



HELLO, AND WELCOME!

Congratulations on taking the first step to making your dream of traveling the world come true. This guide will offer step-by-step guidance, tips and suggestions on how to take your trip from an idea to reality.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

1. Destinations
2. Plane tickets
3. Budget
4. Accommodations
5. Logistics for putting your local life on pause
6. Luggage options
7. Packing list
8. Visas and other documents
9. Travel Insurance
10. Immunizations and vaccinations
11. Safety
13. Travel Tips

DESTINATIONS

(6 months in advance)

The first step you want to do is create your travel wish list. Are there one or a few places you have always dreamt of visiting? These must-see spots become a priority in your itinerary and you can build around them.

Some destinations have a narrow window of time that provides the best travel experience. If your dream is to trek the Everest Base Camp, there is a small window in the Fall that is ideal. Make sure to research your must-see locations and incorporate that into the itinerary plan.

It is also possible to plan around weather conditions. One idea is to plan your route so that you are always traveling in warm weather, which gives you the added benefit of easier and lighter packing choices. Between April and October, stay in the Northern Hemisphere and between November and March stay in the Southern Hemisphere.

Another criteria you may choose to use for picking your destinations is how much it costs to visit each country, especially if you need to stay within a tight budget. The best countries to keep costs low are in Asia (except Japan), South America, some parts of Africa and Eastern Europe. You can travel on a budget even in more expensive countries but plan to spend less time there.

Do some research about destinations you don't know much about to determine if they would be a place you want to add to your list. Lonelyplanet.com is a great resource for independent travelers. If you want to travel off the beaten path, look for independent travel blogs.

What I did: My biggest dream was to visit Australia and New Zealand, so I started there and added on. I wanted to stick to warm temperatures and needed to stay within a fixed budget, so I added countries in Asia and South America (I had already been all over Eastern Europe, so chose to leave that off my itinerary).

PRO TIP: To prevent the feeling of overwhelm if you don't know where to start and you don't have a "dream travel list", just start by writing down countries that sound interesting, or for whatever reason you are curious to visit. Once you have a list of your top 30, pick one of the above criteria (budget, weather, etc.) and start narrowing down, and organizing in a sequence that makes sense.

PLANE TICKETS

(3 months in advance)

You have two options for booking your flights: a RoundTheWorld (RTW) ticket or a series of one way tickets. Both options have pros and cons, the main factors being cost and flexibility.

Option 1. **RWT** - this is a ticket for a series of flights around the world, all offered by the same airline alliance. At the time of publishing this guide, there are two main companies offering RTW tickets: Oneworld (via American Airlines) and Star Alliance (via United Airlines).

The advantages of a RTW ticket are:

- Ease and **convenience** - you have everything figured out before you embark on your trip.
- It can be **cheaper** than buying individual last minute flights (but not always).
- You accumulate **airline perks**.

The disadvantages of a RTW ticket are:

- **Lack of flexibility** to adjust destinations along the way (to me, this was a huge disadvantage as I wanted to travel freely and be able to adjust my itinerary and stay duration based on my actual experience, the people I met at each location, advice I got from locals, etc.).
- You must **start and end in the same country**.
- There are a **lot of regulations** you have to abide by.
- The maximum duration of the trip is **one year**.
- **Limited seats**, which means you may not be able to fly on the exact date you want.

Option 2. **Booking One Way Tickets As You Go**

The main advantage of this option is full freedom and flexibility. If you choose this option, all you need is to book your first flight, and you don't have to have fully planned out your full itinerary, and even if you do, you can choose to adjust along the way, backtrack, etc.

It can also be cheaper to fly this way as you can take advantage of deals and discounts by traveling on off days, etc.

What I did: I bought one way tickets along the way, and I am so happy I chose that option. I had a pretty good idea of my itinerary before I left but I made so many adjustments along the way, and this option worked greatly with my need for freedom and flexibility.

Note: Be sure to research any student discounts that might be available (if applicable).

BUDGET

(6 months in advance)

Traveling the world costs less than what you probably think. That said, there are many factors that determine how much you will spend - the countries you choose to visit, types of accommodation, how long you stay in each location, mode of transport, activities/tours you do. I will offer a ballpark estimate to help you create a budget.

1. Itinerary

Western Europe, Australia, NZ and Japan will be the most expensive countries to visit - you may want to research hostel prices during the season you expect to be there but plan to spend roughly \$100 per day on the lower end of expenses.

Asia, Africa and South America are significantly cheaper, you can splurge on nicer accommodation at reasonable prices (\$35/night) but can easily live on less than \$50 per day.

2. Transport

Flights are obviously the most expensive option, with trains in the middle and bus travel being the cheapest but also the most uncomfortable and slowest. If you have flexibility, you will find what fits your budget and need at each leg of the trip.

3. Pace of travel

Generally, the more frequently you change locations, the more money you will spend.

4. Miscellaneous

Unavoidably, you will have expenses you didn't plan for, so you will ideally set aside around \$1,000 for such expenses per one year of travel.

5. Pre-travel expenses

You also need to factor in all the expenses you will incur before you embark on your trip, such as gear, vaccinations, visa, insurance, etc.

What I did: I traveled in a mix of expensive and cheaper countries, stayed mostly in private rooms in hostels, with nicer accommodations every once in a while mostly in Asia. I opted for train travel as much as possible and I ate inexpensive local food. I spent most of my budget on activities/tours and international plane tickets. I spent \$22,000 for one year of travel and felt very comfortable at that level. You can certainly adjust up or down based on the above criteria and your priorities.

PRO TIP: Pick one or two credit cards (Visa or Mastercard) with great reward programs, no foreign transaction fees and no annual fees (at least not in the first year). AMEX is not widely accepted in many countries.

ACCOMMODATIONS

(3 months in advance)

Booking Accommodation in Advance, or as You Travel?

Pre-booking is a nice convenience and offers peace of mind but the downside is the risk of losing money when inevitably your plans change.

For the most part, I recommend booking as you go along to allow for maximum flexibility and freedom, except for your very first few nights of the trip or when you are arriving at a destination late at night. If you are traveling in peak season or visiting a popular destination, book as soon as you know when you will arrive (i.e. usually a week or two in advance).

Types of Accommodation

Budget Hostels - Rooms & bathrooms are shared by multiple people (think bunk beds). Personal lockers, as well as a very basic breakfast are often available. A few private rooms are also available in most hostels. Check for age restrictions (especially in Australia and NZ where many hostels have restrictions for people over 35).

Local Guest Houses - A guesthouse provides a simple private room. Kitchen and breakfast may or may not be included. [Booking.com](https://www.booking.com) is a good site to search for guesthouses and cheap hotels.

AirB&B - great option with the added benefit of experiencing the local way of living. More pricey than a hostel.

Budget hotels - there are endless options but I recommend picking out a few sites you like, or you'll end up spending too much precious time looking for accommodations. I like [booking.com](https://www.booking.com) and [agoda.com](https://www.agoda.com) (especially for Asia).

What I did: I alternated between private rooms in hostels and budget hotels. I never wanted to take the risk of sharing a bedroom with strangers but I wanted the social aspect a hostel provided. When I needed privacy and a good night sleep, especially in countries where hotels were cheap, I opted for a hotel.

Note: There are many other options, including homestays, WOOFING, couchsurfing, etc. Do your research before you book any option, check out reviews, photos, cancellation policies, etc. to avoid unpleasant surprises.

PRO TIP: Bring ear plugs, a sleep mask, a set of sheets and a [dry towel](#) for added hygiene protection in hostels (*see more in Packing*).

LOCAL LIFE LOGISTICS

(1- 6 months in advance)

Deal with your living space.

Own your home? Decide whether to rent it out or sell, and move ahead with those plans as early as you can.

Renting? Look into subletting or ending your lease.

Belongings - Plan to donate, sell or store your belongings (or a combination of all three).

If you need to rent a storage unit, begin pricing them as soon as possible – looking at prices may help you reassess just how much stuff you decide to keep.

Your job situation.

Decide whether you want to quit, take a sabbatical or keep your job on the road. There are plenty of options for making money on the road too and you want to consider how much freedom you want, and how much time you can afford to go without a steady income.

Bills

Discontinue utilities, if applicable.

Automate recurring bills (cell phone, etc.)

Cell phone

Update your cell phone plan to your desired international plan; OR

Get your cell phone unlocked so you can switch out sim cards in different locations. Pay-as-you-go local sim cards in each location may be cheaper than international roaming charges.

Mail

Arrange for mail forwarding (PO Box, your parent's or friend's house, or a virtual mailbox).

Other

Plan for any additional logistics - pets, car, etc.

CHOOSING THE RIGHT LUGGAGE OPTION

(2 months in advance)

I believe there is a science to knowing what the best travel backpack is – and how to pick it!
What to look for in a good backpack?

1. **Water-Resistant Material:** semi-waterproof material is sufficient (most travel backpacks come with tarps you can put over them in a downpour). Make sure the material won't stay wet long or it will get musty. Look for material that is thick but lightweight. Treated nylon fiber is really good.
2. **Lockable Zippers:** make sure each compartment has two zippers so you can lock them together.
3. **Multiple Compartments** - not a must, but I like being able to keep my belongings organized in different sections, especially if you expect to rarely have the luxury of fully unpacking.
4. **Internal Frame:** makes your bag slimmer, easier to carry around. It also tends to be lighter and more durable.
5. **Padded Hip belt and padded shoulder straps:** most of the weight of the backpack will be pushing down on your hips, so you want a padded belt to make supporting the weight more comfortable. The hip belt should also be adjustable so you can tighten it for extra support.
6. **Contoured/Padded Back:** it distributes weight more evenly to prevent back pain.
8. **Front Loading:** this allows you to zip open the face from the side and access all your stuff, as opposed to a top loading bag which only allows you access from a hole in the top.
9. **Size:** your backpack should be proportional to your body - somewhere between 40- 60 liters. Most airline carry-on baggage sizes are 45 inches (22 x 14 x 9 in) or 115 centimeters (56 x 36 x 23 cm) including handles and wheels so if you get a backpack with those dimensions, you'll be able to carry on.
10. **Backpack vs. a carry-on suitcase?** The advantage of a backpack is not having to lug a suitcase up stairs, hills, cobblestone streets and is generally easier to travel with. The advantage of a suitcase is the ease of organizing/finding your stuff when you go for weeks without unpacking.

What I did: I spent a few months researching and went with [Women's REI Traverse 65 Pack](#).

PACKING LIST

Overall philosophy - pack as lightly as possible (think 1-week worth of clothes), be prepared to wash clothes and purchase items as needed along the way.

Clothing/shoes (for warm weather only):

- 4 T-shirts
- 2 pairs of shorts/skirts
- 1 lightweight long sleeve shirt
- 1 pair of dark jeans/long pants
- 5 pairs of socks and 5 pairs of underwear
- 1 lightweight fleece
- 1 rain jacket/poncho
- 2 pairs of swimwear
- 1 pair of light PJs
- 1 sun hat & sunglasses
- 1 scarf (for women to use for cover in countries where women need to cover up)
- 1 pair of hiking/running shoes
- 1 pair of sandals
- Flip flops

Everything Else

- Medication & First Aid Supply
- Compact Toiletries – pack enough for one month.
- Portable Phone Charger & travel adaptor
- Ear plugs & eye mask
- [Sleeping bag liner](#) – for added hygiene in hostels/cheaper hotels
- Microfiber travel [dry towel](#) (if sleeping in hostels, as they typically charge for towels)
- Packing cubes – a “must have”. They will keep you extremely organized, and make packing and unpacking super easy.
- Headlamp
- Reusable Bag
- Water bottle
- Portable washer bag - I recommend [Scrubba](#) sold by REI
- Small travel lock (TSA friendly)
- Hand sanitizer
- Laptop/tablet (unless you plan to fully disconnect and use your cell phone only)

What I did: I packed one week of clothing appropriate for the season, and budgeted \$25/month to purchase anything else I might need as I went along. I also got rid of stuff along the way if I knew I'd no longer need it.

PRO TIP: Don't pack something just because you found it on a packing list; customize based on your specific needs. You can improvise, borrow, or go without! If you are planning to pack an item “just in case”, don't pack it. “There are two kinds of travelers — those who pack light and those who wish they had.

VISAS/DOCUMENTS

(3 months in advance)

Before you leave, check the visa and entry requirements for all countries you plan to visit, as well as how long you are allowed to stay in each country as a tourist. In many countries, you will not need a visa for a short stay if you have a US passport, but there are other countries where getting a visa takes weeks, so make sure to research all that in advance.

- **China, Vietnam, India, the U.S.A.**, and many other commonly visited countries require visas to be obtained **in advance**. Many of these countries make it fairly easy to get a visa while on the road.
- Be aware of the [Schengen zone](#), which makes up most of Europe, and how long you're allowed to stay within it.
- The [US Department of State](#) has visa information for most countries in the world.
- For non-US citizens, check out [iVisa.com](#).

Note: Make sure your passport is **valid for at least 6 months** past the duration of your trip as many countries require 6-month validity from the time of entry. Additionally, if your passport pages are pretty full, you may want to consider **adding blank pages** for visa as some countries require a specific number of blank visa pages in a passport as an entry requirement.

PRO TIP: I recommend creating an email folder where you scan and keep copies of all important documents - passport pages, credit cards, insurance information, and anything else that you need to be able to have immediate access to in case of an emergency.

Carry Spare Passport Photos (I recommend 10).

TRAVEL INSURANCE

(2 months in advance)

While there are many types of insurance you might buy as a long-term traveler, the most essential for most is a comprehensive travel health insurance. As long as you're covered for long-term health care in your "home country", a travel health insurance plan that will cover medical costs in case of accidents and serious illness abroad is what you'll need.

While some insurance is important, I'd recommend against getting too much insurance. Pick a cheaper plan with the highest deductible you're comfortable with. Your goal is to never actually have to use the insurance, so it's better to pay less upfront, and potentially a bit more if you actually need to rely on your policy.

Even if you're covered for health expenses in your home country, it's important to be covered for emergencies abroad. Most travel health insurance policies are not "primary" health insurance policies. They rely on you being entitled to treatment somewhere, and will ship you there if needed for long-term care.

Make sure your insurance plan includes **Emergency Evacuation**. I recommend a policy with at least a \$100,000 limit, unless you plan to travel in remote areas, in which case you may choose a higher limit.

What I did: I purchased travel health insurance only for \$420 with a high deductible and \$100,000 emergency evacuation limit. The only medical needs I had during my trip were dental emergencies and the insurance denied both claims so I ended up not benefitting from the plan but had peace of mind along the way.

TRAVEL IMMUNIZATIONS

(1-3 months in advance)

Once you have determined which countries you plan to visit on your trip, check the vaccination requirements by country on the [CDC website](#).

For each country, you will find a list of recommended vaccinations and required vaccinations, depending on what parts of the country you will be traveling to (urban vs rural areas), the length of stay, the season during which you will visit, lodging conditions (air conditions, open-air tents, or regular hostel/hotel), mode of travel and the types of activities you might participate in.

Timing

Note that some vaccinations require a series of shots given over a period of weeks, so don't wait until the last minute to get vaccinated.

Where Can You Get Vaccinated?

Start with your family doctor's office. If they don't have all the vaccines you need, find a traveler's health clinic near you.

SAFETY PRECAUTIONS

Online safety

Turn off WiFi when traveling: WiFi not only shows who you are, it also calls out previously saved networks you connected with. Anyone willing to do harm can fake any of these networks and you may connect to a “*rogue access point*” without being aware of it. This will also save your phone’s battery life.

Install PREY app on all your devices - Prey lets you track and find your phone, laptop, or tablet. And it’s free.

Use a password locker like [Lastpass](#), [Onepass](#), or [Dashlane](#). A password locker will notify you immediately when a breach occurs so you can change your password.

Let your bank(s) know you are traveling, and the countries you will visit - that will prevent your card being locked in a foreign country.

Physical safety

Become familiar with **common travel scams** for each country you plan to visit. Refer to [this blog](#) for the 40 most common travel scams, by country.

Common sense will be your most valuable asset. Listen to your intuition - if something doesn’t feel safe, don’t take a risk. Try not to draw attention as a tourist, as much as possible.

Safeguard your hotel room - try to give the impression that you’re in your room even when you’re away by placing the *Do Not Disturb* sign on the outside of your door and keeping the blinds or windows closed. Don’t let any strangers into your room, even if they say they work for the hotel. You can always call the front desk to check whether someone was ordered by hotel staff to come to your room.

Keep your **friends and family updated** - share a copy of your overall itinerary and check in so they know you are where you are supposed to be.

MY BEST TRAVEL TIPS

My trip around the world started when I quit my safe high-paying legal job, donated all my belongings and left New York City with a one way ticket to India, leaping nervously into the unknown and leaving much of my old life behind to pursue my dream of visiting 100 countries before I turned 40. Below is my best advice:

Patience Is Important

Don't sweat the stuff you can't control - and there will be a lot of it on your journey. Adjust and be flexible. Missed your bus? No worries, there will be another one. Make new friends and appreciate your surroundings in the meantime

Wake Up Early To Avoid Crowds

Rise before sunrise to have the best attractions all to yourself while avoiding large tourist crowds. It's also a great time for photos, and it's usually easier to interact with locals getting ready for their day.

Observe Daily Life Around You

If you really want to get a feel for the pulse of a place, I recommend spending a few hours sitting in a park or on a busy street corner by yourself just watching day to day life happen in front of you. Slow down your train of thought and pay close attention to the details around you. The smells, the colors, human interactions, and sounds. It's a kind of meditation — and you'll see stuff you never noticed before.

Slow Down To Enjoy Your Trip

Resist trying to cram 6 countries into 6 weeks. All the good stuff happens when you really take the time to explore. You'll learn about activities that aren't in your guidebook and meet people who are eager to show you around.

Don't Get Discouraged

It's likely that at some point on your trip, you will have some amount of bad luck - you may miss your connection, get lost, encounter difficulty at the border, or be met by unfriendly locals. Take a brief moment to be sad and take care of yourself, but don't let it derail the trip.

Break Out Of Your Comfort Zone

Talk to everyone. Try new weird foods. Challenge yourself to try activities you've never done before. Those will create some of your most fun and lasting memories.

Get Lost On Purpose

If you want to see the parts of town where real people live & work, you need to go visit them. The best way to do this is on foot — without knowing exactly where you're going. Write down the name of your hotel so you can catch a taxi back if needed, then just pick a direction and start walking.

Be Flexible & Don't Over Plan

That's the main (and best, in my opinion) difference between a vacation and an open trip. You won't know what you'll enjoy or who you'll meet until you get to a location.

Learn A Few Foreign Words

Learning a few basic phrases in the local language can improve your travel experience. *Hello, please, thank you, nice to meet you, sorry,* and *"can I take your photo"* were the ones I used the most.

Write Down The Address Of Your Hotel

Sometimes, after a long flight, your phone battery could end up dead. And if you didn't write down the address of where you're staying, how will you tell/show the taxi driver?

Splurge A Bit While Traveling

I'm a huge fan of budget travel but if you are traveling for a long time, not being able to unpack, have your own shower, or smell clean sheets gets old after a while. It's nice (and healthy) to go over your budget occasionally. Book a few days at a nice hotel, eat out at a fancy restaurant or splurge on an activity you have been wanting to try. Enjoy yourself!

Go On Free Walking Tours

You will find that many cities offer **free city walking tours** - it's a good idea to do one when you first arrive to get oriented and learn facts about the city from a local guide, and maybe make some new friends. Just note that the guide will expect a small tip at the end.

Say Yes Often

Be impulsive and say yes when someone randomly invites you to meet their family, try a new activity, or explore a place you didn't know existed. You never know what you're missing unless you say yes! It's these unexpected and unplanned situations that add spice to your travels and always turn into the best stories later. Accept the kindness of strangers when you travel (while using your common sense for safety).

ENJOY THE JOURNEY!