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About 2,300 words

GLOBETROTTING BASICS

by

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All the basic, general information you will need to plan a budget world tour. For specific aspects of your journey refer to the resources cited. The web will be your most valuable resource in digging up information. Fares and prices cited are for comparison and will no longer be accurate.

STEP ONE: READ UP

There are a few books and lots of websites that give information on bumming around the world. Look through as many of them as you can stomach for various approaches and suggestions, and take note of the information that will be relevant to your needs.

Some of the books are noted in the resource chapter of the European guide on this site:

A few of the backpack-the-world websites include:

Some good summary information can be found at: <http://www.travel-library.com/rtw/html/faq.html>

This one is kind of hard to read but it has a lot of information, most of it useful:

<http://travelindependent.info/>

Here is an interesting one about an American couple biking around the world. They left in 2002 and are still going: <http://www.downtheroad.org/>.

I highly recommend "Work your Way Around the World" by Susan Griffith. Published in Britain by Vacation Work, this is an incomparable source of travel lore and hands-on working information. There are lots of quotes and comments from travelers, and plenty of tips on finding jobs through unofficial means. It provides inspiration and useful details and ideas for travelers.

Several publishers print excellent guidebooks to all parts of the world. Go to the library or a good bookstore and skim through several before you buy one. (The most important thing is to keep your nose **out** of it as much as possible and use your common sense while abroad.)

In the planning process, search the web for cheap fares; this will be one of your major expenses. Think about work and volunteer opportunities along the way to mitigate costs and provide a temporary base.

GETTING AROUND

Around-the-world tickets or point to point? Delta, for example, offers a standard coach package fare

with Singapore Airlines and Swissair for \$2,570 plus tax. Generally this includes unlimited stopovers (minimum of three) with some backtracking allowed, to destinations these airlines serve. If, say, you want to island-hop through the South Pacific, though, other airlines are involved, and the fare goes up to \$3,217. Have one year expiration; must complete travel within a year.

You can also go through consolidators, or bucket shops, which can cobble together a ticket using a variety of airlines on different travel segments. STA Travel, for example, can put together a basic ticket through the Pacific to Australia or New Zealand, up to South East Asia, on to India, Europe and back to the U.S. again for about \$2,000 (often cheaper for students and those under 26). These figures are a rough guide; your ticket will depend on where and when you want to go specifically. Stops in Africa and South America usually increase fares considerably.

Spring is a good time for finding bargains, with fares dropping in April. When calling around, do not neglect to call non-U.S. airlines, such as Qantas, Air New Zealand and British Air.

You can also simply travel point to point, buying tickets along the way and/or going overland. The disadvantage is you may wind up paying more, perhaps half-again or more the combined fare. Another potential wrinkle is that some countries require you to have an onward ticket upon arrival, although there are creative ways of dealing with this.

The advantage is you have the flexibility to go where you want and when, changing your plans as you go. Spontaneity is a reality of travel, especially if you are traveling for more than a year (in which case a round-the-world ticket would not work, anyway). There are some well-known cities to pick up cheap flights: London, Athens, Cairo, Bangkok, Hong Kong, and Penang in Malaysia are a few.

If your date is flexible for a flight to Europe, contact Airhitch at (800) 326-2000 or Travac at (800) 872 2800. These are two well-known consolidators you should try, offering plenty of flights from the East Coast for under \$200 (one way).

Getting around overland has many options; trains, buses, boats, hitching, etc. Rail and bus passes are certainly worth looking into, but often they may create the urge to run around like crazy making them pay for themselves. The Eurail pass is no longer a great bargain, but the student pass probably is. In large countries such as India and Australia, air passes are offered to help cover the large land areas between major cities.

To go overland through Africa or to reach South Asia from Europe, contact Trailfinders, an organization that puts together lots of adventure tours and offers cheap flights from London.

PAPERWORK

If you get all your needed visas before departure it may take many months and even then, most must be used within six months of issue. It may be better to pick them up as you go. Most countries have consulates near the borders; check your guidebook for specifics. Keep handy a dozen or so passport photos, which you may need for applications.

HEALTH

Your physical state is an important day to day issue, since travel naturally involves quite a lot of strain

on the body. Pace yourself according to what your body can endure.

If you take regular medication, bring along a supply or the prescription to get refills along the way. Overseas availability is not a problem in most developed countries. A doctor's note stating that you are taking medication helps at border crossings.

You may need shots and/or malaria pills in many developing countries. Consult your doctor or local health department for advice. Your guidebook should also list what is needed, although they may not be up-to-date. While overseas, check a consulate for recommendations and updates on disease outbreaks. Some countries now have AIDS testing requirements, usually for long-term visitors.

If you are going, say, from Europe to Africa or Australia to Asia, wait and get your shots a month or so before you depart to the latter to ensure they are as up-to-date as possible. Common sense and prevention will be your best allies against getting sick overseas.

Should you fall ill, get to a hospital if possible. American embassies and consulates carry lists of local, English-speaking doctors. The biggest cause of tourist emergency hospitalization in many countries I visited: people wrecking their rented scooters.

Travel insurance is worth looking into. Those with an International Student Identification Card (available through CIEE) are covered with some basic health insurance. Call your local travel agency or look for advertisements in this and other travel magazines and books. Shop around.

CULTURAL ADJUSTMENT AND MENTAL HEALTH

Culture shock can happen but generally won't if you are realistic and keep expectations to a minimum. Ask travelers as you go along as to what is ahead, and read as much as possible beforehand about your next destination.

Crossing cultures will certainly cause some type of mental strain as you adjust to new languages and customs, though. There will be times when you need to stop and relax your brain for a while. Look up a friend to visit, find a secluded beach hut; plan "personal down-time" into your itinerary.

Get a dictionary and phrasebook, and use them. If you can't use words, try lots of hand signals combined with sound effects. It works surprisingly well.

Loneliness, isolation and travel burn-out are other things to cope with on long adventures. I found a short-wave radio was a great help. I also wrote a lot of crazy letters to friends when I was feeling lonely.

If you are traveling with someone, these situations will not arise so often, but others will. There are times when you will want to wring your partner's neck and this is normal, since your moods will rarely coincide. Periodically spend time alone to learn to appreciate each other again.

EQUIPMENT

Whatever you take, make sure it is serviceable for your needs. I think a good exterior frame backpack is overall more serviceable than interior pack or, God forbid, a suitcase.

I carried one little sack with a sewing kit, pocket knife, bandages, spare pen, lip balm, a small lock, an alarm watch, an empty film canister, tape (for sealing glue-less envelopes); stuff like that.

Keep clothing and other rain-sensitive items in garbage bags. A big poncho covers you and the pack in the rain and has other uses.

Clothing should be sturdy, comfortable, practical, dark and able to layer. Wear pants with deep pockets, and keep cash and your passport in a front pocket at all times. Keep your hand in that pocket in uncertain times.

If you need such things as a heavy winter jacket or grubby old work clothes, look for thrift shops. Bargains abound, and it is faster and cheaper than trying to have those things mailed from home. On the other hand, you can mail ahead such expensive items as film and new boots.

ODDS AND ENDS

If you have an American Express Card or travelers checks, their offices will hold mail for you (but not packages or boxes). You can also use the "poste restante" service of central post offices although it can be risky.

Remember seasonal factors. You may want to avoid Scandinavia in winter or Asia during the monsoons. The weather usually plays a much more significant role in daily life abroad than it does here.

If you run out of money, American Express will cash a personal check for travelers checks for up to \$1,000 if you are a card-holder: it is very handy. Check with your local banks to see who has international transaction capabilities. As a last resort check with the U.S. embassies or consulates about emergency fund transfers. Getting cash is usually a headache and the procedures are explained in most travel guides.

Try to work or volunteer periodically. It is a great way to meet the natives and get below the surface of local life, not to mention save money and avoid travel fatigue. The resources mentioned above have lots of information on this.

It is good to have an anchor back home; usually a family member who will take care of your mail, any bills, bank accounts, emergencies, etc. Give this person access to your accounts, should they need them. Also leave them with photocopies of your passport, credit cards, traveler's checks, a spare address book, etc. Send this person lots of postcards with your whereabouts and bring them the best gift you can afford.

Reverse culture shock is real. Have patience with others and yourself upon return and remember; you can always travel again. As one Canadian woman in her mid-50's reassured me several years ago in Austria, "You never get travel out of your system."

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