

8 International Travel Tips From a Guy Who Lives Out of a Suitcase

Here's everything you need to know, buy or download before you step foot on the plane.

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If you're heading overseas for business or pleasure, here are a few tips I've learned (the hard way) that will help you maximize your productivity and your fun.

1. Download Google Maps. (Or learn how to ask for directions in Mandarin.)

Wherever you're going outside the US, chances are the bandwidth will suck and Google Maps will not be able to get you where you need to go. Take a few minutes to download the maps for the area you're traveling to *before* you leave, and you'll never get lost abroad. Here's how to do it:

1. Go into settings in the Google Maps app and find the option for "Offline Maps."
2. Choose "Custom Map."
3. Zoom out on the map to include the area you're visiting.
4. Choose "Download."
5. If you need to download a larger area, you can repeat this process for overlapping areas, and you're ready to

go!

2. Get an international data plan. (If you're stupid and rich, skip this section.)

If you plan on calling, texting and using data, you must take this step before you leave the USA. Go to your carrier's website and see what's covered in the places you're visiting, and find a plan that works for you. If there's a monthly fee for the plan, makes sure to cancel it right after you return home!

Option two is to turn off data roaming when you travel, but then most every app (Yelp, Google Maps, Email, etc.) won't work. If you can live with that, you're leading a better life than I am!

Here are links to some of the bigger carriers' international plans:

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3. Find the right power adapter and bring a few – or bring an electrician.

Most electronics adapt to the difference in the voltage from country to country automatically, but you'll still need to deal with the funny looking plugs. Before you leave, you should have a few adapters in your luggage. To find out what kind you'll need, check out this guide. And be sure to have one in your carry-on luggage, so you can charge your phone during layovers or if your luggage gets lost.

4. Buy a portable charger – and remember to bring it!

Portable chargers are a lifesaver when traveling abroad. Phones tend to run out of battery faster when you're roaming, and it's no fun being stranded with no place to charge. Choose a small but powerful portable charger, something that fits comfortably in your everyday gear, so you don't regret carrying it. And bring a longer charger cord, so you can charge your phone while you're using it. Here's one I really like.

5. See if Uber operates where you're going.

Uber is an excellent choice to get around when you're traveling, especially in countries where getting a taxi might require you to go to specific locations or call ahead. Uber doesn't operate everywhere, so you'll have to check their list of international cities. And make sure to create an Uber account *before* you leave if you don't have one already. (Seriously? No Uber account?) Are you more of a Lyft fan? Great if you're going to Canada, but other than that, you're out of luck.

Related: Check Out This CIA Operative's 9-Step Hotel Safety Checklist

6. Use ATMs for cash – but only bank ATMs.

You'll probably need some local currency, even if you mostly use credit cards. It is always good to have a little local cash on hand for incidentals and tips. Just avoid the airport currency exchanges to get your dough.

Using currency exchanges at the airport is a sucker's bet unless you love complex fees and exchange rate manipulation. ATMs in other countries are an easy solution and typically have an option in English (Hint: Click the U.S. or UK flag when it asks!) But only use ATMs that are operated by actual banks, not by currency exchange companies. And avoid no-name ATMs found in tiny shops and all-night markets – they're notorious for odd fees and stealing identities. Keep all of your ATM receipts until you can crosscheck your records back home.

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7. Avoid the credit card hustle.

Credit cards are a great way to manage your overseas spending, but here are some things to check so you don't wind up with unexpectedly huge bills.

- Some cards charge a fee for *each* overseas transaction. This can get painful in a hurry. Avoid using those cards altogether, as there are many that have no additional fees for charging abroad.
- Speak to American Express – it's a brand built on travel, and they offer a ton of cards with features and benefits for the overseas traveler. AMEX is pretty fair with respect to exchange rates and is excellent at protecting its members against fraud. One caveat: there are some merchants that don't accept AMEX, so be sure to have a backup card or some cash on hand.
- Pay in the local currency if you're ever presented with the option to "see your total in dollars," when checking out. While it's nice that the credit card machines can show the amount in dollars, the hidden exchange rate offered is typically way worse than what your credit card company will charge. Just say no, and pay in the

local currency.

8. Be smart with your passport, dummy.

Make two photocopies of your passport before you depart – leave one at home with a friend and take one with you. In case you lose your passport, you can use this copy to help start the process of cleaning up this mess you're in. You should also take a good photo of the passport with your phone. Always secure your passport as soon as you arrive at your destination, like the hotel safe. And set a calendar reminder for the date and time you're leaving so you don't go to the airport without it!

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