

PREPPING FOR YOUR OVERSEAS TRIP

So you've earned your miles, booked your award flights and hotels and are chomping at the bit to hop on that plane and find yourself in your dream destination. Great!

But before heading to the airport, here are a few things you may want to check off your list to make your trip run smoother.

1. Make sure your passport is up to date.

The average time to apply and get a new passport can be up to a few months, so if you are planning to travel in less than 10 weeks, it's recommended you expedite the process. The US Department of State lays out your various options on their [website](#).

Or, if you absolutely need your passport overnight you can try [this option](#).

2. Check to see if you need a visa.

You can also use the [Department of State website](#) to see if you need a visa for the country or countries you are traveling to.

3. Get your shots.

Going somewhere more exotic? [Check with the CDC](#) to find out what shots (if any) are required before your visit and act accordingly.

4. Get traveler's medical insurance.

I personally have used Medex in the past and it was very easy to sign up. However, I thankfully never had need of it so I would recommend perusing your choices before deciding which insurance is right for you. Regardless, medical insurance is not terribly expensive and if something were to happen, I for one, would be relieved to know I had it in place.

You can check [on the CDC website](#) to learn more about traveler's insurance, compare prices and coverage and explore your various options. It doesn't take long and is well worth it.

5. Have cash. Will travel.

No matter where you are going, one thing is for sure. You will need some cash on hand. 30 years ago, this meant going to your bank and getting traveler's checks and/or going to a money exchange booth and exchanging your currency for the currency you'll soon be using. While both of those things are still options, the easiest and most simple option, is to use your ATM card. Most ATMs in Europe for example, will simply accept your ATM card. You type in the amount of money you want and voila! You have local cash to spend.

However, in some countries like Japan, not all ATMs accept foreign cards. To avoid this confusion, simply check with your personal bank and ask them what countries and which ATMs accept your ATM card to decide whether you need to find an alternative way to get cash before hand or not. While you're doing this, make sure to let them know which countries you'll be visiting and when, so they don't put a hold on your account.

6. Call your Credit Card company.

With credit card info so easily accessible these days, credit card companies monitor your "usual" credit card actions on a daily basis. If something really out of the ordinary begins happening (like your card suddenly being used A LOT in a foreign country) your credit card company may just freeze your credit card until they can speak with you and confirm it's really you using the card. To avoid this confusion it's useful to make a quick call to your credit card company (or companies as the case may be) and let them know when you are leaving and what countries you'll be going to. That way your credit card spending won't raise a red flag and you won't need to waste time talking to them while you'd rather be enjoying your vacation.

7. Have the right gear.

Think ahead. How long will you be traveling? How many places will you be going? Can you travel with just a carry-on? What sort of clothes, bags, electronics, shoes etc. will you need?

8. Sort out your Internet and cell phone.

If you want to have Internet access while traveling, it's good to do your research beforehand. Do the hotels you're staying in provide Internet? Is there somewhere close by you can get access to Wi-Fi? A lot of places have Internet cafes but you have to know where they are. Is there a Starbucks within walking distance? They provide free Wi-Fi in most places, but you may have to sign-up for a free account in advance.

As for your phone, call your provider to find out the costs of calling and texting to and from the country you're going to. Also find out if it's cheaper/easier to buy a foreign phone with a sim card to use on your trip. Keep in mind, unless your provider offers unlimited around the world service, calling or texting overseas can cost a fortune, so using your phone for email via Wi-Fi may be the best solution. However, there are apps such as [viber](#) which offer free international calling, texting and picture sharing to anyone else who also has the viber app. You may want to coordinate that with whomever you may be calling back home before you leave.

9. Give your itinerary to someone you trust.

It's always a good idea to leave your itinerary and locations with someone back home. In the event of an emergency, they will know where to find you. Conversely, you should also put a note in your wallet or purse that says: "In case of emergency, please contact _____." Be sure to leave your trusted friend or relative's address and phone number so that whomever finds it, knows what country they are in.

10. Learn your P's and Q's.

This only needs to take a few minutes of your time. Do a simple online search to learn the local etiquette of the place you are traveling to as well as a few simple phrases. Knowing how to say "please", "thank you", "excuse me" and "where is..." in the local language as well as knowing what's considered polite or rude can make a world of difference in nearly every experience you have on your trip. Even in countries where most people speak English, an attempt to speak their language first, automatically makes you more polite and respectful and more likely to be helped by a stranger in a courteous manner. Some of the most interesting and rewarding interactions I've had while traveling, began with me attempting to speak to someone in their own language.