



Travel Tips

By Jan F.

With years of business and personal travel experience, and after many requests from friends, I've compiled (in no particular order of importance) a list of helpful travel tips. Some of these might sound a bit OCD but many should make your travel more enjoyable, less stressful and in case of emergency can save you time and money.

1. TRAVEL AGENTS – YES OR NO? Depends on your situation. If you only need a simple airline, hotel or car reservation, you can definitely book them directly on-line or use any number of travel sites like Travelocity, Expedia, Hotwire, etc. However, it can be quite time consuming trying to find the best deals and you may not see ALL your options as discount sites usually sell *surplus* inventory. You *may* get a great deal but a good travel agent may be able to meet or beat the deal on a package, with better options tailored to your needs. This is especially true for cruises and tour packages! Travel Agents can often get you bonus add-ons to make it even more attractive.

Even with my travel experience and computer skills, I now use a *professional* Travel Agent when booking our cruises and tour packages. She was *extremely* helpful in handling our claims with the cruise line and travel insurance company after our interrupted cruise. And, she's proved to be a wealth of information, like recommending a hotel near our upcoming departure port where we can spend the night before our cruise, park our car for the entire week for FREE and have FREE shuttle service to and from the pier! That's a HUGE freebie as pier parking is usually \$15-\$20/day and cabs can also be expensive.

If you'd like a referral, let me know! She can assist even if you're outside the Atlanta area.

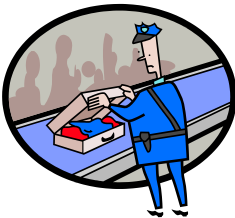
2. TRAVEL INSURANCE: It's not terribly expensive and if you have to cancel or your trip is interrupted, you can at least salvage part or all of your investment. This is especially important for us "seniors" or when booking far in advance. Be sure you know what the coverage actually pays as policies vary greatly. Travel Guard is a good one but usually best to sign up with the cruise line or tour group directly.
3. MEDICAL INSURANCE: Know your coverage! Especially important for International Travel. Find out if you have coverage in foreign countries and how to access it. If not, or if there are limits, this may also be included as part of the Travel Insurance mentioned above.

4. EMERGENCY CONTACTS & MEDICAL INFO: You may have an insurance card but do you know all your medications and dosages? Allergies? Passport Number? Do you know the info for your spouse or travel buddy and do they know yours? Probably not! Remember, in a REAL emergency, you or they may be unable to answer lifesaving questions. Attached is my simple form to list all pertinent information. Have each traveler complete the information, then make copies for each other, and safely tuck in your wallet. If you don't want to swap, just let your friend know you have it and where it is in case of emergency. Keep in a safe place and destroy after your trip as it does contain a lot of personal info! When traveling with children, it's also a good idea to have a copy of their immunization records from their doctor.



5. FOR FRIENDS AND FAMILY: Not to rub it in that you're heading out for a fabulous vacation, but for practical reasons, give a copy of your itinerary to family members and/or close friends in case *they* need to reach *you* in an emergency. Be sure to include Dates, Flight Numbers, Hotels, Cruise Port, Ship, and Cabin Number and any other pertinent contact info, such as Passport Numbers on international trips. There is usually an emergency contact number for each ship listed on the cruise website.

6. **BEFORE YOU LEAVE HOME:** Aside from the obvious, here are a few additional thoughts:
- Mail & Newspapers: Put a Vacation Hold on your mail and papers and you won't have to bother a neighbor. Attached is a copy of the PO form or you can download on-line.
 - Ask a trusted neighbor to keep an eye on your house and leave them an emergency contact number for you or a relative if you're out of the country.
 - Security Company – Call and let them know your travel dates and they will make a note to “dispatch immediately” if your alarm goes off during your absence.
 - Local Police – Call the non-emergency number and they will usually do a “vacation watch” for you to keep an extra eye on your house.
 - Credit Cards and ATMs – For security, only take the minimum cards you need. Usually, I take AMEX, VISA and my Debit Card. Then, call those companies and tell them when and where you will be traveling so they will not accidentally freeze your account when they see unusual spending habits. This happened to me and I wasn't too happy about it! Make copies of the front and back of each card as well as your DL and Passport and keep in a safe place with your travel documents. If you have a lost or stolen card, purse or wallet you will have the numbers to call to report it and get a replacement.
 - Cell Phone and Internet Carriers – Call and add Roaming or International Roaming to avoid unexpected surprise bills. You can turn it off when you get back.
7. **CHILDREN – TWO-LEGGED AND FOUR-LEGGED:** When leaving your minor children with the grandparents for your romantic second honeymoon or your beloved pet with friends when you're vacationing, be sure they have your WRITTEN permission to pick them up at school, seek medical attention, etc. during your absence. They should also have the pediatrician or vet contact info in case of emergency.
8. **AIRPORTS:** ARRIVE EARLY AND BE PREPARED! Call before you leave home to make sure your flight is still on-time. You can also get text alerts from your airline or use <http://www.flightview.com> to keep you updated on time, gate changes and airport delays. Links to airport maps and terminal layouts are listed under TRAVEL LINKS. For domestic travel, plan to arrive at least 2 hours before your scheduled departure and allow even more time for international flights. You may be delayed at the ticket counter or TSA. Have your documentation handy (DL or Passport, Confirmation No., etc.) Know the TSA rules and be prepared to: remove your laptop and 3-1-1 bag (if you have to ask, look it up on the TSA link at the end), take off your shoes, jackets and belts and put them in the plastic bin. Ladies: purse goes in a separate bin. Empty pockets: cell phones, keys, change, wallet in plastic bin or bowl provided by TSA agent. Wait until instructed to walk through the security scanner.



Most of all be PATIENT and do not argue with TSA Agents – they win every time! They may ask to open your bag if they want to check something. Do not touch the bag, they will do it. If they ask to “pat you down” make sure you have a TSA agent of the same sex. There are lots of jokes about this invasion of privacy but it's *usually* not a big deal. If something inappropriate DOES happen, ask for a supervisor right then!

9. **CHECKED LUGGAGE:** Be sure to check the airline, cruise, train, bus, or tour group baggage policies on their website shortly before your trip for your specific carrier as they are constantly changing and vary from airline to airline and domestic to international. Sometimes the first checked bag is free and other times not. Be sure to know weight and size limits for checked and carry-on bags! I have a little baggage scale to make sure my bags are under the standard 50 lb. limit and it goes with me so I don't overload the bags on the way home if I've been shopping (who me?) Often the fee for a 2nd bag is less expensive than an overweight bag, plus you won't get a hernia!

DO NOT PACK ANYTHING OF VALUE IN CHECKED BAGGAGE! There is no such thing as a “locked” bag these days as most bags are easily broken into or simply stolen or lost. Cameras, laptops, jewelry, etc. routinely disappear from checked bags. A friend of mine put her new and very expensive Louis Vuitton purse in her checked bag only to find it missing when she returned home. Of course, she had no proof that the LV purse was in her bag, so the airlines denied her claim.

Take a photo of your bag before you check it. Can really be helpful if your bag is lost or misrouted!

10. CARRY-ON LUGGAGE: Again, know the size and weight limits and rules 3-1-1 Rules for liquids. Usually, you can have one carry on and one personal item (purse, briefcase, etc.) that must fit under the seat in front of you. Each air or cruise line post their rules on their websites.

The following notes are suggestions for all trips but especially important for international travel or when connections are involved. There are several things you should carry with you just in case of delayed or lost luggage.



- a. Valuables: cell phones, cameras, laptops, iPad, iPod, Kindle, jewelry, etc.
- b. Medications – preferably in labeled prescription or store bottles
- c. Spare Reading Glasses (important for anyone over 40!)
- d. Travel Documents – copies of your itinerary, tickets, passport, etc.
- e. Cell phone and laptop chargers (when delays happen you may need to recharge!)
- f. Neck pillow and/or blanket – airlines don’t furnish these except on long flights.
- g. Gum, Bottled Water, Snacks or even Meals. Airlines rarely serve more than a soda and pretzels these days. Water must be purchased AFTER you clear TSA Security.
- h. Comfortable shoes
- i. A change of clothes or at least underwear and night gown
- j. Anything else you might need for a day (or two) if your bag doesn’t make it.

11. WHAT NOT TO PACK:

- a. Hair Dryers. They’re bulky and most hotels and cruise ships have decent ones. If they’re not in the room, call the desk and they usually can bring you one.
- b. Shampoo and Conditioner. Again, these are usually provided and it’s one less thing to take up space and risk spilling. If you MUST have your preferred brand, buy some small travel bottles and take what you need not full-size products.
- c. Irons. Most hotels provide them and they’re a no-no on cruise ships
- d. Candles, matches, lighters. No-No in most hotels and ALL cruise ships
- e. Of course the obvious: No knives or scissors, except small ones in checked baggage
- f. And the not-so-obvious: No wrapped gifts, even in checked bags. TSA may open them...I know because it happened to me!



12. OPTIONAL ITEMS: If you have space, these can come in handy:

- a. Travel Alarm. Most hotels have clocks but cruise ships often don’t. Even if they do, I like to have one in the bathroom to keep track of time when getting ready.
- b. Hand-Sanitizer and Wet Wipes. You’ll have to pack the liquid in your 3-1-1 carry-on or checked bag, so the wet wipes are good for travel days.
- c. Emergency flashlight and extra batteries.
- d. Multi-Outlet Plug or Extension Cord. Hotels and Cruise Ships are notorious for not having enough outlets or not where you need them.
- e. Power Converters for international travel. Check on-line for the particular countries you will visit to know what adapters you might need so you won’t fry your electronics.
- f. Travel Straps or handles to help identify your bag. Sure, you can always tie a colorful ribbon around your handle but there are many great styles available on sites like TravelSmith.com and

Magellans.com I prefer the colorful, wide bands that stretch around your bag, and have a tether so they don't fall off. Also helpful if a zipper breaks!

- g. Consider anti-theft purses, wallets. Pickpockets love to target travelers and it's getting worse with "teams" targeting people in airports, restaurants, public transportation, malls, crowds, and special events. This is becoming common here in the US and abroad. Your credit card, debit card and Passport info can even be scanned when in your purse or wallet! PacSafe and other companies make purses and wallets designed to thwart the bad guys with anti-slash straps, extra security clips and RFID pockets to protect data from being scanned. You can find them on-line at various sources like Amazon.



CRUISE SPECIFIC TIPS

1. **BALCONY CABINS:** If budget allows, aside from just the sheer indulgence of enjoying your morning coffee or a beautiful sunset from your private deck, your cabin will feel so much larger. It's definitely worth the extra bucks in my opinion. In case of some catastrophic emergency, (like loss of power or A/C) you can always get fresh air and sleep on deck if necessary. And, in the WORST case scenario, you have an emergency exit!
2. **DOCUMENTATION:** Sounds simple but make sure you have your Passports, Cruise Tickets, etc. for ALL passengers and make sure all names are EXACTLY THE SAME on all documentation! Especially important if go by a nickname or middle name (i.e. William Charlie Smith but your ticket reads "Chuck Smith"). Or if you've recently changed your name and haven't updated your ID, it's a good idea to have a copy of your marriage or divorce certificate with you. We see people almost every cruise scrambling to get proper documents faxed to them because they forgot something.

Special Note to divorced parents: Even if you are the CUSTODIAL parent of a minor child, especially with different last names, you may need a notarized letter from the other parent giving their permission for you to take the child out of the country! We saw this happen on our last cruise – calling the other parent to fax the permission letter.

3. **BEVERAGE PACKAGES:** These vary by company and can be pricey, if you're not a big drinker. You can purchase these in advance or on-board. Options usually include Soda, Beer or Wine Packages but read the fine print before you purchase. For example, the Soda Package is usually for Fountain Drinks for 1 Person and does not include the canned drinks in your mini-fridge. Beer and Wine Packages are usually one or the other and may not include premium selections.

The one exception I always make is the Bottled Water Package. I usually order 8-12 large bottles of water (which I pre-purchase on-line) and it's waiting in my cabin upon arrival. It saves the hassle of remembering to purchase it bottle by bottle and lug it back to your room. The price is usually comparable elsewhere on the ship or even ashore...even with the added gratuity, it's usually around \$4 for the large bottles which isn't bad. And, if there are a couple of bottles left over, it's not enough to worry about. Plus, in case of a real emergency, you will have at least some drinking water on hand!

4. **SHORE EXCURSIONS:** Part of the fun is exploring new destinations but again, make informed choices. The easiest and safest bet is to book your tours directly with the cruise line. They will know where you are at all times and hold the ship if the excursion is delayed. If you venture off, like renting a car or taking a private tour, it is YOUR responsibility to be back on board on time! We routinely hear them paging missing passengers before departure! Remember, the cruise line isn't responsible for your personal safety if you're not on one of their tours and, if you do miss the boat (literally) it's YOUR expense to get to the next

port. And, when should you book your excursions, spa treatments, specialty dining, and surf classes? You can normally do this on-line pre-cruise, which is a good idea as many are limited and book up quickly. Plus, you avoid long lines at the Shore Excursion desk!

The one exception to this would be when working with an experienced travel agent who may be able to help with excursions outside the cruise lines. Our agent works with a preferred provider that has never missed a departure and guarantees to get passengers to the next port of call if necessary. They're bonded and insured - only company that has been able to satisfy the exhaustive requirements of her host agency to get "preferred" status. They are generally less expensive and frequently offer smaller group size, hence a better over-all experience. And, if you are traveling in a group, they can arrange a *private* excursion.

5. **ACCESSIBILITY:** Travel has its challenges, especially if you have mobility issues. The good news is you or your loved ones don't have to stop traveling! Here are some simple suggestions:
- Request wheelchair assistance at airports and cruise terminals.
 - Book an Accessible Cabin, *if necessary* and available. You or your agent usually has to do this directly with the cruise line and submit a Special Needs Form so they know what assistance you might require.
 - You can rent a wheelchair, mobility scooter or even oxygen for your cruise. The typical mobility scooter rate is usually \$250-\$300 for a 7 day cruise. The best part is, it's ready and waiting in your cabin on arrival and you leave it there at the end of the cruise. Our preferred vendor is CareVacations.com.



EMERGENCY EVACUATIONS: Not intended to scare you here but in the unlikely event that the worst happens, you may have to leave your hotel room or cruise ship quickly. These tips might save you valuable time when minutes count. These resulted from our recent personal experience when our cruise ship had a major fire at 3:00 am and we were sound asleep. Keep in mind, you don't know the *scope* of the emergency and if or when you'll be allowed back to your room, so better to be prepared! We were out of our cabin for almost 5 hours but it could have been much longer.

1. Have a robe or clothes handy that you can slip on quickly and a pair of shoes! We saw many people in their jammies and barefoot which is not a good idea, especially in an emergency. Even if you don't have time to actually dress, grab a pair of pants to slip under your gown or over your PJ's if necessary.
2. Like most ladies, I will always remember to grab my purse, so when I take off my jewelry at night, I put it in a pocket of my bag so it won't get left behind. I usually leave my camera in my bag as well. We were lucky and had a few minutes to grab our essentials like cell phones, iPad, passports, wallets, keys, etc. which were in our safe. Fortunately, I leave the safe unlocked when we're in our cabin so everything was in easy reach. Everything was dumped into my travel tote but it would have been better to have a "bug out" bag ready with our life jackets that would have had the flashlight, batteries, first aid kit and water ready to go. You may only have a minute or two to evacuate and no time to think about what to take.
3. I mentioned taking your keys but on a cruise ship that also includes your ship's "Sea Pass" which is your on-board charge card, your cabin key and ID card. They may use it to scan you into Muster to make sure everyone is accounted for! Some ships still do a verbal role call but some have this new system which goes much faster.

These are some simple things that easily become habit, like fire drills or knowing tornado preparedness when you live in the south! It just becomes second nature and you're ready in the unlikely event you need it. Remember, we were out of our cabin for almost 5 hours so some of these things made us much more comfortable than others. Having our cell phones and iPad allowed me to update our family during the emergency so they could hear

from us first hand and not on the news. And, some (like having our passports) would have been VERY helpful had it been necessary to abandon ship.

So, hope this gives you some ideas of how to travel smarter not harder!

TRAVEL SITES:

- TSA Rules and tips <http://www.tsa.gov/>
- Time Zones & Temperatures http://www.timetemperature.com/tzus/time_zone.shtml
- Time and Date <http://www.timeanddate.com/worldclock/converter.html>
- Trip Advisor (travel reviews) <http://www.tripadvisor.com/>
- Travel Gear, bags, accessories www.travelsmith.com
- Travel Gear, bags, accessories www.magellans.com
- Foreign Currency Exchange <http://www.xe.com/>
- Mobility Rentals www.carevacations.com
- US Airport Location Maps <http://info.mapquest.com/airportmaps/>
- Airport Terminals <http://www.flightstats.com/go/AirportTerminalMaps/airportTerminalGuide.do>