

Travel Preparation Guide-International

Pre-Trip Research & Entry Requirements

Visa/Entry Requirements: Every country has its own rules, and they can change. Take time to verify visa requirements, length of stay limits, and passport validity so there are no surprises at the border.

Passport: Make sure your passport is valid for more than six months before you enter a new country. Be sure to make copies of your passport and have an extra passport photo to expedite the process of replacing a lost passport.

ETIAS: If traveling to Europe, confirm whether you need an ETIAS authorization before departure. It's a simple step but missing it can disrupt your plans.

Schengen Area: Know the rules about how long you can be in European countries without a Visa.

STEP: Registering with the Smart Traveler Enrollment Program allows your embassy to contact you in emergencies. It's a quiet layer of security that often goes unnoticed until it matters.

Health, Safety & Awareness

Safety Rating: Understanding the general safety of a destination helps shape your behavior, not your fear. Awareness allows you to move confidently and make informed decisions.

Vaccines: Be sure to get any necessary vaccines before traveling to a new location. Do this ahead of time as some vaccines have multiple doses that must happen within a certain timeline.

Prescriptions: Unless you are traveling with Schedule 3 prescriptions, you shouldn't have any problems taking prescriptions into any country. But be sure to take a copy of your prescription with you. Also, check the rules for each country you enter.

Healthcare Options Close to Accommodation: Knowing where the nearest clinic or hospital is provides peace of mind. It's a small detail that can feel very large if you ever need it.

Weather: Weather affects everything from packing to daily plans. A quick check helps you prepare realistically instead of reactively.

Seasonal Events or Holidays: Festivals and holidays can enrich your trip or complicate logistics. Knowing in advance helps you plan around crowds, closures, or unique experiences. Know before you go.



Local Scams: Always check out each area for the most current scams that are being run. Knowing what to expect will help keep you from being scammed.

Navigation & Logistics

Plot Sites and Activities on Google Maps: Saving key locations in advance creates a personalized map of your trip. It helps you see proximity and avoid unnecessary backtracking. This can also help you to determine where you want to stay.

Download My Google Maps: Offline maps ensure you're never completely lost, even without service. It's one of the simplest ways to stay oriented in unfamiliar places.

Address on Card for Driver: Having your destination written down avoids language barriers and miscommunication. It's a simple backup that can save time and stress.

Tripit: This website (and app) keeps all confirmations in one place. You can send itineraries and confirmations from your email directly to Tripit, reducing the chance of entering information incorrectly. It allows you to access your itinerary quickly when needed. There is a free version that works great, but the paid version is well worth the minimal cost as it provides real-time flight data.

Multiple Document Backups: Be sure to save itineraries and confirmations in more than one place. Sometimes you will have limited data and Wi-Fi access. Saving items in photos or your phone wallet will give you peace of mind.

Cultural Preparation

Learn Phrases: Even a few local words show respect and openness. It often changes how people respond to you in subtle but meaningful ways.

Become Familiar with Currency: Understanding the value of money in a new place helps you make quick, confident decisions. It also protects you from overpaying without realizing it.

Get Local Currency: Having some cash on hand when you arrive gives you immediate flexibility. Not everywhere accepts cards, especially for small transactions.

Download a Currency Converter: There are lots of apps that you can download that allow you to convert currency in the country you are visiting. This will help you know how much something is costing you in your own country's currency.

Look Up Tipping Rules: Tipping customs vary widely, and assumptions can lead to awkward moments. A quick check helps you align with local norms.



Planning & Inspiration

Best Area to Stay: Where you stay shapes your entire experience. Researching neighborhoods helps you match your environment to your travel style.

Watch YouTube Videos: Visual content gives you a feel for a place beyond written descriptions. It helps set expectations and sparks ideas you may not have considered.

Check LonelyPlanet.com: Guidebooks provide curated, reliable overviews. They're especially useful for first-time visits or when you want a balanced perspective.

Social & Connection

Look for Meetups: Travel doesn't have to mean isolation. Meetups create opportunities for connection, learning, and shared experiences.

Join Facebook English-Speaking Groups: These groups can be incredibly helpful in non-English-speaking areas. They offer local insights, support, and sometimes instant community.

Communication

Phone & Data: Be sure to check your phone plan to confirm what your plan covers while traveling abroad. Knowing this ahead of time will save you money and headaches.

Add an eSIM for Data: Reliable data access makes everything smoother, from navigation to communication. Setting this up ahead of time avoids scrambling upon arrival. Even with the best phone plans, there are times when having a different source of data comes in handy.

Download WhatsApp: This is a free messaging app that lets you send texts, make calls, and share photos or videos over Wi-Fi or data instead of relying on traditional SMS. When traveling globally, it's especially useful because it works across countries without extra fees, making it easy to stay connected with people, hotels, and tour operators using just an internet connection.

Download Google Translate: Offline translation can bridge communication gaps instantly. It's one of the most practical tools you can carry without taking up space. Be sure to go into the app and download the languages you will be needing while traveling.



Credit & Debit Cards

Credit Cards: Choose a credit card that will give you points for each dollar you spend. Those points can be transferred to hotels, airlines, car rentals and much, much more. Choose a card that carries great travel insurance and that also does not charge foreign fees.

Be sure to take at least 2 credit cards and 2 debit cards and keep them in separate locations so that if one is lost, eaten by an ATM machine, or stolen, you will have another card to use.

Two of the credit cards I carry are the **CapitalOne Venture Card**. It provides the best rewards program. The other is the **Chase Sapphire Preferred** card. It provides the best travel and health insurance. Both have a small annual fee but are well worth it.

Debit Cards: Choose a debit card that either does not charge for use at a foreign ATM or one that reimburses you for that fee. These are primarily associated with an investment advisor (i.e. Edward Jones, Charles Schwab, Fidelity, etc.)

Note about ATMS: Be careful about which ATM's you use. Choose on that is attached to a local bank and that is in a location that is safe. When removing cash, you will be asked if you want the bank to convert the money for you. Always decline, as this allows the bank to charge you a higher rate. (This also sometimes applies to places where you use your credit card.)

