

TRIP ORGANISATION

I made this document to keep some notes for my future trips, but also in order to share my experience with others interested in undertaking such a trip or something similar.

The most important and time consuming things to do before departure are :

1. Booking the flights (and other things if needed / desired)
2. Preparing your travel equipment
3. Medical check up and vaccinations
4. Visas if needed

Booking the flights can take time if you do a big trip because you need to have done some research to decide when to be where depending on what you want to see. How much time you should plan for each location, restrictions, weather, events, etc.

Preparing travel equipment appears quick and easy. You get 90% done in not even half a day, but then come little things you need to fine tune.

THE PLAN

Where : What are you looking for ? Where to get the info ?

It is good to make a bit of a plan to have a general idea of what you want to see and where you want to go.

Be very careful about looking at pictures of the places you want to go to ! Many of the sources of pictures focus on what is best and it is sometimes difficult to find pictures that reflect a more realistic view of what you will see. Looking at too many pictures of the best circumstances of where you plan to go can make you be disappointed when you arrive at the destination. Trust me ! I have been there and done that.

Books Like Lonely Planet are great ! However, be careful. There is a long list of recommended things to do in them. Lonely Planet was a little frustrating for me. There are so many ideas in them that it is difficult to stay focused on the essential. Even what they call the essential would take a long time to cover and contains some things you will not necessarily be satisfied with. It is great if you go spend 3 months in Argentina for example, but if only one month you could feel frustrated. At least, this was my reaction. I stopped using it after Cuba and did just fine and was more relaxed.

Getting advice from people is great, but that also, one has to be careful, because we do not all function the same way and have the same interest.

Conclusion : There are many ways to get information. None is perfect. We all have to gain experience with this and find a personal way of getting the information. In the end, there is no black or white solution. It is a combination of sources. For me, something is confirmed when I feel that it has been repetitively recommended to me.

When – Better to go when it is not too hot or cold and not daily pouring with rain. I also highly recommend traveling off season to be more flexible and not have to book things in advance and fight for space. I went to some locations where it was obvious that there are times of the year where there are thousands of visitors attending. It was a great pleasure to be there in a small group when there was almost nobody else.

Booking : What do you need to book in advance ? In my opinion, flights are the only thing that needs to be booked in advance. But even there, try to have a flexible solution with which you can at least change dates.

Be careful if you go somewhere during high season, but otherwise I personally liked to have the possibility to improvise. I rarely booked a place to stay for more than one night and rarely firmly decided in advance where I was going to go next. Depending on what you see, whom you meet, what you learn, the weather, etc. you feel like going in a different direction or at a different speed.

FLIGHTS

For a trip around the world, there are several options of which Star Alliance and One World come to my mind. It is not that one is necessarily better than the other. It is good to try all because depending on where you want to go and the kind of route you want, a different one will be more efficient and cost effective.

I used Star Alliance to get the base of my trip. I then booked the little local flights separately depending on how I was feeling and what I wanted to do. For example, I booked flights to spend 2 months in South America and then organized the 3 regional flights separately whenever I knew better the kind of timing I wanted. Where possible, I took the bus, because much cheaper and with a bus it is possible to decide last minute which day you want to go where. Taking the bus also has the advantage of letting you see 10 times more than with a commercial airplane. Finally, I have some amazing souvenirs in buses, having contacts with locals.

MEDICAL

Vaccins and checkup - do not forget to do this !!!

Don't forget to take a pack of preventive items – this you need to go see a doctor that makes a list for you depending on your destinations and personal needs.

Dentist – good to make sure you are fit for the coming months. You do not want to need to go to the dentist when you are in the middle of nowhere and there is no access to someone you trust.

Medical Insurance – Make sure your medical insurance is international so that you are supported even if something happens to you abroad. This generally implies paying a fee for 6 or 12 months.

VISAS

Quite a few countries require Visas, especially in Africa and Asia. Most visas take 2-3 days to get but can often be obtained in one day if you pay extra. There are some exceptions however. A notable and memorable exception for me was India. It took minimum 5 days to get a visa for India.

If you can time wise, I recommend doing it from home before departure. But when doing a long trip it is not always possible. Most Visas are valid 3 months, but there are different ones, this has to be checked. For Asia, I made of Bangkok my base and this is where I got my Visas.

BACKPACK

I found an amazing backpack ! It also has wheels. 95% of the time I was rolling it around, not carrying it on my back. Of course, this depends on the kind of plans one has. If you plan to do a lot of trekking with your bag, then that is not the best option because not very comfortable when carrying on my back.

I also took a second Daypack (small backpack) that served for daytrips and is useful for carrying valuable items when in flights.

List of what to take with you :

VERY IMPORTANT : take printed versions of the documents you may need, but also scan them all and put them on Internet somewhere where you can have access to them from any internet connected computer (I used Dropbox). Include : passport, credit cards, flight plan, reservations, etc. I even uploaded the pictures I took during the trip so that I still had them if my camera and all the memory backups were lost or stolen.

MONEY BELT – This is something amazing ! A belt in which you can leave your passport and extra money. You are carrying it and have low risk of losing.

MONEY BACKUP - I highly recommend taking a backup of US dollars almost anywhere you go. US dollars work in almost any country and can help if one day you have an issue with credit cards, etc. In fact, I also highly recommend taking several credit cards so that if one does not work you have a backup.

Passport

Important papers (driver's license, vaccinations booklet, copies of passport & health insurance card)

Wallet, bank cards, traveller checks, credit card

Pants (2 pairs) – 1 pair should become a short

Sweater/jersey

Rain/wind jacket

Swimming gear

Underwear & socks (7 pairs)

T-shirts (x 7)

Gloves

Hat

Walking Shoes

Sandals

Sunglasses

Toiletries

Towel

Water bottle

Swiss army knife

Umbrella / poncho

Sunscreen Hat

Glasses / contact lenses & lens fluid

Duct tape Ziploc bags

Small medical kit – get personal doctor advice on what you should bring.

Insect repellent

Sun cream

Electricity adapter – to plug your electric items anywhere in the world

Flashlight

Music (MP3 player)

Camera

Small alarm clock

Lighter / matches

A deck of cards

Guidebook or other source of information

Map

Notebook / travel journal & pen

GROUND TRANSPORT

Buses

I did close to 250 hours of bus rides during my trip. It was never very complicated and generally possible to book last minute. Worst case, I had to book it 24 hours before. However, I am possibly not a reference because 90 % of my trip was off season.

Car rental

There are locations where renting a car is a fantastic solution. If you can share with 2 or 3 other people it often does not cost more than Scenic tours. However, if you reserve on Internet, be very careful with insurance cost !! I made some bookings and thought the price was decent. I thought I should add 20 or 30 % to the price for the insurance cost. WRONG !!! The insurance cost was superior to the car rental cost. Sometimes as much as 150 % !!! Do not make a reservation on Internet if it does not include the Insurance cost. And even if it does... they often hide something, so put some margin.

I did not know about this, but I understand that there are some insurance contracts one can have that avoid needing to get the rental insurance. If this is true, then it is surely a very worthwhile way of saving a lot.

WHERE TO STAY

Hostels are the best place to stay. In South America, Argentina in particular, it is more than amazing ! Hostels receive people that are doing similar trips and therefore, not only do you meet people that do similar trips and have interesting things to share, in addition many hostels know how to show you around, advise you what to see, offer you tours that are of interest.

BUDGET

This is a delicate question and very much depends on people.

However, many people do ignore the fact that it is possible to make absolutely amazing experiences at a price that is affordable for the average European or American person. In South America and Asia you easily find Hostels or equivalent for 10 US dollars per night. And you are not staying in a horrible place. On the contrary, some are super cool. Yes, in South America you mostly share the room, but even that can be a lot of fun. In most places in South America and Asia it is possible to feed yourself absolutely decently for 5 dollars per day.

Then comes how you fill your days. How you fill your days can have an enormous impact on your budget. There are activities that are not given at all. However, there are many fantastic activities that do not cost a fortune. During my trip, I regularly rented a bicycle and lived extraordinary days where I saw a lot. There are many accessible locations where there are many things to see at a short distance. There are also many trips that

are organized in a way that you share them with a group of people and therefore divide the cost. Some of the most amazing tours I participated in were organized in such a way that we were between 6 and 15 people in a group taken for a 2, 3 or 4 day trip for 25 dollars per day all included (lodging, food, guide, transport, etc.).

Transportation is the most expensive part of a trip, but if you stick to buses, in most parts it is affordable and a great experience. The most expensive part of the whole trip is flights. If you are tight on the budget, the solution is to dedicate a profound commitment to one continent.

Then, you need to add some margin to the budget for the visas, the medical, the equipment you may need to purchase and for possible unexpected.

Make sure you sublet your flat during your absence.