

TRAVEL TIPS

(be sure to download our Pre-Trip Planning and Packing checklists)

Traveling can be intimidating if you don't do it often. This page is intended for general travel tips, safety tips, packing tips, and more. We also have a downloadable packing list so that you can check off items as you pack. We are happy to share our experience with you—feel free to email us with specific questions about traveling and we will try to provide an answer for you.

You'll find tips specific to each trip on its booking page—tips such as travel necessities specific to a location, visa requirements, specific electrical converters, local currency, customs, language, and other useful tips.

We recommend packing light. Laundry service is usually available for a nominal fee. We always recommend casual wear and natural fabrics for comfort, plus one outfit suitable for “dressy” occasions, should you include that in your itinerary. You may be sitting for long periods, so be sure your clothing fits comfortably. We suggest natural colors such as khaki, greens, blues, grays—soft colors, not including white, as white stands out and can alarm animals.

We normally take one roll-aboard bag and a backpack or a medium-size camera bag so that we do not have to check any luggage regardless of the length of the trip. When traveling, we wear layers on the airplane: comfortable pants (Karen usually opts for a long skirt or dress with leggings), a short sleeve shirt, long sleeve shirt, fleece hoodie, rain jacket, a scarf, and slip-on shoes. You may have to walk long distances in the airport; choose shoes that are comfortable and easy to slip off while sleeping on the airplane.

When packing, try to avoid “negative” space such as empty shoes or toiletry kits; socks and underclothing can be rolled tightly and placed inside. Place bottles of liquids and creams inside ziplock plastic bags with the air squeezed out to avoid spills; keep those in your backpack for easy removal at airport security checkpoints. Roll clothing tightly to pack more efficiently; folding uses up more space. Clothing can also be rolled and placed into gallon-sized ziplock bags with the air pressed out to “vacuum” seal for a smaller footprint. Roll larger camera lenses inside of pants and shirts for additional padding and place them in the center of your suitcase. We usually put our camera equipment in the roll-aboard bag while traveling, and use the smaller camera bag for snacks and items that we want easily accessible while on the aircraft.

Be sure that each bag has a contact information tag with your name, phone number, alternate phone number (friend/relative/travel companion), and email address; never include your home address on any identification tag. Place the same information inside each bag in an unlocked pocket in case the exterior tag falls off. Each bag should also have a travel-size combination padlock that can secure the zipper pulls together.

Consider packing clothing that you do not intend to bring home if you are traveling to an area with a high poverty rate. Someone may appreciate your undamaged clothing; you have the benefit of more room for souvenirs and a lighter load to carry home. If you are traveling to another country, it can be fun to bring postcards, candy, or other small gifts from home to give to people you meet along the way, such as guides, lodge staff, and children.

It is a good idea to take a picture of your documents, including passport, ID, credit cards, plane tickets, prescriptions, itinerary, etc, and email it to yourself at a personal account that you can access via the Internet. Include a copy of Travel/Medical insurance and the phone numbers. Also include any passwords or account numbers you might need in case your documents are damaged or stolen. Be sure you know the password to your email account. We also keep a Xeroxed copy of our passport and ID inside our roll-aboard, and keep the original separate, either inside the backpack or camera case, with the compartment locked.

Planning and booking your vacation:

Compare airfares and book your flight early. Be sure to check the carrier's own website as well as the discount sites. Fares on the carriers' own website can be hundreds lower in cost. If you have a long way to travel, you might consider a route that will allow you a long layover in an interesting city. For example, you could fly from the USA to South Africa for 16 hours by going from Atlanta or Dulles to Johannesburg, or you could travel via a layover in the major cities in Europe and spend a day or two exploring Amsterdam, London, Frankfurt, Zurich, or Paris. We are happy to look at your route and make suggestions if we can.

Be sure you consider time changes when booking your flights. Be aware that you might need to book your flight a day early or a day late to arrive or leave on time. If you are making major time zone changes, consider traveling a day or two early to compensate for jet lag.

Check your destination's Customs and Immigration information to ensure that you do not bring contraband into the country. Check to see if you need a Visa to enter, and be sure that you have obtained the Visa prior to travel. Google "visa requirements" for your intended country of travel.

Check with your doctor, Center for Disease Control, or Travel Center to see if you need immunizations or medications for your trip. For example, Yellow Fever immunizations are required for central Africa (Uganda, Rwanda, Kenya) but not for southern Africa (South Africa, Namibia, Botswana, Mozambique). Malaria preventatives are recommended but not required for most African countries. Your doctor can advise you, based on your health and your travel plans. Ask your doctor for copies of your prescriptions; be sure your prescription bottles have prescription labels.

Be sure to notify your credit card provider that you will be traveling. Be sure that the PINs associated with your credit cards work for cash withdrawal (test it before you travel). Know your daily/weekly cash withdrawal limit. We do not recommend carrying a debit card that is linked to your primary checking account. Check with your bank for foreign transaction fees on credit cards. We always carry two credit cards and keep them in separate locations when we travel.

Consider adding an international cell/data plan to your cellular service. Most providers offer temporary monthly rates.

Consider Travel Insurance, including emergency medical service. You may want to insure the cost of your vacation and the cost of medical care/evacuation; there are affordable plans available that may bring you peace of mind. Check with your employer, your credit card company, and with your medical insurance plan to see if they cover out-of-country medical services.

Consider notifying your embassy of your travel plans.

Consider exchanging a small amount of money prior to travel, but know the fair exchange rate and transaction fee. Transaction fees can cost as much as 50% of your transaction! Most airports have ATMs from which you can safely withdraw cash upon arrival, and bank ATMs are safe for withdrawals outside of the airport. ATM fees are much lower and the exchange rate is much better, in most cases.

Before you leave home:

Be sure a friend or relative has a copy of your itinerary and your Travel/Medical insurance, including contact information at your destination. Be sure that you know their phone number by memory, or email it to yourself.

Pack everything you can at least 3 days prior to your trip. Think through each day of your trip, from waking up to going to bed, to be sure that you have packed everything necessary. Remember that laundry services are available, and you can often buy most of what you need, so again, pack light.

Check the weather forecast for your destination to be sure you've packed essential clothing. Make a list of the things you still need to pack the day of your trip including ID, credit cards, passport, tickets, itinerary, personal items including sunglasses, and be sure to check it twice. We make two checkmarks to be sure we've double-checked everything.

You must have all liquids, creams and gels in 3 oz or smaller containers.

Eat well sleep well the night before travel. Be sure you hydrate before and during your travels.

Be sure you have enough prescription medication for your trip and for 7 days afterwards.

Do not walk out of your house without your passport, ID, credit cards, and camera! If you are the forgetful type, bribe a friend to be available to run anything you've forgotten to the airport for you.

Traveling:

Leave early! Be at the airport 2-3 hours prior to departure for international flights; check with your airline for their recommendation. Online check in may be available up to 24 hours prior to your flight. The sooner you check in, the better seat you'll get. You may be able to select your seat online.

If you must check a bag, be sure your contact information (name, phone, email only) is on a tag on the bag, as well as inside the bag—a letter sized piece of paper placed on top of your clothing can be the difference of getting your bag back quickly or not. Be sure the only things in a checked bag are things you can easily replace or go without on vacation. DO NOT leave valuables in checked bags.

Know where you parked your car if you leave it at an airport lot. Text or email the location to yourself, and write it on your itinerary sheet.

Have your passport and ticket available, your 3 oz liquids bag accessible, and lock up your bags prior to entering the airport. Keep your bags near you at all times, and if you are going to sit and relax, lock them to your seat with the cable.

Charge your phone at the airport, and whenever you can. You don't want to arrive at your destination and not be able to communicate.

Fill your water bottle after security, and stay hydrated.

On the plane:

Keep these items easily accessible during your flight: eyeshade, ear plugs, books, tissues, lip balm, hand lotion, water bottle, snacks/drink mixes, socks, compression stockings, toothbrush/paste, USB cable, phone/ipod/e-reader/laptop, ear-buds, scarf, hoodie, jacket, neck pillow, business cards, and anything else that might help you relax or entertain you.

We wear compression stockings on all flights over 3 hours, and we get up to move around and stretch as frequently as possible. A pair of thick socks are nice when napping, as is an eyeshade and earplugs. Dressing in layers means that you can control your comfort, regardless of the ambient temperature. Drink lots of water; airplanes have low humidity and it is easy to become dehydrated.

Don't be afraid to ask the flight attendants for anything you need. Please remember that they are working, and that kindness and respect goes a long way. They always have a soft spot for courteous passengers.

Arriving:

After deplaning, you'll go through Customs and Immigration. Customs will check to see that you are not bringing contraband into the country. Immigration will check your passport and visa status to be sure that you can enter the country. If you have a checked bag, you will pick it up prior to going through Customs. You will often have to put your bags through an Xray machine prior to entering the country. Be sure to read the Customs and Immigration documents thoroughly and fill them out carefully.

Airport ATMs are usually secure although they often have higher fees than bank ATMs. There is usually an ATM between Customs/Immigration and the exit, should you want to withdraw cash at this time. Your hotel or safari driver can usually stop at a bank ATM if you want to wait; ask if this is possible before leaving the airport.

Depending on your itinerary, you will either look for a person holding a sign with your name on it when you exit Customs/Immigration, or go to your hotel prior to joining us for safari. Either way, we can usually arrange to have someone there to pick you up.

You may have come a long way to spend time with us, and we know that you might want to maximize your stay with additional vacation time. With enough advance notice, we may be able to make suggestions, inquiries, and recommendations to assist you in planning and booking additional activities. While we are not a travel agency and cannot book outside of our safaris, we usually have contacts that can help you extend the vacation of a lifetime.

Gratuities:

Tipping our Guides, Rangers, and Trackers is mandatory. Please check our specific travel tips on the bookings page of your trip for guidelines or ask us for guidelines, but you can generally plan \$10-20/day for the Ranger/Guide, and \$5-10/day for the Tracker. Please never offer your Ranger or Tracker an extra tip for locating a specific animal.

In most of our locations, general staff depend on the extra income from gratuities, but you should tip based on the service you receive. We strive to ensure that you received tip-worthy service at the locations we book, and we would like to know immediately if the service and attention you receive are lacking in any way. Most lodges have a staff tip box and divide the tips monthly. About 5-10% of the cost of your lodging is generous.

If you would like to tip individually, here are some guidelines:

Assistance with your bags at the equivalent of \$1 USD per bag

Drivers to/from locations, depending on time/distance/traffic - \$1-10 USD

Housekeeping - \$1-5 USD/day

Bartenders/wait staff - 10-15% per order if not included in the safari package