



Top 25 Tips for Traveling Abroad: Your Ultimate Guide

Description

Increase your odds of smooth travels and reduce stress by using our top 25 tips for traveling abroad.

“Traveling—it leaves you speechless, then turns you into a storyteller.”
Ibn Battuta

Travel chaos over the last couple of years has sadly discouraged many people from getting out after years of being held back due to COVID-19. The stories of lost luggage and crowded sites have deterred even more people. This year is shaping up to be the busiest ever on record. If everything else is lined up in favor of traveling, no situation should keep you from heading on a long-overdue adventure.

First, remember, though the stories sound awful, most flights are still taking off on time, and most people’s luggage is getting to their destinations. Second, life is too short to keep putting off what brings you joy and excitement. What next year brings is unknown, and if you are ready to go now, then do it. Travel always comes with some risk and potential chaos, but learning how to mitigate those risks is vital. These Top 25 Tips for Traveling Abroad provide you with every chance of success and give you as much control as possible. It has worked for us for years.

Another reason we pulled this together is people ask us how our travel is so stress-free and always seems perfect. That isn’t entirely true, as many crazy moments and problems arise during our travels for the blog and our personal lives. We have always handled these events gracefully and with a go-

with-the-flow attitude. One way we continue to be successful is by following the 25 Tips to reduce travel stress. Some are easy, and some will take practice. Our goal here is to provide you with the tools and inspiration to make your travel dreams a reality.

Even with the best-laid plans...

Remember that even if you do everything on this list, things can still go wrong or get messy. There are no guarantees in anything in life. So make the best of any situation, learn to go with the flow, and embrace whatever your travels throw at you. Turn it into an adventure that will be part of the fantastic story you will tell. Let's delve into our top 25 Tips for Traveling Abroad.



1. If possible, reserve airline tickets, hotels, cruises, and rental cars at the source.

In other words, if flying United book through United, using Avis book through them. We prefer Hilton hotels, so we book directly through Hilton. In the case of cruises, please go through the cruise line

itself. They are more likely to take better care of you than if you used a third party. If their issues arise, especially during travel, you can deal with them directly, not through other parties speaking for you. You might also be less likely to be bumped off if the flight is overbooked.

No matter how you place your reservations, verify every couple of weeks to see if everything is in order, especially for airlines. Are the dates correct, and is the reservation still showing up? If you have a connecting flight on a different airline, look at that airline's website to verify the flight is still there. Don't wait until right before departure. Several years ago, a connecting flight on a different airline was canceled, but the airline we booked the flight on never notified us. We only noticed it when our final destination was no longer the same. Our trip was only four weeks out, and because we caught it ourselves, it gave us plenty of time to find alternatives.

Hotels are especially important to confirm

It is essential to confirm with hotels you have reservations with before the trip. You can do this directly with the hotel or verify that your reservation online is still there. Look closely at the dates and room category. Some people recommend checking if you can make new reservations at the hotel you are staying at; in other words, verify it is open. This is a good idea, especially for privately owned, smaller boutique hotels. If you are on an Airbnb or VRBO, write to the contact person to confirm that your arrival is all in order.

2. Book connecting flights with at least 3-hour layovers if non-stops are not available

We have been doing this long before all the recent chaos, both for international and US-based flights. So far, it has never failed that we and our luggage make the connection. That is, one of us is flying at least once a month!! Our first choice is always non-stop, if possible. Sometimes, they cost only a little bit more, but your time and stress should be your primary concern. Plus, like most of us, our time for travel is limited. Having a whole extra day because we arrived in the morning vs. late afternoon can be huge! Also, the less time you have inside an airplane, the better your body will adjust to the changes in time. The dryness of airplane air is harsh on a body; spend the least time possible at 37,000 feet.

Based on our destinations, in most cases, we have to go over. We always aim for at least a 3-hour layover. Often, it is about 4 hours. Most international airports have a ton of great shopping and places to eat. There is sometimes entertainment, workstations, and places to lay your head and put up your feet. You get free drinks, food, and a pleasant waiting environment if you have access to airport lounges. We find that time goes by quickly, and we can get some work done. It is worth it versus missing a tight flight, avoiding the stress of trying to catch a flight, and worrying if our luggage made it.

Show up early

Along with long layovers, showing up early for your first flight is a great idea. We have been arriving at least 3 hours early for international flights for years. Checking in before the rush comes will increase the chance that if TSA pulls your luggage for an extra check, it can still make the plane. A bonus is spending time in the free airport lounges we have access to due to our travel credit cards. We find that when we get on that plane, we are relaxed and start the trip on a positive note. Want to get free access to travel lounges and other free perks? Check out our blog post.

[*Want to travel for free? Let us show you how*](#)

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Picture from Global Entry Website

3. NEVER EVER leave home without travel insurance.

We all have home insurance, though it is rare for a house to burn down. Travel insurance is no different and is there for the big and little stuff that can occur. We know many stories of people who were financially devastated after a crisis while traveling. Once that flight is booked, our next step is buying travel insurance. We have become loyal fans of [Squaremouth.com](https://www.squaremouth.com) and highly recommend them. They have many companies to choose from and advocate for you when needed. It is essential, though, to do your research and closely look at reviews before purchasing a policy. It tends to be inexpensive for great coverage if you know what to buy and how to compare pricing.

Many say I have travel insurance through my credit card, so I am covered. We do, too, but it is insufficient for medical incidents. Become an empowered consumer and learn why having a separate policy is essential. Check out our blog post, [Travel Insurance: Learn How to be a Savvy Consumer](#), to learn more about the best insurance at a reasonable cost.



4. Register with the [STEP](#) (Smart Traveler Enrollment Program)

[STEP](#) is a free service provided by the U.S. Bureau of Consular Affairs under the auspices of the U.S. State Department. Protecting the lives and interests of U.S. citizens abroad is a core mission of U.S. Embassies and Consulates. [The Smart Traveler Enrollment Program \(STEP\)](#) allows U.S. citizens and nationals traveling and living abroad to enroll in their trip or extended stay with the nearest U.S. Embassy or Consulate. They can provide important safety and security information and support during

crises or emergencies. We have been registering for years. We especially appreciate that we get an advanced notice via email of planned demonstrations in each country so we can avoid the area.

The process is simple and quick. We feel so strongly about this program that we wrote a blog post about it. Check out this link: [Smart Traveler Enrollment Program \(STEP\) for U.S. Citizens Traveling Abroad.](#)



5. Use credit cards for almost all purchases and get foreign currency before you leave



We get a few hundred dollars worth of currency at our local Chase bank before leaving our home country. This provides us with cash in hand when we arrive, and it will cover tips, small purchases, and those rare places that don't take credit cards or use Apple Pay. Our norm is to get about \$200 worth of currency. We often never need to get more cash once there. In most cases, we come with 50% of what we left with.

Once at your destination, use your credit card for everything. Europe, Central, and South America have mostly become cashless societies. For added security, set up Apple Pay, Google Pay, or Samsung Pay prior to leaving; they are free of charge. Many countries prefer touchless payment, and if you use such options as Apple Pay, your number is encrypted; the vendor never learns your total number. Your card can't be scanned or stolen, then. [Learn more about touchless payment options here and how safe and secure they are.](#)

During all our travels, it is rare for a place to not take Apple Pay, even in small villages. In most European nations, it is preferred and what most locals use, even in a cash society like Germany. In Paris recently, when buying a crepe for 3 euros, I tried to pay with cash, and they asked if I could make a touchless payment instead. On a trip to Easter Island, 90% of the restaurants and stores took Apple Pay. Many road tolls and parking meters can only be paid by credit card. We found that on public transportation, you can often use Apple Pay to pay your fare.

Be prepared for loss or theft

Always have more than one card with you and keep them stored separately in case your wallet or phone is stolen or your card is compromised.

While traveling abroad, it is crucial to check your credit card activity every few days to ensure only your charges appear. Never use your debit card as a credit card; it gives scammers access to your bank account.

While at it, this would be a great time to apply for a travel credit card. One that provides nointernational fee exchange rates, fantastic travel perks, and reward points for future travel will bereplaced if lost or stolen cards are overseas. It also provides car rental and other travel insurance forfree. We are huge fans of Chase Sapphire Reserve credit cards, which are geared toward travelers.They also have sweet sign-up bonuses that translate to free travel or money back in your pocket. [Check out our article on the best travel credit cards.](#)

6. Invest in some Apple AirTags



Apple AirTags

These AirTags are a new hot travel must-have. You just put an AirTag in each piece of luggage you take with you. These have proved invaluable for many. It tracks where your luggage is anywhere in the world. We know of cases of airlines telling people that their luggage did make it to their destination when the air tag shows it is right there in the airport. It also directs you to it if you need to find your suitcase in a sea of bags. Click the [Apple AirTag Amazon link](#) here to learn more about them. The price on Amazon for an AirTag runs between \$20-\$27 if a sale is happening. We carry an extra AirTag on us to put on rental car keys.

Do you want some other great suggestions for travel? Check out our top recommendations for travel gear and accessories and other great products we use during travel. Our Amazon Storefront has so much excellent gear that we have tried and tested; check [them out here.](#)

Want a story on how valuable these AirTags are? Joelle had her luggage stolen right off the belt at the airport before she arrived at baggage claim. If it weren't for her AirTag, she would still be told it was "los" instead of stolen. [The story can be found here.](#)

7. Write your contact info on and in all your luggage before you leave, then take pictures of each piece of luggage and its contents.



Place your contact info outside and inside the suitcase as exterior tags fall off. It is crucial to make the writing clear, including your **name, address, home country, email, and phone number, with the country dialing code** on all luggage. People often forget to add email, home country, and country dialing code; these are essential. If your luggage gets on the wrong plane and lands in South Africa, the person handling it may not know the U.S. dialing code or what country North Dakota is located in. Many people can now text or email from their cell phones, so providing various quick methods to reach you is valuable.

Please take pictures of each piece of luggage and its contents before leaving for the airport. If your luggage is lost, the airline will often ask for a description or image. If your luggage can't reach you during your travels and you need to claim its contents, pictures will help with that claim process.

8. Make copies of all travel documents and cards



Make copies of your passport, Covid vaccination card, travel insurance coverage, paper tickets, credit cards (front and back), hotel and car reservation, medical insurance card, medical info, and med list, and place them in a binder. We keep this binder in our carry-on, so it is always with us. Make an electronic copy if you like, but you need the paper backup in case your phone is lost, stolen, or malfunctioning. Then, take one set of photocopies of the documents, place them in a manilla envelope, and store them separately from your main binder.

Leave one set of photocopies of all your travel documents with someone you trust at home. In Italy, we once had a wallet stolen. It was a simple call home to have the family notify all the banks.

A harsh lesson from that incident is never to keep all your cards in one place. In this case, we did, and all our cards were gone. Luckily, we had left most of the cash in the room. Since our main card was a travel one, a new card was delivered to our next destination for free in just a couple of days. It was awesome.

9. Buy what event or entry tickets you can apply online before departure, especially for those must-dos on your schedule.

Queues in Europe can be notoriously long. Time is precious, and standing in line wastes time when

there is much to see and do. Look for Skip the Line tickets that you can buy from the venue itself. You can also purchase a City or Museum Pass that offers free admission and bypasses buying tickets.

10. Pack light and use only carry-on luggage if possible



Writing that feels a bit hypocritical as that will never be us. Due to her medical background, Joelle wants to be prepared for everything. Plus, there is no room for clothes between camera equipment, laptops, meds, medical supplies, etc. If you can keep it to only carry-on, you have one less thing to worry about.

If you are like us, splitting your checked baggage belongings between your suitcases is a good tip. This way, if one piece of luggage is lost, which has never occurred internationally to us (knock on wood), we both still have clothes in our one suitcase. Once there, we move everything back into our own bags. We have a page with valuable tips on packing with printable packing lists. Check out our blog page, [Packing for Success](#).

Of course, our most vital suggestion, even for carry-on, is to put an AirTag in your luggage. Often, people are forced to check their carry-on when bins are full, so always be prepared to know where they are.

11. Prepare early by packing a few weeks before your departure date



Our tradition is about 3-4 weeks before a trip, we start sorting clothes and travel essentials in a spare bedroom. It helps coordinate outfits and determines what other essentials you may need. It also gives you time to sort out what you won't need to bring.

Buying needed items early when you aren't rushed can reduce costs. Too often, last-minute purchases result in expedited shipping costs. People often forget that travel costs are also what you buy beforehand, so keeping that in check is valuable.

12. Rest, hydrate, and eat healthily on the days before and on the day you travel.

It is counterproductive to start a trip exhausted, ill, and emotionally drained. It makes you more susceptible to issues when you are traveling, too, such as illness, falls, and stress. We know it is easier said than done, but try to start on a healthy note. Drink lots of water, eat nutritious meals, avoid alcohol, and get a good sleep in the week before you leave. One reason to pack early is to prevent some craziness those days before travel. In recent years, we have become diligent in our vitamin intake in the weeks before a trip. Check out our blog page on [How to stay healthy during travel](#).

We also feel it is essential to dress comfortably during travel. We do not advocate dressing fancy to fly in hopes of being upgraded. This is a well-known myth that has no factual basis. Having been upgraded often, we can assure you that is not why it happens. Also, having been upgraded often, most business and first-class people are not dressed to go to the theater.

13. Avoid jet lag – follow this simple rule

This, for many, sounds impossible, but it is pretty darn simple. There is one consistent message in the medical travel community, along with travel experts like Rick Steves. Never nap, even for a few minutes, when you arrive or in the first days in your new time zone. Whether you arrive early or later in the afternoon at your destination, keep moving at all times. Stay outdoors when possible and get lots of fresh air. Hydrate and get some solid nutrition in you. If alcohol makes you tired, then avoid it. It will get tough sometimes, but haven't we all had sleepless nights and then had to work the next day or care for

our young kids?

Plan to go to bed early your first evening; you will be exhausted. We sometimes take Benadryl or melatonin or both to encourage deeper sleep. Chamomile tea works for many people. We sleep wonderfully and wake the next day ready to go, fully normalized in our time zone—no jet lag, no sleeping issues, just off and running full of energy.

Since we have followed this approach, we have never had jet lag again. We are quite a few years apart in age, so that doesn't seem to play a role. All the people we travel with do it and have done fantastic—the ones who ignore it all land up with significant jet lag. Once jet lag sets in, it can take many days to adjust, making many people miserable and leading to other health issues during the trip.

What about sleeping on the flight?

Sleeping on the flight itself is up to you. In Joelle's case, she rarely can sleep on a plane. Ryan is often so engrossed in the great entertainment choices that he watches movies the whole flight. On average, we get a couple of hours at most. Keeping sleep to a minimum helps us reach an even better night's sleep that first night.

14. Learn the essential words in the language and the history of the place you are visiting

Learn hello and goodbye, please, thank you, excuse me. Do you speak English? When entering a store or business, always greet the locals in their language. It goes a long way to showing respect and being gracious. Thank them and say goodbye in their language.

We use Google Translate to help when more conversation is needed. You can type in what you want to say in your native language and then have it written or spoken for the person you are communicating with. It is an excellent free option that came in very handy. Click here for the [Google Translate](#) link.

While you are at it, learn a bit about the country you are about to visit. Please take a moment to know their history, cultures, and traditions. It will enhance so many aspects of your visit.

15. Read recent reviews

Always check reviews or get recommendations from multiple sources on any hotel, restaurant, or activity you use. Please make sure they are recent reviews, too! What was a fantastic place to eat two years ago could have changed owners, but now it has awful service and quality. There are many great sites for reviews, but we favor Google Maps to seek out recent reviews and photos. They are an excellent resource for all things travel, and we rely on them heavily.

16. Do not wear expensive jewelry or carry costly handbags; leave them at home.

Europe is known for its pickpockets. It is essential to do all you can to prevent being a victim. The goal is to avoid looking like a tourist as much as possible and wearing clothes similar to how the local dress helps. Thieves constantly look for targets from which they can get the most significant take. You make yourself a target if you wear huge diamond earrings, have a Rolex, or carry a Louis Vuitton. Even wearing a wedding ring with large gems can draw attention. Please keep it simple and reduce your risk.

In our case, we carry one backpack between us, with no purses or other items. The **Travelon anti-theft backpack** is our absolute favorite, and we have used the same one for years.



It has the following features that we love: The first is a complex, interlocking mesh barrier engineered right below the surface material to prevent a blade attack aimed at opening up your bag. The second is a hidden steel cable that runs the strap length to prevent it from being cut, and your bag pulled off your shoulder. Third, the main compartments of our bags lock to prevent a skilled pickpocket's hands from accessing them. Fourth, RFID-blocking card slots and passport pockets protect against hand-held identity scanner theft. And finally, lock-down hardware allows you to lock your bag to a chair or stationary object when sitting in a public area. Check out this link to learn more about it. Also, dress for comfort; you have a lot of things to see.

17. Remember, always, you are a GUEST IN THEIR COUNTRY!

Behave as a good guest should, as you would expect of those visiting your home. Respect the culture and traditions of the country you are privileged to see, even if they don't mesh with yours. Be sensitive to their political situation, and listen more than talk. Avoid judgments. You don't have to choose their way of life, but you do have to be polite and show respect. The choices available to them are different than yours. You are not there to change them but to observe and learn about their way of life.

Take the time to learn about the people, their behaviors, and customs. For example, some countries are very conscious of space. If that is the case, then follow suit. Check out our [Country Travel Guides](#) to see what essential cultures and traditions you must be mindful of.



Valetta Malta

18. Stay flexible at all times and avoid a rigid schedule.

If that cute little village caught your eye, go. If you want to grab a cold brew, do so. If that shop intrigues you, go in. If you come across a local medieval festival, stay and partake. If that local dessert calls to you, get it. If you need downtime, take it.

Planning an itinerary is essential, but always allow for flexibility and spending time in places you discover along your path. Seek off the beaten places. Go down that one-lane country road. Some of our most memorable moments have been experiences not on our itinerary.

19. Go with the flow. Stay Calm.

Travel is an adventure; sometimes, things can go haywire, as life often does. Shit happens. Getting agitated and ruining a trip over something out of your control wastes energy and serves no purpose. In the end, the person you hurt most is yourself and the people you are traveling with. So, you lost a day or two due to delays, illness, or injury. That doesn't mean the rest of your days are any less noteworthy. Accept what came your way and move forward.

Another common irritation is if someone is rude and disrespectful to you. Don't let someone you don't know, who you will never see again, ruin your dream trip. They are nobody to you; why would you give them power over your journey and memories? Just smile, wish them a nice day, and walk away. Make them part of the story; don't let them ruin your story.



Siena Italy

20. Be street savvy

Think safety at all times. Assess the situation around you. Keep on top of travel alerts and safety warnings. Ask the hotel staff if it is safe to walk around at night. Are there areas you should avoid? Check your emails often for STEP travel warnings of local threats or other issues.

21. Keep communication open among travel companions

When traveling, everyone in your group should have a voice, even the kids. Sometimes, when we travel with others, we keep silent about what we will enjoy. Suppose you are a person who tends to run the show. Step back at times to consider whether your traveling companion's needs and expectations are being met, too. Be sensitive if they are in pain, exhausted, or hungry.

The word compromise is a powerful word when traveling with others. Use it well, and it will serve everyone in your travel party. Joelle can no longer climb steep hills or hundreds of steps up that clock tower. Ryan does it while she wanders down below. If both of us are on board with the plan, why not? It works well, and Ryan gets fantastic pics in those high places.



Eze France Top 25 Tips for Traveling Abroad

Finally, be conscious of those who have health issues that keep them from participating in many activities. Sometimes, we can neglect them and leave them behind for hours, time and time again, because they can't participate. We can get so wrapped up in all we want to do that we forget they are left alone. At times, that is not an issue, as we all need space, but it can get old quickly if it happens for long periods.

If you have a partygoer in your group who drinks themselves into a stupor each night, doesn't get up until noon, and then is hungover and cranky all day until it is time to party again, why should you lose out? They are not being respectful of you. Don't stay back and miss out due to their bad choices. Take back control of your vacation while keeping the lines of communication open.

Travel Buddies

Finding someone you mesh well with for traveling is pretty darn tricky. Someone can be your dearest friend, but traveling with them is a nightmare. That makes for uncomfortable and stressful situations. Many friendships end as a result of bad travel experiences. Don't lose a good friend over that; say we are not meant to travel together. That is okay; you have two choices: don't travel with them again or discuss the issues openly. If talking is a good option, consider spending your days alone and meeting for dinner or breakfast.

Ultimately, the trip is both of yours, so don't set yourself up to be miserable by not doing what you enjoy the most. Keep lines of communication open and be respectful.

22. Stay grateful.

You are blessed to be traveling when so many will never have the opportunities you have at this very moment. Step back and look at the marvel around you. No matter what crosses your path, appreciate all you have, even the bumps in the road. Over the years, we have learned that some make for incredible memories.

23. Be kind. Be patient. Be friendly.

Inevitably, problems can occur, such as unexpected closures of an attraction, scams, losing an essential travel document, becoming ill, or finding that the hotel you booked doesn't have your reservations. Lashing out at others or having a fit usually does not serve you well or help the situation. Gather yourself and calmly think about the next best step to take.

You will have a much better experience and more positive interactions with honey vs. vinegar. Stay realistic, too. Not everything will be as you expected. It won't be perfect. So, please focus on the positive aspects and enjoy it all. It is an adventure, after all. Perfection is boring.

24. Let go of what you can't control.

We have known people who only focus on the negative aspects while on a trip. They waste time wishing they picked a better tour, agonizing over a wrong hotel choice, or whining about a bad meal. It is a waste and so annoying to all in the travel group. Do your research and travel planning before you go, and hope for the best. If mistakes happen, take note of them to avoid them in the future. Think of the big picture and focus on what matters, enjoying your time away.

25. We are all humans on this planet; let's not forget that.

Unfortunately, some people need to hear a few facts. No, Americans are not better. Our way of life is not above everyone else. We do not rule the world. They do not owe us anything. No, they don't have to learn our language.

Our lives and cultures are different. We all have our stories. Everyone has bad days. You don't know what they could struggle with or face at home. Please keep that in perspective, and remember their experiences are not yours. Their views of the world are based on different factors than yours. Show them the respect they deserve, especially since you have entered their world. Be good ambassadors and be gracious. It will serve you well.

There you have it, our Top 25 Tips for Traveling Abroad. It is about making beautiful memories, and you are indeed on your way.

Our Rules of Travel



Dubrovnik, Croatia

We should all remind ourselves to break out of our mold and make the experience the best possible. If you follow what we call “our rules of travel” you will gain more than you can imagine and positively impact others along the way.

Observe life around you.

Keep an open mind

Have a gentle heart

See with new eyes

Immerse yourself in the culture

Break out of your comfort zone

Meet new people

Laugh at yourself

Get lost in the moment

Take a deep breath and slow down your pace

Wander in wonder

Smile a lot!

Be kind

Treat everyone with respect

Understand and appreciate our differences

Be grateful

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Planning a trip and needing accommodations?

No matter where you are going, 100 miles to 5,000 miles away, finding the right place to stay can make or break a trip. We believe that looking at reviews closely, especially recent ones, is essential. After that, find the best deal.

Final Thoughts

Now, with our top 25 tips for traveling abroad, you have tools at your disposal. Never forget that travel is a gift, and you must make the most of every moment. Embrace the challenges and cherish the good times. Now, explore the world, create unforgettable memories, and live your travel dreams to their fullest potential.



Sunset in Poipu Kauai

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Author

contactwandererscompass-com

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