Top 10 International Travel Mistakes

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International travel can be challenging, stressful and even dangerous. It can also be very rewarding. You can make the most of your travel experience by avoiding some common mistakes.

**10. Over packing**

You may get away with it when you travel domestically, but frequent international travel will break you of the desire or need to over pack. International travel can mean ‘rolling’ luggage over broken pavement or on mud and dirt streets, carrying it up multiple flights of stairs, maneuvering it through a city subway system or holding it in your lap on a local bus.

International packing advice:  
• Pack light! It is easier on the back and it will save you money. Airlines and taxi drivers charge more for extra luggage and airlines charge extra for heavier luggage.  
• Pack less! You don’t need a new set of any item of clothing for each day of the trip. You can figure at least two (or more) wears for almost everything.  
• If you discover that you didn’t pack the clothing you need, you can get it locally or can figure out a way to live without it during your trip.

**9. Checked luggage**

If you ‘pack less’ for your short trip you should be able to get everything in one piece of luggage and you can carry that luggage on the plane with you. As a general rule you can “carry on” two pieces of luggage (one piece up to 21 inches, and another personal item - like a purse, briefcase or backpack).

With ‘carry on’ luggage:  
• You don’t have to pay any airline luggage fees.   
• You know where your bags are at all times.  
• You never have ‘lost’ luggage.   
• You never have to wait at the airport luggage carrousel.   
• You get out of the airport ahead of the crowd.

**8. Invalid passport**

A valid passport is necessary for travel to any country. It is important to know when your passport expires. Most countries require passports to be valid for three or even six months beyond the last day of your itinerary. Airlines enforce these restrictions when you check in at your home airport. The airlines are subject to heavy fines if they allow you to board the plane with a passport that will soon expire. How to avoid this problem: Renew your passport before it is within six months of expiring. A US passport can easily be renewed through a local post office or passport office.

**7. Not using a travel agent**

A good travel agent can save you time, money and stress. The agent knows international travel. They are familiar with the rules and regulations.

• Example 1: When you purchase an airline ticket, the longer you wait, the more you pay. Airlines only have so many seats available at the lower fares. Once those seats are sold, the fare goes up. Waiting until the last minute to purchase your ticket can mean a huge increase in the cost of the ticket. A good travel agent will reserve the space and hold the price for a limited amount of time, and will advise you of your deadline to purchase the ticket at that price.   
• Example 2: You may save a little money if you purchase a ticket online. But when your travel begins to unravel (the flight is cancelled, you miss a flight, you are bumped from a flight, etc…try getting that online company to help you. Doesn’t work. Online travel companies advertise low ‘potential’ prices they don’t always have those seats available when you are ready to purchase. Making group reservations can also be a challenge with online companies. Airlines have a huge number of rules and regulations. Simple mistakes can be costly or may ruin or cancel your trip.   
• Example 3: What if you need to come home early? What if your plans change unexpectedly? You need an experienced travel agent who can negotiate with the airline, fight your battles for you and help you in emergency situations.

Our favorite, National Travel Systems.

**6. Not notifying your bank**

An ATM card is the safest and easiest way to get local currency in another country. Your bank closely monitors the use of your ATM and credit cards. When they see the card used from an international location they assume that the card has been stolen and they may quickly lock you out of the system. Easy solution: Call your ATM or credit card provider before you travel and notify them of your international travel plans.

**5. International ‘roaming’**

International roaming, third party carriers, data charges, texting charges – there are many ways to rack up an enormous phone bill when you are travelling internationally. To avoid this mistake, before departure, call your cell phone company and make sure you understand exactly what they will charge you as you use your phone overseas. You may also upgrade to a temporary international calling plan. You may use local Wi-Fi, use Skype. You may buy a SIM card. Or you may leave your phone at home.

**4. Not protecting valuables**

Having your wallet, purse or passport stolen is a great way to ruin a short term trip. There is an easy solution. It is called a money belt. You often see tourists wearing these around their necks, outside of their clothing, displaying their id cards, passport, itinerary, etc… Not advised. The money belt is not for your convenience, it is for your protection. Store your credit cards, passport, id cards, extra cash in the money belt and wear it inside of you clothing. Keep some local currency in your empty wallet and keep the wallet in your front pocket. If your wallet is stolen, you have only lost a little cash.

**3. Fearing the local food**

There are two types of food fear for international travelers.   
1. Fear of the unknown. If you refuse to eat the local food because you don’t know what it is, you have never seen it before, you have an unusual gag reflex, or you are just picky. Hey, just get over it. You are not a 2-year old child. You don’t have to love it all, but you need to try it if it is offered to you. Don’t insult local hosts by refusing to eat food that they offer. You may even discover a food that you really love. And you may earn the opportunity to hang out with your hosts a little longer.   
2. Fear of the known. Sometimes you should not eat certain food because you do know what it is and you know that it will most likely make you sick. This becomes more even more complicated (and requires quick and serious prayer) when local friends are serving you.

General rules:   
• Cook it, Wash it, Peel it, or Forget it.   
• Wash your hands. Sometimes it is not the food that makes you sick. It is your dirty hands.   
• Don’t drink the tap water. Bottled water is available.   
• The locals don't like food poisoning any more than you do. If there is a long line, consider the place fairly safe and assume you're going to be fine.

**2. Being a virtual traveler**

In an age of constant interaction with mobile devices and social media, it is easy to be ‘somewhere else’. It is possible to travel to exotic and exciting destinations and never actually ‘be’ there. How often do you get the opportunity to visit another country and interact with another culture?   
During your trip  
• Forget Facebook. Toss Twitter.   
• Don’t be a ‘tourist’.   
• Don’t stick to the guidebook.   
• Don’t follow the crowd.   
• Don’t hang out at western restaurant and coffee chains.   
• Don’t shop at the tourist traps.

Be present where you are! Leave your comfort zone. Learn from the local people. Respect the local customs and culture. Accept the hospitality of local people.

**1. Not looking for where God is at work**

When you travel internationally (or domestically), as a Jesus-follower you are always ‘on mission’. How can you be an effective ‘message-bearer’ as you encounter people of other cultures and beliefs?  
• God is already at work preparing hearts to hear about Jesus and believe in Him. He has prepared a plentiful harvest and asks His followers to pray for more ‘harvesters’. (Luke 10:2). As you travel, you are a ‘harvester’. Look for, listen to, and seek people who are ready to hear the Good News.   
• Jesus was committed to join the Father wherever He was at work. (John 6:38). As you travel, look for evidence of God’s activity. Find a way to be a part of what God is already doing in the lives of those who need to know Him. (John 5:17-20)  
• Abide and Obey. Apart from the Father you can do nothing. (John15:4-5) Unless you abide in a close relationship with Jesus, you cannot see where God is at work, nor can you bear any lasting fruit for His Kingdom. Unless you obey His commands (John 15:10) you will be ineffective as a ‘harvester’.

As you travel, realize that God has given you an opportunity to bring His light to a place where it seldom shines. Make the most of that opportunity. Seek His presence. Look for His activity. Share His message. Become His ‘harvester’.

<http://www.imbstudents.org/explore/1476.aspx#.UnqJ9l_nZjo> November 6, 2013