prepare yourself for the prices you'll encounter.

## **5. STYLE OF TRAVEL: Are you a Traveler or a Tourist?**

*The main difference between a tourist and a traveler is pure and simple: The tourist sight sees, while the traveler sees.*

Unknown

Can it be this simple? I didn't think you'd let me off that easy.

Travel is what you make of it, what you experience and observe. It has the power to influence and change in a way that affects you for the rest of your life. Stereotypes abound here: Tourists go on tours, travelers find their own way. Tourists stick with other tourists, for the most part, whilst travelers meet the locals. You get the idea. Yes, I'm fond of travelers, which isn't to say that being a tourist is all bad. I'm guessing, however, that if you're reading this you're a traveler, or at minimum an aspiring traveler.

One thing I always tell people: Traveling is like theater seating. You see the show, but does anyone ever ask you where you sat? Put another way, is it really all that important how you got there (first class or economy) or where you stayed (a beach hut or a five-star resort on the beach)? Or it is just important that you WENT, you did something; you got out of your doldrums and did something.

Regarding money, there are obvious polar-opposite ends of the spectrum, no matter if you're a tourist or a traveler. The bottom line is easy: go with what you can afford. If you need first class and can afford it, then do it. If you're on a very tight budget, then plan on staying in backpacker hostels (which means dorm accommodations with bathrooms down the hall) and eating with the locals or from street vendors.

The middle ground is a quite affordable option, however. Most often, you would choose locally owned, smaller hotels, hostels, posadas, or pensiones—the names vary but the style remains the same—which cost a fraction of what an international chain would set you back.

Then, if and when you grow weary of staying in grottier places, you have the option of upgrading for a night or two at a nicer place with room service, a concierge and bleached white towels. Don't ever take this for granted. You have the option to check into a nicer hotel while most of the locals don't ever have that luxury.

An alternative to all of this is adventure travel, which means you're definitely "off the beaten track" for most of your trip, and doing something more rigorous and challenging than you would ever do at home.

Adventure travel is still the fastest-growing segment of the travel industry, especially for wealthier, westernized travelers. An example might be that you fly into a remote part of Mongolia to go hunting with trained eagles, teamed up with a herdsman who provides you with a horse and a comfortable, warm place to sleep, and you are literally thousands of miles away from any contact with the rest of the world. Is that what you need, is that what you're craving?

Travel, by its very nature, is more dangerous than staying at home. You're always looking up gawking at something, the sidewalk might have holes bigger than a VW, and you're bound to stumble over a pothole or eat something that doesn't agree. You're eating different foods and drinking different water, so your body might well acknowledge the change and show its unhappiness.

None of these "hardships" are worth *not* traveling. It's a small price to pay—and the rewards far outweigh any inconvenience.

## **6. GENERAL TRIP PLANNING**

*A good traveler has no fixed plans and is not intent on arriving.*

Lao-Tzu

The biggest question here is: how much should you plan? Or, more specifically, how much should you plan vs. how much should be left to spontaneity?

The answer depends on how much time you have. A one or two week trip, by nature, requires more planning than a four or five month trip. If you're doing the grand tour of Europe in 28 days, you absolutely must plan out the majority of your time. Whereas, if you have the luxury of weeks or even months away, you also have the luxury of being spontaneous, which means you can wander off the beaten path and explore. Then, if you hit a dead end or a "not so fun" part of the world, you don't have to have any guilt about it and merely move onto the next locale.

How long should you go?

From someone who's taken four days trips from Denver to Paris as well as 12-month trips around the world, let me say this: stay away as long as you can. If you can squeeze out a month or more, do it. If you can see your way to being gone for a year, all the better. You'll know what you can afford. You might not have the opportunity to go again anytime soon, so why not make the most of it?

What may surprise you is your tolerance level, for both good and bad.

You may discover that you really DO miss your home bed and pillows, and anything more than ten days ends up being torture. On the other hand, you could just as easily find out that you've taken to travel like a duck to water—after two weeks on the road you're just getting warmed up and you can't understand why it's take you so long to get a passport.

Part of the joy of travel is just winging it. Take a bus or subway to anywhere and just getting off and explore. Of course, plan on seeing the main attractions and dining at a few famous restaurants, but leave room in your schedule to just meander, to discover.

The one quality you'll assuredly gain from travel is patience. After spending time waiting for trains, taking long bus rides, waiting for the rest of a group to get ready so you can go to dinner, you'll gradually discover that it's better to simply be patient. Things will happen, eventually, and getting uptight or upset isn't going to make things go any faster.

Jam-packed travel often times means that you're skimming, not really seeing or remembering anything. Take time to savor. Drop those shopping bags and sip a cappuccino for a few hours and just people watch.

Travel never disappoints... when given a chance.

## **7. ON-LINE TRIP PLANNING**

*The journey of a thousand miles begins with one step.*  
Lao-Tzu

These days, on-line trip planning is the way to go. If you need to go at a specific date and time, you may well lose out on some of the better bargain fares, so be as flexible as possible to get the best deals.

For airfares, cars and hotels, check out a few of the big boys first, such as:

expedia.com  
cheaptickets.com  
tripadvisor.com  
travelocity.com  
orbitz.com  
hotels.com  
sidestep.com  
cheapflights.com  
kayak.com  
farechase.com

Most of the major airlines have web sites as well, such as ual.com, jetblue.com, or aa.com. Often times, there are bargains found on-line that aren't advertised or even otherwise available. The latest opinion is that the best deals are found if you go directly to the airline, hotel or car rental company, instead of a secondary site that needs to make a commission on the sale, or at least you know that they might take better care of you, a loyal customer, rather than an anonymous search engine who you found on the second page of a search.

If you're willing to work a little harder and be that much more flexible, you may want to try

the bidding process at priceline.com. In this case, you tell them how much you're willing to pay and they come back with a yea or nay. If it's nay, you can always go back and re-submit a higher bid or another date. I find it frustrating, but others swear by it.

A good on-line source if you're going to multiple countries is airtreks.com, based in San Francisco. You enter the cities and dates and it will give you a rough estimate, followed up by a firm cost within 24 hours.

A few other web sites I use and enjoy:

escapeartist.com

travelfish.org

multimap.com (for maps)

lonelyplanet.com (good for backpackers, and check out thorn tree on the site as well)

travlang.com (foreign language translations)

gonomad.com (info for backpackers, but good chat rooms)

traveler.nation.com (research before you go)

cdc.gov/travel (info on current health risks, shots, etc.)

globaltravel.com (general travel)

trailfinders.com (excellent London-based bucket shop for cheap tickets)

bootsnall.com (independent traveler site)

travltips.com (has freighter travel info)

There are more web sites at the end of the book as well, with as new ones coming online constantly. **Keep abreast**, as they say.

## **8. LISTENING TO TRAVEL AGENTS (OR NOT)**

*A good holiday is spent among people whose notions of time are vaguer than yours.*

John Boynton Priestly

Should you listen to a travel agent? Are they trusted professionals, or slime bags who will sell you a ticket to hell for a commission?

Needless to say, there are some of each on this great, wild, wonderful planet of ours. YOU are the one who needs to be sharp.

For the most part, I like travel agents. They're usually someone who loves or at least likes to travel, in that the industry isn't something that people just "fall into." (There are, of course, exceptions to everything.)

These days, travel agents have a rough go of it. The airlines have cut their commissions to nearly nothing and most agencies have had to resort to tacking on a "service fee" or "ticketing fee" of some sort, usually in the neighborhood of \$15 to \$30 per ticket. Hey c'mon, everybody's gotta make a living.

At the larger agencies, there is almost always someone who specializes in certain areas. If you know you want the South Pacific, then call and ask if anyone is an expert in that neck of the woods. If not, check at another travel agency. If you're looking for real advice and hands-on knowledge, the worst thing you can do is take the first person that comes along.

Do your homework, and hopefully the travel agent will have done so as well.

Many agents will tell you they've been somewhere, which probably means they've been on a Fam trip, which is short for Familiarization. A tourist board, hotel or whatever will fly in a group of travel agents to let them get familiar with the area. I've been on these; it means they show you what they want you to see, the best of everything and little else. (And, since you're traveling, often in luxury, for free, the tit-for-tat is generally that they like the agents to only say nice things about them, or at least skim over any bad parts...) It's a nice way to go, but it's certainly not a realistic (or unbiased) appraisal. Ask the agent if they've traveled to where you want to go independently or if it was just a Fam trip.

Let's face it: travel agents are in it for the commission. What that means is that they will generally try and book you into the most expensive hotel they can, the most expensive car rental, etc. etc. I'm not saying that's wrong, it's their job, but it doesn't mean it's right. Even worse, the agent may have a "special" relationship with a particular hotel chain, for example, and they'll always try and book you there—even if something more suited to your taste and/or pocketbook is just down the road.

Pay attention! Does it feel like the agent is "pushing" something, does he or she have an agenda? Have they asked you the right questions, and do they really seem to listen and understand what it is you want and the type of traveler you are? All of this can come home to roost if you find yourself at a swanky resort with lots of kids running around when all you wanted was a quiet hammock on the beach and a mai tai.

## **9. WHEN TO GO/WEATHER CONSIDERATIONS**

*"And they traveled by night and they slept by day, for their guide was a beautiful, wonderful star."*

Henry Wadsworth Longfellow

I always say: "The time to go is now."

Travel IS for everyone but, if the truth be told, it's a helluva lot easier when you're younger. Don't get me wrong. I'll travel 'til I can no longer drag my own bag behind me, but I can also acknowledge that it was smoother going when I was 20 than when I turned 50. On the other hand, I have a far greater tolerance for the hassles of life now that I'm older—but I only gained that attitude through travel.

I, personally, like to travel for long periods of time. Tourists are the ones who save up their precious two weeks of travel and head to the beach or the mountains. Travelers, on the other hand, go as often as possible, and then go again. If you go with the right attitude, a four day getaway can be completely satisfying and restful. That said, think seriously about taking a sabbatical, a longer sojourn away from the pressure of work, family and life in general. I've done it several times, and never regretted it. Of course, this takes planning and savvy, but if you want it bad enough it can happen.

I've never been one to make a travel decision based solely on what the weather might be. I love London in the dead of winter; the crowds are down, you can always get theater tickets, and the rain is good for your complexion. Ditto for Paris, Prague, Pretoria or any place not in the far northern or southern hemispheres. Those places with extreme weather conditions

obviously require special, detailed planning—you don't just pop up to Lapland without some serious considerations.

Travelers also understand the value in off-season travel, because the crowds are thinner, you can always get a reservation at a much lower rate.

If you need the sun, the tropics are nearly always ready for you. Sure, Mexico or Greece can be really hot during the summer months, but the breezes blow and the ocean is always there to cool you off.

The way I see it, if it's cold, you can always warm up with extra layers of clothing. If it's



hot, you can always cool down by drinking a hot beverage (Yes, hot, not cold!. A hot drink equalizes your inner body temperature while an icy cold drink on a hot day just cools down your insides and makes you even more aware of the heat. I took me a long time to figure that out, but a guy in Burma on a sweltering day proved the logic to me.)

**Rain is the worst** complication, in my opinion. Being soaking wet never seems to be much fun, unless you're in a swimming pool, or in love (and then nothing matters). Still, don't discount going to the tropics in rainy weather,

since most of the time the storms come through and leave quickly. Anyone can put up with that... just be sure to pack a water-repellent jacket or bring an umbrella or two.

With the ever-changing global climactic changes, there's nearly never a guarantee anymore anyway. So don't wait, just go—but be ready for whatever (see What To Bring). Accepting what comes your way sure beats cursing the sky any day!

While you're planning, don't forget the fact that the northern and southern hemisphere climates are reversed, so when it's winter in the north hemi, it's summer in the south, and vice-versa. (Even knowing that, I was still very naive the first time I went to South America. I kept thinking 'south, it's warm in the south.' Yet I was quite ill-prepared for the blizzard we encountered on that bus ride from Argentina into Chile!)

The Equatorial tropical regions, such as Amazonia and Indonesia, are virtually always hot, the only difference is in whether you're in the wet or the dry season. Even the wet seasons aren't too wet, consisting mostly of brief but torrential showers, which pass quickly. Sure, you can find a spat of days on end of rain nearly anywhere—and if you're a traveler you just move on and find someplace drier.

As a general rule of thumb, plan your arrivals and departures to anyplace during daylight hours. You'll feel safer and more comfortable being able to see where you're going. It goes without saying that most of your travel will occur during the day as well, but don't be afraid of the dark, nocturnal hours once you've settled in and have your bearings. (That said: Flights into Tahiti very often arrive late at night... and I'm here to tell you that there's nothing better than arriving in the dark and then wake up to the sights and smells of an early Tahitian morning!)

You can hear or read lots of "travel nightmare" stories. And yes, bad things happen to travelers all the time. Do they happen any more than if you were still at home? Probably not. Accidents and rip-offs can happen anywhere, anytime. Don't let the horror stories scare you away from traveling, please!

Precautions and common sense are your two best allies.

## 10. HEALTH ISSUES and INSURANCE

*"He who has health, has hope; and he who has hope, has everything."*  
Arabian Proverb

Like my mama always says: "If ya got yer health, ya got everything." That seems to go double for travelers.

Keeping healthy isn't much different while you're on the road. As much as anything, it's a state of mind. If you think you're going to get sick, you probably will. If you think about foreign germs, you'll probably attract them as well.

Before you leave home, you should contact a medical expert in foreign travel. You may really like your personal doc who's been treating you since you were nine years old, but he or she may know nothing about tropical diseases. Instead, contact your local public health service, which often has a foreign travel department, or a private travel clinic which will have staffers who have up to date information on what inoculations and precautions you need to take. Check to see what's covered by your insurance plan. It might be that the consultation is covered, but not the shots. In that case, find out which shots and medicines you'll need, and then go to the public health clinic for the actual inoculations.

Check with the Center for Disease Control ([cdc.gov](http://cdc.gov)) as the first and foremost source of information. They're up to date experts on worldwide diseases and prevention. The phone number is 404-639-3311 or 800-311-3435. The CDC traveler hotline: 800-232-4636.

Don't be surprised by how many shots you might need, or by how much they'll cost! Just one dose of the hepatitis series may cost you over \$100, and you might need up to three shots. Still, it's far cheaper than the cost of a trip interruption should you contract the disease.



Just to give you the heebie-jeebies, here is a list of a few of the inoculations you might need, depending on where you'll be traveling:

Typhoid  
Yellow Fever  
Hepatitis A & B: Usually, one inoculation covers both  
Diphtheria  
Polio  
Meningitis  
Measles, Mumps and Rubella  
Rabies  
Japanese Encephalitis  
Cholera  
Influenza  
Tetanus

There's a few more that you don't even want to know about! You won't need all these shots, but quite possibly some of them, especially if you're going anywhere slightly off the beaten track. Do your research, depending on where you're going, and act accordingly.

All the injections and treatments you receive will then be detailed and documented in your yellow immunization card that you'll need to carry with you. For the vast majority of travelers, you'll likely never look at it again. However, if you do end up in, say, a zone with an outbreak of hepatitis, you'll be glad to have proof of which form you've been protected against. (I can attest to that: Having that yellow card showing I had taken all the Hep-C shots helped me get out of a sticky situation in South Africa...)

For the most part, get as many of the inoculations as you can before you leave. Also, plan ahead since some of the shots (such as Hepatitis B) need to be taken weeks apart. And yes, it might be cheaper to get some shots in a foreign country, but consider the time it will take out of your day to find the clinic, wait for the treatment and pay. (You might even be required to provide your own sterilized needle and syringe before getting a shot in some locations, which eats up *another* few hours of your day.) I once spent a long, futile day in Santiago trying to get more malaria pills. In the end, I found another traveler who had an extra dosage that she sold to me. Voila, problem solved!

As with so many things in life: an ounce of prevention is worth a pound of treatments.

I highly recommend you join the International Association for Medical Assistance to Travelers, or IAMAT. This is a network of physicians, hospitals and clinics around the world that agree to treat travelers. They are not, I should point out, always the cheapest doctors in town, but they're dependable. In a pinch, that's what you want.

The main office is in Canada, but the US office is:  
IAMAT  
1623 Military Road, Box 279, Niagara Falls, NY 14304  
716-754-4883  
iamat.org  
Twitter: @IAMAT\_travel

When you join, you should also make a donation to this fine organization. IAMAT also publishes several valuable pamphlets such as the World Immunization Chart, the World Malaria Risk Chart and the World Climate Chart. You can also get from them a directory of doctors

and dentists from around the world that speak English.

Yes, you should have insurance with you when you travel. It's doubtful, but your main insurance carrier MAY cover you while you're out of the country. More than likely though, you'll need new or additional coverage.

There are a number of organizations that sell specialized travel insurance. Know what you're buying. Many of them may be good for less-than-major situations, but not all of them may be sufficient for a major catastrophe. Some might ONLY be good for getting you home in a crisis and all of them are priced accordingly. As with any insurance, purchase what makes you comfortable. Some travelers think that it doesn't matter; "since so many countries have socialized medicine, they'll take care of me." That may, or may not, be true. Cover thy butt, as they say.

A few on-line recommendations include:

Council on International Exchange: [ciee.org](http://ciee.org)

International Medical Group: [img.org](http://img.org)

Atlas Extra International Travel Insurance: [worldtrips.com/quotes/](http://worldtrips.com/quotes/)

International SOS: [internationalsos.com](http://internationalsos.com) (available only to US and Canadian residents)

## 11. WHAT TO BRING

*"Pack half and bring twice the money."*

Sound advice from every traveler I've ever met

I could probably write a book just on this subject.

Plan sensibly. What you bring depends on many factors: where you're going, naturally, as well as how much "shit" you like to have at your disposal.

Not that I'm paranoid, but think about the worst-case scenario. If your daypack gets stolen while you're sleeping on the train, you can always replace your sunglasses or your make-up. But think through what would happen if you lost your passport. What would you do? Who would you call? Where is a copy of at least the first pages? Ditto for your credit cards or anything else of value. Everything is replaceable, but just consider how much hassle it would be to have to wait a week for a new passport while your friends head off to Morocco and you're stuck in Madrid.

Here are the essential's, followed by many other possibilities:

- Passport

Passports have been around for eons. In ancient times, it was often an engraved silver pendant from the king or emperor, which stated that the bearer should be allowed to travel across the lands. It's really not different today in many ways. That little booklet is a very powerful legal document that says who you are, where you were born and it has an expiration date. Then there are 20-some blank pages that will get stamped whenever you enter or exit a country.

The first words of a U.S. Passport reads: "The Secretary of State of the United States of

America hereby requests all whom it may concern to permit the citizen/national of the United States named herein to pass without delay or hindrance and in case of need to give all lawful aid and protection."

I don't want to sound paranoid, but your passport is about your most prized possession once you leave the shores of America. Its value far exceeds that of what you paid for it. Trade in stolen Yankee passports is rampant, mostly because they're so hard to acquire if you're not a US citizen. Keep your eyes on it, always know where it is, sleep with it if you must. Just don't lose it or let it get stolen.

Passports are available from the National Passport Agency: [travel.state.gov/passport](http://travel.state.gov/passport)  
You can phone to ask questions from 8 a.m. - 10 p.m. EST, Monday thru Friday, at 877-487-2778. (For life or death emergencies after hours: 202-647-4000.

You either mail in your application and photos, or take it to any of 4,500 "Passport Acceptance Facilities" found at post offices, courthouses, libraries, or municipal offices. Regular service takes approximately 4-6 weeks. You can have your passport in 2-3 weeks with the Expedited Service, available at selected Passport Facilities for an additional fee, or in 8 business days for an ever greater expedited fee. The Passport website is detailed and easy to navigate, so I encourage you to use it or find someone who can.

United States passports are now issued for 10 years. Always make sure you know that it's secure—can I say this enough—either on your person or safely locked in your hotel. If the hotel doesn't have a safe in your room or at the front desk, then at the very least hide it well in your baggage, preferably in a zippered and locked place.

You'll need to send two identical 2x2" black and white or color passport photos with your application. These you get from places like Kinko's or AAA for around \$10 per set of two. Look under Passport & Visa Services in your local yellow pages for other options. You can also shoot and crop the photos yourself. The background needs to be white or off-white, full face and current. Don't wear hats or sunglasses; however if you wear glasses, hearing aids, religious clothing or wigs on a daily basis, then keep them on for your photo.

Make sure your passport always has at least two years left on it, especially if you'll be traveling for an extended period of time. It's not unheard of for a country to refuse admittance unless you have at least six months left on your passport.

Most hotels and hostels require you to write your passport number when you register, so you'll likely have it memorized after a short while. Still, keep a photocopy of the first two



pages of your passport and store it in a separate, secure place. For added protection, give a photocopy to a relative or friend at home as well, along with this phone number to the State Department's Citizen Emergency Center: 888-407-4747 from the USA or 202-501-4444 if you're overseas.

And let's hope you never have to use that number!

Age and experience has helped me. After years of disorganization, and even though it doesn't always look "cool," I now like to have some sort of document carrying case. (A hidden money belt can do the trick as well, if you like wearing them.) The best ones are waterproof and lockable. You can then keep everything in one place, and not have to scramble to find things quickly. Every now and then, a customs official may ask to see your cash or return plane ticket, and it just looks better if you can put your hands on it quickly.

In your document case and/or money belt, you should have with you: passport, yellow card showing your immunizations, return plane ticket, personal checks, driver's license, etc. Take the carrying case with you, lock it in your room safe or place it in the hotel safe.

Indeed, there is some logic in not keeping everything all in one place—in that if it gets stolen, you won't lose everything.

#### SIDEBAR: When is Visa not a credit card?

Some countries require US citizens to get a stamp or sticker in their passports before they arrive allowing them to enter their country. That's called a visa, versus that good ol' Visa card in your wallet. Some, such as those we have cordial international relations with, will allow you in without a visa when you arrive. As a general rule, most of Western Europe doesn't require one, nor do many of the more popular places in South America and Asia. However, there are exceptions (such as Japan, Vietnam and Brazil, to name a few), so CHECK FIRST with the country (or countries) you're looking to visit.

Arranging for visas before you leave our soil generally means that you call or email the nearest embassy or consular office for the country or countries you want to visit. They will send you, or you can download, an application form that you fill out and return along with a payment and one or two passport-size photos (whatever they require). Be aware that this process can take time, very often many weeks, so allow for that. Also, know that most countries require that it to be used within six months of being issued or they automatically expire.

Visa costs vary, from as little as \$5 to more than \$100. The key word here is "reciprocity." What this means is that different countries charge different prices for a visa, depending on what YOUR country charges THEIR countrymen to enter. That is the reason why Canadians may pay more, or less, for a visa than Americans. Don't get aggravated over this, it's merely "politics in action." Remember that the US does not make it easy for others to enter, so it's only fair game for them to make U.S. citizens jump through a few hoops as well.

If you're already on the road and traveling for an extended period of time, you can shortcut the process by getting your visa in a neighboring country. This entails going to the local embassy or consulate, filling out the paperwork and paying the fee. (Say you're in Istanbul Turkey and you decide to go to Uzbekistan. You can likely go to the Uzbekistan consulate in

Istanbul to get a visa, although not always! In some rarer occasions, a country might require you to get a visa from your home country. Do some research!) If you go to an embassy for a visa: Dress up with your best clothes and be polite, even solicitous. Procuring visas while you're on the road is not difficult—the only thing is that it can eat up a half-day of your trip, plus you may have to wait several days while the visa is being processed. To save time and aggravation, try and arrange as many visas as possible before you leave.

There are also visa services, which are companies that will arrange all necessary visas -- for a sometimes steep price. They are generally reliable, and can get you visas in usually under two weeks. Several to check out are:

expressvisa.com  
traveldocs.com  
G3visas.com  
travisa.com

- Credit cards: Bring more than one if possible, in case anything happens to one or in case a machine doesn't want to accept your card. And never keep all of your credit cards in the same place: hide one (or two). In case anything happens to one, you'll always have others. For more information, see MONEY/COSTS.
- Make sure to keep your return plane ticket in a safe place. They're either expensive or impossible to replace. Also, many countries issue an entry permit that you need to give to customs when you depart that country. DON'T LOSE IT or you could find yourself delayed for a few hours and/or paying a lot of money.
- Your International Certificate of Vaccinations, also called the Yellow Card. This card lists all the immunizations you've had and can be obtained from either your doctor or a local or state immunization/health clinic. Most mid-size to larger cities will often have a private travel clinic where there are expert doctor and nurses who keep up on all the current immunization requirements (and they do change frequently). Not all countries require a Yellow Card, but you won't want to be without it in any case. Brazil, for example, won't let you in without a Yellow Fever shot, and they're very strict about it. The card also lists your blood type, eyeglass or contact lens prescription, and a brief medical history.
- An International Youth Hostel card, if you're planning on staying in hostels along the way. You can generally get one at any sanctioned IYH facility, which all have the triangular sign with a cabin in the middle of it. The IYH website is [hiusa.org](http://hiusa.org) (hostelling site, and be sure to check out the resources section too) and also [hihostels.com](http://hihostels.com) (international youth hostel, reservations, etc.)
- Your insurance card, if you have one, and you should. More and more insurance companies are offering travel insurance - certainly designed more for the casual tourist than for the year-long traveler, but they do offer a sense of security and protection that should help you sleep easier at night (along with your family and friends).
- A student ID card, if you're still a student, can help get you discounts to museums and some transportation. Check out CIEE and ISIC, for two of the biggest card issuers.
- Your driver's license, and it's probably best to get an **International Drivers License** from AAA as well. Some countries require an IDL in lieu of your local driving license.

- A copy of your marriage certificate, as necessary, as well as the birth certificate of any minor age children traveling with you.
- US Customs and Border Protection registration is a US government document issued for anything expensive (cameras, computers, etc.) purchased in the US that you're bringing back with you. These are available from your local US Customs office, or go to [cbp.gov/travel](http://cbp.gov/travel) and search for Form 4457 titled "Certificate of Registration."
- Extra passport photos (6-10) for visas along the way, as well as for things like your week-long pass on the London subway (tube).
- Your SCUBA card if you have one and plan on doing any deep-sea diving.

## 12. LUGGAGE

*"The most peaceful place on Earth is among strangers."*  
Elias Canetti

During the "golden years" of travel you wouldn't be caught dead without a 16-piece Louis Vuitton matched set or something of that ilk. In those days, you would always check-through to your destination, never carry on-board, and have bellhops and Sky Caps carry it for you at all times. Those days are long gone, save for dignitaries, celebrities and sultans.

Nowadays, there are many, many ways to go regarding your main piece of luggage. I'd recommend you take some time in your search, looking both at mountaineering stores as well as luggage specialists. This is an important decision and you don't want to buy the wrong thing. I am not prone to recommend any brand over another, but ask lots of questions of other travelers and salespeople. While you may luck out and find a good deal at a luggage seconds store (where they sell slightly damaged, or last year's models), you can easily spend from \$200 to \$600 and up on your primary bag. (As always, depending on your personal needs and style, I'd caution toward going with something less conspicuous rather than anything flash. I'm not saying it has to be basic black and boring, but fire engine red with floral print patterns might not suit either.)

For many travelers today, the choice for many are bags with an internal frame system that look fine when you're checking into a nicer hotel, but that also have the ability to convert to a backpack when necessary. You can now get these types of bags with rollers as well, which are quite handy although the wheel mechanisms do add extra weight. If you'll be using the wheel systems to any extent, make sure they are durable and easily replaced should anything go wrong with them. Remember: those streets in Uruguay might not be as smooth as the ones in the shopping mall where you bought the bag.)

The fabric is often, or should be, rip-stop, making them less susceptible to bag slashing (where bad people slash your bag as you're asleep on the train or walking through a crowded market, and then grab whatever they can. This one I know from experience... watch yourself in Quito, Ecuador!). While these bags could technically be called "backpacker" luggage, they are absolutely used by travelers of all ages and you won't feel out of place with them in almost any situation.

The external frame backpacks are sturdy and absolutely necessary if you'll be doing any sort of long hikes or camping out. Also, your hands are always free because you don't have

anything else to hold or worry about. They're completely utilitarian and functional, but they forever brand you as a backpacker/gypsy/nomad, which isn't all bad.

One other tip: look for bags that have few or even no external pockets since that is a favorite spot for thieves to target.

You'll likely also need and want some sort of daypack or backpack. These have improved over the years, becoming far more comfortable and durable. Make sure your straps are properly adjusted, no matter which position it's in—you'll sometimes want to carry it in front or to the side as well as on your back. Some luggage allows the backpack to zipper onto the front of your main bag. I don't think this is worth much, since most of the time you'll be carrying the backpack with you, even on the airplane. Cute design, but rather impractical.

Whatever you buy, carry it around with you for a day or so, to see how it feels. Make sure you understand how it works and all its compartments, since you'll be living with the bag on a daily basis.

You might want a smaller fanny pack as well, or in lieu of a daypack - although personally, it reeks of "TOURIST." Still, they're practical and the personal belongings you use daily are close at hand and relatively safe. (Keep your passport, money, etc. in a safer place such as a money belt.)

Bring several, small combination locks with you for security as well, preferably the spin kind, not with keys, since a key is just one more thing to lose.

And don't forget to have several secure luggage tags so that everything is clearly marked... and have your name, address and phone on the inside of all your luggage as well. Be sure to include a contact name and phone back home as well, in case your bag is found but you're still lost.

There are several hidden "money belt" options. I prefer the "hang around your neck" ones, because they're easy to access and easy to hide. Make sure the strap is comfortable and doesn't rub you the wrong way. Another option are the "round your waist" belts, which are a bit more secure perhaps, but more awkward to get at, especially if you're standing in line and everyone is watching. The third type I've used straps around your ankle. These are very incognito, but a bit less comfortable and harder to find.

The one best packing advice: Roll things in things. Roll your socks and put them inside your shoes; roll your dresses and/or shirts; roll everything.

### **13. FIRST AID KIT**

*"He who would travel happily must travel light."*  
Antoine de Saint-Exupery

You don't think you need a First Aid kit? You do. (First rule of travel: Don't be reckless.)

Generally, for longer trips, I carry two toiletry bags. One contains the things I use on a daily basis while the second has all my medications, extras, etc.—the things I don't necessarily need all the time. Obviously for shorter trips you'll only need one kit.



For the toiletry bag, bring everything you need, however don't feel as though you need to bring a six month supply of everything. Amazingly, many brand names you're familiar with (from Kleenex to Crest) are available around the world. If not, it's fun to shop around for a local substitute. (In Asia, they used to sell "Darkie" toothpaste, with an image of a black face man on it. But it's now been renamed to a more culturally sensitive "Darlie.")

Here's a list of items. Again, you won't need all

these things, but it's good to **think ahead** about what you're bringing. You could easily add a dozen more things to this list, but do you really need them?

#### DAILY KIT:

- Toothbrush/toothpaste
- Razor/extra razors
- Hairbrush
- Deodorant
- Shampoo/Conditioner
- Dental floss
- Compact mirror
- Lip balm
- Sunscreen
- Soap (in container)
- Q-tips
- Toilet paper (but you really need to see how "soft" we have it in the USA)
- Small scissors
- Make-up (for women, but I don't mean to sound sexist)

#### MEDICINE KIT:

- Aspirin
- Vitamins
- Imodium
- Flu/cold medicine
- Insect repellent (with maximum Deet\*)
- Birth control pills
- Tampons
- Tweezers
- Nail clippers

Antibiotic cream  
Malaria medicine (as needed)  
Zantac (or something to help you sleep on those long 17 hour flights)  
Antihistamines  
Band-Aids  
Thermometer

\*Deet is the active ingredient in bug repellants. In the US, you'll probably only find 35%, but you can find much stronger doses in other countries. If you're heading to bug-infested places such as Laos or Amazonia, you'll want the highest Deet strength you can get your hands on.

## 14. CLOTHING

*"Pleasure is so often more exhausting than the hardest work."*  
Katherine Anne Porter

What you wear naturally depends on where you're going and the style of travel you're into. A five-star cruise wardrobe is significantly different than if you're backpacking through the jungles in Borneo. For the "average" traveler, these clothing tips should work well and suffice.

My first suggestion for clothing is to choose a color palette and stick with it, whether it is green, gray, brown, blue or black. Everything matches, and you won't be seeing most of these people again anyway so who needs to put on a fashion show? You can always buy or trade t-shirts and clothes along the way if you get sick of what you've brought.

The next best advice is to bring things you can layer: undershirts, shirts or blouses, sweaters and jackets (and again, all in the same color range).

Beyond that, bring:

- No more than four changes of underwear, bras, panties, and/or socks. Plan on washing them out in the hotel sink or have them laundered. (Travelers bring baby shampoo to use both on their hair and to wash their socks/underwear at night. Tourists have their hotels do the laundry each night.) TIP: As you're traveling in most third world countries, you can always find someone to do a load of clothes for a few dollars—and you're helping the local economy.
- Two pairs of shoes should do you fine. One should be a sturdy pair of walking shoes/boots that can hold up to a hiking trail but also clean up enough to look good at a dinner party. I highly recommend Ecco or Mephisto shoes, which I call my "magic shoes" since they hold up so well. The second pair should be either a good pair of sandals or a comfortable pair of athletic shoes, depending on the weather conditions where you'll be. Remember, as a shoe salesperson told me years ago: Shoes should be comfortable as soon as you put them on. If not, don't buy them, and certainly don't bring them on a trip with you. In any case, they should be "tried and true" shoes that are already broken in.
- A pair of flip-flops are nice if you're going to be using communal bathrooms or walking to the beach.
- For men, swim trunks that you can also wear as shorts. For women, a pareo or sarong (a one-piece wrap around piece of fabric) that can be worn on the beach or used as a casual wrap up cover.

- One or two t-shirts (and then buy more along the way, or trade, or give them away).
- Two shirts or blouses (and again, buy more along the way if needed).
- Two pairs of pants/slacks with belt. Even though everyone seems have caught onto those long pants that have zippers which turn them into walking shorts, I still endorse them. The fabrics are often rain and stain resistant and the practicality makes sense. The other pair should be either jeans or "nicer" pants, depending on what your travel style is. Remember that jeans take a long time to dry when wet, and they're relatively heavy.
- One sweater, preferably not wool since it's so bulky. They're more expensive, but I like the feel and durability of cashmere. Fleece can be bulky, but warm.
- One jacket or windbreaker (lined if you're heading to colder climates). Unless you're really heading into a frigid area, that combination of t-shirt, shirt/blouse, sweater and jacket should keep you nicely warm.
- One baseball or sun hat. (Again, easy to buy more along the way.)
- One dress for ladies dress-up nights, or to wear to temple. If it's sleeveless, bring along a light wrap to cover your shoulders.
- As needed: gloves/mittens, wool hat, heavy scarf

## 15. A FEW MORE THINGS TO CONSIDER BRINGING

"It's what you do with your life that counts."  
Millard Fuller

Here are a few items that you might also want to bring. You won't (and don't) need all of them, but think about where you're going and what you'll be doing, and choose accordingly:

- Maps and guidebooks of where you'll be going (believe it or not, but some people never leave with travel books, preferring to discover everything on their own). Good, reliable maps can be difficult to find in many places, and they can be expensive. Check in at your best local map store, or search online to see what a wide range of options you have. If you're on an extended trip and don't want to carry all those heavy books, either tear out just the pages you'll need and take those along, or have someone mail you books at appropriate points along the way.
- A small world map or a pocket atlas is handy. It helps when fellow travelers are planning ahead, or when someone says they want to visit your country and you help them plot out an itinerary.
- Of course, if you choose to only use your phone and Google Maps, then you'll need your charger AND an electricity adapter.
- A watch, possibly one with a calculator, and waterproof is not a bad idea as well. If you don't mind things in your pocket, take a pocket watch instead of a wristwatch.
- Notebooks and pens for journal writing.
- Sketch pads, especially if you're an artist or budding artist and need to record your images - and especially if you can draw caricatures (people love them!).
- Pictures of home, or at least postcards, since everyone likes to see where you're from and pictures of your family and friends.
- A flashlight, for those midnight walks to the loo when the electricity has gone out. Maglites are small, yet powerful. (What's a loo, you ask? That's what the Brits call a bathroom.)
- A world band radio is great to have, especially if you like to keep up with the news. But a warning: buy a good one because the cheap ones aren't worth the money.
- Think about binoculars if you're any kind of a nature buff. Of course, they're mandatory for an African safari, but you can also enjoy the birds in St. James Park in London. Magnification of 8x30 is usually enough.

- The new "sport" towels are amazing. They absorb like crazy and don't take up much room - but rinse them out often or they get stinky.
- If you're into it, bring some natural herb remedies. Also, Vitamin C can often be expensive in other parts of the world!
- If you're traveling in Asia, you might want to bring along your own pair of chopsticks. That way, your germs stay with you and the germs on the restaurants chopsticks can stay with them.
- **Mole skin**, a "second skin" adhesive that come in a roll, never hurts to have around, especially after you've been hiking all day in shoes that weren't broken in.
- A magnifier of some sort, to better read those small map details.
- A whistle is small and effective in an emergency.
- A deck of cards to relieve your boredom on a long train ride, or to strike up a friendship with a quick game of strip poker.
- I'm not an advocate for bringing sleeping bags. Whether you should bring one depends on a few factors: Are you going to be camping out? Are you going to be in very cold areas? Are you staying in cheaper hostels? If yes, then you should probably bring one. However, remember that sleeping bags can often be rented and, for most hostels, a sleeping sheet (a sleeping "bag" made from either sewn-together twin sheets or another light fabric) is sufficient and far less bulky.
- A Swiss Army knife, the best one you can afford (but not so expensive that you'll really be bummed if it gets stolen or confiscated). Many a traveler has won big points for having a corkscrew handy, and sometimes the toothpick can save the day. Just don't bring with you as carry-on at the airport, as it might well be confiscated.
- Condoms, rubbers, prophylactics, or whatever you want to call them. (See Sex on the Road.)
- Water purification tablets or drops (the drops taste worse), which you add to local water in order to take out some of the impurities. Regarding these systems: I think they're unnecessary these days unless you're going for an extended period of time into the rain forest or the desert and there's a distinct chance you won't be able to purchase bottled water. Then again, the downside to all those ever-so-convenient plastic water bottles is that they're causing an enormous waste problem since many countries don't have recycling systems.
- A hooded rain poncho that folds up small.
- Don't be bashful: if you want to bring your stuffed animal that you've slept with since you were three, then bring it if it makes you feel good.
- A wind-up alarm clock. Hotel employees may forget to wake you up on the day you have to get up at 5 a.m. for an 8 a.m. flight. Plus, you might like the tick-tock sound as "white noise" that can block out other noises (or the tick-tock might drive you nuts!).
- Business cards, since some foreigners expect the formality.
- Cooking equipment if you'll be camping out, including stoves, utensils, pots and pans, etc.
- Rubber bands, safety pins and plastic bags, for lots of various uses.
- A calculator or money converter, but only if you're obsessive about figuring out your expenses to the penny or on a daily basis. Or, again, consider bringing a watch/calculator combo.
- Mosquito netting, but only if you're camping in the rain forest on your own or staying in the very cheap hotels - otherwise, hotels have them.
- Extra pair of glasses or contact lenses. You CAN find lens-cleaning solutions nearly everywhere nowadays, though it'll be expensive and are most often found at pharmacies or sometimes eye clinics, instead of grocery stores. Bring extra sets of contact lenses AND your prescription (just in case). You can find lens-cleaning solutions at either pharmacies or opticians. This might be a good time to consider having "lasik" surgery, which would eliminate the need for contact lenses.
- Compass, for you Boy Scouts or if you're doing some backcountry treks.
- Cable and locks to secure your backpack in the hotel storage room or at the train station.

- Universal rubber sink plug (for washing out your undies in the hotel sink... even if the sign says don't do it).
- A resume, in case you're looking for work along the way. At least have it formatted and stored for easier access on an internet site or your own website.
- Duct tape or some sort of package sealing tape—you can USUALLY find cardboard boxes to mail things home in, but finding good sealing tape can be another story. Duct tape is useful for many things, from repairs to lint removal.
- Inflatable neck pillow, for both airplanes and emergency naps.
- Earplugs, especially if you're staying in noisy Chinese hotels.
- Eye covers if you're a very light sleeper.
- Sewing kit with extra buttons.
- Cord with mini-clips for hanging wet laundry.
- Dictionaries and/or phrase books for the languages you'll need. I'd be embarrassed to whip out one of those foreign language converters, but I suppose someone needs to buy them.
- Extra batteries, because they're often expensive and/or hard to find, especially the odd sized ones. (Although, at times, batteries can slow you down going through airport security...)

Finally, don't worry if you forget something, or wish you'd brought something along. In nearly every instance, you can buy what you need when you get there, and possibly for a cheaper price than you would at home.

## 16. MUSIC CHOICES

*"Music expresses that which cannot be said and on which it is impossible to be silent."*  
Victor Hugo

Many of you are saying: Music? There's no choice. But ahhh, there are always choices!

I'm not so naive to think that most anyone would travel without their music. Still, there are a few "thorny" issues amongst travelers; whether it is better to bring music (i.e. on your phone, an iPod, iPad, or some sort of portable music player) and run the possible risk of being insensitive to local customs to say nothing of "cutting yourself off" from local sounds, or not give a whit.

I understand and appreciate both sides of the issue. Much of it depends on whether or not you're a "music person." Of course I like music, but it doesn't drive my daily existence. I also realize that this is a highly personal choice.

Downloading is ubiquitous worldwide, so long as you have the wifi connection obviously. Buying CD's or DVD's while you're on the road is not only possible, it's impossible to avoid. Bootleg CD's (reproduced illegally, with the artist getting zero for their work) can be found just about anywhere, from street markets to shopping malls. It's fun to cruise the sections and see what's popular with locals. As always, the imported ones (in this case, those from Amer-



ica) are the most expensive because of shipping and import taxes. I'm not an ethicist, but think about what the value is of "stealing" another person's work.

Here's how I see the situation:

PROS to bringing music:

- It's comforting, relaxing, something I can't live without
- It's cross-cultural sharing, in that you can share your music with others and vice-versa
- You can keep up with the "latest" and learn more about other cultures and their music
- Music is a good gift to give away to others
- You can learn a foreign language while you travel
- It's indispensable on a long bus or train ride

CONs of bringing music or, at the very least, :

- It's a barrier. People don't talk to you if you have a set of headphones stuck to your head.
- It's rude and/or elitist. People who may have little or nothing can think you're a snob.
- It's one more thing to get stolen.
- I'd rather hear and support live, local music
- It forces me to get out and meet the locals and see the sites instead of sitting in my room listening to Beyonce.

Now the choice is yours, but at least give it a think.

## 17. APPEARANCES

*"Farewell, Monsieur traveler. Look you lisp and wear strange suits; disable all the benefits of your own country."*

William Shakespeare, *As You Like It*

I think the key word here is "blending in." While you may well be full of patriotic pride and want to wear your red, white and blue leather jacket, doesn't it make more sense to try and be as inconspicuous as possible? Think about why you need to draw attention to yourself. You probably don't. Plus, if you're not so worried about how you look, it will leave you that much more time to enjoy the sites and people.

I'm sure there's probably an argument to be made for dressing well enough so that you're not an embarrassment to your fellow countrymen. Does that mean you need to have a suit jacket and tie or a fancy party dress stashed inside your luggage? Again, probably not. Being clean and comfortable will suffice for nearly every situation you'll encounter on the road.

In some cases, you might well be tempted to try and "dress like the natives." That could mean you pick up a kaftan in Marrakech or a kimono in Japan. Personally, I think tourists look silly when they try and don the local attire, because no matter what you do you'll always remain a visitor. Sure, if you want, buy those native costumes and ship them home. I can't tell you how many times I've had people drag them out of the back closet or, better yet, how many times I've seen obvious "native costumes" for sale at Salvation Army.

Use common sense: prepare for variety and maximize your options. Think about things such as what you need for the climate where you're headed, the weight of what you're carry-

ing, and its cleanability.

## 18. ECO-TOURISM, VOLUNTEERING and GAP YEAR

*"Boundaries are for the bounded."*

Rob Unsworth

There are two growing segments of the travel industry that continue to pique people's interest: ecotourism and adventure travel. You'll find entire books and magazines geared to these two travel approaches, so finding information and details about either one won't be a problem.

Ecotourism entails traveling in an eco-sensitive manner; quite commonly you'll stay at an "eco reserve," which has been built to be a part of its environment, and then take tours into the surrounding areas to see nature up close. There are a seemingly infinite number of options here; just go with your heart's desire. What about water rafting in New Zealand, or hanging with a shaman in Mongolia or Bolivia?

All of these things are possible, especially if you have money. Which brings up another point: In certain instances, you might easily yet unknowingly be aiding in the corruption of local customs and lifestyles. More than one primitive culture has been corrupted by unscrupulous profiteers, who convince (and pay) the natives to perform for the tourists. This is not always a negative thing and, as often as not, the locals are glad for the opportunity to share their culture with others and make a few dollars at the same time. Just know that this can be a blatant rip-off as well, with the producers getting rich off the work of the natives. (Are you starting to see that travel can sometimes be complicated, as well as invigorating?)

**Adventure travel**, as the name implies, is geared toward adventure, action and excitement. This style is a reaction to the "safe but dull" tours of old where you go from monument to museum. Instead, you may find yourself snorkeling among coral reefs in the morning, followed by a mountain biking excursion in the afternoon and salsa lessons that evening. The depth of your adventure is only limited by your imagination, and pocketbook, for there are few places in the world that aren't on the adventurer's "radar." Do a Google search for Adventure Travel, and you'll be amazed at what you'll find.

Another viable option to consider is volunteerism. In this regard, most often you'll pay for your own transportation and accommodations as well as paying a placement fee which can vary from a low of \$95 up to several thousand dollars. As a volunteer, instead of lazing on the beach or hobnobbing around town, you'll be working in a village helping build a home, teaching to an eager group of children or developing a theatrical show to educate people about HIV/Aids. This can naturally be a satisfying journey for those who want to do something more than the typical getaway vacation. It can expand your horizons and allows you to see the world in a unique way. Plus, it can't hurt to see volunteer work on your resume. For an excellent point of reference on volunteering, check out the monthly magazine: *Transitions Abroad*, or [transitionsabroad.com](http://transitionsabroad.com)

Also, check these out:

[goabroad.com](http://goabroad.com)

[I-to-I.com](http://I-to-I.com)

[volunteerabroad.com](http://volunteerabroad.com)

projects-abroad.org  
goglobal.mit.edu

And then, of course, there's the proverbial warning label: Please, please do your research into any and all volunteer organizations. I'd like to think that most do great and admirable work, but there are always stinkers out there who'll take your money and provide little in terms of content or support. Read the reviews, ask around, and don't be afraid to ask the tough questions when you're speaking to someone (what happens if I need to go home suddenly, who's in charge of the program in-country, what are the accommodations in detail, etc. etc.)

Americans are not super familiar with the term **Gap Year**, or sometimes Interim Year. However, the term is quite popular in the United Kingdom and Australia. The Gap most often takes place in the year between high school and college. During that time students can choose to simply travel to explore more of the world, or do something more structured such as volunteer in Africa or Asia for part of the year, take a course in something new and then travel independently or with a group for the rest of the year.

While parents might well balk at the idea of paying for "fifth year" of college, in reality many (many!) kids end up messing up the first year or two in college and end up attending for five, or six years anyway. The value of a gap year experience, in theory and if well-thought-out, is that it helps an undecided student focus in on what they really want to do with the rest of their life. Or, put another way, it might well eliminate some ill-conceived choices. ("I always thought I wanted to be a vet, but after spending four months working at a clinic I really decided that wasn't for me." Or "Wow, I had no idea that my passion is teaching in a third-world country. I just love the people there!") Put into that context, a gap year might just be the right ticket, for the right student who needs some help "clarifying" what they really want to do.

I took a Gap Year when I got out of high school, although I didn't know to call it that in those days. I saved up my money from shelving books at the public library and scooping ice cream at Baskin-Robbins, and spent eight months traveling throughout Western Europe and North Africa. My favorite slogan in those halcyon days was "Every night is a Friday night, and every day is Sunday." It was bliss, and definitely what got me turned on to travel. And then I came back, convinced that I wanted to become an orchestral conductor, until I took my first class in music theory and figured out that conducting wasn't for me! LOL My entire "gap year" was still had a huge impact on me, one which I'll never forget nor ever regret.

## **19. GOING ALONE, TOGETHER OR IN A GROUP?**

*"He travels the fastest who travels alone."*  
Rudyard Kipling

This question may not seem as obvious as it sounds. If you're single, you go alone; if you're married, you go together; and if you're old and afraid, you go in a group. Right?

Wrong. This decision needs to be thought out much more thoroughly, as every choice has an upside and a downside.

GOING ALONE allows you to be closest to the culture. It's just you and them. You can "be" whomever you want, in that the people you meet know only what you tell them. I'm not ad-

vocating being a liar, I'm just saying that you can choose how much you reveal about yourself—and there's no one who can disagree with you. Being alone allows the most freedom; you're no longer anyone's son or daughter, brother or sister. You're just YOU. You can be "invisible" and be a silent observer, in which case most everyone will not pay much attention



to you and leave you to yourself. I had a friend who slipped into Paris, donned a pair of dark sunglasses and spent her days idling in a small café pretending to be a writer, watching the locals go by and taking long walks in the Luxembourg Gardens. She left her stressful life behind for just a week of being mysterious, alone and untethered.

Going it alone gives you time to explore, relax, read and think without anyone else telling you what to do or where to be, in your own time and manner. It's exhilarating

to meet new people and make new friends, people who like you for just being yourself. You can be truly anonymous which is all the better to really observe and learn about the rest of the world, without any other distractions. No one bothers you, unless you want to be bothered. Naturally, you can also go wild and let your hair down, letting go of your inhibitions and discovering your more flamboyant side without fearing any judgment from friends or family.

On the downside, it can be lonely, especially if you're not comfortable being by yourself. You can't let your guard down as you can when you're with someone else. There's no one else to watch your things while you go to the bathroom, or to help make a decision about which restaurant to go to or which hotel to book. It can get tiring making all those decisions, day in and day out. It can also be a bit de-humanizing to be a single traveler, in that the locals often times "look through" the tourists—they hardly see you, let alone pay any attention to you because you are so "invisible." That can sometimes be hard on the ego.

Bottom line: Going alone offers the most freedom and flexibility. It can get lonely, but it might be the best decision you've ever made.

GOING AS A COUPLE means any combination, be they married, gay or just friends. Two, even three, can make for some excellent travel. A partner will push you to try something new, to go places you might not have thought about, or to see things in a different light. Possibly the best reason to go in two's or three's is that the costs are so much cheaper. Single rooms are the most expensive, whereas a double can often be less than half the price. For whatever reason, people seem to be less suspicious of couples—not that singles are anything to be afraid of, mind you. Perhaps it's because couples seem less "threatening," I'm not sure.

I went through China with a married couple in the early 1980's. We didn't have much money to spend, and saved expenses by sharing a room. Since most Chinese families only have

one child, it is quite common to find hotel rooms with one double bed and one single bed.

However, most hotels were reticent to let us share the room, one can only guess because they thought we'd be having some kinky three-way sex (which was not the case!). We got around this slight dilemma by telling them, in our very bad Chinese gleaned from guide-books, that the wife and I were brother and sister (which we weren't nor did we look *anything* alike), and then it was never a problem to get a room! It was ingenuity in action, plus it saved us enough so that we could travel for at least an extra week.

On the other hand, waiting for another person or a pair of slow pokes when you're ready to go can be terribly frustrating. It's no longer a matter of just up and going, like when you're single. You now need to consider the other person's emotions or energy level, all of which can slow down the travel process. If you're married or committed to the other person, it's awkward (at best) to say to them: "I need some time alone." To alleviate this problem, have an honest discussion before you leave, saying that there may well be times when one of you may want to go off and explore on their own. This should not only be accepted, but it should be encouraged. Think of it this way: you're both seeing something new and you can come back and exchange what you saw or who you met.

Bottom line: It's cheaper to go as a pair or trio, but you better like the person you're with because you'll be spending lots of time with them.

#### GOING ON A GROUP TOUR

Truth be told, group travel is not all evil. Sometimes, the mix of people can be fun, stimulating or even magical. Sure, you might be on a tour bus and getting stares from the locals but, duh, you are a tourist.

There are two types of tours you can take. One is the portal-to-portal variety, where you book up with the group and go with them from start to finish. Occasionally, there are free times allowed, but generally you're together pretty much 24/7. Again, if the group is "together" and you share interests then this can be a treat. Everything, or nearly everything, is taken care for you; from luggage transfers to most, if not all, of your meals. You don't have to think much, just look and listen. If the tour guide is a dip or a nerd, then your trip will obviously suffer. MOST of the tour guides I've met have been decent folk, interested in where they're going and what they're doing. If you get a bum one, complain immediately to the tour company and seek a refund or at least a discount on another trip.

Obviously, if you tragically end up with a "not so fun" group, it could make for a l-o-n-g vacation. There's not much you can do at that point except grin and bear it.

Ask lots of questions before you go, and don't be afraid to be persistent about who the others are that are going. If you're going solo in a group, single supplements are almost always available for an extra (sometimes exorbitant) charge. If money is a concern, ask the travel company who books the trip if there might be another single with whom you could share a room.

The other type of tours are day tours, which can last anywhere from several hours to all day. The point being: you know you're going to be with these folks for a limited period of time, which means you should be able to put up with just about anything.

I recommend these types of day tours whole-heartedly. City tours, for example, can give you a good, basic overview and orientation of a new city, which gets you acclimated and

lets you get your bearings. They're especially good if you have a limited amount of time and/or a limited budget. Day tours can be booked through the local tourist bureau, or even more likely through an independent tour operator. Some you can just find on the street, buy a ticket and hop on. Quality of service and depth of knowledge can vary, and it might be best to ask other travelers or someone at your hotel for recommendations.

In nearly every country around the world, it is also possible to book a customized or private tour. Ask at the tourist information office about these, go into a travel agency to make an inquiry or spend some time to check out any of the independent operators. In some countries, these types of tours can be downright affordable. Generally, what you're doing is hiring a guide and his/her car (or whatever means of transportation... once I rented an ox cart in Burma) for a specific amount of time and usually for a specific area. Say, for example, you want to take a tour of Soweto, the "township" outside of Johannesburg, South Africa. There are numerous men (sorry, don't mean to sound sexist, but they are usually men) who will be glad to take you on a tour of their town. They are mostly knowledgeable and informative and, if you decide to take a detour if you spot something interesting, they'll be glad to oblige.

Costs vary of course. You should ask around for "the going rate," and obviously only go with a certified or licensed guide. OK, something this just isn't possible, but at the very least you should ask around for recommendations. Be sure and tip these folks as well, since they're probably not making much by the hour. (Or, as they say, Tipping is not a city in China...)

For lack of a better word, there are also tours which I'll call Hippie Buses. These are usually long-haul operations, taking passengers from London to the Middle East, throughout South Africa, or across the Sahara. Again, ask around or at tourist offices for these buses. These are generally geared toward younger travelers, although there are by no means any age restrictions. (Comfort restrictions are another story!)

The typical set-up is for these buses to pick-up passengers at their hotels. The gear is stowed either in a rear or side compartment or, just as often, in a separate trailer which is pulled behind the bus. Most of the time, there will be either an ultra-friendly bus driver and/or a "guide" of some sort who sorts out the daily details. In some instances, the guide collects money up-front for a food kitty, after which the meals are prepared along the way, thus saving time and money. If not, rest stops at cafes or restaurants are arranged.

The Baz Bus in South Africa, for example, allows passengers to buy a ticket from Point A to Point B, yet you can take as long as you'd like to complete the journey and make as many stops as you want along the way.

Many long haul companies tend to be centered around London, since the Brits are amazingly good travelers and it's a hop-skip-and-a-jump to the European continent and Asia. Several of overland trekking companies are:

[nomadictravel.co.uk](http://nomadictravel.co.uk)  
[encounter.co.za](http://encounter.co.za)  
[overlandescape.com](http://overlandescape.com)

## **20. AIRLINE TICKETS**

*"There are only two emotions in a plane: boredom and terror."*

## Orson Welles

Beyond a good travel agents and on-line ticket discounters, there are a number of cost-cutting ways to purchase airline tickets. (If money isn't an issue, I presume you'll know how to pay full fare.)

Consolidators are those companies you see in the newspapers, screaming their bargains with type so small you can barely read it. These days, most of them are reputable, however it's probably not a bad idea to check with the Better Business Bureau or the Air Transport Association (ATAA) in your area to make sure there aren't any claims against the company.

Consolidators buy blocks of tickets from the airlines and then sell them at whatever price they can get. They're fine if you're flexible and can travel at odd hours. They're busy people, and not always the friendliest, but you CAN find some great values. Always pay with a credit card, even if it costs you a bit more, just in case something happens at the airport (it's not going to happen, but just in case....)

I've bought tickets from consolidators in many places, and never had any trouble. In London, they're called "bucket shops," but you'll find them in most major cities. Check the travel sections of the paper (usually on Sunday). My "secret" to choosing which one is to simply go for the ones with the biggest ads. It might be simplistic but it seems to work on the assumption that if they can afford big ads then they're probably doing well with business.

Also, if at all possible although rarer and rarer, do NOT let them give you an e-ticket, an electronic ticket that only requires you to show an ID. If anything happens while you're traveling, it is much easier to get a change if you have a regular ticket—and that goes triple if you need to switch airlines. It might be easier for the airlines, but don't fall for it. Some of the less developed countries don't have computers and/or are not tied into the major ticketing programs, so they are of zero help to you with your e-ticket. Ask for a hard ticket, or pay the extra bucks for it if you think there's any chance you might be changing your itinerary.

**Round The World** (RTW) tickets are another option, and you can even get them with points (just so long as you have a few hundred thousand of them! These tickets are issued by a carrier and its partners (United Airlines is in cahoots with Lufthansa, Thai Airways, Scandinavian and about 18 others, for example. I'm sure you've heard of Star Alliance, or OneWorld). The general rule is that you need to keep flying in one direction (east or west) without backtracking, although that hard-and-fast rule has relaxed somewhat or can be broken for an added charge. A typical route would be something like New York-London-Cairo-Delhi-Singapore-San Francisco-New York. All classes of service are available on these RTW flights as well.

If your plans change while you're traveling, you will need to pay a "change fee." If you change just the dates, that costs a small fee, whereas if you change the cities AND the dates, that can cost even more. READ THE RULES before buying a RTW ticket, and understand them. Ask questions if you don't.

RTW tickets work best if you're on a limited timetable and know exactly where you want to go. My experience is that problems often arise if you're on an extended trip.

For example: you're in Bali and meet some great folks. They're heading to Australia, but you have your ticket out of Singapore, heading to Katmandu. See the problem? It just doesn't let you be very flexible, or spontaneous.

If you're taking a longer trip, a far better option is to buy just the first leg of your ticket (say from Los Angeles to Australia), and then buy the rest of your tickets along the way. London is a great place to get tickets, as is Hong Kong, Singapore, Bangkok and Delhi. Sure, it takes a half-day out of your trip to purchase tickets, but you'll save money in the end.

One hint: IMHO, the best time to call is midnight their time. They'll have more time to spend with you and you'll get more answers.

RTW specialists are few and far between. In fact, the only one I know of is: [airtreks.com](http://airtreks.com) (out of San Francisco), but they're good. You might also want to check out: [nomadic-matt.com](http://nomadic-matt.com) and search for his guide to buying a RTW ticket.

Most countries also sell air passes, which allow you to travel for either a certain period of time or to a defined number of cities within one country. These are an excellent option if you want to cover a lot of territory within a specific country and don't have a lot of time. You almost always need to buy the air pass BEFORE you arrive, and you generally have to specify which cities you want to visit and when. If you're visiting Brazil, for example, buying an air pass from the national airline Varig means you can cover vast distances in hours instead of days. Once you've decided where you want to visit, check to see if there are any air pass options - it could be money well spent.

#### SIDEBAR: A word about jet lag...

There are many theories and cures for jet lag, and for some people it can really be a problem. It simply means that the jet is moving quicker than you are and it takes some time for your body, your internal clock, to catch up. I've found a few simple rules work best for me:

- Rest as much as possible on the flight, or take a mild sedative to help you snooze, such as Xanax
- Avoid liquor and caffeine, even though the booze is free
- Move your watch to the local time so that you can be psychologically adjusting the whole time
- If you land at your destination during daylight hours, stay up as long as possible (i.e. don't nap), and then get to bed early and get a good night's rest
- Personally, I find traveling from east to west easier on me than the opposite, but everyone seems to have an opinion on this

There is also increasing evidence of what is commonly being called "economy class syndrome." That's a bit of a misnomer however, since it can obviously happen to anyone in any class of service. It's caused from sitting for long periods of time in a cramped position, which can cause clots in your blood that can move to your heart or lungs and create havoc. To avoid it, take frequent once-an-hour walks around the plane and/or do isometric stretching exercises at your seat. Some airlines have even begun airing video on their in-flight programming that encourages you to stretch.

And note: there's lots more about other means of transportation in Chapter 27.

## 21. BUDGETING

*"The proper function of man is to live, not to exist."*

Jack London

May I say it again: pack half what you think you'll need, and bring twice the money.

What else can I say? A simple budget is never simple, considering all the variables. The Westernized countries will ALWAYS cost you more per diem, while the Third World countries allow you to stretch your dollars the farthest.

When you're preparing your budget, start with what you'll need to bring, and then add your travel expenses. Say, for example, you're going on a one-month backpacker trip to Central America. (Note: These costs are typical, yet NOT definitive.)

Backpack: \$250.00  
Airline ticket: \$500.00  
Clothes/shoes: \$150.00  
Camera: \$150.00  
Immunizations: \$100.00  
Incidentals: \$500.00  
Sub-total: 1,650.00

Food and Hotels 30 days x \$50.00/day: \$1,500.00  
Ground Transportation: \$250.00  
Gifts/Souvenirs: \$100.00  
GRAND TOTAL: \$3,500.00

OK, so \$3,500 is quite a bit to spend for a month in paradise: \$100+ per day using these figures. However, if you amortize those initial costs over a longer period of travel, say six months or longer, the daily cost shrinks to about half that number. My calculation based on 180 days x 50.00/day (\$9000) + pre-departure costs, transportation and gifts (\$2500) = \$11,500, which brings it down to a "mere" \$63 per day.

You get the point. Those pre-departure costs can add up, but they're nearly the same whether you go for one month or ten. You can do your own calculations based on your needs and desires, but the basic formula remains the same (pre-departure costs plus per diem equals the rough estimate of your trip's budget).

Now, is \$50/day sufficient? In some places yes, and you'll have money to spare. In other locations, such as Tokyo, Oslo and London, you'll be lucky to even find a place to sleep for that amount of money, to say nothing of food, entertainment and transportation.

All these considerations need to be taken into account, first and foremost with deciding where to go, and then a careful consideration of your travel style. Will you be satisfied with staying in cheap hotels or airbnb all or part of the time? Do you drink alcoholic beverages daily? Do you enjoy nice meals much of the time, or all the time? Again, there's a lot to think about, no?

As much as anything, learn how to budget your money. Let's face it, if you're not good with money and credit cards at home, you're not likely to improve much once you're on the road. Unfortunately, for you, that can cause even more hassles and aggravations when you're not near your bank or your parents, and unable to explain what happened.

## 22. BOOKS, GUIDEBOOKS and READING ON THE ROAD

*"We wander for distraction, but we travel for fulfillment."*

Hillarie Belloc

Take a walk through any decent size bookstore, and you'll be surprised, amazed and quite possibly overwhelmed by the travel book section, to say nothing of the zillions of options on Amazon. Don't let it get to you, and certainly don't let the magnitude of it make you decide to give up before you've even started.

Travel books in traditional bookstores are usually divided into geographic sections, and then alphabetized by country. Asia, followed by China, Japan, Korea, Vietnam, etc. Single country books, obviously, concentrate in depth on a particular country. There are also a good number of general travel books, such as those about working overseas, those about freighter travel and books about women traveling alone. Take a look at these as well and see if any strike your fancy. Remember, everyone has his or her two bits to add, myself included.

If you're a certified "arm chair traveler," there are always plenty of travel novels, fiction and first-person accounts, as well as travel history. I'm quite sure that plenty of people started with these sorts of books, and eventually decided that they needed to get out and see the world for themselves. Again, DO IT, just GO.

Again, I won't be giving you specific recommendations. You can see the differences immediately, however, and just peruse slowly. Read snippets and try to put yourself in that setting. VISUALIZE yourself arriving at the train station in Bangkok and taking a cab to your hotel. VISUALIZE yourself walking through the dusty medina (market) in Marrakech. VISUALIZE picking out your snorkeling gear and splashing into the cool waters of the Great Barrier Reef. That's what books can do for you.

Backpackers gravitate toward Lonely Planet Books, which also has an excellent web site - [lonelyplanet.com](http://lonelyplanet.com)—and be sure to check out the Thorntree section of their site, which has a large selection of specific travel categories, including regions, ocean travel, older travelers and a gay forum. Moon Handbooks, Let's Go (and its website: [letsgo.com](http://letsgo.com)), Rick Steves, Frommer's, Berkeley, Baedekers, Footprints and Rough Guides are also there, and each have something different to offer. I also love Insight Guides, which have awesome photography and more history than the average guidebook. Remember that each book is targeted toward an audience, be it upper-end travelers, backpackers or whatever, so make sure what you're reading "rings true" with you.

A wise option is for you to then **tear out** the relevant pages or chapters that you'll be needing. It isn't necessary for you to drag along all that "filler" at the beginning and end of every book, but you need to bring the important parts such as the city or specific sites you'll be going to. (Obviously, with an ebook this problem is nonexistent.)

These guidebooks, often imported, can be expensive to purchase while you're traveling overseas. An option would be to have someone mail you the books you need for the next portion of your trip. Say you take the Western European books with you for the plane ride, but then have your Eastern European guides mailed to you in Prague. You can then sell or trade your Western Europe books to someone who's headed that way.

I guess what I'm saying is that I don't consider guidebooks to be something I hold onto and cherish for all eternity. The information changes too much and, personally, they're just not something I feel compelled to keep in my library.

One downside: printed guidebooks can be expensive and heavy. Pre-read and absorb as much as possible before you leave so that you don't have to take every book. Read to get the essence, the feel of a place. On the other hand, don't feel as though you have to have every signpost and monument figured out before you leave. There's also a lot to be said about the "fun of discovery" when you just go and figure out what to do when you're there. Don't forget that nearly every place has a tourist office where you can pick up brochures and pamphlets on the sights, hotels and restaurants in that area.

A few other points:

- Sure, of course, we mostly use online maps such as Google Maps or the ones you have with your phone service. Still... I like having a printed map in hand many times, in case you can't get wifi or you find that the online maps aren't accurate. So... Pay special attention to the maps you buy. Some are quite detailed and useful, while others are drawn at such a large scale that they're virtually useless (except for perhaps giving you a general overview of a city). Many books now have detailed maps printed in the back of the book (tear them out!) or even have separate, pullout maps. That said, make sure that you brush up on your map reading skills while you're at it. Get used to quickly getting your bearings by spotting the major streets, intersections and landmarks. If nothing else, buy or borrow a map of your city or state, and see how well you do with reading the major thoroughfares, sites of interest and using the cross-reference points.
- Make sure you check out the publication date in any travel book, online or in print. If it's more than two years old, I'd suggest finding another more current book. (The history and pertinent facts don't change much, but you need and should want the most up-to-date information about transportation, food, hotels, etc.)
- Don't forget to look into older, out of print armchair travel books as well. It was interesting to read a book called "Tramp Travels," which was written in the late 1800's, and then compare it with the Europe of today. You might be surprised with how some things never change.

As far as "casual" reading while you travel, a good book is essential. You'll always find yourself with a few minutes to spare while waiting for a train or plane, your iBook or Kindle has run out of battery life, or you'll need something to read before hitting the sack perhaps. I also believe that, at times, you need a book to immerse yourself in just to "zone out"—maybe the sights, sounds and smells are finally getting to you. A book then becomes the "escape from the escape."

Books can also bond people. You might be surprised how well read other travelers are, and how avid they can be to discuss what they're reading or what they have to trade. It's part of the universality of travel. (That can happen with e-books as well as print copies, but how many times does anyone ask you what book you're reading on a Kindle versus how many times does the book you're reading solicit questions on a long train ride which allows time to chat with other travelers or locals?)

I'd recommend taking two or three books with you to start. Some folks see traveling as a time to finally read *War and Peace* or the collected poems of T.S. Eliot. Whatever your choice, it is indeed a perfect time to read. You don't have the pressures and obligations of home, and you have the time to read things you normally wouldn't attempt. TAKE ADVANTAGE OF IT.

After you've plowed your way through the books you brought, you'll be looking for more, I assure you.

English language books are available in most places, however you might have to look for them. Generally, the local bookstore in any major city will have a section or at least a few shelves of books to choose from. However, these books are usually imported, and therefore expensive. And, to add insult to injury, your choice of authors is somewhat limited— meaning lots of Judith Krantz and Stephen King.

Salvation is at hand, my friends! Many, many stores, hostels and even restaurants have started selling or trading used books. Most of the time, they'll swap books one-for-one, or sometimes two-for-one (you trade them two books and they give you one in return). Even others simply sell used books for a minimal amount. The point being, you don't need to always pay high, imported book costs AND you'll always be able to find something to snuggle up with on a chilly evening in the highlands of Malaysia.

### 23. CAMERAS AND CELL PHONE PHOTOS

*"Memories are all we really own."*  
Elias Lieberman

Camera people are their own breed. Nothing I write here would mean much to the person who's just spent \$1,000 on a new Sony digital. Hopefully, there are a few things to consider BEFORE you buy.

Digital cameras are obviously the only way to go these days: they're coming down in price, they're getting smaller and more powerful all the time which means less "extras" to lug around. However, they may not be able to be repaired if anything goes wrong and you're in the middle of the Chilean desert, plus they're rapidly becoming a target for thieves.

If you have a digi and you're planning on sending pictures back from some free wifi or internet cafe along the way, remember that not all cyber cafés will have plug-ins available, and they may well not have the most up-to-date systems or programs nor might they be willing to let you install a program if you've brought along the disk. Upper-end hotels might have either better connections or even some sort of business center that will likely have better facilities.

Cost aside, weight is the most critical factor. I suggest you figure out the weight of your camera gear and then try walking around



with it for half a day. That experience will just BEGIN to approach what it's really like... you're tired, you've been going at it for weeks and yet you still need to climb to the top of some mountain to get (yet) another panoramic picture of the countryside. Is that eight-pound camera bag filled with all those cameras and accessories worth it?

A few other if's:

- If you are really concerned about losing the thousands of photos on your external thumb drive, just mail it home (registered, of course) from time to time.
- If you'll be going to riskier locales, try taking a beat up camera case instead of a brand-spanking new one that says "STEAL THIS."
- If you're wondering, those lead-lined bags do work, especially if you're taking your exposed film through the x-ray machines at the airport.
- If you're in tropical climates, get some of those de-moisturizing tablets. It'll help keep the dampness off the insides of your camera.
- If you are camera-savvy, be sure to get one with a good zoom lens. If only I had a nickel for every picture someone has taken of a tree and then they say "See that gray speck up there? That's a monkey!"
- If you bring a tripod, be sure it's small, lightweight and collapsible.

## SECTION TWO: ON THE ROAD

### 24. I'M HERE. NOW WHAT DO I DO?

*"When I was at home, I was in a better place; but travelers must be content."  
William Shakespeare, As You Like It*

You decide to "take the plunge" and you're traveling overseas. But what are you gonna do?

First up, let me summarize what happens once you've landed in your first foreign country. If you're flying, as most do, you'll have had your first taste that international travel is a bit different. You have to show your passport, multiple times most likely, and then you head to the departures lounge where you might end up staring at the departures board and wondering where all those exotic cities are: Dubai, Mombassa or Tenerife.

On board, you'll also discover one of the perks to international traveling: all the **booze is free!** Not matter what I write here, you'll probably want to over-indulge yourself—I know I did the first 10 or 20 trips. The flight attendants have more than likely given you some paperwork to fill out for arrivals and customs, usually some sort of "landing card." It's basically the paperwork that a foreign country uses to keep track of how many foreign visitors they have in their country. It asks for your name, passport number, visa number (if required) and, often times, a local contact address. (As of right now, you might as well, and should, memorize your passport number because you end up writing it a lot on landing cards and

hotel registries, and it just doesn't hurt to know it by heart in case, God forbid, something should happen.) If you don't have or know an address, just put down a hotel or hostel name, which will generally suffice. Most all are written in the local language as well as English. Take a minute to fill it out onboard instead of trying to write it while you're standing in the customs queue (pronounced cue, a Brit word for line).

As you exit the plane, follow the signs (and the people) toward Customs, a.k.a. Foreign Entry or Passport Control. If you're lucky, this can be a fairly painless process, but be prepared for the worst: long, slow lines, people who crowd or push their way, and customs officials who may not win awards for friendliness and congeniality. Their job is to make sure you're not on any terrorist or criminal list and, let's face it, any government job can be a repetitious drag. However, your "job" at this point is to just be as patient and accommodating as possible. A smile never hurts. And just follow their instructions: nowadays you often have to stand in one exact spot in order to have your eye/iris photographed, for just one example.

I won't belabor this point, but in essence you are an "ambassador" for the United States anytime you leave our borders.

People observe you, and also make general assumptions about you and the entire U.S. of A. based upon your actions and reactions. How do you think we've gotten the reputation as "Ugly Americans?" Because, in too many instances, American travelers come off as impatient, demanding and authoritarian. Remember, you are a guest in their country, and it's only fitting and right that you be a polite, considerate guest. Think of it this way: How would you like them to act when they're a guest in your home, or your country? Act accordingly. End of lecture.

Most often, the customs person will stamp your passport, showing what day you entered. Sometimes they'll hand you back one-half of your landing pass. Don't lose it, because you'll need it when you exit the country, so keep it in a safe place or (sometimes) pay a fine when you're set to depart and can't find it. This is so that they can know how long you've been in their country when you exit. If you've had to get a visa, it will state how long you can stay: three months, six months, whatever. Be aware of the local laws on this, as most countries in the world can be rather strict on this issue. If you exceed your allowed time, you can sometimes be faced with a fine, or at least a lot of hassles.

Let's say you're having a great time in Thailand, and maybe you've even struck up a special friendship with one of the local lads or lasses. Then one day, you realize that your allocated time is running short. You have one of two options: you can go to an immigration office and



see about getting an exception, which can be easy or a nightmare depending on the country. Or, you'll have to exit the country, cross the border into a neighboring country, say The People's Republic of Lao, and then come back into Thailand and thereby get another six months on your passport. It's all a game, but you'll quickly get the hang of it. Travelers don't often talk about their passports and visas, mainly because everyone is responsible for their own destiny, err... I mean passport.

After you've gotten through passport control, next up is to collect your checked baggage. There may, or may not, be carts if your stuff is too heavy. But why did you bring that much if you can't even carry it all?

Most countries have some sort of "Nothing To Declare" line (often times green signs) or "To Declare" (the red signs most likely). Since you aren't bringing more than \$10,000 in cash, or any animals or plants or firearms (you aren't, are you?), you can probably walk through the "Nothing To Declare" doorway. If you should be asked to open your luggage, be cooperative. They may not want you to even touch your bag as they go through it. Since you've got nothing to hide (right?), just smile a lot and answer any questions honestly. More than likely you will never have to go through this, but don't be nervous or act pissy. Perhaps you got spot checked because you look different or troublesome, or maybe you're just unlucky. If you've got nothing to hide, then you have nothing to worry about.

After your bags and you and finally reunited, you'll head out to the arrivals hall. These can be chaotic, or maybe just semi-chaotic. In any case, it's time to talk about "touts."

A tout is someone who wants to sell you something. At the airport, it's could be a taxi ride into the city or perhaps they're trying to entice you to stay at their hotel (or their cousin's hotel), or maybe to rent a car from them or sign up for their scuba school. You've probably been on the airplane for six or eight hours, not slept well and arrived in a different time zone. You're whacked—the dreaded jet lag—and a bit disoriented. This is the time to be cautious. Not paranoid, not peeved, but watch yourself. Sometimes a tout can be your best friend, but just as many times they're best to avoid. You'll develop some "traveler radar," with any luck, and will eventually be able to spot the bad ones.

The best thing to do is decide your plan of action. You either want to already know the best way to get into the city (assuming you're arriving into a city, and assuming you've read a guidebook), or have arrangements made with someone to pick you up.

At the very least, know the local currency and have a rough idea of how much you should be charged. I don't mean to make you paranoid, because many cities have excellent transportation systems with posted rates so there's no question about what should be charged. However, many places can be nutty to navigate. If nothing else, ask around on the airplane before you arrive and I'll bet that someone will have some advice on the best ways to get around.

If possible, I always like to know where I'm staying the first night when I arrive, most often by booking something online or even phoning directly before I leave. If nothing else, it doesn't hurt to have a name of a hotel or hostel in mind—at least it gives you a goal to head toward. Also, it staves off some of the touts, and gives you a little piece of mind. In many places, you can also look for a kiosk that can help you find local accommodations. They may not always work hard at finding you the cheapest place, but then again they might just be a lifesaver. Be mindful that most hotels won't have rooms available for you until mid-afternoon (since they have to clean the rooms of the folks who didn't check out until noon.) In that case, I'd still head for the hotel and ask them to check your bag into their storage

room. Even grotty places can usually honor that request.

You've checked into your room. **Now what to do?**

Get acclimated. Hopefully you're happily enjoying the views of a new environment. Even if I'm only staying for a few days, and especially so if the stay is for a week or more, I like to unpack most of my bag. It just makes me feel more like I'm HERE. I'm not kidding, but sometimes I'll even buy a small bouquet of flowers to put in my room, just to make it all feel even homier. (Don't laugh 'til you try it!)

You most likely have a guidebook or online book that will give you the address to the local tourist office. If not, ask at the front desk for an address and directions. If there isn't a tourist office, or you've arrived on the weekend when it's closed, then talk to the hotel staff. Generally, they'll enjoy giving you a few tips about where to go, what to do, where to eat, etc. If, for any reason, the staff can't or won't help (or if you feel as though they're only telling you the places that their cousins own—it happens), then chat up other tourists. You can always spot 'em; they're the ones with their noses in a guidebook or pouring over maps and smart phone in the hotel lobby.

Be logical about first things first. It also depends on what your priorities are, of course.

You'll need to figure out the local transportation system, unless you've decided to rent a car, in which case you'll need to find a secure parking location. It's good to understand the options. Sometimes it can be cheaper and easier to take cabs, while in other places you'll want to be taking the subway or bus, or maybe the best solution is to rent a car, in which case you need to start learning the roads and which side the steering wheel is on.

You'll also need to know where the nearest ATM is, since you don't want to be carrying around wads of cash.

Learn how to log onto wifi, and maybe even how to use the local phone system as well, since you could easily be calling to confirm appointments or making restaurant reservations. BE SURE to have checked with your phone carrier about foreign roaming charges!!! (Can I say that strongly enough, I don't think so.) There are always international plans to choose from, each with their own peculiarities. Don't just think it's as easy as making a call back home, because it's never that easy, or rarely. If you can't figure it out, ASK. Some local systems require coins first, others while you're talking—there's no consistency. Most countries have some sort of cheap, by-the-minute phone card you can buy at news kiosks or tobacco stores, and most internet cafes have Skype or another internet phoning system complete with headphones and microphone.

Now you have a place to lay your weary head, you've got money, maps and a subway pass... it's time to enjoy!

Try and get your bearings as quickly as possible. What does that mean? Simply put, immediately start by figuring out (or asking) which way is north, south, east and west. Get the picture in your head that the mountains are to the west, or the water is to the south. Also, be aware of any "landmarks," such as monuments or statues or even the local McDonald's or closest Starbucks. The sooner you get familiar with the local turf, the better.

My first option in a new country is to generally just get out there and walk. Head out with or without a destination, and just start getting a feel for the place. How do the people dress? What's the local pace of life? Is everyone scurrying around, like in Tokyo, or are they lei-

surely sipping their cappuccinos all morning like in Tuscany? Don't try and make too many general assumptions. Don't make the mistake of immediately trying to validate your pre-conceived notions. Let the city or place you're in unfold before your eyes. Use all your senses to soak it up: What's the place smell like? What do the local foods taste like? What different types of architecture are you seeing? How differently do they dress?

**Breathe!** And relish in the fact that you're somewhere that relatively few people ever get to experience: Another culture. Another lifestyle. Then, you're probably ready for either nap, or a beer! If you have any local contacts, such as friends-of-friends or perhaps even a long-lost relative, now might be a good time give them a ring. Start making connections right away, and by that I mean physical as well as mental connections.

Once you're got your bearings, there are all the things to do like museums, churches, ancient ruins and the like—let's call those the obvious. Yes, you need to hit some of them, otherwise you'll spend too much of your time explaining why you didn't see the Louvre or Machu Picchu or whatever.

Don't feel pressured to spend ALL your time seeing what every other tourist has seen for centuries. Remember, you're not Marco Polo, you're YOU, with your own interests, hobbies and passions. Whose trip is it, anyway? You're the one who's paying, and you're the one who should enjoy it.

If nothing else, don't be afraid to just chill. Know that you won't be able to see and do everything, but you should enjoy whatever it is you're doing.

The best travel stories are often the least expected. The time when a family in Crete brings you in for a glass of chilled wine and a plate of baklava. Driving for 75 miles before you realize you're on the wrong road, but finding yourself in a spectacular seaside village with an incredible restaurant. Hiking an unmarked trail and meeting up with a group of Flemish students who you end up traveling with for the next week. Walking around a corner in Umbria and running smack dab into an on going wedding... and finding yourself dancing with the bride.

You'll likely want to find a local nightclub as well, since they're a great way to meet the locals and really observe the local customs and dating rituals. Don't be embarrassed to ask around for the best ones—someone will want to show you, if only you ask.

Don't just stay in the town center. Get out in the countryside, or just explore. Take a few chances. Don't be afraid to just get on a subway or bus and take it to the end of the line... then get out and see what unexpected things you'll find. What's the worse thing that can happen? You end up taking a cab home and having some wonderful stories to tell.

That's exactly what happened to me one gray Sunday in Paris. I hopped on Le Metro and stumbled upon Pere Lachaise, the famous cemetery where Oscar Wilde, Jim Morrison and Sarah Bernhardt are buried. Who knew? It's in all the guidebooks, but it felt more like I had the thrill of discovering it on my own, which is far more satisfying.

For your own amusement, it might be fun to have a few tricks up your sleeve. Perhaps a magic trick or a silly bar trick, since everyone loves them. Or, if you're theatrically minded, you might want to have a basic working knowledge of mime because it's silent and universal. One fellow traveler I admired was popular because he had a book of lyrics which had ALL the well-known songs, from Row, Row, Row your boat to Hey Jude. People loved sitting around the fire and singing late into the night.

Follow your passion. If you're into architecture, then spend a day just looking at arches, or doorways, or balconies. If you're into animals, then find the zoo, or see if there are any working farms nearby. Ask around... If you're into antiques, there is almost always some form of antique mall or flea market to be found. If you're into food, always ask where's the closest food market.

Try to see or attend one or more of the following as well. These are things you're familiar with, but they're never the same when you're away from home:

- a wedding
- a funeral
- a christening
- a local dance
- the theater
- a concert, indoors or out
- a local dance, or perhaps take a tango lesson if you're in Buenos Aires
- go to a school and introduce yourself... the kids would probably LOVE practicing their English
- a hospital... where everyone can always use a smile
- a unique, weird or entertaining local holiday or festival... ask around first, or read up and make it the goal of your trip

## 25. ACCOMMODATIONS

*"To awaken quite alone in a strange town is one of the pleasantest sensations in the world."*  
Freya Stark

The world is **a carousel of accommodation options**. With very few exceptions, you can find everything from the cheapest \$3 cold-water flophouses to the most luxurious of luxurious five-star hotels. I admonish you to look for comfort, location, budget and variety.



All guidebooks and websites have lists of hotels and hostels, but don't limit yourself to just what they say. Ask around, ask other travelers, read fellow traveler's websites or check with the tourist information office for new or improved hotels. The point being that the information in many guides can be a year or two old (at best) and things can change in that amount of time, both for the better and the worst.

I would really stress variety as well. If you've never tried a B&B (Bed and Breakfast) before, then isn't this the time to try, while you're on vacation and looking for something new? In some places, such as Great Britain and the Garden Route along the south coast of South Africa for example, B&B's are the best way to

go. They're plentiful, which means the rates are competitive, and the hospitality is unparalleled.

Never be afraid to ask to see a room before you register. This is appropriate, even in the high-end places. If you don't like the location, or you think the room is too noisy, ask to see another. Cheaper rooms go first, so don't expect the world if you arrive at 6 p.m. without a reservation.

Most major cities, and even the smaller ones, generally have some sort of "traveler center," meaning an area of town where you can find the cheaper hotels and/or hostels clustered together. Seek them out, since it means there will be plenty of other travelers (safety in numbers, don't ya know?) and the prices are therefore competitive.

For the most part, my thinking is that you're not really spending all that much time in your room when you're a tourist. So why spend lots of money on a place that just sits there being lonely all day? What I prefer to do is find cheaper, err.... affordable places for the majority of my time away. Then, when you're ready to relax a bit, splurge on a nicer hotel room.

I realize that, for some people, "struggling" means a hotel without 24-hour room service. (And I agree, sometimes it's great to come home at 2 a.m. and order up a burger and fries!) Be aware that those sorts of "luxuries" can eat up a substantial portion of your travel budget. Wouldn't it be better to find a less expensive place down the road—and then just sneak into the pool area of the swankier place?

Touts are omnipresent in the hotel world. They'll meet you at bus or rail stations, boat docks and airports in order to help find a hotel. You can go with them and see what they've got to offer and perhaps give them a few coins. Remember, the hotel owner pays them a commission as well. Not all touts are evil, and if you arrive at a busy time they might be a real lifesaver. Be aware that they might take you to places in the opposite direction of where you want to stay, or they might not be taking you to the cheapest places. Don't rely on them, yet don't discount them completely either.

I should probably say here that your best friend might well become **Trip Advisor** (tripadvisor.com). Most travelers use it, some swear by it, but it's never a bad idea to log on, see what they propose (for anything from hotels to restaurants to tour guides). The site does a better-than-average job of weeding out hotel owners who post their own glowing reviews, just as Yelp and the other customer-driver review sites all do (hopefully).

Here are other types of places you'll find or read about. This isn't a complete list, but it will give you a general idea of what's available in many parts of the world. Believe me, you will rarely ever be unable to find a place, especially if you're flexible and open to try new things:

- One, Two, Three, Four and Five Star Hotels. Mind you, in many places this is an arbitrary system. Some cities and countries are regulated and checked by organizations such as Guide Michelin in France. In other instances, it's up to the discretion of the owner. You won't be surprised to learn that their opinion of the hotel and yours might be quite different. Checkout times vary, anything from 10 a.m. onward and you can always ask for a late checkout. Most places will store your luggage for you if you have a day to sightsee before catching a plane that evening. If the room has two beds and you require a third, most hotels will bring in a rollaway for little or nothing. This can be a great way to s-t-r-e-t-c-h the travel budget if you're traveling with a small group.

**SIDEBAR:** All of these hotels I'll call "Western" hotels. What that means is that they have sit-down toilets, purified water, English-speaking staff (or at least try), and many of the comforts of home, like hot water and soap). Remember that sit-down toilets are considered a luxury in many places. In many Third World and some developing nations, what you'll find is a "squat" toilet, which means just that: you put your feet on a footpad, squat down over a hole and do your business. The nicest ones have a button or a chain to pull for flushing. Others have running water and a dish and you're expected to rinse. And others, of course, have nothing save for perhaps two planks of wood over a hole in the ground. Sorry, don't mean to be too graphic, but it's the truth! Don't be freaked out by this. It's life, it's how much of the world lives and it's an experience you'll not want to miss - really!

- **Hostels.** Again, there are some who are members of the International Youth Hostels (IYH), while others just use the moniker of hostel or are part of a loose-knit hostelling organization. Both are viable options, but check for cleanliness and what the rules are. Some require you to perform a "duty" before leaving, such as sweeping or cleaning the kitchen. Others might lock the doors at midnight, which means you need to find an open window to sneak in or get someone to open the door for you. You might also be required to have a sleeping sheet with you, which is basically a sleeping bag made of sheets, cotton or another washable fabric, or you might have to buy one of theirs.
- **Backpacker Hotels.** This is a casual term, used more in the guidebooks as an indication of someplace inexpensive, not fancy and often times centrally located. It does not mean that only those with backpacks are allowed in! Yes, you'll mostly find younger people here, but anyone is allowed and welcome. Always check the room first. Bathrooms are most often shared or down the hall much of the time, although there are often a few rooms with bath available for an extra cost. The cheapest rooms are dormitory style. In that case, be sure to have a way to secure your baggage from an unsavory backpacker who might be prone to see what you've got in that bag. Some have footlockers for you to lock things up, which means you'll need to have a lock with you.
- **Home stay (or, in Spanish) hospedaje.** These can be arranged casually or through an organization that specializes in home stays. They're a great way to really meet the locals and see how they live. Often times, you'll share meals with the family and participate in their daily routine. Most of the time, the cost is nominal (considering what you're gaining with life experiences). It's also nice to perhaps find a small gift to leave with your hosts.

Do a Google search to find home stay listings, but here are a few to get you started:

[gohomestay.com](http://gohomestay.com)  
[internationalstudent.com/homestay](http://internationalstudent.com/homestay)  
[couchsurfing.com](http://couchsurfing.com)

The latter has grown tremendously, and many cities even have regularly scheduled couchsurfing meetings so that hosts can meet and discuss the situation.

The newest outgrowth of home stay is, of course, the wildly popular **Airbnb and VRBO** ([airbnb.com](http://airbnb.com) or [vrbo.com](http://vrbo.com)). In just a matter of a few years, these sites have come to dominate the whole "stay with the locals" market—and, for the most part, this has been a good thing. Yes, there have been issues with some unscrupulous people mis-using their Airbnb privileges, and some towns and cities have started to see them as extensions of hotels and are now charging hotel taxes, which cuts down on the cost-saving potential. Still, I use them constantly, and always check out what options are available where I'm headed... and

you'll likely be doing the same. The "breakfast" part of Airbnb isn't always included, so if that's what you're looking for, go with:

- Traditional B&Bs. You'll be staying in someone's home and they fix you breakfast. Most are quite "homey" by nature and the owners or managers are usually keen to help with friendly advice. I'd say that B&B's are NOT well suited for those who want to be alone. The fun in B&B's is to chat with the owners and other guests, both at breakfast time as well as around the house. Most have some sort of living room/family room where folks can congregate, read or watch TV.
- Pensiones, Posada or Residenciales. Usually a small, family-run hotel, with prices and styles that vary wildly. Some you can bargain, others not, but these are great places to look for since in general they're plentiful and affordable. Look to these for good value and homey comfortability.
- University or college dorm rooms. It's not unusual for colleges to rent out dorm rooms during the off-season. Meals can sometimes be purchased for not much money. Again, ask and ye shall find.
- Tourist Bungalows, Guest Houses or Apart-Hotels. Another casual term for an inexpensive traveler hotel. Conditions vary wildly and you'll find everything from basic to quite posh accommodations. Some have fans, others air conditioning for warm weather, and/or some sort of heater for colder climates. Remember that central air conditioning and central heating is a luxury known to only a few countries. For much of the world, a fan or a small heater is deemed adequate and you just take off or put on clothes as necessary. Bungalows and guesthouses are also good options to look for if you're considering a longer term stay and often come equipped with a full kitchen, bedding and towels.
- Losman. Found in Asia, these are usually small, thatched roof cabins, often with attached bathrooms, called a mandi, which has a basin of cool (unheated) water. You splash yourself, lather and then rinse. Nothing is more refreshing after an all-day walk in the rain forest. Breakfast is usually included, although it's simple: yogurt, fruit and hot tea.
- Cabinas. Cabins found generally on or near the beach. They usually don't have much in the way of amenities—sometimes just a bed with mosquito netting and maybe a hammock, no water or electricity. The advantage they have is that it's right on the water.
- Monasteries. Yes, it's possible to stay in a monastery. Ask around or ring the bell once you've arrived... you might be pleasantly surprised.
- Railway Retiring Rooms. Found often in India, these are cheap places to crash if your train doesn't leave for several hours but you need to get some shut-eye.
- Airport VIP lounges. If you're so lucky as to be an elite member of an airline club, they sometimes have sleeping facilities within the lounge area, often for little to no charge. Of course, you have to get past the door person in order to get in, but it's also possible to sometimes buy a day-pass, which allows you all the privileges of being a club member. Check and see what's available: This was a life saver for me once on a long layover in Dubai, or was it Doha. Doesn't matter, you get the point.
- Mountain huts or "refuges." These can be a quite casual affair, or something very organized, but rarely expensive. If you'll be heading into the high country, check with the local

tourist office or park ranger stations.

Another organization you should know about is called Servas. This group has been around for many decades and they're wonderful. You need to apply for membership, and there are thousands of members around the USA alone. Then, as a member, you can "rent" lists of other members in the country or countries you want to visit. (Some, but not all, of the country host lists are available on a secured site.) The list has names of Servas hosts, along with addresses, phone, ages, interests and languages spoken. You contact the host and, if they're available, you can then stay with them for two or three nights—for free! It's an amazing way to meet locals and great on the pocketbook as well. Some "day" hosts cannot let you stay at their home, but they'll be glad to meet you and show you their town or village. Others will let you stay longer and you can really integrate into their life and their world.

Why do they do this? Because they want to meet people just as much as you do. They're trusting, too, in that they often will hand you the keys to their home so that you are free to come and go. They're not required to feed you, but as often as not you end up sharing some meals and cooking time. I once stayed with an architect in Buenos Aires for ten days. I had my own room and bath and ate out with them much of the time. It's polite to leave a gift of some sort when you leave, and you'll likely want to keep in touch via email or post-cards afterward.

The main office is:

U.S. Servas  
1125 16th Street, Suite 201  
Arcata, CA 95521-5585  
Phone (707) 825-1714

Their email is <mailto:info@usServas.org>. I can't recommend this group highly enough.

## **26. MEETING UP WITH PEOPLE ALONG THE WAY**

*"I am a citizen of the world."*  
Socrates

Finding like-minded fellow travelers is a natural occurrence when you're on the road. You meet at the hostels most likely, at the Laundromat, or while taking a day tour. You find out you're heading the same direction and someone finally suggests, "Hey, why don't we travel together?"

I can't encourage this sort of experience enough! Over the years, I've met and traveled with people who have become life-long friends. (Hello Julia! Hello Caroline!) When it's over, you've shared some wonderful times together and have things in common that can never be taken away. The normal rule would apply here: Make sure you both trust each other before getting too "enmeshed." Take it slowly at first, and see if you're really matched or if it was just a momentary fling. This is important because eventually you'll be sharing quite a bit, everything from splitting monetary transactions to swapping water bottles.

While traveling with folks in Morocco, we all became quite financially "enmeshed." It happened gradually... one person would buy dinner and beers for the others, someone else

would pay for gas for the VW van we had all bought together, while another needed to borrow money to make continual phone calls back home to his lovesick girlfriend. Every once in a while, we would have what we called the "transitory process," which entailed sorting out who owed who what. It was actually funny, because it got rather complicated in a happenstance sort of way. It always got sorted out to everyone's satisfaction, and I'm sure there's a story in there somewhere about keeping track of expenses—but then who wants to travel with a bookkeeper and a QuickBooks program?

There are the rare circumstances when trusting and well-intended travelers have been ripped-off by scam artists. The most extreme example I've ever heard of was when someone gained the **trust** of another traveler. He extracted his new "friend's" home phone number, and then conveniently came up with an excuse to leave. What happened next is that he called the parents of the traveler and told them that their son had been in an accident and they needed to wire him \$600 immediately. The parents, not knowing any better and in a state of shock, sent the money... and the guy was never seen again. It can happen. These folks are, thankfully, the exception to the rule, yet they still give travel a bad reputation. Don't buy into it too heavily or get paranoid, and just remember that most travelers are honest, earnest and sincere folks who merely like to know more about the world.

One tip: Just in case, you might want to pre-determine a "safe word" with a few family or friends before you leave. By that, I mean you could (or should) have an easy-to-remember word or phrase that is known by just a few of you. Then, say for example someone does call and tell a lie that you've been put into jail, the family or friend can ask them to tell them the "magic word" (or phrase), in which case they'll know that the problem is for real. Who knows, it might just help in an emergency (and possibly save everyone money and grief).

## **27. MEANS OF TRANSPORTATION/ GETTING AROUND**

*"When I was at home I was in a better place; but travelers must be content."*  
William Shakespeare, *As You Like It*

Airplanes are the fastest, most efficient way to travel (until Star Trek transporters are invented, of course), but that doesn't mean you should limit yourself to just the skies. Try EVERY mode of motivation you can!

Millions of people have a love affair with the railroad, and rightfully so. Nothing can beat the clickety-clack of a steam engine as it chugs up the mountain, and I'll never forget the sight of rolling into Cusco, Peru at sunset as the lights of the city seemed to sparkle in the high, Andean light.

Trains are a much more acceptable means of transport throughout the world, much more so than in the United States. They go places that planes never do, they're generally safe, reliable and on time, plus they're often times cheaper than other means of mobility. A bonus is they're just fun... watching the countryside roll by, eating in the dining car, sleeping (or trying to sleep) while a drunk German snores nearby. (Don't ask, but it was naturally on the way to Berlin.)

Classes of service vary wildly. There's everything to be found, from the most luxurious Palace on Wheels in India to the quaint steam engine ride along the Garden Route in South Africa or the jam-packed metro service in Japan. Indeed, you can be crammed into tight quar-

ters, with a family of eight seated across from you, including their two prize roosters in a make-shift cage and four gigantic cardboard boxes filled with all their earthly possessions. Or, you can travel in the lap of luxury eating gourmet food and being waited on by staff in white gloves. It's all there, ready and waiting for you.

If you'll be traveling in Europe or Great Britain, you might want to see if a Eurail pass or a Brit-rail pass works for you. Each allows you access to rail service, with some restrictions. For the most part, you merely have to figure out which train works for you and jump aboard. You can skip having to stand in line for a ticket, just be sure that you don't lose your pass because they're difficult to replace. If you want to cover quite a bit of territory in a short amount of time (say under three months), then these are a convenient and cost effective option. Another decision you have to decide is which class of service you'll want (first or second). First class is more comfortable, naturally, especially if you'll be taking numerous overnight trips (which saves money on hotel costs). However, you'll find most students and cost-conscious travelers in the second-class cars.



Train travel has been around for hundreds of years, and you've probably never even been on one. Now's the time.

Another typical means of getting around is by **bus**. In America, going by Greyhound is considered one of life's least desirable experiences. Thousands do it daily, but few seem to relish it. It's a shame that the bus system in the USA isn't of a higher standard.

In Argentina, for example, there are first class busses, called "cocha cama" that are two-story wonders on wheels. The seats lean back to an almost horizontal position (cama means bed), there's a steward onboard who passes out blankets and pillows and serves meals along the way. Movies are shown continually (which can be a bit of problem if you're seated directly underneath one) and the experience is, by Greyhound standards, simply wonderful.

Yes, there are bus rides from hell that can be found throughout the world. Bolivian and Mongolian bus rides can be especially grueling since the vast majority of roads in those countries are unpaved. It's also not unusual to find goats on the roof or a half-dozen dead ducks sitting next to you, as the people nearby stare at you and speak in some indecipherable native tongue. Personally, I love all of it—and you well may too.

Bus Advice: Don't be afraid to consider this affordable, how-you-say, "colorful" way to get around. Don't sit under the TV screen if possible, and stay a few rows away from the toilet as well. Other than that, there isn't much more than the proverbial choice of "window or aisle."

**Boats** are another viable transportation option, and sometimes it's the ONLY way such as in the Amazon region of Brazil.

Boats, of course, vary between a small two person dugout that you might use to shuttle across a river in Africa, up to the largest and grandest of luxury lines. Again, a little of each is a satisfying experience for any and all travelers.

Contrary to the old joke, it IS the size of the ship that matters, at least when it comes to the motion of the ocean. Say, for example, you're heading out to the Galapagos Islands off the coast of Ecuador. A mid-size tourist boat in that area sleeps 48, although they can go up to as large as 90 passengers. The size and tonnage of that size ship means that there will be little if any sway, meaning you'll be less prone to seasickness. (By the way, some people are more susceptible than others to being seasick. If you're one of them, or think you might be, be sure to ask your doctor for the correct medication. There are pills as well as wristbands that can be used which can nearly obliterate the malady, or at least make it bearable.)

The downside to the larger ships is that it can take (seemingly) forever to get all the passengers on and off the ship when you're either in dock or taking a side trip on smaller excursion boats. It's just a trade-off that you'll have to weigh for yourself.

The luxury cruise ships are an option, for those who are into it. (They're really for tourists, not travelers.) If you crave eating from morning 'til midnight, having your daily life being taken up with games, shore excursions and Vegas-style floor shows... there are options galore. There are also bargains to be had, since the industry has over-built so much, and those who are in love with these "floating hotels" will never be persuaded to try anything different.

A fine option is to consider a 12-passenger **freighter** trip. The world of freighters has grown tremendously, offering many of the amenities of cruise ships but at a fraction of the cost. Freighters ply the international waters, calling on exotic ports with names like Ningpo, Pa-peete, Setubal or Jeddah. They run the gamut from the largest of the world-class container ships carrying hundreds of containers along with several thousand cars (called container ships, coincidentally), down to smaller tankers that merely carry a few hundred metric tons of cotton (referred to as bulk freighters).

The maximum number of passengers that any freighter can carry is 12, because if you have more than a dozen paying passengers then the ship is required to have a doctor onboard (which is too great an expense for the shipper). Basically, the most important "passenger" on the ship is the cargo—the passengers are an extra source of income but not the primary source of revenue.

Meals vary, naturally. Most of the time, passengers dine with the officers, while the rest of the crew eats in their own dining mess hall. Meals are usually well prepared and thoughtful, since having a meal is one of the few distractions to "entertain" the crew and passengers.

Some freighters have just the basics: a room with two bunk beds, usually an in-room bath, laundry facilities and perhaps a TV/recreation room with a small library and a VCR. Others are getting fancier, some even with swimming pools and gymnasiums. The standard rule applies: You get what you pay for. You spend your days reading, relaxing, writing and visiting, but there aren't any planned activities. You're on your own, which can be both exciting and daunting. You are often allowed to roam the decks or you can go onto the bridge to watch the crew as they navigate the waters and plot their course. Some captains will even allow you to stay on the bridge while the ship pulls in or out of port, which is a fascinating experience.

Remember: Freighters are best suited for those with time to spare. Some of the ships make very regular runs and can be dependable, at least schedule-wise. But what makes freighters so exciting is that you never know where you might end up. The final port of call may be the London port of Tilbury, with stops in Dakar and Le Havre, but you might easily be diverted for a stop in the Canary Islands.

For scheduling, freighter lines and more advice, check out

freightertravel.com  
travltips.com  
freightermen.com  
freighterworld.com

Other common modes of transportation include:

- Renting bicycles or tandem bikes. They are a cheap, easy and healthy way to get around, and you'll never be the same after seeing someplace from the seat of a bicycle such as in Beijing, China. Hotels can sometimes rent you a bike, or they can point you to the nearest rental shop. Rarely are the prices very steep, although you may need to assure that you'll be returning the bike by giving them a credit card or maybe even your passport. Obviously, avoid the latter but be prepared to offer some sort of security deposit. You'll also need a good lock and key, which should be included in the rental price.
- Cars can be rented nearly anywhere. You'll recognize most of the major names, in that Hertz, Avis, Budget and Dollar-Rents, as well as ZipCar and Car2Go, have all expanded throughout the world. Remember that gasoline can be MUCH more expensive in other parts of the world—\$6 per gallon and up is not unheard of—which means you'll have yet another reason to appreciate the gas prices at home. It's sometimes not possible to rent a car if you're under 25, and you'll need to check with your home insurance company as to their renter's insurance policy in foreign countries. It's possible to rent without a major credit card, but only if you leave a substantial cash deposit. Most companies prefer that you return the car to the same city in which you rented it, or it might cost you extra to drop-off in another city. And finally, you should probably have an international driver's license available, either in lieu of or in addition to your state-issued driver's license. These are available most easily at a local American Automobile Association (AAA) office. (Be sure and bring two passport photos for it, too!)
- Mopeds and motorcycles are available almost everywhere as well. If you're not sure how to use a motorcycle, stick with the moped, which is much easier to learn and navigate. In some countries, the same rules of the road apply to motorcycle drivers as to automobile drivers. In others, it's every man for themselves.

A few more types of locomotion you might run into:

- Tuk-tuks are three-wheel, motorized carts that make a "tuk tuk" (or putt-putt) sound. You'll find them in certain parts of Asia. Arrange the price BEFORE you get in, and tip an extra coin or two.
- Bemos (in Asia) and Colectivos (in Central and South America) are passenger vans that prowl the streets. Someone hanging out the door or window calls out the names of the destinations, and they usually have a final destination printed on the front of the bus as well (although not always decipherable). The system is for you to jump onboard and squeeze in

amidst the other 5 or 10 or 20 already inside, and you pay only as far as you're going. I LOVE these, although they take a bit of confidence to use, mostly because you'll likely have trouble understanding where they're going (unless you speak the local language fluently of course). Ask someone standing nearby for help, or motion the van to slow down so you can ask a question while they're paying attention. Yes, you can get ripped off and end up paying more than the locals, but you're probably talking about pennies.

- Three-wheel trishaw's and rickshaw's, better known to us as pedicabs, are still used in many places, especially India, China and Cuba. These usually sit one or two people, with room in front or back for a few packages. You MUST arrange the price before entering the cab. I've found that trishaw drivers are often excellent tour guides as well. It's easy for them to turn around and point out a few of the sights, as well as offering suggestions about where to eat (usually their cousin's restaurant, naturally). Others, of course, keep their heads to the grindstone. Tip according to services and smiles rendered.

- Helicopters, hot air balloons and prop planes are used, predominantly for "scenic rides" over mountains, shorelines or glaciers. They're never cheap, but it's relative since you can also never see the same vistas from down on the ground—the Nasca Lines in Peru come to mind immediately—so consider your pocketbook but remember that memories can cost money. Ask to see their license and/or safety certificates if you have any doubts. If they can't produce them, then your instincts were probably right. Don't NOT take them just because you vaguely remember hearing some travel horror story. If there are plenty of other travelers around, you're more than likely safe to venture into the air.

- Taxicabs are everywhere, and as confusing as ever. Some cities offer excellent service, such as Tokyo with their white-gloved drivers. Others are complete nightmares, where you're forced to deal with pushy, aggressive drivers who take you on a ride-to-hell. I'd have to say that the vast majority of my taxi rides have been totally uneventful and per functionary, getting me from Point A to Point B with a minimum of hassles. Ask around, and get to know the local taxi system. In Paris, you can almost never wave a cab down, instead you have to find a taxi stand and wait for one to show up or speak to the dispatcher on the nearby call box. Other cities are divided into zones, and it costs so much for you to travel between zones. Everyplace is different; just think of figuring out the system as one more adventure.

Certain rides stand out in my memory (such as the time in Brazil I spent almost \$30 on a ride that should've cost me \$3), and every good traveler has at least one taxi story to share. Keep your wits about you, try to look for major landmarks if you can, don't yell since nothing gets solved that way, and complain to the proper authorities if need be. The oldest scam in the book is for drivers to tell you that their "meter is broken," in which case you get out and find one that works (Rio de Janeiro is famous for that). However, for every bad driver there are 10 good ones. In Fiji, I even ended up staying the night at the home of a guy who had been my taxi driver for the several days I was there. He knew I had an early morning departure, and he just suggested I stay at his home with his wife, two kids, three pigs and a rooster that woke me up at the crack of dawn. He didn't have much in the way of luxuries, or so it seemed on first inspection. Then, after a simple dinner of soup and bread, he uncovered a small television and VCR and we stayed up watching a black market tape of *Superman* and sipping Galliano (the liqueur with which you make Harvey Wallbangers).

- Most major world cities have some sort of subway system. Without an exception that comes to mind, these are fast, cheap options—all it takes is a bit of know-how and experience that you can quickly gain. London's "tube" is an excellent way to get your bearings, because its color-coded and logical. The subway lines either are named or numbered, and

quite often you can figure out the direction by looking to see what the last stop on the line is. Some have coins or tokens, others require you to purchase some sort of a card or hard ticket from either a kiosk or a ticket office. Always check and see if there's a 2-3-or-7 day pass available for purchase, which would logically be cheaper on the ol' budget. Remember, this is mass transportation, which means that the masses will be riding along. Perhaps a new subway system can seem overwhelming, but I assure you that if you take a minute to figure it out, you'll discover that it isn't brain surgery.

- Another sort of transportation you might be using would be "animal power," which is an exceptional way to see the world, albeit slow. There are the famous camels in Egypt, the elephant treks in Thailand, the horse carts in Burma (now Myanmar) and the dolphin rides in Hawaii, to name a few. The only comment I can make about any animal experience is to make sure that the animals are being treated well. You don't want to be part of the problem, if indeed the animals are being mistreated or feed improperly. Common sense should kick in here.
- Hitchhiking is somewhat more acceptable around the world than in the United States, simply because not as many people have cars at their disposal. The thrill of getting a "long haul" trip for free is alluring, and I've certainly done my share of "thumbing it." The standard safety precautions go out here: don't get in with anyone who doesn't "feel right" and make sure they haven't been drinking or doing drugs. Women need to pay special attention. In fact, women should probably just skip it unless it's the ONLY alternative.
- Then, of course, there is the cheapest, safest and most reliable transportation of all: **walking**, also called trekking or tramping. I can't stress the advantages of walking while traveling enough. You see more, you smell more, you meet more people... it's all around the best way to see the world! (Talk to anyone who has walked the Camino in Northern Spain and they'll explain the joy of walking to you.) Trekking can mean something a bit more adventurous such as mountain expeditions and camping out, or going overland from Nepal to Tibet for example. Tramping is a bit more casual version: a planned but less strenuous hike through the Lake District of England would be a good example of tramping.

## 28. MONEY MATTERS

*"Much have I travell'd in the realms of gold, and many goodly states and kingdoms seen."*  
John Keats

The days of carrying wads of cash or even traveler's checks are virtually gone. Taking cash is like gambling, can you afford to lose it? These days, the most convenient—and safest—way to go is with debit/credit cards, or whatever payment device is currently in vogue on your smart phone. Just be aware that some countries can be behind, or ahead, of the technology you're trying to use.

MasterCard and Visa are accepted virtually all over the world, with Visa perhaps being slightly more popular. If possible, try and take one of each, and also try to see that you have one of each the Plus and the Cirrus systems as some cash machines can be picky that way. Make sure your bank or credit card company has provided you with the most up-to-date version of card, be it either "chip and sign" or "chip and PIN." (I'm referring here to the computer chips implanted into credit cards, which mostly eliminates having those easy-to-tamper-with magnetic strips on the back side.)

Diners Club, Discover and American Express are accepted for purchases, hotels and restaurants, especially in the higher end bracket. They may not be as readily accepted everywhere however, because the service fees they charge to shopkeepers, etc., are generally higher.

Be sure and call your credit card company and/or bank before you leave to inform them that you will be making charges outside the country. This is very important. Without your prior notification, any foreign transactions may appear "out of your ordinary charging pattern" and the charge could be declined. At that point, you then have to make an international call to your bank or card provider to sort things out and, in the meantime, you'll have to figure out some other way to pay for that Afghan carpet.

Also, take along the out-of-country phone number for every credit card in your possession in order to report any theft or loss.

A few other notes: Most foreign banks seem to want only a four-digit PIN code, so make the change accordingly. **Cash dispensers** give you money in the local currency, and at a good rate, so be sure you're familiar with the exchange rates before you start your transaction. (You don't want to get more than you'll need, otherwise you'll pay a commission to change it to another currency.) And yes, ATM's are found nearly everywhere these days and they're usually operational 24 hours, just like home. The normal security precaution apply: Get your money and leave, don't dawdle near a cash machine and never re-count your money in full view.

One other important consideration is to know how much of a transaction fee your bank charges. A one dollar fee is acceptable but it can be as high as \$3—plus remember that you're probably being charged that much again by the withdrawal bank. Fees are increasing as banks see how much money (and profits) can be made through those service charges.

Check and see if you can get a credit card such as the one offered for Schwab and Company, for example. That particular card refunds any and all transaction fees charged by foreign banks, which eliminates any concern about taking out smaller but more frequent withdrawals from your account. Schwab isn't the only company that offers it, but it's the one I happily use.

If you insist on traveler's checks, choose Thomas Cook, MasterCard, Visa or American Express. It doesn't hurt to have a few as an emergency back up, I suppose, in case you can't find an ATM that works. Banks are generally the best place to cash them, although you'll need to be aware of the banking hours in each country you visit. Some countries have short banking hours, some are closed on weekends, and others just don't make it very convenient. Your hotel will most likely cash a traveler's check for you as well.

Regarding how much cash to take along: bring only a minimum amount and hide it well. Cold, hard American dollars are impossible to replace if lost or stolen. Bring mostly smaller bills, for tips and such, and perhaps a few larger bills. If, for some reason, you need more US dollars, you can always get them at currency exchanges or banks.

Electronic currency converters are a waste of money, in my opinion, unless it also doubles as a calculator or can mix you a martini. You'll learn the exchange rates soon enough, at which point all you need is a hand-held or watch calculator. With those currency converters you need to enter the rate first, which takes as much time as working a calculator. And, of course, there are currency converter apps for just this purpose.

Traveling in Europe has been simplified with the advent of the Euro. These bills and coins

are accepted throughout the Continent, with a few exceptions (England, for example) meaning that you only need one currency instead of the several dozen we used to have to lug around.

## 29. LANGUAGES

*"I dislike feeling at home when I am abroad."*

George Bernard Shaw

Fear of not being understood seems to be one of the prime reasons why more people don't travel to foreign countries. It's natural, I suppose, to not want to be misunderstood, or, God forbid, to look stupid. The thing is: language shouldn't be the deal breaker that stops you from considering a trip to a foreign country.

Why? Because English is fast becoming the universal language. Sorry, but it's true. Take a typical group of travelers in a hostel. There might be a few Germans, a couple from Amsterdam, three party animal Australians and a smattering of Americans, Israelis, and Frenchmen. The group decides to go out for the evening but can't decide where to go because everyone is talking in their own tongue—and quite naturally everyone reverts to English so that a decision can get made.

There are several, irrefutable reasons for that. To begin with, many if not most people around the world are in close proximity to those who speak another language. Flemish, French and German surround the Dutch for example, and many people in South Africa speak English, Dutch and Afrikaans. In the U.S.A., we have Canada to the north and Mexico to the south (and the Mexicans are all learning English!). In other words, it's not really in our culture to learn a second language.

The second reason, cause of an even bigger impact, is because of CNN and the preponderance of the internet and American television around the world. So many countries around the world have expanded or installed cable, and don't have any local programming to broadcast. Enter good ol' capitalistic Hollywood, eager to make more money selling their product to anyone who would buy it.

Ditto for Hollywood movies and video as well. International distribution has been going on for a long time, but what's been amazing is how little competition has ever emerged. Of course, the British make movies, as do the French, Italians, Indians and just about every other country. But the reality is that, right or wrong, America dominates the media world.

I'm not telling you this just to ease your conscience. You should have studied your French, Spanish or German better when you were in junior high or high school. But now it's too late, you've forgotten most of it, and you're just going away for two weeks anyway, right?

If you do decide to brush up, or start learning, a second language, try and find an instructor who is from the country you're visiting. The reason for that is because each country has its own inflections, idioms and slang, the sort of thing that only a native speaker can give you.

In any case, once you're traveling, there are a few things I'd like to mention about dealing with a foreign language:

Never just start speaking in English to a local. **The polite thing** to do is ask first if they speak English. You can ask in English or, even better, learn how to ask that question in the local language. *¿Habla ingles? Parlez-vous anglais?* — it's an easy phrase to remember.

At the very least, learn a few of the "niceties" of the language: hello, good-bye, thank you very much, please, how are you, excuse me, yes, no and, of course, how much does it cost? It probably doesn't hurt to learn the basic prerogatives as well: why? when? what? where? and the numbers from zero to ten, at least. From there you can stumble along with sign language, a map and a prayer.

Speak slowly, clearly and distinctly. Use short sentences and try to keep it to one thought per sentence, i.e. no long, string-along sentences. Also, avoid using contractions—say "I will not be able to attend" instead of "I won't be able to attend."

Remember that YOU DON'T NEED TO SPEAK LOUDER just because they don't understand you. They can hear fine, they just may not know what you're saying.

Again, let me reiterate. NOT speaking another language is NOT a good reason to NOT travel. Indeed, it gives you a leg up, a bit more confidence, and perhaps a better chance of not getting ripped off. Find a friend to travel with who speaks "the tongue" or hook up with other travelers along the way who do—but JUST GO.

### 30. PHOTOGRAPHY ISSUES

*"Unless we remember we cannot understand."*  
Edward Morgan Forster

Issues? I have no issues! But, you have your camera. What are you going to do with it?

There's nothing worse than the image of The Ugly American, or Japanese, German or Auzzie (slang for Australian) for that matter. They're the ones with one or more cameras slung around their shoulders and multiple thumb drives for more ammo. They point and shoot their cameras with abandon, showing absolutely zero concern for anyone else. Getting "that" picture is paramount and being invasive isn't a concern. And don't even get me started about selfies, and the danger that selfie sticks can cause in a crowded situation. (Be aware of your surroundings, rule #1, right?)

Think about it. Do YOU like people taking your picture? Maybe yes, maybe no, but you know plenty of people who don't. (And ugh, don't even get me started about how much it disgusts me to see people pointing their iPads up in the air... they just look silly.)

BE SENSITIVE, both to the people and the situation. Don't run up and snap someone with a colorful costume or a unique body part just because you think they won't mind. They very well might. Of course, some don't mind at all, but ASK FIRST. Be polite, be courteous.

Do you ever have to pay for a picture? The conventional wisdom is that if you pay, you'll turn them into a nation of beggars. You can always spot someone who's just out to make quick money off the tourists. Sometimes, especially in heavily touristed places where they're probably sick of seeing tourists and figure "why the hell shouldn't we make some cash off these yahoos?" How much to pay I can't say... probably just a coin or two. Think of

it as though you're helping the local economy, not turning them into beggars.

Some think they're being "sneaky" by shooting through a bush or from around a corner. They know, they've probably seen more tourists than you've seen K-Mart checkout clerks. Being sneaky makes you look bad and you give other travelers a bad reputation.

I vote for what I call a **"Responsible Tourist Moment."** That's when you've got a great shot and a willing subject—a win-win situation. You've asked and they've agreed to be preserved. It's also nice to see if they'd like you to send them a copy of the photo. I once sent a photo to my rickshaw driver in Goa, India. It was addressed to someplace under a bridge... I wonder if he ever got it? Some people are nomadic and have no addresses. But if you promise to send a photo, do it.

If you don't want any of the hassle of taking photos, then do what many do: buy postcards. The quality of the image is probably better than anything you'd get anyway.

Don't think that I'm anti-photography. I'm not, and I have boxes of photos and thousands of images in the iCloud to prove it. Taking photographs improves the power of observation. It makes you really LOOK at things instead of just glossing over things. However, just remember that you won't be able to photograph everything, and some things will just have to be mental memories.



Taking photos can do one of two things: it can make you see and understand the differences, or it can make you appreciate the similarities. Speaking of which, you might want to consider focusing your photography to one or two topics. It doesn't matter what it is — toilets, faces, cemeteries, clothes, furniture, the color red. Whatever you're interested in or passionate about works best.

Now could you move back just a few feet? And smile!

### **31. DOCUMENTING YOUR TRIP: Journals to Blogs**

*"What we learn with pleasure we never forget."*  
Charles Alfred Mercier

It's not just because I'm a writer; I can't encourage you enough to do SOME sort of journal about your trip, be it in a paper journal or an online version.

There are two basic types of journaling, as I see it: an activity diary or a journal of your impressions. The differences are fairly self-explanatory but I suggest that you do a combination of both.

With an activity diary, you're merely listing what you did each day. This information is important, and you should document it all since you WILL forget it down the road.

It's been my experience that a more intimate, detailed journal is the thing that you'll enjoy reading in later years. You definitely want to record the sites and adventures that you've had, as well as memorable meals and interesting people you met. However, take the time to go a little further and jot down your impressions and feelings as well. Try and capture that moment when you first saw the Eiffel Tower. Write a poem about the beauty of the Taj Mahal at sunrise with the oxen grazing in the distance and the chanting being done under the main dome. THOSE are the memories you'll cherish, and those are things your grandkids will want to read.

I've seen others using micro recorders as well, or even the memo app on their phone, which is certainly a viable option. Those recorders are inexpensive and the tapes are small and don't take up much room. If you're more of a verbal person than a writer, consider this option.

Websites and Blogs have gained dramatically in popularity, and it's easy to do this while you're traveling (especially if you're an intermediate to advanced computer user). Indeed, there are more people than ever who couldn't imagine not sharing each meal on Instagram, or each funny thing that happened to them on Twitter.

More and more, it's easy to find free wifi in many places, which makes the USA seem backward. Entire cities now have free internet, and most hotels, hostels and airbnb offer free wifi or for a very small connection fee. You can still find the occasional cyber café, yet the normal precautions apply (don't do any banking, or anything that requires you to enter passwords or user names, for example).

In addition to the obvious options (from Facebook, to YouTube, to WordPress), a few other travelogue websites that allow you to post your own stories include:

mytripjournal.com  
virtualtourist.com  
blogspot.com

To say nothing of the 100,000+ travel blogs out there...

## **32. EATING/FOOD**

*"Road food is always neutral in color and taste. It only turns exciting a couple of hours later."*

Thomas Cobb

Pretty sights are nice, but nothing sustains like food. The pleasures of it are immense, people go crazy for it, and none of us can live without it. Indeed, food can be as much or as little a part of your trip as you'd like, but at least widen your horizons and embrace the entire world of possibilities.

Mind you: in many places around the world, especially the Third World countries, food isn't



the gorge-fest it is in the U.S.A. For most people, food is merely sustenance. It's truly just fuel to get you through the day, and can be little more than rice and beans or noodles – day in and day out. Depending on where you go, you might quickly come to realize how much choice we have in America versus the distinct lack of options in some countries (mostly developing or Third World). It doesn't take long to appreciate the plethora of options we have, and yet we never think twice about it.

Yes, McDonald's, Burger King, Taco Bell and KFC are fairly ubiquitous in nearly every country, but that's not how most people eat. Sure, tourists eat there along with the local "hipsters" who see McDonald's on cable television. (And, I'll admit, sometimes it's nice to not hassle with anything and just "grab a burger.") But look a little deeper and see how the locals are really sustaining themselves.

Being adventurous is definitely the way to go. Visit the **local markets**

- there are few things more colorful, vibrant or interesting. (For an online guide, check out [publicmarkets.com](http://publicmarkets.com).) In some, you'll see everything from exotic spices to strange animal parts to things still alive. Don't be terrified of the street vendors, either. Look and see which ones seem to be doing the right things like staying clean and keeping food either hot or cold (as needed).

The locals have had years (generations!) of being accustomed to the local germs. You might need a little more time. Don't be paranoid, just be aware. The cleaner the general conditions, the safer you'll be. No one likes to be sick while traveling, but sometimes it's tough to avoid (such as in India).

Asking for recommendations is the smartest way to approach which restaurant to choose. Remember again that the information in guidebooks can be old, which makes it virtually useless. I never use books unless it's been published within the last year, or if I'm desperate.

Don't be afraid to just try restaurants randomly. If there are people in there, that's a good indication of quality, no matter where you live. Ask questions, ask for the specials, ask to see the kitchen first (if you dare... sometimes it's better to not know) - whatever makes you happy. Restaurants are a service-industry anywhere you go.

Try the local "specialties" as well. I've had everything from **sparrow to whale**, as well as eel, dog and guinea pig. In Indonesia, they like to show you the dog meat on the menu and then sort of "growl." I think they're just trying to get a reaction out of you, but it's interesting.

Get into the rhythm of the local eating schedule as well. Everyone knows that Latin countries like to eat late... so why not try it? If necessary, take a nap in the afternoon (when everyone else is taking their siesta) and then make a dinner reservation for 11 p.m. You'll finish dining around 1 a.m. and then you can either hit the clubs or take a stroll.

There are always unique experiences to try. In Cuba, you can dine in private residences, called *paladares*, for example. The menu is limited to what they can find in the markets with their ration cards, but usually the cooking is special, if not exceptional. Some are legal, some aren't, but ask around for the best ones. Also, be aware that YOU might be eating some pretty swell food, but the owner of the *paladares* and his/her family may well be eating beans and little else (i.e. they spend everything they have on food to feed YOU).

If you get sick of tandoori in India, or parillas in Argentina, the most common ethnic cuisine —throughout the world—is Chinese. It may not do it for you completely, but it will give your taste buds a momentary respite. (I love Inidan food, but I was never so happy to have a little break from the daily ingestion of Indian cuisine while in Delhi than to grab some greasy Chinese.)

There are a few general rules to follow regarding keeping healthy:

- Avoid anything that has been washed in water, such as salad greens, unless you're sure of the health standards.
- Go for things that can be peeled by you, such as bananas, oranges and avocados.
- Avoid ice unless it's been made with purified water. Usually, if the ice has holes in it then it's been made commercially and safely.
- Avoid uncooked foods or things that have been reheated or seem to have been out for awhile (such as at a buffet).
- Tap water is often not safe to drink, but bottled water is almost always in plentiful supply. (Now... what they're doing, or NOT doing, about those mountains of plastic bottles is another story completely. Setting up a recycling system is expensive.)
- Double-check the caps on water bottles to see if it has a firm seal. It's not unheard of for people to refill bottles with tap water and then just put on a new bottle top.
- Shellfish can only be eaten at certain times of the year, and risky at others. Ask around.
- Not all milk and cheese products are pasteurized like back home. Fresh varieties may taste better, but they may not all be safe for your tummy.
- Don't be bashful: If you're really not sure what you're eating or what they're describing, ask or better yet pop into the kitchen and lift the lids. (This I often did while in China, and I found that the chefs/cooks were almost always friendly and eager to show you their kitchen.) I know, I know, you'd never do that at home—but then you're not at home either, are you?
- Wash your hands often. Watch the use of hand sanitizers. Yes, they're useful once in awhile, but research has shown that the over-use of them can cause a build-up on your hands that can actually allow more germs to adhere to your skin, thus causing a greater

health risk.

### 33. COMMUNICATIONS

*"Don't forget to write."*  
Every mother of every traveler

Don't worry, you'll be able to communicate with the folks back home!

Of course, there's the ubiquitous email, Twitter, Facebook, Instagram and all the rest. In case you haven't been warned enough already, BE SURE to check with your phone provider to see what sort of international plan they have, and be sure to do this before you leave the shores of the USA. You'll need to know if your phone is GSM or CDMA or if it's locked or unlocked... and if you don't know what I'm talking about then you better start doing your phone research. It's somewhat complicated, or at least more complicated than you're used to at home, I'm sure. It's insane how many people have been "caught" with some enormous charge when they get home for unknown roaming charges that they didn't know they were racking up. Ditto for making sure what your hotel provides: more and more it's free wifi, but not always, and sometimes the charges can be downright obscene (\$10 a day, really??).

A few other quick notes on phones: If you're going to be staying in a country for any amount of time (say a few months or more), you might well look into buying cell phone service from their local telephone company, or at least be sure that your phone is unlocked, which allows you to buy and insert a **local SIM card**. Yes, that means you'll have a new, local phone number, but it's always a helluva lot cheaper.

Familiarize yourself with how to make international calls before you leave. You'll always need the international access number (011 for the US very often), country code where you're calling (44 for England, etc.), followed by city code (or area code) and the phone number.

Occasionally, you may have a need to go to an internet cafe, which can still be found although they're mostly found in developing or third world countries anymore. A cyber cafe can generally be found in one of two places: central downtown areas or shopping centers. Hours, needless to say, vary. Systems vary as well, but generally you pre-pay for a certain amount of time, and when it's used up you simply buy more. It's also typical to check in at the counter and then find or be assigned a free computer, and then pay when you're through. Often times, you can also purchase a snack or drink to enjoy whilst you tap away.

Many internet cafes have added telephone handsets to every computer, so that you can make internet long-distance calls (via Skype or VoIP companies like net2phone.com).

If you've brought your laptop and you don't have access to free wifi somewhere, the best places to go online are going to either be at higher-end hotels or at a friend's office or home, although let's face it, entire cities in some of the more-enlightened countries around the world now have free wifi everywhere! However, if you must, most cyber cafes aren't too keen on you bringing your own equipment into their shop. You'll need adapters, both for electricity as well as connectors, since many places don't have universal, or modular, connections. It's not unusual to find phones hard-wired into the walls, so be prepared. Keyboards at cyber cafes are most often hard-wired, so don't plan on plugging anything in

there. Repairs to laptops can be a struggle as well. Though not a scientific study, it appears as though Dell and Compaq are the most popular. Sadly, it's rare, though more and more frequent thankfully, to find Macintosh sales or repairs.

Even though I'm showing my age here, there's "**snail mail**," which is this age-old method where you write a postcard (wish you were here!) or a letter or aerogramme. Then you put a stamp on it and pop it into a postbox. The fun is really for the recipient, say your Mum or your Granny, because there's nothing better than getting a postcard from some exotic locale. Plus, there are still many stamp collectors out there who simply love adding to their collections. (Certain places such as the People's Republic of China and Liechtenstein are renowned for their stamps.)

Sure, there are a few drags to snail. It's time consuming. Writing and then finding a post office that's open (hours vary wildly, plus there seems to be fewer and fewer of them). Plus, you're never 100% sure that the letter or card will actually arrive. Letters are especially notorious for disappearing in some countries. If it's important, you can always send anything special delivery, certified or registered.

That said, I once met a guy who was paying for part of his trip around the world by sending postcards to friends, and many strangers, back home. He sold these folks on the idea that they would be getting one postcard per month from someplace in the world—and people were actually paying him handsomely for this "service." He must've had more than 100 postcards to send out monthly but, at \$10 per month per person, he had quite a little industry going. He figured that the postcards and postage cost him half the profits, but that still left him \$500 free and clear for extra traveling money.

### **34. SAFETY**

*"He that is over-cautious will accomplish but very little."*

Johann Christoph Friedrich von Schiller

The bottom line: be cautious, but not paranoid.

There are fear factors everywhere you go, and just because you're in a foreign land doesn't mean that you're in any more imminent danger. (Personally, after the bombings in Bali, London, and Madrid, it seems like anything is possible, anywhere.) You need to be street-savvy nearly everywhere these days, be it New York City, New Delhi or Denpasar.

Women have a bit trickier time in some parts of the world. Blondes might be especially attractive to some cultures, which means they attract even more attention. Women need certainly be more cautious than men. Travel in pairs or groups when possible, and keep walking if you feel you're being watched or followed. Pop into a store for a few minutes and then proceed with caution. There are several books out designed specifically for female travelers. If you're nervous, I'd recommend picking one up.

The US State Department does issue Travel Advisories and Warnings. Check with them before departing, if you think you might be in any particular danger. Their website is [travel.state.gov/travel\\_warnings](http://travel.state.gov/travel_warnings)

Remember that news may be old, and stereotypes persist. That doesn't mean that it's untrue, but things may easily have changed. Tensions may have relaxed, or it could go the

other way around. A perfectly peaceful city, beach or area has suddenly become a hot spot. Read newspapers and blogs online while you're traveling in order to pick up on the current situation. Ask around. A traveler who has just returned from where you're headed will likely have the best intel going.

(It always amazes me how much is written in US guidebooks and US government publications about "safety in foreign countries." Imagine what THEIR guidebooks must say about OUR country!)

One more time: cautious, but not paranoid.

### **35. PATIENCE ON THE ROAD**

*"Patience is passion tamed."*  
Lyman Abbott

On the whole, Americans are not very patient people. We want things fast, cheap and good —and nothing less will suffice.

For Americans, and perhaps that could be expanded to include all North Americans, travel may prove to be quite a shock. Having everything immediately is not the way the rest of the world operates. Yes, that's changing with the onslaught of McDonald's, Starbucks and Walmart around the globe. Instead of demanding it YOUR way, however, why not accept things THEIR way?

That goes from big things to small. A good traveler will learn to accept that the roads may not be paved to a high-gloss asphalt, which means that travel times may be longer. Going slower is par for the course with just about every aspect of travel.

And you should learn to embrace that, to accept it, to revel in it. Don't fight it, don't get frustrated, just **BE PATIENT**.

Computer connections are often slower than home. Getting your food in a restaurant may not happen as quickly as you'd like. Buying a bus ticket may end up taking several hours, when you know it would've only taken 10 minutes back home. Not every business has an up to date website. Hot water may not come out in a constant stream like home, if indeed it comes out at all.

What do you care? You're away from the stress of home life. You're out of the American rat race for a few weeks or, hopefully, months. You're one of the lucky ones.

Learn to take a breath. Inhale, exhale, relax. Nothing, you'll soon learn, is important enough to get THAT upset about. So it takes a half-hour for everyone to get off the ferry. Who cares if there's only one ticket-taker at the museum, which means your wait in line takes a few extra minutes. Ignore your propensity toward thinking how much better everything would run if YOU were in control. You're not always going to be in control when you're traveling... in fact, you're RARELY in control. This isn't your country you're traveling in, it's someone else's. Enjoy it.

## 36. SMALL TALK

*"A single conversation across the table with a wise man is worth a month's study of books."*  
Chinese Proverb

Conversation, or small talk, is a fine art on the road. It puts people at ease when you can have something innocuous to chat about. It's about having a sense of "social grace," or knowing how to act in public. It doesn't mean that that you have to keep all your conversations shallow. It just means that you need to think before you speak, and feel out the situation before you make a fool of yourself.

As a general rule, politics, sex and religion should probably be avoided. You never know how fervent someone might be, and a flip comment on your part might be enough to set him or her off on a tirade from which you can't escape. Also, you should know what you're talking about and not just spout off trite things that you could soon regret—the old "open mouth, insert foot."

What's safe to yak about? Things like sports, music, movies (they've seen most big hit American movies most likely), history, geography (especially where you've traveled and vice-versa), collecting (everyone collects something) or art.

Not every conversation you'll have along the way will be heavy, or even of any consequence. Much of the time, the local you're chatting with will not be able to speak more than rudimentary English anyway. It's also not realistic to think that you'll be able to get into anything much deeper than the weather and perhaps your work.

I'm not saying that you should be afraid to enter into **weightier discussions** and that everything needs to remain surface level or light and frothy. You should, however, make sure that you know and feel comfortable with the people you're with before you go off about communism, the joys of bi-sexuality or Islam. Americans, as a rule, aren't quite as politically aware, and you might easily find yourself defending something you're not exactly sure of. That said, I've also found myself being more patriotic than I ever expected merely because of the misconceptions that people have about America. Be proud of where you're from, but just keep your wits about you as well. Again: get a sense of the mood, the people and the situation before you start to spout off.

## 37. WHO YOU'LL RUN INTO

*"People don't take trips—trips take people."*  
John Steinbeck

It's true you'll meet many a character as you travel.

I tend to avoid meeting other Yanks, and sometimes even any other English-speaking travelers. Why? Just because I "know them" to the extent that we share much of the same background and heritage.

For my dollar, the fun is in meeting the locals: someone from a new lifestyle, environment or culture, those who are from another background, region, religion, socio-economic or eth-

nic heritage. Sure, it's fun to run into someone from "back home" and find out that you used to live just two blocks from each other and shopped at the same stores. But you know what? That doesn't compare to meeting a Bedouin who lives in a cave and has to go 28 miles to buy supplies for his family. In the end, you may find out that he also drives a Land Rover and has satellite television... but that's still an experience you'll never forget.

You can always spot the "real" travelers. They have small soaps (taken from hotels around the world); they have shoelaces bought in Mexico, shampoo from Chile and a funny, folding hairbrush from Japan; they don't get too excited about things, because they've "been there, done that" and things just don't throw them much; they don't yell, or talk too loud; they always have a bottle of water; and they're generally friendly and will always be the first one to introduce themselves.

I really abhor stereotypes, although we have them programmed into our brains. Still, all French aren't snobs, all Australians aren't alcoholics, not every German is arrogant and all Japanese aren't shy. Even if any of that IS true, at least find it out on your own... see for yourself.

Still, I believe wholeheartedly that true travelers are ones that see, hear, explore and ask the right questions... but they don't make any waves. In essence, the best travelers are those who follow the "prime directive"—they do not disturb or alter what they see and quietly move onward.

Try to get beyond your **pre-conceived notions** and find out a little more. I somehow find solace in the fact that people are different everywhere you go, just as much as people are the SAME anywhere you go.

### **38. SEX ON THE ROAD**

["What happens in Amsterdam, stays in Amsterdam."](#)

[A variation on a Las Vegas theme \(OK, I just made it up... but you get the point\)](#)

Hooking up, or sex on the road, is like that white elephant in the corner that no one wants to talk about. Yes, it exists, so let's chat about it, not moralize or preach about it. Hooking up with fellow travelers is a natural, quite common occurrence, and it is possibly one of the best things about travel. Not a reason to travel, but let's call it a delightful side benefit.

I'll presume that we're talking about all you healthy, single folks out there—none of that kinky stuff, although anything and everything IS available, somewhere, and if you ask the right questions. And yes, there are places in the world where not-so-nice men go to have sex with underage children or to take advantage of the plight of poor, destitute women. Their actions are deplorable, illicit and unhealthy, and there's just no way to condone nor justify their actions. May they all get what they deserve.

However... there are other far more normal aspects to sex on the road.

A common situation might be that you meet some nice person at the beach, or perhaps at the local nightclub. You click, you connect, and the next thing you know, you're sneaking him or her into your hotel or hostel. (The rules at many hostels and some hotels stipulate that only the person registered can be in the room.) It's fun, it happens, and in some ways, it's easier than home.

More than one person has told me that sex is better while you're traveling. The "game" is the same, the thrill of pursuit and those moments of ecstasy—but somehow it's better. Maybe that's because it's even more anonymous than when you're home. You don't know anyone else in town, and you'll probably never see each other again. Whether you're hooking up with a fellow traveler or a local, they most likely know you'll be gone in another day or maybe a week, then it's off to another town and the whole game starts over again. It's like an endless "summer romance," with the exception that you're in Bilbao, Bogotá or Bremen.

Don't kid yourself though. Many a traveler has been duped and/or heart broken while on the road. Foreign men and women can be heart-achingly beautiful, sexy and available. It's easy to think, "this is the one," when what the other person is really thinking is "slam bam, thank you ma'am" and they're off to the next tourist. Happens ALL the time. You surely don't need to come home with a broken heart... followed by endless lovelorn texts or emails that never get answered.

Be smart about it, ALWAYS have **safe sex**, but know that you're the one who's already got the suitcase packed. Meeting the locals or travelers from other countries can perhaps be thought of as part of the cultural and esthetic adventure of travel.

Speaking of safe sex, in case you aren't aware, AIDS is worldwide. Don't kid yourself and think that they may not know about it. The crisis is acute in Africa, South America and Asia. The people there are *very* aware of safe sex, or getting up to speed very quickly. That can be tough in places like Brazil, where people are just naturally "sexy." But carry protection along with the rest of your baggage.

Sex clubs are out there as well, naturally. Finding them online or asking around makes it simple. I'll never forget, however, in Paris, many years ago, we asked the taxi driver for a recommendation on a "fun club," only to be taken to an underground club where the champagne costs \$200 per bottle and the women just wouldn't take no for an answer. Watch yourself: there are scams galore waiting for unsuspecting tourists.

The other sex zones are places like Amsterdam (for straights and gays), Cuba (where they're anxious if not desperate for American dollars and everyone seems available), Brazil (especially the carnival towns of Rio de Janeiro, Bahia and Recife), Sitges (near Barcelona, a renowned gay resort), Sydney (incredible bodies at Bondi Beach, and very gay during Mardi Gras), Bangkok (perhaps the most famous sex city of them all, although recent reports seem to indicate that the police are starting to crack down on after-hours sex club).



I'm not recommending any of these, I'm just passing along commonly known information. Even more, safe sex is something that needs to be adhered to and followed without question. The rest is up to you.

### **39. DRUGS**

*"I might be going to hell in a bucket, but at least I'm enjoying the ride."*  
Bob Weir

The other topic that doesn't get enough discussion before travel. And I'm not a prude—I certainly have had plenty of experiences when it comes to drugs. Still, I cannot say much more than AVOID THEM when traveling (with the exception of Amsterdam or anywhere else its legal—but even there be smart about it).

If you must, rent and watch *Midnight Express* before you leave. That's the story of the guy who barely escaped with his life out of a Turkish prison. Or *Brokedown Palace*, starring Claire Danes, the story of a girl currently serving a 33-year sentence in Thailand after being used as a patsy by drug traffickers.

An American consular officer cannot get you out, because U.S. laws and constitutional rights do not cover you once you leave our shores. Bail and/or parole are often not granted, and the burden of proof can fall on YOU to prove your innocence. In many countries, food and clothing is not provided to prisoners, meaning that you have to receive help from someone on the outside in order to survive. It's also a possibility that you would be forced to pay for your own incarceration.

Many, make that most, countries are not very tolerant of drugs and drug users. In some countries, such as Malaysia, Pakistan and Turkey, drug possession can incur the death penalty. The US government is financing many programs around the world that are designed to train local authorities on drug eradication. Drugs are a problem world wide, and all I can say is "don't be a part of it."

Perhaps it's just because traveling is such a high in its own way. I've never found that anything else was necessary.

Sure, Holland pops to mind, with its hash bars and a food industry geared toward those with the munchies (think things like french fries topped with mayonnaise). Jamaica is famous for more than its music. Hash cookies used to be available nearly everyday in Morocco, and there's always the latest "pot haven," for travelers such as the People's Republic of Lao. But even in those places: be careful, will ya?

EDM and ecstasy is omnipresent as well, although the usual warnings apply; know what you're buying and taking because bad batches are always possible. There's a definite "travelers' network" when it comes to drugs, which means that the scene changes, moves and evolves and you need to keep your ear to the ground to know what's going on and where.

But you didn't hear any of that from me! THINK FIRST!

## 40. DRINKING ON THE ROAD

*"Do as I say, not as I do."*  
Thom Wise

Face it, booze is everywhere. If you wanna get drunk, you won't have any problems in almost every country, with the possible exception of the most devout Muslim countries. And even there, you can find it if you look hard enough.

One of my most memorable experiences was on a boat headed back to Athens after a side trip to Crete. A fellow traveler I had met (and whom I'm still friends with some 30 years later) decided that we would try and "drink like sailors." We actually starting a drinking contest with the sailors on board... and let me suffice it to say that they won, hands down. The last thing I remember from that night was barfing on the floor of the first class dining room and craving greasy food. And yet, it was a wild evening that I'll never forget.



If you were looking at it from a purely education point of view, it would perhaps be justified if you approached drinking from an educational point of view. It's like learning another part of the culture when you discover what incredible brews are made in each part of the world. Indeed, it is actually interesting to do a round-the-world taste test of every national beer you can lay your hands on.

Beyond beer, many countries have some sort of national drink or liquor as well. Try the aquavit in Sweden, the tequila in Mexico, the port in Portugal, or the mead wine in Ireland. It's all fun to try, while the usual warning about over-indulging goes without saying.

## 41. HOW TO GET INTO TROUBLE

*"He that seeks trouble always finds it."*  
English Proverb

There are a few easy ways to get into trouble along the road. Read these, and don't say you haven't been warned:

- Not knowing the language. OK, there's not much you can do about it with the exception of dragging a translator around with you wherever you go. (Too pricey, not practical.) The best thing you can do is learn the basics, improve your mime and sign language skills, remain patient and learn how to say "can you say that slower, please" in every language.
- Not understanding the rules. This can be as simple as not knowing what the local banking hours are, to something potentially more damaging such as arriving at a border crossing

at midnight without a proper visa. Play by their rules when you're in another country—don't pull some spoiled routine and demand that something be done your (American) way. Your best safeguard is to read, ask questions and try to gain as much information as you can before going any further. There are no stupid questions, just stupid answers, and that goes double for travel.

- Assuming. You arrive into Genoa without any Italian lira and assume you'll be able to find an ATM. Well... the banks are all on strike and every ATM within a 10-mile radius is out of currency. PLAN AHEAD. Keep your wits about you if something happens, but don't assume that everything will work out just because you're an American, or just because it always has before.
- Poor planning. Never rely on one plan. Learn to always have a Plan A and a Plan B, possibly even a Plan C (it couldn't hurt). Say you arrive in Tel Aviv and think you're going to be seeing all the major sites in one day. Come to find out, there's a national holiday you've never heard of and everything, literally everything, is closed. What do you do? Move onto Plan B and rent a car, hitting Haifa and the beaches to the north instead. If you have to adjust, don't let it throw you for a loop... it's all part of the joy of traveling. Expect the unexpected.
- Not knowing local customs, a.k.a blowing the etiquette. There are always certain customs that are common knowledge, such as never touching the head of a Buddhist or never shaking the left hand of an Arab. The list is truly endless ... like leaving a bite or two of food on your plate in Japan, otherwise the host thinks you're still hungry and you'll be given yet another plate of food to finish. Many customs center on food, possibly because people are so funny about what they ingest. Others are simply unique to a country, such as how you never bring marigolds as a host gift in Mexico since marigolds are most often used for funerals there.
- Messing with the Black Market. In general, I'd say stay away from it. Your most common association will be with moneychangers which, in some countries such as Cuba, might be nearly unavoidable. However, you have a far greater risk of being ripped off or cheated when dealing with these characters. I won't even begin to imagine the downside of what would happen if you'd be caught in an even more dangerous black market game such as drugs or guns—so let's not. Again, keep it above board.

## 42. FASTING

*"Anyone who has been fasting for a month will look spiritual and gentle."*  
Jawaharlal Nehru

This is a personal statement on my part, and I won't elaborate much on it because those of you who get it will get it, and the others never will.

If you're taking a trip of any length, say a month or more, and traveling to Third World countries, it will eventually strike you how lucky we are to be Americans. We have so little to worry about—really—especially compared to all of the hardships that much of the world experiences.

For that reason, I find it **enlightening** to fast for one or two days during my trip. Not only

does it help clear out the toxins in your body, but it also makes me appreciate my how fortunate I am. If I'm hungry, or low on money, I can always go to the bank and withdraw more money, and then go eat. It's that simple, and we hardly even think about it any longer. Most people in the world don't have that luxury. Did you know that fewer than 8% of the world's population have any sort of money saved, and live a day-to-day existence, or that \$2 a day is what millions of people live on? For that reason, and maybe a thousand others, I always declare Fast Days while I'm on the road.

When you resume eating, especially if it's been three days or longer, be sure to eat lightly for the first 24 hours. Start back with juices, then yogurt and grains, followed by a salad later in the day.

But think about it. That's all I'm asking.

### 43. GETTING NEWS ON THE ROAD

*"No matter where you go, there you are."*  
Earl MacRauch

Keeping up with the news isn't nearly as tough as it used to be. In the old days, you might be able to get some news from a major international paper that was probably a week old at best, or the occasional issue of Time or Newsweek that someone left at the hostel.

These days, breaking news is available 24/7 on everyone's phone, wristwatch, or iPad. Nearly every major city has an English-language newspaper, published weekly if not daily. It is also easy to find the international editions of Time, Newsweek and U.S. News and World Report. They will cost more than at home, but you'll have the information.



I love reading the International Herald, published by the New York Times and Washington Post in tandem—an excellent source of news. The same goes for the generally unbiased views of the Christian Science Monitor. If the local newsstand doesn't have these papers, you can always check out the newsstand or gift shop at one of the major hotels (such as Hilton, Marriott and the like).

Remember, however, that news from where you are might well be known back

home before YOU ever hear about it. Think about it: there's been an earthquake in southern Peru. You're hiking on the Inca Trail and don't hear about it for over a week, while your family back home hears about it immediately on CNN and is distraught wondering why you haven't called to tell them you're OK. There's nothing much you can do about it, except be

aware of the possibilities.

All major hotels, and even some of the smaller ones, will have cable television in the rooms. Even backpacker hostels often have a lounge with a television. You'll be able to have CNN Worldwide, as well as other excellent news sources such as the BBC (British Broadcasting Corporation), Deutsche-Welle or DW, the German equivalent of 24-hour CNN (except they present in several languages throughout the day), or Al Jazeera.

Thanks to the international level of all things American, such as HBO, Nick @ Night, Cinemax, MTV, E! Entertainment, WB, Film & Arts, Jerry Springer, The Price is Right, Fox News and Animal Planet, you'll be able to watch all those episodes of The Nanny, Cheers, Game of Thrones, CSI, The Simpson's, Teletubbies and South Park that you missed the first time around. Believe me, if American distributors can sell it, they'll buy it. Plus, it's fun to watch Seinfeld or Simpson's re-run's that have been dubbed into German or Japanese.

All of that said, you might also want to consider "how much news do I really want?" Of course, everyone wants to be up on the "latest," but it's also rather nice, when you're traveling, to get out of the news-loop. You'll find that most of it is fairly irrelevant to your life anyway, and not something that needs to eat up much of your precious travel time. Besides, when you're back home and people ask if you've seen this movie or that television special, you can always say, "Oh I guess I missed it. I was out of the country."

#### **44. GIFT GIVING/EXCHANGES WITH LOCALS**

*"Take only memories. Leave nothing but footprints."*  
Chief Seattle

Tricky issue.

Some people advocate taking along little gifts to give away to the locals as you travel. (We're speaking mostly about Third World and perhaps a few Developing Countries here. You certainly won't be handing out pens to the kids in London, I assure you.)

The type of things most commonly given include pens, pencils, postcards, pins (as in those collectible ones), band-aids, chocolate, stickers, small notebooks, cigarettes, plastic bags, coins—you get the idea, anything small and somewhat utilitarian.

But are you making yourself feel better rather than actually doing something useful? It's definitely something to think about. The argument is that, by giving something away, you're making them a country of beggars. Instead of finding work, it's easier to just let the tourists hand you things that you can then turn around and sell.



I've always found it fairly obvious when this "generosity" has gone too far by well-intentioned tourists. The kids, and sometimes the adults, get aggressive in their begging, most likely because they've seen it work. The more they beg and pressure the well-heeled tourists, the more the tourists hand out. It's a vicious circle that has to stop.

In some instances, you really ARE helping out. However, if you really want to help, I'd suggest that, instead of handing out \$10 or \$20 worth of pencils, why not make a donation of that amount (or even more!) to a local charity? Nearly every village has some sort of organization, or there are always nationally organized groups that will gladly take your monetary donation. That way, you know your money is going to a good cause and you'll feel good about it without any lingering doubts.

That said, don't feel as though you can't or shouldn't EVER give away something if you feel so inclined or motivated. Depending on where you are, it's sometimes nearly unavoidable. In India, for example, there are small coins you can purchase on the streets, the sort of thing where you can buy 20 wafer-thin coins for a few pennies and then hand them out to the people who line the entrances to the temples.

India, to further explain, has elevated begging to an art. It's well-known that families will purposely maim their children in order to make them even more miserable looking to the sympathetic tourists who will then open up their wallets even wider. Please, I don't mean to sound cold-hearted or callused, but there this is something you should at least be aware of. Fortunately, there are not many countries as intense, diverse nor complicated as India.

There are other instances where you are virtually required by custom to offer gifts. It's appropriate to offer a gift to the chief when you enter a village in places such as Africa and Indonesia. Have something ready in that case, and even be prepared for a ritual of sorts. I was once serenaded for hours by the local children in a village on the island of Nias, off the coast of Sumatra. After listening and watching for hours, they then all sat down and waited for ME to do something! They seemed satisfied after a few a cappella songs and some mime... and then went on to party until the wee hours of the morning.

## **45. MAILING STUFF HOME**

*"If an ass goes traveling, he'll not come home a horse."*  
Thomas Fuller

Yes, it can be tricky to send packages home of all that "loot" that you've bought and collected, but don't think of it as impossible.

In many cases, the first step is to find a box. (Don't laugh, that isn't always easy!) You can usually procure one by either buying a new one at an office supply store, or by inquiring at grocery or liquor stores. It can be an exercise in frustration in some countries because things like boxes are religiously recycled, but eventually you'll find some cardboard. Masking tape can be found either in the local markets or at an office supply store. (Even better, bring a roll with you when you leave.)

Check to make sure what the local requirements are before sealing your box. In some countries, the post office and/or customs people will need to physically inspect the contents of what you're sending. This can be a cursory check or a thorough going-through, so be pre-

pared. Rarely, but in some cases, you will need to pay an export duty, which is the amount they assess on top of what you've already paid. Indeed, there can be unscrupulous officials who are only looking for money to line their own pockets. If you see this, inform the authorities. That said, it might be easier to just pay the "fee" and think of it as "insurance" that your package will arrive safely.

Always register your boxes, and insist on a registration number. Granted, it may not be easy to track your package if it's lost, but a registration number at least gives you proof and a leg to stand on.

If possible, seal the boxes yourself so that you can make sure every seam and corner has been taped securely. It's also not a bad idea to scribble your signature to the seams so that you can notice immediately if your package has been opened after you left. It's not fool-proof, but it's an effective deterrent.

The post office will be able to ship your package either by land/sea, or via air. The land/sea option always takes longer, sometimes up to six months. I've been lucky and have never not had a package arrive, but maybe I'm just lucky. Some post offices also have an "in-between" option, often called something like Expedited or Priority Land/Sea. Supposedly, the packages with this option receive special handling. Look at the cost and evaluate if it's worth it.

The other way to ship is via airmail, which is the fastest but also the most expensive. Some will tell you this is the safest method, and there's probably some truth to that. However, evaluate what it is you're shipping and consider if it's worth it to ship by air.

Federal Express and DHL (plus other locally owned air freight companies) are found in most major cities these days. The safety factor is high with these companies because they give you a tracking number with which to (hopefully) find your box if it's lost, and your package arrives within days. The cost is not cheap, usually more than if you ship by airmail.

Buying and shipping antique, historic or valuable objects poses a different set of problems. Many countries have become much more sensitive and aware of their heritage being sold and expatriated. It's understandable, considering the amount of antiquities that are now sitting in museums and people's homes. The best advice is to always buy anything of this nature from reputable, licensed dealers. They will be able to expedite the handling and shipping of your objects, which usually means they will pack, ship and register your items for you. The good dealers know how to provide you with the proper paperwork, which can sometimes be quite extensive. Be aware that very old objects, the really rare pieces, are not generally allowed out of the country—it's not impossible but it must be done correctly.

Again, if you're purchasing something large, say carpets or furniture, the store you're buying from will almost always be able to ship for you. The cost to send things back can be astronomical if you ship via air, so consider the more economical method via registered land/sea. Then, it's a real surprise when you open them up in six months and remember what you'd forgotten.

With these larger, more expensive, objects, you may well have to pay an import duty that must be paid before the object can be released. This fee is a percentage of the value, and don't think that having a shop keeper under-value your item means you won't have to pay much of an import tax. The customs people know the value of imported good because they've seen it all. Honestly IS the best policy, and if you can afford the item you can probably afford the import tax.

One thing to take advantage of is something called Value Added Tax or VAT. Throughout Europe and many other places, countries add on a VAT when you purchase items things of higher value such as perfume, jewelry, leather goods, furniture, etc. If you're a tourist and taking the items out of the country, you are entitled to have the VAT refunded to you. This procedure varies but, if the object(s) are worth something, it can well be worth the time it takes to stand in line at the VAT refund desk. These are most often found at airports, although some countries (such as South Africa, for example) now have refund stations situated in shopping malls. In any case, you'll need to show that you're taking the items out of the country (meaning you're not re-selling within the country you're in). This can mean a savings to you of anywhere from 6 or 7 percent to as much as 15 percent or more.

## **46. WHAT TO BRING HOME**

*"A man travels the world over in search of what he needs and returns home to find it."*  
George Moore

Loot. Treasures. Swag. The fruits of your labors. Call it what you want, but having something to show for your efforts is a big part of any trip abroad.

Without being too obvious, look for something of significance to you, not just something that says you've "been there, done that." Find an object that has some context, an emotional tie and one that solicits a memory. What that means to me is going to be different from yours, as well it should. This is YOUR trip, no one else's, and that should extend to your gift buying as well.

Keep in mind how much longer you'll be traveling, of course, as well as how much room you have left in your bag. Some travelers are known to pack an empty bag inside of their main luggage, so that they'll have an entire extra bag just for gifts and loot. I can't imagine wanting to lug all that around for months or weeks, but to each their own.

There's always the obligatory "did we get something for Mark and Judy?" Sure, buy a little token for those you love back home, but don't feel as though everyone needs to be remembered. Think about small or easy-to-pack things such as picture books, fabric, art (which can often be taken off the frame and rolled up), CD's of the local music or small trinkets purchased at the local artisan center.

As with any shopping experience, you have options as to what you buy and who you buy it from. In general, I'd like to recommend that you buy from shopkeepers you seem to like. Why spend money with people who ignore you, or sneer when you turned away? All that does is encourage ill-mannered behavior toward tourists.

Don't aid corruption just the same. Under paying or extreme hard-bargaining can mean that someone else's sweat went so that you can have something for cheap. I'm not saying don't bargain but, in a nutshell, barter but don't beat up. When you hassle the seller until they finally say uncle, you're only making it harder on the next tourist because the seller or shopkeeper will just try and get back their lost profits from the next person.

Is bargaining allowed everywhere? Let's just say that it's far more acceptable than anywhere in America. Department stores and high-end shops aren't likely to let your bargain,

but nearly every street seller and most small shop owners will allow it, if not expect it.

## 47. CLEANLINESS ON THE ROAD

*"The real voyage of discovery consists not in seeing new landscapes, but in having new eyes."*

Marcel Proust

I'm not here to tell you that "cleanliness is next to Godliness" or any of that. However, I can say that nothing gives a worse reputation than a filthy, grotty traveler with jeans that could walk on their own and rat-nest hair. C'mon, have some pride!

It's not too tough to keep clean while you're on the road. Laundromats can be found even in small villages. Most hotels will have a laundry service of some kind, although it may not be the cheapest way to get your clothes clean. Or, if you're traveling in the Third World, you can probably ask around and get someone to wash the contents of your backpack for a few dollars.

I'll never forget seeing the gigantic **central laundry** facility in Mumbai, where all the hotels send everything to be cleaned. It was the size of two football fields and you couldn't imagine how everything didn't get lost. Yet nothing was missing when my clothes came back the next morning: dried, folded and ready to go. Each piece had a thread sewn onto it, which has something to do with how things keep from being lost.

Getting a haircut or a shave isn't ever much of a struggle either. For women, you'll be amazed at how similar the experience of going to the hair shop is, whether you're at home or in Athens. Women chatting and gossiping with a TV playing soap operas (OK, in Greek) in the corner. Higher end hotels will of course have salons on premises, but I think it's always more fun to go out, explore and find your own. I bet you'll be surprised what the cost of a pedi and a mani is as well...

I loved having a professional shave once in India. It was in an open-air market, and I was perhaps not the first Westerner to get a shave but definitely a rarity. By the end of the experience, I had a crowd of several dozen... and a great memory.

One final thought: remember you're an ambassador from your country when you're traveling, whether you like it or not. For that reason alone, keep it looking clean at least. What can it hurt?

### SIDEBAR: DO WHAT YOUR MAMA TAUGHT YOU

Everything your mom, or daddy or grandparent taught you probably goes doubly true if you're traveling:

- Floss often
- Eat your vegetables (but only the ones you can peel)
- Drink plenty of liquids, especially (bottled) water
- Get plenty of sleep
- Take a nap if you're tired
- Don't eat anything bigger than your head

## 48. TRICKS OF THE TRADE

*"Experience is one thing you can't get for nothing."*

Anonymous

I've interspersed bits of advice throughout this book, but here are a few more, in no particular order:

- Much of the world uses military time, 2200 hours instead of 10 p.m. Learn it and get used to it. Ditto for celsius vs. fahrenheit... C'mon, you know those already, right!?! (If nothing else, just remember that 40 degrees celsius is HOT.)
- Get your hair cut short before you leave, and have it trimmed as you go. It's easier to maintain, no one knows you or cares anyway, you'll use less shampoo and it's yet another experience to go out in search of a barber or hair stylist when your hair grows out.
- Think of travel as a weight-loss program. You'll likely drop a few pounds just because you're drinking so much bottled water and walking so much. If you get hit with the trots, then you'll be eating less and eliminating more which helps as well. The only people who come home with more weight are those TOURISTS who go on cruise ships.
- Learn the rules to "futbol" or, as we know it, soccer. That's the game of choice for most of the world. Sorry, you won't be able to debate them about last year's big Super Bowl upset—they won't have a clue what you're talking about. And yes, there are American-style sports bars popping up here and there so you can catch up on the sports news.
- Travelers often just go by first names, so don't take offense to that. It's not that anyone is being snobby, it's just that it's really not important. Sometimes, you might even be given a new nickname that could stick with you for the rest of your life. Hey there, Digger.
- Don't give your address to anyone unless you want him or her to show up at your door. I'm serious about this! I've cautioned about this already, but this is said in reference to having a foreigner whom you barely knew show up just when you're sitting down to dinner six months after getting home.
- Before you leave your hotel, grab a business card with the hotel name on it, just in case you get a bit too tipsy to remember your way back. That should be enough for any taxi driver to get you back safe and sound.
- If, for some reason, you want to receive snail mail letters while traveling, there are generally two methods. One is to have your mail addressed to you in care of Poste Restante, which means General Delivery. Then you'll need to find the main post office and retrieve your letters. Option number two is, if you only carry one American Express traveler's check or credit card, you'll be able to collect mail at their "Member Services" desk. Often, the AmEx office is more centrally located than the main post office. In either case, make sure they look for your letters under your first and last name; it could easily have been filed under either. To make it easier, have your friends address letters to you with your surname first, all in caps and underlined. It might help, but still no guarantees.
- One of the few good uses for places like McDonald's and Burger King when you're on the

road is that you can always count on them to change big currency. Often times, the cash machines or currency exchanges will/can only give you large bills and small shop owners or restaurants simply can't make change. However, the multi-national chain restaurants always seem to be able to give change, especially if you just buy a Coke or an ice cream cone from them, and they'll even do it with a smile.

- Sadly, **dogs** are not held in the same exalted way that they are in America. In fact, many times they're mangy and bad-tempered, as well as being quite unpredictable. DO NOT go up and pet dogs as you might at home. They may easily turn on you, and no one needs to go through a rabies vaccination regime. (Besides, you might be petting that night's dinner... but that's another story.)

- Learn to play backgammon, dominoes or chess, if you don't already know. They're popular, widely accepted games that may lead to a fun afternoon with the locals.

- Be sensitive to any and all local religions. Much of the time, you'll be experiencing something new and unique, but you need to respect it nonetheless. Always try and read up on what the main religion or practices are where you're going, but also don't be afraid to ask questions of the locals. They'll likely be proud to answer and instruct you.

- One of the oldest scams in the traveling world is the old "distraction" ploy, and you need to be aware of it. Usually what happens is one person will come up to you (in a restaurant, a railway station, wherever) and ask you a question to divert your attention. Then, while you're pre-occupied, someone else swipes your bag and runs. Even cleverer, someone will surreptitiously drop or spill a bit of something—mustard, "bird doo," or paint—on your clothing and then pretend to "help" you get it off. You're grateful... until you realize that, in all the commotion, your wallet or watch has been taken!

- If you'll be traveling for an extended period of time, or if you have any sort of complicated banking or financial picture, you'll need to sign over a Power of Attorney to someone you trust. These can be as simple or as complicated as necessary but the piece of mind is worth it. The POA can legally sign documents, be signatories on your checking account or, heck, they can sell your house for you if you're really having fun and send the check to you in Tahiti.

- **How to order a cappuccino:** This may sound simple, but there's often a system, especially in Italy, and you don't just stand at the counter and order. Normally, you go to the cashier first and give him/her your order and pay for it, and they'll give you a little slip of paper. THEN you go to the counter and give the chit to the barista, and he or she will make you your order.

## 49. THE DOWNSIDE OF TRAVEL

*"Even disasters can be turned into adventures."*  
Thom Wise

Here's some of the grim reality. I love travel, but there are still parts of it that can get you down. Maybe if you're prepared for the worst of it, the pain and the hurt won't bother you so much.



- **Crime.** This is something you'll contend with no matter where you are in the world. The only way to counter it is through "due diligence." That means be cognizant of the situation, aware, but not paranoid. Protect yourself and your belongings. Don't have a victim mentality, which means don't look for trouble to find you. Try to blend in as much as possible, don't walk around with an "I'm a tourist" attitude. Keep your wits, and be prepared for the "what if" of travel—if your passport gets stolen, what do you do? If your Visa card gets stolen, what's the number to call? Also, know your rights. You have the right, in most countries, to due process. Don't let the police tell you there's "nothing we can do." Insist that a police report be written, and follow-up on what they're doing.
- **Loneliness.** Six billion people in the world, and you're lonely. It can happen, even to the best of travelers. Maybe it's because you're far, far away from home, nobody knows you and you're feeling like the world is passing you by. Who knows the reason? The best thing to do is A) remember how lucky you are to be able to travel, B) force yourself to make a new friend wherever you are and C) call home and remind yourself why you left.
- **Tedium.** I can't call it boredom, but there is a certain tedium that can set in when you're traveling, brought on by the constant regime of bus or rail travel, finding yet another hotel and restaurant, telling your life story to the 16th person that day... oh the woe of it all. Keep your interest up by NOT falling into the same patterns you do at home. Eat at different times, seek out the variety of life not the similarities, force yourself to break your old habits and find the wonder in everyday occurrences. I guarantee you'll never find travel blasé again.
- **Naiveté.** While it's endearing to be naive, the child-like quality doesn't lend itself very well to travel. Don't be too trusting until you really know who or what you're dealing with. It's called Traveler Savvy, and it might well save you time, money and/or aggravation.
- **Nausea.** Not that travel itself makes you sick, mind you, but the change in schedule, food and drink can cause you slight-to-severe tummy troubles. You're not getting sick to your stomach thinking about how much money you're spending or questioning why you even bothered to travel in the first place. You've most likely just picked up a little bug—and that too shall pass.
- **Not knowing who to trust.** It could be as simple as not know which restaurant recommendation to use, to as important as which country to travel to next. Remember that everyone has an opinion, but you don't need to believe what everyone says. Seek a consensus: if you start hearing the same story from a number of sources, then quite possibly it's true. Rampant rumors are rife when you're on the road—so don't ever forget to **CONSIDER THE SOURCE**. Does the person seem trustworthy? Do you have any reason NOT to believe what they're saying? What does your intuition tell you? **Listen to your heart**, and don't let your mind talk you out of something because it seems more "right" or it's more "logical." Also, keep in mind that someone may genuinely want to befriend you, so don't be too distrustful. Perhaps their intentions aren't above board, and perhaps they are. Don't discount their friendship out of hand—it could lead to bad feeling, on both sides.
- **Not knowing the worst-case scenario.** Always make sure you are conscious of the downside, what's the worst thing that could happen to you. If you're carrying around \$300 with you, and it gets stolen, will you be able to survive? If your camera gets stolen, what's your back-up plan? If you go river rafting in a remote area and, God forbid, you get hurt, who's going to help you get help?

- You get tired of defending the United States, or you get tired of explaining capital punishment and gay marriages. Even the least patriotic person will occasionally find themselves trying to defend their country... especially with political students or alcohol-induced folk from anywhere. Do your best by reading up on the issues and at least be able to form an opinion. Part of the problem lies in the fact that many cultures see Americans as ignorant, ill informed or blasé. Make an effort to at least speak knowledgably about the issues. (Good luck with capital punishment. They think we're barbarians!)
- Over-amplified emotions. Things like bigotry, prejudice, insensitivity, jealousy, empathy, sympathy, resentment—and on and on—can all become overwhelming. You see and feel more than you do when you're safely at home, but that can occasionally get you down. Relax, absorb and process what you're seeing and experiencing. Write things down in your journal or write letters home. Talk to others - don't let it bottle up inside of you.
- Burn out. It happens to the best of travelers. You're simply "full up" from seeing, doing, experiencing so much. You're overwhelmed. You can feel the weariness in your bones... and all you want to do is be home and sleep in your own bed with your own pillows. In my experience, this is a momentary situation and can easily pass once you've re-charged your batteries on the beach or at a spa. Just think about it before you fly home and then wish you were back at it a few days later. ("Oh my God, what have it done?!")

## SECTION THREE: FINAL THOUGHTS

### 50. COMING HOME

*"The journey, not the arrival, matters."*

T.S. Eliot

There are a number of issues to deal with here:

You're thrilled and proud, and you can't wait to come back and tell all your friends. Get ready for this; they may not give a damn. They may be jealous, they may be whatever, but I've experienced this first hand. It can both be a shock as well as hurt. There will, of course, be a few friends, maybe even a travel club or network of friends who love, love, love travel. Embrace them, and forget the rest. And, of course, your mom will listen (because she'll just be glad you're home safe!)

I've also experienced the blasé attitude of people toward pictures on your phone or iPad as well. Some people love to look at pictures, but they're in the minority. It's an old joke, having to sit through the Jones' pictures of their trip to the Sinai... everyone gets drunk and no one pays attention. Again, solace yourself with the fact that SOME will want to see it, at the very least your most polite friends.

Don't be surprised if people don't ask you lots of questions: they probably don't want to know. It's tough to swallow after having just immersed yourself with Greek culture or the stories of the Incan empire. But, believe it or not, most Americans are terrible about history and geography and they probably can't begin to process or even place what, where or who you're talking about.

You'll likely also need to deal with those who say, "You mean you didn't see (fill in the blank)?!?" It's said with this sort of "how can you go to Italy and *not* go to the Leaning Tower of Pisa?!" Your first response will likely be, "I couldn't see everything," but unfortunately that usually doesn't suffice, since the Leaning Tower is probably the **ONLY** thing that idiot knows about Italy and he wants to show off with that juicy morsel of geography. You and your better traveler friends **KNOW** that you can't see **EVERYTHING**, no matter how much time you spend living out of a suitcase. Just smile, and say, "we'll have to remember to see that next time," with the emphasis on **NEXT**, since you **WILL** be traveling again, now won't you?

Another pitfall to avoid is to become a "jaded" traveler, especially when you've only begun to see the world, but you think you know it all. There will always be another traveler who has seen and done more than you, so don't play that game. You might well have seen more of the world than many of your friends, but that isn't an excuse to seem ho-hum about their lives or their voyages.

The other irritating travel snobs are those who play the "Can you top this" game. What that consists of is them trying to out-do you in some aspect. If you climbed six mountains, they've climbed seven. If you dined at the Connaught Hotel in London, they dined with the **QUEEN**. My advice is to not play the game at all, since you're bound to lose. They just want to show you how much they know, or how much they've spent, and it's really quite an unattractive sport that no true traveler would ever lower himself or herself to play.

## **51. ADJECTIVE INTERPRETATION, or, An idea can drown in a sea of words**

*"Travel tends to magnify all human emotions."*  
Peter Hoeg

(This list is "tongue in cheek." There's no science to what I'm saying, all of this is merely a product of my years of traveling, so it's clearly personal and subjective.)

As you go around, you'll hear things described by the locals—anything from a local monument to a battlefield to something truly spectacular such as a Gothic cathedral or an award-winning botanical garden. Some of these places may truly be astounding and well worth the time and effort it takes. Others, I'm afraid, are not all that they're cracked up to be. Locals are always proud of whatever they have, and bless their hearts. But c'mon, let's face reality. For that reason, I gingerly present this list of adjectives, and the "real" description it's meant to imply.

Imagine if you ask about a museum you've read about, and:

Someone says it's... / And what they really mean is...

Fine / Don't bother, it's barely worth your time

Good / A non-committal OK so don't go out of your way

Really Good / It's worth seeing, could be a best bet

Nice / The area around it might be nice but not more

Pretty / Think of your granny's rose garden

Brilliant / Means it's most likely something to pay attention to (although watch it because

the Brits overuse it)

Excellent / They probably just don't want to appear stupid so they use a trite word like this

Okay / Nothing could be worse, blah, ho-hum

Fantastic / It's dangerous or a special thrill in some way

Sweet / Only your spinster aunt would be happy here

Terrible / Run down but could have a kitsch value

Amazing / Has something you've never seen before

Wild / It's surprisingly good, and could be dangerous

Incredible / Check it out, could be really good

Sucks / Really bad, avoid at all costs, travelers beware

Deplorable / A snob term for something "beneath them"

Appalling / Something hard to look at, often used for zoos

Not very nice / Could have some sexiness to it, if you're lucky

Splendid / Possible historical value, a step above sweet

Charming / You'll need saccharin, it reeks of quaint

Horrible / Has something teenage boys would love to see

Educational / Boring and quite possibly musty

Enlightening / Boring, but with a message

Dreary / Poorly lit

Great / Means almost nothing, totally non-committal, which means be cautious as in "we were suckers and went, so should you"

## 52. WHAT I LIKE ABOUT TRAVEL

*"All the beautiful sentiments in the world weight less than a single, lovely action."*

James Russell Lowell

- The little unexpected things you'll find: tile-patterned sidewalks, a smiling street seller at midnight, and a song drifting out of a piazza window
- Hanging out in the parks or the central plazas for hours, just watching the world go by
- When someone unexpectedly turns out to be nice
- Waiters delivering coffee on silver trays (with plastic dome tops)
- Sunday strolls with the family
- Finding a place without McDonald's, Starbucks or 7-11's
- A smile—it's amazing how far they can go
- How street vendors can just cover up their wares and no one will touch it
- Fresh fruit every morning, and cheap
- Drivers who turn out their headlights at stoplights to save them
- The fact that you're no one's brother, sister, father, mother, son or daughter when you're traveling... you're just YOU
- Graffiti: The silent, visual "screams" of the people

## 53. WHAT I DISLIKE ABOUT TRAVEL

*"The minute you begin to do what you what to do, it's really a different kind of life."*

Buckminster Fuller

- The trash that can be overwhelming
- The traffic, especially when cars are given right of way over pedestrians
- Being lonely sometimes, or thinking I'm alone or isolated
- Not knowing what to do about beggars, feeling helpless
- Scowls from the locals, for no apparent reason
- Surly waiters (they're everywhere, except perhaps Thailand)
- Losing perspective, forgetting where I am, how lucky I am (how lucky ANYONE is who get to travel)
- Being ripped off, by taxi drivers, shop keepers, whomever
- Holes in the sidewalk, which causes you to look down, not UP
- Constant noise: from street hawkers to traffic
- Not knowing what's being said (sometimes about you)
- Seeing the duplication of America, especially shopping malls, McDonald's, Nike, KFC and Pringles... do they need to be everywhere??

#### **54. 106 USES FOR A FRISBEE**

*"Whatever you can do, or dream you can, begin it. Boldness has genius, power and magic to it. Begin it now."*

Johann Goethe

If there's one, indispensable object THING that every traveler needs, it's a Frisbee. A Frisbee is magic: it can do anything. It could be the perfect gift to any potential traveler.

A Frisbee's potential includes:

throwing  
 air movement  
 cutting board  
 tortilla rolling device  
 measuring device  
 prop  
 seat on wet ground  
 protective barrier  
 striking surface  
 seed sorter (wheat from the chafe)  
 dish under plant  
 sunshade for eyes  
 plate  
 tray for items at airport x-ray  
 drinking vessel  
 dip platter at parties  
 lid  
 spanking device  
 drum  
 speech-cloaking device  
 gold pan  
 water bailer on boat  
 fan  
 paddle

deflective device  
peek-a-boo aid (for babies)  
"coin toss" alternative  
advertising space  
visual art display  
use of recycled plastic  
sled  
snow shoes  
breast protector  
floating candleholder  
dog toy  
junk holder  
dredging device  
tadpole catcher  
small boat for animal  
message sending device (note inside)  
circle tracing device  
pancake batter measuring device  
ash spreader  
serving tray  
kitty litter box  
cake platter  
cookie carrier  
scale/balance  
dartboard  
percussion rattle (with rocks inside)  
wind gauge device  
wheel for small, lightweight cart  
strainer  
rolling ruler  
cookie cutter  
washbasin for shaving  
costume halo  
fake UFO  
juggling  
"grape leaf" a la Adam & Eve  
shovel  
traction device for car in mud  
bedpan  
windshield wiper  
spittoon  
ashtray  
rain cover  
toenail clipping catcher device  
wedding favor  
stepping stone for muddy trail  
surface smoother  
stirring device in bath  
rug beater  
lampshade  
self defense  
tidily wink catcher  
card table

paperweight  
trophy  
souvenir  
gift  
party enhancer  
fire fanner  
leak catcher for oil changes  
flatulence fanner  
hood ornament  
pooper scooper  
dog drinking dish  
smoke signal device  
lap writing surface  
hard hat  
dark Frisbee w/ water is a mirror  
signaling device  
sundial  
bird bath  
spanking prevention device  
bird feeder  
church collection device  
street beggar device  
painting palate  
drink coaster  
sand castle builder  
puke catcher  
bug capturing device  
Jell-O mold  
bug smashing device  
latrine cover  
hunting aid for flushing out animals

(With assistance from Benjamin Gaylord.)

## **55. SELECT TRAVEL MOVIES**

Travel has always been a ripe source of material for moviemakers. Many a movie has a European or Asian background, and all of them can help you get excited, or get some perspective on what you're headed for.

Here are a few that I'd suggest you try and see:

*Eurotrip*  
*If It's Tuesday, It Must Be Belgium*  
*Summertime*  
*European Vacation*  
*Around The World with Orson Welles*  
*Around The World in Eighty Days*  
*The Trip*  
*Wide, Wide World*

*An American Werewolf in Paris*  
*Last Tango in Paris*  
*Amelie*  
*Roman Holiday*  
*Who's Killing the Great Chefs of Europe*

## **56. MORE GREAT WEB SITES**

First and foremost, check any and all of the great search engines out there for travel information. Just type in TRAVEL at any one the following and see where your search leads you: <http://www.google.com>, <http://www.altavista.com>, <http://www.askjeeves.com>

Also, check out any and all of the following as well:

[justgoglobal.org](http://justgoglobal.org)  
[letsgo.com](http://letsgo.com) (from the Let's Go book folks)  
[weather.com](http://weather.com) (includes 10 day forecasts for cities around the world, averages and records, etc.)  
[crazydogtravel.com](http://crazydogtravel.com) (GREAT site!)  
[ciee.org](http://ciee.org) (council on international exchange: travel, exchanges, study programs etc.)  
[travelsites.com](http://travelsites.com)  
[roadtripstore.com](http://roadtripstore.com) (check out the tacky tourist trinkets)  
[planetrider.com](http://planetrider.com) (has a currency converter, weather links and an interesting lifestyles section)  
[away.com](http://away.com)  
[magellans.com](http://magellans.com) (for travel clothes, accessories, etc.)  
[travelsmith.com](http://travelsmith.com) (for clothes, accessories, packing lists, etc.)  
[elderhostel.org](http://elderhostel.org) (educational needs for those 50 years and older - their tagline is "adventures in lifelong learning")  
[raileurope.com/us](http://raileurope.com/us) (maps, youth passes, 24 hour processing including BritRail and Rail 'n Drive)  
[seat61.com](http://seat61.com)  
[heifer.org](http://heifer.org) (a great non-profit organization)  
[volunteermatch.org](http://volunteermatch.org)  
[servenet.org](http://servenet.org)  
[idealist.org](http://idealist.org)  
[charityfocus.org](http://charityfocus.org)  
[oneworld.net](http://oneworld.net)  
[unv.org](http://unv.org) (United Nations volunteers)  
[travelchums.com](http://travelchums.com)  
[goabroad.com](http://goabroad.com)

## **57. RECOMMENDED READING**

*The World Awaits: How to Travel Far and Well*  
Paul Otteson, Avalon Travel, 2001

The Global Adventurer's Handbook: How to Plan, Pay For, and Enjoy Your Extended Vacation

John Malarkey, Perpetual Press, 1995

The Frugal Traveler: How to See More of the World for Less

Caroly Jones, Newjoy Press, 2000

The Power of Travel: A Passport to Adventure, Discovery, and Growth

Steve Zikman, Jeremy P. Tarcher/Putnam, 1999

World Stompers: A Guide to Travel Manifesto

Brad Olsen, CCC Publishing, 1999

Dining With Headhunters: Jungle Feasts & Other Culinary Adventures

Richard Sterling, The Crossing Press, 1995

The Art of Pilgrimage: The Seeker's Guide to Making Travel Sacred

Phil Cousineau, Conari Press, 1998

Arthur Frommer's New World of Travel: A Guide to Alternative Vacations in America and Throughout the World

Arthur Frommer, Prentice Hall Press, 1991

Don't Know Much About Geography: Everything You Need to Know About the World but Never Learned

Kenneth C. Davis, Avon Books, 1992

You Can Travel Free

Robert Wm Kirk, Pelican Publishing, 2002

(Eek, this is an old list! There's tons of new books out there... Do some sniffing!!)

## **58. 11 RULES TO LIVE**

1. Always have a current passport
2. Always drink good champagne (the cheap stuff gives you headaches)
3. Use protection
4. Appreciate nature
5. Learn how to dance
6. Always wear sun block
7. Listen to your heart, not your mind
8. If the shoes aren't comfortable when you try them on, don't buy them
9. Try everything... once
10. Remember that life is a roller coaster, so enjoy the ride
11. **Pee whenever you have the chance**

## 59. ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Thom Wise has been traveling internationally since 1972, when he took his first trip to Europe via Icelandic Airlines for \$165 RT. Since then, he's been to more than 70 countries on six continents. He is an award-winning journalist, having written about travel, theater and restaurants for Denver's *Rocky Mountain News*. His other credits include contributing editor for *5280: Denver's Mile High Magazine* as well as being a regular columnist for *Colorado Homes and Lifestyles*. Later he was the editor of both *Las Vegas Magazine* and *Las Vegas Life*, both of which had an extensive make-over under his watch. Wise was a radio talk show host in the Denver market for more than eight years (KOA, KHOW and KTLK), and has interviewed celebrities and "the common man" alike. He is currently a Digital Communications Specialist with FE-MA, which means he waits around for disasters (and travels when the coast is clear).



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## THE END

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Email to [wisethom@gmail.com](mailto:wisethom@gmail.com)

Mobile: 303-927-9767