

TRAVEL CONNECT NOW PRESENTS

The Smart Traveler's Guide

*Essential Tips & Safety for Every Journey —
at Home and Around the World*

A complimentary guide from

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Where "I Do" Meets "Let's Go"™

Travel Smart, Travel Aware

Whether you're boarding a cruise, chasing an adventure, unwinding at a spa, gathering the family, or celebrating a milestone, the happiest trips share one quiet ingredient: a traveler who planned ahead and stayed aware. After 25+ years in the travel world, I've learned that a little preparation is what lets you truly relax once you arrive. This guide gathers the essentials I share with my own clients — practical, no-nonsense, and useful whether you're staying stateside or crossing an ocean.

PART ONE

Before You Go: Documents & Prep

Check your passport early — the “six-month rule”

Many countries require your passport to remain valid for at least **six months beyond** your travel dates, and airlines can deny boarding if it doesn't. The easy way to check: add six months to your arrival date — if your passport expires before then, renew it now. The U.S. State Department suggests renewing about **nine months** before expiration to stay ahead of processing times. (Adult passports are valid 10 years; children's, 5 years.)

Flying within the U.S.? You need a REAL ID

For domestic flights, your driver's license must be **REAL ID-compliant** (look for the star in the upper corner) — or bring your passport. If you arrive without an acceptable ID, TSA's newer **ConfirmID** process may let you fly for a **\$45 fee**, but it's not guaranteed and adds time. Don't leave it to chance at the airport.

- ✓ Make copies — photo and digital — of your passport, ID, and travel insurance
- ✓ Leave a copy and your itinerary with someone you trust at home
- ✓ Store a digital copy in secure cloud storage you can reach from anywhere

NAN'S TIP

Snap a clear photo of your passport's photo page and email it to yourself. If your passport is ever lost or stolen abroad, that copy dramatically speeds up getting help from the nearest U.S. embassy.

PART TWO

Money Matters

A few small moves before you leave keep your money safe and your cards working when you need them most.

- ✓ Tell your bank and card companies your travel dates and destinations, so a purchase abroad isn't flagged and frozen
- ✓ Carry a little local currency for arrival — taxis, tips, and small vendors aren't always card-friendly
- ✓ Bring a backup card and keep it *separate* from your primary one
- ✓ Favor a credit card with no foreign transaction fees; use ATMs attached to real banks

AWARENESS FIRST

Split your cash and cards between two places — say, your wallet and a zipped inner bag pocket. If one is lost or stolen, you're never left with nothing. A slim RFID-blocking sleeve adds cheap peace of mind for tap-enabled credit cards.

PART THREE

Packing Smart & the Airport

The days of the oversized carry-on are ending

Good news first: a standard carry-on (about **22" high × 14" wide × 9" deep**) fits the new airport scanners just fine — if your bag is within the limit, you have nothing to worry about. What's changing is *enforcement*. For years, many travelers quietly got away with a bag a bit larger than allowed, because size checks were inconsistent. The newer 3D scanners have a slightly smaller opening than the old machines, and they've effectively become the size check themselves: if a bag is oversized — or so overstuffed that wheels, rigid handles, or bulging pockets push it past the opening — it may simply not fit. If it can't go through, it can't be screened, and you'll be sent back to check it. Airlines are tightening up at the boarding gate, too.

- ✓ Pack a change of clothes, medications, chargers, and valuables in your **carry-on**, never checked
- ✓ Keep medications in their **original labeled bottles**; bring a copy of prescriptions
- ✓ In the newer scanner lanes, you can leave laptops and 3-1-1 liquids *in* your bag

GOOD TO KNOW

Traveling with a film camera? The new CT scanners can ruin undeveloped film in a single pass — take it out and ask for a hand inspection.

PART FOUR

Health & Peace of Mind

- ✓ **Travel insurance is worth it.** It can cover trip delays, cancellations, lost luggage, and — importantly — medical emergencies your regular health plan may not cover abroad
- ✓ Pack enough prescription medication for your whole trip, plus a few extra days

NAN'S TIP

Read what your travel insurance actually covers *before* you buy — especially medical evacuation, which can be extraordinarily expensive out of pocket. This is one of the details I help my travelers get right.

Staying connected abroad

Before you depart, call your mobile carrier, tell them which countries you'll visit, and ask to add an **international calling and texting plan** for the month. These plans are usually billed for each month you're abroad, so a longer trip may span more than one — and it's easy to forget to **cancel it when you get home**, so set yourself a reminder. (An eSIM or international day-pass is another option worth asking about to avoid surprise roaming charges.)

Check destination health requirements (international)

Some countries recommend — or even require — specific vaccinations, and health notices can change from season to season. Before an international trip, look up your destination on the CDC's **Travelers' Health** site at **cdc.gov/travel**, where you'll find recommended and required vaccines, malaria guidance, and any current health notices for that country.

Try to see your doctor or a travel-health clinic **4–6 weeks before** you leave — some vaccines take time to become effective or require more than one dose.

AWARENESS FIRST

Carry a copy of your immunization records when traveling internationally. A few destinations ask for proof of certain vaccines (yellow fever is the classic example) before they'll let you enter.

Safety & Awareness at Your Destination

Awareness isn't about worry — it's what lets you relax. A few simple habits go a long way, whether you're in a big U.S. city or a village overseas.

- ✓ Stay alert in crowds and transit hubs, where pickpockets work; keep bags zipped and in front of you
- ✓ Use the room safe for your passport, extra cash, and valuables
- ✓ Trust your instincts — if a situation or “deal” feels off, step away
- ✓ Learn the local emergency number (it isn't 911 everywhere) and note your hotel's address in the local language
- ✓ Be cautious about telling strangers you're a tourist or where you're staying
- ✓ Keep a mental note of exits and stay aware of your surroundings, just as you would at home

NAN'S TIP

On arrival, grab a hotel business card — or jot down the hotel's name, address, and phone number — and keep it in your wallet. If your phone dies or you get turned around, you can show a taxi driver exactly where you need to go, no language barrier required.

PART SIX

Digital Safety on the Road

- ✓ Avoid banking or shopping on public Wi-Fi; if you must, use a VPN
- ✓ Turn off auto-connect to open networks on your phone and laptop
- ✓ Consider waiting to post vacation photos until you're home — real-time posts announce an empty house
- ✓ Back up photos to the cloud as you go, so a lost phone doesn't mean lost memories

PART SEVEN

Traveling Internationally? One Extra Layer

Enroll in STEP — it's free

The State Department's **Smart Traveler Enrollment Program (STEP)** registers your trip with the nearest U.S. embassy at no cost. You'll get safety alerts for your destination, and the embassy can reach you in an emergency — a storm, unrest, or a family emergency back home. Enroll at **step.state.gov** (the current platform uses a free login.gov account).

Know the advisory level before you book

The State Department rates every destination on four levels: **1** — Exercise Normal Caution, **2** — Exercise Increased Caution, **3** — Reconsider Travel, and **4** — Do Not Travel. Check yours at **travel.state.gov** before you book and again before you go, since conditions can change.

KEEP THESE HANDY

U.S. State Department emergency line for Americans abroad: **+1-202-501-4444** (from overseas) or **+1-888-407-4747** (from the U.S. & Canada).

YOUR QUICK PRE-TRIP CHECKLIST

Before You Leave Home

- ✓ Passport valid 6+ months beyond your trip (or REAL ID for domestic flights)
- ✓ Copies of documents — digital and paper — and itinerary shared with someone home
- ✓ Bank & card companies notified; backup card packed separately
- ✓ Travel insurance purchased and reviewed
- ✓ Carry-on measured; meds in original bottles in your carry-on
- ✓ Prescriptions filled with a few extra days' supply
- ✓ Destination health & vaccination requirements checked at cdc.gov/travel (international)
- ✓ Phone plan or eSIM sorted for your destination
- ✓ STEP enrollment done (international) & advisory level checked
- ✓ Local emergency number and hotel address saved to your phone — and a hotel business card in your wallet

Travel With a Pro in Your Corner

This guide is a start — but the real peace of mind comes from having an experienced advisor handle the details, watch the fine print, and be there if anything comes up. From dream vacations and getaways to destination weddings, I'd love to help you travel smarter and worry less.

[Book a Free Consultation →](#)

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Sources: U.S. Department of State (travel.state.gov) · U.S. Transportation Security Administration (tsa.gov) · U.S. Customs & Border Protection (cbp.gov) · U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (cdc.gov/travel)