

The Ultimate Checklist for Traveling Abroad

(Courtesy of Shannon McMahon, SmarterTravel)

Traveling internationally is an adventure best planned ahead of time, and not just when it comes to booking flights and packing. Sure, showing up at your gate *sans* passport or forgetting [melatonin](#) for your red-eye flight can put a damper on your long-awaited escape, but most of your preparation should be dedicated to ensuring health, safety, and financial necessities are covered. To save you some prep time, we've compiled this international travel checklist for your next long-distance journey.

Focus on Safety First

One of the easiest and most important items on an overseas travel checklist is also arguably the most ignored. Travel insurance and State Department alerts can be incredibly important in emergencies abroad, but many tourists bet they won't become part of the small percentage of travelers who require evacuation assistance or protection from hotel or flight cancellations.

Subscribing to the [State Department's STEP alerts](#) for your destination can help you stay up to date on upcoming and current travel restrictions, strikes, and areas of political unrest. Any alerts you receive will let you know whether or not to plan for some unexpected obstacles in advance.

[Travel insurance](#) can cost as little as a few dollars per travel day and cover anything from replacing a broken camera to emergency medical attention, potentially saving you hundreds, maybe even thousands of dollars.

Get Your Travel Documents and Credit Cards in Order

Make sure your passport and any necessary travel visas are up to date. Some countries require a passport to be valid for at least six months after your scheduled return, so make sure you won't be turned away or delayed at customs because of an old passport. Not sure if you need a visa? See this list of [every country that requires a visa for Americans](#).

Keep physical and digital copies of your passport and all your paperwork in case anything is lost, and give copies as well as your itinerary and contact numbers to family and friends whom you can contact in case of an emergency.

Notify your bank and credit card companies about your travel dates so they don't deny your purchases, and ask about international ATM fees so you can find out which ones won't charge you. It's always a good idea to bring multiple cards in case one stops working.

Don't underestimate how helpful a cell phone photo of your passport can be. Whether you have to go to the consulate and report it lost, or are just filling out a customs card and need your passport number, it will likely come in handy. Email the image to yourself to have an extra digital copy in case your phone runs out of batteries or goes missing. You may also want to bring a spare copy of your [passport photo](#) on your trip; having it handy will speed the processing of a new document.

Get Vaccinated

It's best to get the necessary vaccinations out of the way as soon as possible since it can take a few weeks to build full immunity. Some also require multiple doses, which may need to be administered over days, weeks, or even months. Talk to your doctor about getting the [CDC-recommended shots](#), as the protocol for vaccines varies by country. For example, dozens of countries [require proof of a yellow fever vaccination](#) if you've been to at-risk areas. A [travel clinic](#) can help you sort out which vaccinations and medications you might need.

Keep your vaccination certificate in your carry-on in case customs requires you to present it when entering the country.

Study Up on Your Destination

Whether you're a travel app connoisseur or more of a paperback guidebook person, having some source of knowledge about your destination is invaluable. Read about the region you're traveling to in advance to gain insight into important information such as [currency exchange rates](#), useful phrases, tipping norms, appropriate clothing, and cultural/legal customs. It's best to be prepared so you don't land yourself in a compromising situation.

Make Sure Your Home Is Cared For

There's nothing worse than realizing once you're six time zones away that you forgot to stop your mail delivery or ask someone to water your expertly cultivated house plants. Make sure your daily tasks are covered before you leave, or appoint a trusty friend to do them for you.

You can find a house or pet sitter to do your chores if you're willing to list your home on [TrustedHouseSitters.com](#). Plus, you could find lodging through the site for your trip abroad if you're willing to spend some time with someone else's furry friends.

Stay Connected

Want to stay in touch while traveling abroad? If you haven't taken your phone overseas before, call your mobile provider to make sure it will work in the country you're visiting and to ask about international phone plans that might be available. If your carrier's plans are expensive, a [mobile hotspot](#) can be a cost-effective alternative.

Download the Necessities

Sometimes the most important thing you'll pack is in your smartphone rather than your suitcase. Offline maps are your best friend when it comes to traveling with limited data or battery. You can find Wi-Fi in many places, but downloading offline maps through Google Maps or CityMaps2Go will allow you to follow your GPS without using up battery life and roaming data.

Downloading in-flight entertainment could also save you if your TV malfunctions on the long-haul flight. Streaming won't be available without consistent [in-flight Wi-Fi](#) (which you shouldn't ever depend on) but you can pre-download movies and TV shows through [Amazon Prime](#), and music streaming service [Spotify](#) allows paying users to download tracks for offline use with the press of a button.

Don't forget a [portable backup charger](#). Watching hours of your favorite TV show is sure to drain your battery life, and there's nothing worse than finally finding a Wi-Fi spot only to have your phone die.

Check Your Destination's COVID Policies

Make sure you're aware of your destination's most up-to-date policies regarding COVID and vaccination status. Check with [the State Department website](#) well before your trip to make sure you meet the requirements, and check in periodically to monitor for potentially changes. Similarly to the US, mask-wearing policies may be left up to the discretion of an event or venue, so its a good idea to [have a few masks on hand](#) when out and about.

Pack These Essentials

While the contents of your checked bag will largely depend on the climate you're visiting, you'll want most of your trip's essentials on hand in your carry-on. Start with this international travel checklist of items to pack:

- Passport and visa
- Medications
- Insurance and ID cards
- Cash, debit cards, and credit cards
- Pen to fill out customs forms
- [Portable charger](#)
- [Earplugs](#), [eye mask](#), and [sleeping pills](#)
- [Electrical converters and adapters](#) specific to your destination
- [Headphones](#)
- [Antibacterial wipes](#)
- [Sweater/scarf](#) in case the plane is chilly
- Cell phone and charger

For more ideas, check out our essential [international packing list](#).

Consider taking photos of your packed suitcase (both inside and out) in case it gets lost. That way, airline employees will know what to look for, and you'll know what was inside in case you don't get it back and need to file a claim.