# Travel Tips

If this is your first time traveling abroad, or maybe you just need a refresher here’s a list of 20 tips you should do or bring before your trip.

**Security & Health**

**1. Check-in with your doctor and insurance carrier.** Double check and make sure that you have all of the proper vaccinations and that you have renewed all essential prescriptions. Also, ask your medical insurance provider if your policy applies overseas for emergencies. If it doesn’t, and you want to add extra coverage, [consider supplemental insurance](http://www.travelzoo.com/blog/what-to-know-before-buying-travel-insurance/).

**2. Bring copies of your passport.** If your passport gets stolen or lost you want to be sure that you can still get back into the country, or be able to prove your citizenship.

**3. Leave a copy of your passport.** For extra backup, leave a copy of your passport at home or with someone you trust. Consider making an electronic copy you can store in your email account as well.

**4. Register with your embassy.** If there’s a problem in the country, this will make it easier for your government to contact you and get you to safety.

**Money**

**5. Look up the monetary conversion before you go.** Finding out that one Danish Krone is equal to just 19 cents … bad surprise. Make sure you do your math before you travel to get a sense of where the conversion rate is at.

**6. Make sure your credit card will work in the country you’re visiting.** European banks have switched almost completely to the more secure chip-and-PIN technology, and fewer businesses abroad are accepting the outdated magnetic-strip cards.

**7. Go to a bank or ATM in the country you’re visiting.** The conversion centers in the airport or around the city tend to be huge rip-offs. You won’t get charged as many fees at the ATM or the bank, and the conversion will be exact.

**8. Always have local cash.** Not every place takes credit cards. Especially important places like trains or buses.

**9. Call your bank or credit card provider.** Sometimes banks think that fraud may be occurring if transactions are suddenly happening in Bali when you’re from Jersey, and they will turn off your card as a security measure.

**10. Check the country’s entrance/exit fees.**Some countries require travelers to pay in order to enter or leave the country. These fees are not included in the price of your airline ticket, and can range from $25 to $200.

**Local Research**

**11. Buy tickets now for places you know you want to visit or see.** By buying in advance you’ll be able to skip more lines, and find more deals targeted toward you.

**12. Get guidebooks.** Guidebooks usually include maps, key words or phrases, and give you enough detail on certain sites that you won’t need to purchase the pamphlet at the venue. And download apps before you travel. Avoid downloading charges from your wireless carrier and get your apps before you leave.

**13. Research events going on while you’re there.**This will help you make sure that you’re not missing the best events going on in the city — fun things like festivals, ceremonies and natural events. Also be sure to research a few national dishes to try. You don’t want to leave the country without experiencing what it’s known for.

**Electronics**

**14. Bring a charger adapter.** Countries have different size plugs and voltage. So if you want to use your iPod, make sure you can charge it.

**15. Check the voltage of your electronics.** From my own experience I know that nothing is worse than having an adapter and still not being able to use a blow-dryer or a straightener because the voltage isn’t high enough for that country.

**16. Activate your phone’s global capabilities.** There’s usually a charge for doing this, but it is much less than the roaming charges you’ll get if you don’t.

**17. Download Travelzoo app.**The [**Travelzoo app**](http://itunes.apple.com/us/app/travelzoo/id451314284?ls=1&mt=8) can help you find great deals in a variety of countries, and has options from local deals to transportation options.

**Luggage & packing**

**18. Pack an extra set of clothes in your carry-on bag.**Don’t be one of those travelers decked out in J’adore Paris apparel because the airline lost your luggage and you have nothing else to wear.

**19. To check a bag or not to check bag.**Each airline has its own set of guidelines as to how many bags can be checked or carried on for free. Make sure to look up what your airline’s rules are to avoid any incremental fees.

**20. Bring snacks.** Traveling abroad is fun, but eating in a foreign country can sometimes become a task. Bring small snacks that will tide you over until you find that perfect restaurant or food cart.

**21. Notify your bank where you will be traveling:** You’re already going to be combating jetlag, don’t compound the problem by being woken up at 4 am to calls from your bank notifying you that your credit card account has been suspended due to suspicious activity, and then having to call in (at a cost of several dollars a minute!) to get your account reinstated. Save yourself the hassle by calling your bank ahead of time and letting them know when and where you’ll be traveling.

**22. Avoid dynamic currency conversion:**Dynamic currency conversion is like the sneaky little brother of foreign exchange fees. Many merchants these days, including major hotels and restaurants, will offer you the ability to pay for your purchase in the local currency or in your own currency, supposedly as a convenience for travelers. However, by opting to pay in your own currency, you’re actually accepting a commission or transaction fee that usually runs around 2-3%. Stick to the local currency and save.

23. **Safety should be a key consideration no matter where you travel,** and part of staying safe in an unfamiliar place is dressing to blend in -- or, at least, not dressing to stand out. Beyond avoiding matching T-shirts, baseball hats and white sneakers, not to mention "I Love NY" sweatshirts, keep in mind local customs and attitudes, as well as religious beliefs, when choosing your attire. This will help you avoid causing offense to locals or becoming a target to thieves.

**24. Religiously Immodest Clothing**

It's wise to dress conservatively in any country holding deeply religious views, such as those in the Middle East (if you're not sure, your travel agent or guidebook can offer advice on local religious customs). Women in particular should avoid miniskirts, tank tops, bra tops, short-sleeved shirts, shorts and sometimes even capri pants. Revealing dresses and cleavage-bearing necklines are also huge no-nos. Men should avoid shorts and sleeveless tops in many Middle Eastern countries or when entering a church or other holy place.

Pants and long skirts are a safe bet, and women should carry a shawl in their bag or purse just in case. As a general rule, travelers should cover their shoulders and knees when entering any church or holy site to avoid unwanted stares or being denied entry. It's also wise to keep your feet and ankles covered. When in doubt, stick to long sleeves, and men, keep that chest hair concealed.

**25. Sneakers and Open-Toe Shoes**

In many parts of the world, sneakers are for sporting activities only. White tennis shoes, Crocs and Birkenstocks are notably frowned upon by Spaniards and Italians. Instead, wear comfortable leather walking shoes in the city, and keep them polished and in good shape. White, lace-up tennis shoes are the calling card of American tourists (and don't even think about Velcro sneakers).

If you're traveling anywhere but a beach, it's generally wise to stick with closed-toe shoes, which can help prevent insect bites or cuts on your toes from gravelly surfaces. "It is not sanitary to wear flip-flops and other open-toe shoes when traveling to some areas because you can get infections," notes Talia Salem, a communications specialist at PlanetWildlife.

 [**Five Things You Shouldn't Wear on a Plane**](http://www.independenttraveler.com/travel-tips/air-travel/five-things-you-shouldnt-wear-on-a-plane)

**26. Shorts**

Yes, we Americans do love our shorts, but some other cultures -- such as Indonesians and Vietnamese -- don't wear them for everyday walking around, no matter the season or how close they are to the equator. Consider reserving your khaki shorts for beaches, parks, tennis clubs and hiking trails.

**27. Flashy Jewellery**

Never wear expensive, flashy jewellery abroad, unless you want your diamond rings, pearls and pricey watches to be tagged for someone *else's* collection. Since there's probably no need to impress anyone that much on your trip abroad, leave the valuables at home.

**28. Religious Imagery, Curse Words or National Flags**

Avoid clothing sporting religious or military symbols, swear words, national flags and any words or symbols written in a language you cannot translate. There's no need to unintentionally spark an emotional debate while on vacation. It's also not a bad idea to leave religious jewellery, even cross necklaces, at home. If you must, wear them under your clothes so they're not visible to anyone.

**29. Bright Colors**

Unless loud colors or bold patterns are the norm in your destination, consider sticking with conservative hues like navy, blue, tan and gray. Look put together, opting for classic, well-fitting clothing. You want to blend in, not draw unwanted attention to yourself (and nothing does that better than a neon green tank top).

 [**How to Blend In with the Locals: 20 Tips**](http://www.independenttraveler.com/travel-tips/travelers-ed/how-to-blend-in-with-the-locals-20-tips)

**30. Inappropriate Colors**

In the Western world, we may wear black to wakes and funerals, but in parts of [**Asia**](http://www.independenttraveler.com/destinations/asia), white is the funeral color -- good to keep in mind on the off chance you may be mourning someone's passing while on holiday. Meanwhile, stay away from wearing black or blue in central [**Africa**](http://www.independenttraveler.com/destinations/africa-and-middle-east); these are the favorite colors of large, biting tsetse flies.

**31. Jeans**

Jeans are increasingly popular around the world, so they don't scream "Tourist!" the way they used to. That said, they should fit well and be wrinkle-free. It's even better if you opt for black or dark blue jeans. Baggy or ripped jeans are frowned upon in some cultures, and they may look disrespectful if you wear them into churches, mosques or other holy sites.

If you're traveling to a warm and/or rainy climate, consider alternatives to jeans; they don't breathe well and take a long time to dry, making them impractical for many itineraries.

**32. Backpacks**

Planning to spend the summer backpacking across [**Europe**](http://www.independenttraveler.com/destinations/europe) or Southeast Asia? Then a large backpack is practical and probably a better bet than a rollerboard suitcase for lugging onto trains and traveling between destinations. But bring a secondary bag, like a small fabric tote bag that can be worn across your chest, for everyday touring around cities. Any kind of backpack, big or small, may mark you as a tourist. They're also easy to reach into and steal from if you're wearing one on your back on a busy bus or train.

**33. Cameras**

This advice isn't workable for pro photographers, but casual shutterbugs should snap a photo or two, then put the camera away. Nothing screams tourist like a camera permanently hanging from your neck. Not only do you stand out, but you may also get targeted by thieves. Carry a camera or smartphone that you can fit into your small bag.

**34. A Few More Tips**

Dressing appropriately while abroad not only helps you fit in with locals and receive friendlier service, but it also protects you from standing out to pickpockets. When in doubt, look at what the locals are wearing. "The best thing a traveler can do is go to a local clothing store and buy a couple of outfits -- then no one will ever mistake you for a tourist," says travel expert John E. DiScala (a k a Johnny Jet). Plus, your new wardrobe additions make great souvenirs.

Beyond watching what you wear, there are a few other things you can do to make yourself look like less of a traveler. For one, look like you know what you're doing and where you're going, even if you have to fake it. "Standing in the middle of the block looking confused -- or worse, unfolding a map -- calls you out as a tourist," notes Matthew Reames, who traveled extensively through Europe a few years ago. "[Instead], pop into a coffee shop or something like that to give yourself time to pause and get your bearings."

Be wary of hand gestures, both making them and wearing clothing depicting them, because these can have different meanings depending on where you are. In Bangladesh, for example, the "thumbs up" gesture is considered obscene. Since you may never know what certain images suggest in another country, avoid them to keep from offending anyone. Visit Guide.CultureCrossing.net to read up on common local gestures and taboos.

Sometimes even more important than how we look is what we sound like. Many Americans can be readily identified by their loud (and often complaining) voices. Keep your sound level low and your speech polite, though this suggestion can certainly be applied to travel anywhere, even within your own home town.