



# How To TRAVEL EVERYWHERE

THE ULTIMATE GUIDE *to* PLANNING YOUR NEXT ADVENTURE  
WITHOUT WASTING TIME, MONEY *or* YOUR SANITY

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*written by*

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*exclusively for*

**vagabondish**

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# INTRODUCTION

## Why I'm Jealous As Hell (Of You)

### **You're excited.**

Soon enough you'll be on the road.

In a new country, experiencing a new culture, a new way of life ... and most importantly: a new *you*.

Sounds good, right?

But there's a snag. Just when your excitement peaks ... when you picture yourself on that tropical beach ... or trekking through jungle ... or scaling mountains ... *it* happens.

*Doubt.*

How will I get there? How much will it cost? Do I need any shots and/or travel insurance?

These are all good questions, but... if you've traveled abroad before, you know the hardest part is leaving. Once you land in a foreign country, the rest inevitably works itself out.

And if you *haven't* taken a long-term adventure abroad ... well ... I envy you.

**Because you're about to experience a life-altering, preconception-shattering period in your life, after which nothing will ever be the same.**

In other words: you're in for a damn good time.

But regardless of your experience abroad, you – like Hunter Thompson in *Fear and Loathing in Las Vegas* – will need plenty of help before this thing is through.

And that, dear reader, is what this guide is for.

**It's a pre-trip guidebook.** One which answers all those nagging questions and doubts about your next adventure before you leave home.

No, this *won't* help you escape Turkish prison, smuggle drugs from Juarez or learn to whip up mouth-watering Uruguayan cannibal cuisine in the middle of an Andean snowstorm...

... but it *will* help you plan your next adventure and (hopefully) save a few bucks along the way.

Ready? Then let's get packing...

Adam Costa,  
Editor In Chief, Trekity.com

## Big Corn Island, Nicaragua

P.S.: Kudos to Mike Richard, Editor of *Vagabondish.com* for letting me write this. Hope you enjoy reading it as much I did (after I wrote it).

# PLANNING

## Choosing the Right Guidebook(s)

Most people purchase a guidebook before hitting the road. Which makes sense.

It gives you time to pick areas you'd most like to visit and (hopefully) get a feel for what these regions are like.

But here's the thing: as the travel market continues to grow, more and more guidebooks appear each year, all catering to a different audience.

Some guidebooks focus on specific regions, while others provide info to a specific audience such as families, or gay and lesbian travelers.

Because of these differences, there is no "right" guidebook for everyone.

There's not even a perfect brand of guidebook for *you*.

Sure, you may have been a flea-ridden backpacker in your early twenties, perfectly happy to sleep in cheap hostels, but that same \$3USD Cambodian bed doesn't look *nearly* as appealing when you're married and pushing thirty.

Trust me.

So choosing the right guidebook depends on several factors.

Here's how to find the right one for you.

## **6 SUREFIRE WAYS TO TELL YOUR GUIDEBOOK SUCKS**

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**It's outdated.** Research for guidebooks generally occurs up to one year prior to publication. This is a nice way of saying that even the newest eBooks are *at least* a year out of date.

In addition, not all guidebooks are updated annually – which means it could be as much as *three to five years* out of date.

**Your guidebook on Germany was written by Australians.** Ideally, the guidebook's author should live there, speak the language and understand local culture and its national identity.

Sadly this is rarely the case. Many authors visit the destination long enough to dash through the country, hastily check a few attractions, score a few free meals and pull their information from local brochures.

It isn't really their fault. Travel writers are notoriously underpaid, and strict deadlines keep them "traveling" at a frenetic pace. Read the author bio closely to see their

experience level. If it says they “fell in love with the country ever since ...” you may want to move on.

**The author is an a\*\*hole.** Or – God forbid – Thomas Kohnstamm. Some publications (e.g. Rough Guides) strive for editorial-style content, while others (e.g. Moon) give their authors more room to express themselves. This freedom can be a blessing or curse, depending on how closely you associate with the writer.

For example, if you're interested in finding laid-back beaches in Southeast Asia and the author dedicates whole sections to the nightlife scene, this may not be a good fit.

Remember, these authors will be your closest traveling companion during most of your trip, so choose wisely.

**They screw up your hometown.** Browse their guidebook on your country/city. If you feel they hit the mark, that’s a good sign. If it seems disconcertingly surface-level, move on.

**Their “budgets” are insane.** Guidebooks can vary widely on this particular subject. One guidebook recommended a daily budget of \$300 for a stay in Nepal (?!), while my wife and I lived quite comfortably on \$30 per day. On the other end of the bread line, Lonely Planet's *Southeast Asia On a Shoestring* series often recommends hostels which we wouldn't be caught dead in.

It's a personal choice, really.



**Each map is more confusing than the last.** If the maps are good, you can simply tear a page out and carry it with you. If not, you'll need to grab local maps as you go.

OK, these are just guidelines. Let's take a look at each major publication in greater detail ...

### **TOP TRAVEL GUIDES: WHO NEEDS 'EM?**

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This is a list of the most popular guidebooks on the market today, with a short description about each:

**Access Guides:** focuses mainly on US cities, and features high quality color-coded maps for easy navigation. Each map includes restaurants, attractions, shopping and other tourist sites.

**Bradt Guides:** specializes in off-the-beaten-trail locations. For common destinations, it also offers plenty of unique destinations not recommended in other travel guides.

**DK Eyewitness:** if you buy guidebooks for the pictures, look no further than this high quality publication. DK includes professional, glossy photos of its destinations. It's definitely the least in-depth, but gorgeous pictures make this a front runner for exploring major cities.

**Fodor's:** caters to mid and upper class travelers. Fodor's recently released its *See It* series, which includes color

photographs in a style similar to DK guides. It's one of the oldest companies - started way back in 1936.

**Footprint Travel Guides:** is a direct competitor to Lonely Planet and Rough Guides. In my opinion, they're just as good as either but remain significantly less popular. This turns out to be a good thing, *especially* if you're looking to get off the "Lonely Planet" trail.

**Frommer's:** generally covers the most popular areas only, with a focus on culture and history. High-quality content catered more towards more mature, established travelers. (*Full disclosure: my father's wife writes for Frommer's guidebooks*)

**Insight guides:** another beautifully visual guidebook ideal for city tours. High-quality paper and photographs are a common theme. Like DK, Insight Guides focus more on shopping, sightseeing and culture than hotels/logistics.

**Lonely Planet:** the top-selling guidebook for backpackers, Lonely Planet has established its own culture and even spawned its own tourist trail. Their layout, in my opinion, is perhaps the best among backpacker focused guidebooks; however, their content is generally not as good as Rough Guides or Footprint.

**Moon Travel Guides:** focuses mainly on Asia and the Americas, and slightly more high-end than Lonely Planet. Their guidebooks tend to be livelier and more opinionated

than their competitors, which may or may not be a good thing for readers.

**Rick Steves:** one of the most popular travel writers today, Rick Steves began publishing guidebooks in 1980, and has since published over 30 guides. His focus remains on popular cities and countries within Europe, making his guides a popular selection for first-time visitors to the continent. His writing style is waxed and opinionated, and feels like you have your own personal travel guide across Europe.

**Rough Guides:** like Lonely Planet, Rough Guides began with the backpacker crowd and slowly extended their reach into other markets. In my opinion, Rough Guides' maps and layout are inferior to Lonely Planet, while its content is vastly superior.

**Michelin:** the definitive guide book for travelers looking for the highest quality restaurants and hotels available. Restaurateurs will proudly showcase even a single Michelin star, and rightfully so. Highly recommended for foodies.

**Zagat:** started by Nina and Tim Zagat in 1979, this guidebook began as a restaurant guide to New York City, and since branched out into over 70 cities around the world.

## Travel Communities

### HOW TO FIND UP-TO-DATE INFORMATION ON NEARLY EVERYTHING (EVEN VENEREAL DISEASES)

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Most of the time you'll want a second ... third ... even fourth opinion about a destination before booking your tickets.

This is natural. With the growing popularity of online message boards, you can find the answer to nearly any travel question.

The trick however, is to find the *right* message board for a given topic. While Lonely Planet's [Thorn Tree forum](#) for may be popular for destination advice, it's decidedly lackluster for planning cruises, making the most of your frequent flyer miles, or reviewing specific hotels.

The following is a list of the most popular forums, with a brief summary of their particular expertise.

### TRAVEL FORUMS: GENERAL TRAVEL ADVICE

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**Lonely Planet Thorn Tree:** Organized by region, this forum is ideal for destination advice, especially about specific routes, (e.g. the best overland option from India to Nepal). *Note:* there's also a special section for travel bloggers, where you can meet and swap best practices.

**Frommer's Travel Talk:** Mostly organized by region, this forum also includes lifestyle boards which target specific markets such as honeymooners, families, backpackers and seniors.

**FlyerTalk.com:** This is the definitive site for frequent flyer miles, and offers *highly* subjective opinions about individual airlines. Discuss major airlines, hotel chains and car rentals with experienced jetsetters. The crowd here is predominantly business travel, and - while you may travel for different reasons - their advice is still top-notch.

**Oyster.com:** Expert hotel reviews from *paid* professionals. Each hotel listed on Oyster is reviewed in person by one of their paid researchers (instead of former guests with a personal grudge).

My favorite thing about Oyster is their collection of hundreds of un-doctored photos, so you can literally see what you're paying for.

**CruiseMates.com:** Easily the best resource online for up-to-date information on cruises. CruiseMates includes specific ship reviews, how-to articles and a message board where people exchange ideas about different cruise lines.

## A Word on Government Travel Warnings

"You're going... *where?*"

After visiting dozens of countries, I'm accustomed to raised eyebrows when friends and family hear where we're headed next.

For example, my wife and I announced our intention to visit Nicaragua (which is truly excellent, by the way). My mother informed us of numerous dangers in Nicaragua; then, in the very next sentence, mentioned a shooting that happened eight blocks from her own house.

The point? Perception of danger is relative.

Therefore, check travel forums and see what travelers have to say about safety; you'll receive a much more informed explanation about its relative dangers.

Of course, if you still want to see what the government has to say, consult the following resources:

- US State Department
- CDC Travel Health Information
- Australia's Consular assistance service
- Canada's Consular affairs Bureau
- United Kingdom's foreign and Commonwealth office

### **"Warfare, Drug Runners and Hurricanes..."**

If you expect any of these, register your travel plans with the State Department.

I know, I know... it sucks. Jason Bourne would definitely *not* approve.

But it's a smart move when traveling to areas with potential for political unrest or natural disasters.

For example, if you plan on visiting the Caribbean during hurricane season, leave your name, destination and contact information with the State Department. Seriously: it could save your life.

## Deciding When to Go

You usually know when and/or where you want to go. Which leads to one of two questions:

1. When is the best time to go to India? ... or...
2. Where is the place to go in July?

And perhaps an even better question – which guidebooks rarely answer – is **“when is the absolute *worst* time to visit?”**

Believe me, you do *not* want to visit Rajasthan, India in the summertime.

You just *don't*.

However, many guidebooks offer conflicting suggestions on the best time to visit. So here's a list of simple tips to help you choose when to go.

## **5 SIMPLE WAYS TO FIND THE PERFECT TIME TO VISIT ANYWHERE IN THE WORLD**

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### **#1: Major Events or Holidays**

Anyone visiting Germany in late September or early October probably realizes Oktoberfest will be in full swing. They're either going to Germany *for* Oktoberfest, or they know enough about it to steer clear of its teeming masses.

Sure, sure ... but ... what about all the other small holidays most travelers aren't aware of?

Simple.

Use [this list](#) of major holidays (organized by country) to see which holidays you'd like to join in on, and which to avoid like the plague. Not only will this list save you time, it will save you tons money on hotels and airfare.

### **#2: Your Fellow Visitors**

Travelers visit the same location at different times for different reasons. Partygoers hit major holidays and festivals, students will visit during summer breaks from University, while retirees visit during winter months back home.



Sometimes, understanding *who* visits a specific destination *when* helps you decide the best time for you.

### **#3: Weather**

Research weather patterns before visiting a destination. It's not just about temperature: check for high times for insects, water conditions, snowfall and the best time for specific activities.

### **#4: Seasonal Prices**

In some areas, prices vary dramatically depending on when you arrive.

Most destinations have four rates depending on the time of year:

- **high season** (usually during great weather),
- **peak season** (holidays),
- **low season** (usually the worst weather), and
- **shoulder season** (the transitional period between high and low season).

Shoulder season provides the highest value.

After all, there's usually a reason for low season prices, like hurricanes, avalanches or other extreme weather.

Shoulder rates are lower than high season without the nasty bits of the low season.

Of course, “nasty bits” is subjective.

For example: Austin, Texas is one of the best cities in the U.S., but it gets swelteringly hot in the summer. This is a major turnoff for some but if you’ve lived in humidity your entire life, it may not be a big deal.

### **#5: Shameless Plug: Trekity.com**

**Trekity** ([www.trekity.com](http://www.trekity.com)) is a travel inspiration website. Simply checkmark when you want to go (plus who you are) and it serves up ideas from around the world. It can help you find your next adventure – and the best time to go – instantly.

(*Full disclosure*: I am the editor for Trekity, so when I say it’s awesome; there may be a touch of bias. But seriously... it *is* awesome.)

## **Organized Tours vs. Going it Alone**

**“Group tours? But I’m a *traveler*... not a ... (gasp) ... *tourist*!”**

Whatever your thoughts on the matter, there are several reasons why organized tours can be better than going alone.

For example, traveling with like-minded people on a specialized tour can make it a whole lot more fun. Foodies will enjoy taking a culinary tour of Florence with other foodies; rafting enthusiasts will enjoy rafting with experienced rafters, etc.

And sometimes – especially if you've been traveling on your own for a while - it's nice to just kick back and let someone else handle logistics.

For example, my wife Darcie and I spent a year traveling throughout Asia, and were delighted to take a three-day tour of Ha Long Bay in Vietnam. It gave us a chance to relax, meet new people, and let go of the reins for few days.

Of course, there are a few **disadvantages to organized tours**.

Firstly, the food (culinary tours notwithstanding) usually sucks out loud.

Instead of fresh food from a street market, you're herded into a large banquet hall serving cafeteria style, thrice-boiled grey... um... *something*. (We experienced this in both Italy and Vietnam, two countries known for good cooking.)

Secondly, you don't choose your tour group.

Ernest Hemingway once famously said you should travel only with people you love. Unfortunately, with organized tours it's really a matter of luck.

While you may end up making best friends - or finding the love of your life – on an organized tour, you may also find yourself stuck with a group of the *stupidest* people you've ever met.

*Caveat emptor.*

If these two points are deal breakers, consider a customized trip for your next adventure.

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## HOW TO CHOOSE THE RIGHT TOUR: 3 SIMPLE STEPS

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The following will help you decide on the right organized tour for you:

### **#1: Check the Demographics**

Most tour operators will gladly provide general demographics on their typical client. For example, you don't want to find yourself on a bus full of twenty-year-olds if you're pushing 60 (and even if you *do*, it still pays to ask).

### **#2: Find Out What's Included**

Some tour companies are very upfront about what's included.

Others ... not so much.

For example, sightseeing tours may or may not include admission to listed sites. Be sure to take a full inventory of what's included in each tour package *before* submitting payment.

### **#3: Check the Itinerary**

Some people like all-inclusive tour packages, where a tour operator takes care of their entire day. Others prefer to have downtime in between each activity.

Be sure to ask the tour operator how flexible the itinerary is. For example, you may not be interested in shopping and would prefer to hang out by the beach. Is this possible? Or are you stuck answering questions like "Does this make me look fat?"

## **PROFESSIONAL TOUR OPERATORS**

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### **Traditional Style Tours:**

- Collette Vacations
- Gate 1 Travel
- General Tours
- Globus and Cosmos
- Mayflower Tours
- Pleasant Holidays
- Tauck World Discovery

- Trafalgar Tours
- Travoca

### **Adventure Tours:**

- Abercrombie & Kent
- Backroads
- Discovery Tours
- Geographic Expeditions
- Lindlad Expeditions
- Mountain Travel Sobek
- National Geographic Expeditions:
- Smithsonian Journeys
- Wilderness Safaris
- Wilderness Travel

## **Directories/Associations**

**Gordon's Guide:** what began as a blog soon became a huge online database filled with adventure travel companies. You can search by activity and/or destination.

**Great Outdoor Recreation Pages (GORP):** Owned by *Outside Magazine*, this website publishes up-to-date information on national and state parks, particularly in the United States. There is additional information on group tours if you're so inclined.

**Specialty Travel:** As the name implies, this directory includes a *wide* variety of tour operators - including whale watching, bird-watching and even deep-sea fishing.

**SpaFinder:** The definitive directory for finding the perfect spot for you. Spa finder lets you search by location and/or demographics (e.g. children, couples, elderly).

**ShawGuides:** Cooking tours have grown in popularity over the past few years, though they still may be difficult to plan ahead of time. I highly recommend ShawGuides to help you find the right tour. This site allows you to search for cooking programs around the world based on available dates, destinations and cuisine. They also offer a wide variety of wine tours as well.

**Volunteer Vacations:** Travel – for me, anyways - is usually self-indulgent, though I do support local bars whenever possible. No matter your method, there are plenty of volunteer programs available.

- **International Volunteer Programs Association:** the largest online database of nonprofit volunteer programs around the world. You can search by destination, type of work or duration of stay.
- **Volunteer Abroad:** similar to the IVPA, volunteer abroad lets you search thousands of volunteer opportunities around the world.

# BOOKING

The time has come. You've done your research, traced your route and are *itching* to hit the road.

Now all you have to do is book your plane tickets (and maybe accommodation).

Sounds easy, doesn't it?

After all, there are *hundreds* of websites promising to reveal every possible flight combination, which – in a perfect world – makes choosing your flight as easy as snapping your fingers.

But what none of the sites ever tell you is: **no website shows you every flight.**

They just don't.

At best, they'll show you a handful of flights from *most* airlines.

The key is to know *what* you want and perhaps more importantly, *where* to look. But before we delve into strategy, let's agree on some guidelines:

**#1: Cheapest isn't always best.**



Sure, that flight might be \$70 cheaper, but is it *really* worth the 6 AM departure time, three layovers and a 4AM arrival? Probably not.

So here's a better idea...

Use [Hipmunk](#) to find the least "agonizing" trip for your money.

With Hipmunk, you can organize flights by price, departure time, arrival time and total trip time.

But what really makes Hipmunk stand out is its "agony" metric, which takes into account the amount of hassle versus overall ticket price.

So once you factor in multiple layovers, early departure and late arrival... that extra \$70 doesn't seem like much.

## **#2: Price guarantees don't matter.**

Many travel operators offer a low-price guarantee. While this may seem cut-and-dry, the fine print may reveal otherwise.

In order to qualify for this low price "guarantee," you usually must find a competitor's deal which uses the same fare code (which is nearly impossible as seats fill up).

Keep in mind we're talking about **fare codes**, *not* coach, business or first class.

Here's an example of how it works:

Coach class is made up of numerous fare codes: X,Y and Z class are all examples.

Often times there are nine seats available in each code, and as they fill up, the next code becomes available at a higher price.

And so on.

So in order for a low-price “guarantee” to actually apply, you must find a promotion which applies to the *specific* fare code – which remember, is only nine seats – that you originally purchased. Good luck with that.

Ouch, right? Well that’s why you must ask the right questions...

## **Booking Flights: What to Ask Before You Buy**

As we've already discussed, the lowest price isn't always the best option. Before you book your flights, be sure to ask the following questions:

### **What's the Cancellation Policy?**

Some tickets can be canceled for no fee; others for a fee, while others cannot be canceled at all. Depending on your flexibility, this is an important consideration.

### **Are There Any Hidden Fees?**

Some travel providers won't mention additional handling fees – such as extra baggage fees, on-site visas or handling fees - until late in the booking process. Be sure you are fully aware of the total cost *before* booking.

### **Does the Provider Offer Member Benefits?**

Some airlines provide incentives like extra frequent flier miles for booking directly from their site. It doesn't hurt to ask.

### **Who Can You Contact With Questions?**

Some websites are not forthcoming with telephone numbers; this can be a problem if you find yourself stranded or need to speak with someone immediately.

## **The Strange World of Vacation Packages**

Let's face it: vacation packages are more popular than ever.

And while they come in many flavors, vacation packages are – at their essence - a hearty mix of flights, hotels and car rentals wrapped together in one neat little package.

Sure, they *promise* greater discounts than booking individually but (sadly) this is not always the case. Just as if you were booking each segment individually, do your homework first to ensure you're getting the best deal.

## HOW VACATION PACKAGES WORK

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You either browse through a list of prepackaged vacation deals (see a full list below on where to find these) OR search for flights in a specific city, then let the booking engine recommend a package for you.

Keep in mind, however, while vacation packages are growing in popularity, they are usually only available in major cities and tourist destinations.

In other words, don't expect to put together a stunning vacation package to Skokie, Illinois.

## BENEFITS OF VACATION PACKAGES

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**Peace of mind.** Bundling your hotel, flight and car rental in one package means there is one point of contact should anything go wrong. It's also usually easier to book a vacation package than booking each individually.

**Possible discounts.** Yes, they *are* possible ... but you need to compare package prices versus booking individually.

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## DISADVANTAGES OF VACATION PACKAGES

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**Inflexibility.** Vacation packages get their inventory from large hotel chains... so if you prefer to stay in smaller, local hotels these packages are not for you.

**Longer flights.** Vacation packages generally include flights with multiple stops - and longer than average layovers – which extend your overall travel time.

## The Wonderful (and Confusing) World of Air Passes

Looking to see the world for less? Then air passes might be just what you need.

**Air passes** – run by either national or international airlines – let you fly to several cities for a discounted rate. Most air passes cover a specific region or continent, with the exception of a **round-the-world ticket (RTW)**.

Since air passes are purchased in bulk, they can offer significant savings. For example, I purchased a RTW ticket with the following route:

- Sydney
- Singapore
- Saigon
- Kathmandu
- London
- Toronto
- San Francisco
- Sydney

Total cost? Roughly \$1,200 USD.

Now before you get too excited, keep in mind this was a *student* rate ... over ten years ago.

But that doesn't mean savings aren't still out there ... and the following should help you find out whether an air pass is right for you.

## **AIR PASS FAQ**

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### **How Do Air Passes Work?**

Air passes are purchased through an airline, alliance (e.g. Star Alliance) or travel agent. Prices are determined by three factors: where you're flying to, the trip's total miles and/or how long you intend to travel for. *Note:* many air passes give you between 6 to 12 months to complete your journey.

Not all air passes are the same. Some require you to purchase the pass from outside the region, while others include the price of international flights to the region.

Flexibility also varies. Some passes require you to reserve each segment before you leave home, while others let you schedule each segment as you go.

### **Who Are the Main Providers?**

Air passes are offered by the three main airline alliances (Oneworld, Sky Team and Star Alliance). This lets you book flights with multiple airlines under the same alliance.

Here is a table listing [each major airline](#) and their respective alliance.

As a general rule, air passes through these alliances will save you money on longer, more complex journeys (e.g. South America or Europe) while specific airlines are a better deal for smaller regions or individual countries. If you're a member of that alliance's frequent flyer program, you should be able to accrue miles; using your existing miles to purchase the pass depends on the details of the pass. Ask before you purchase to make sure.

### **Who Can Buy Air Passes?**

Air passes are for people who live outside the region in question. So if you're Canadian, you'll have a much easier

time purchasing an air pass for South America than North America.

### **What Are the Restrictions?**

As mentioned before, you'll need to purchase an international flight into the region using one of the airline's alliance members.

The easiest way to do this is to purchase your international ticket first, then have the confirmation code ready when you purchase your air pass. Which leads to the next question ...

### **How Do I Book an Air Pass?**

It ain't easy on your own. After all, you're attempting to coordinate multiple flights/airlines/regions/countries... which gets difficult fast. Your best bet is to build your itinerary online, then call the agency to answer any additional questions and book your tickets.

## **REGIONAL AIR PASSES**

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### **Asia**

**All Asia Pass:** Covers over 40 Asian destinations, and includes the price of getting to Asia (from the US, anyways) in your air pass, which can save several headaches down the road. The pass currently offers over



40 cities. The pass is good for anywhere between 21 days and six months.

<http://www.cathayusa.com/offers/AllAsiaPass/subdefault.asp>

**Star Alliance Asia Airpass:** A more restrictive pass; you must book every segment – between 3 and 10 - in advance. The pass is good for up to three months. Star Alliance also offers specific air passes for China, Japan and Thailand.

<http://www.staralliance.com/en/fares/regional-fares/asia-airpass/>

**Sky Team Asia Pass:** One of the largest and most flexible air passes for Asia. Sky Team's pass includes over 20 countries and extends into several Pacific islands, New Zealand and Australia. The pass is based on "coupons", where one coupon equals one flight. No minimum stay is required, though the pass is only good for 60 days. Sky Team also offers a China Pass.

<http://www.skyteam.com/about/products/asia.html>

**Visit ASEAN Air Pass:** An excellent air pass for Southeast Asia. Countries include Thailand, Vietnam, Indonesia, Malaysia, Singapore and several others. You must confirm each segment ahead of time. The pass is only good for thirty days.

<http://www.thaiair.com/offers/special-fare-promotions/en/visit-asean-airpass-fares.htm>

**Oneworld's Visit Asia Pass:** The biggest pass in Asia, with access to over 50 different cities including Tokyo, Delhi, Bangkok and Seoul. You pay based on geographical zones, so pay close attention on where you want to fly to. You only need to confirm the first segment.

<http://www.oneworld.com/ow/air-travel-options/single-continent-fares/visit-asia>

## **Australasia**

**Qantas Aussie Air Pass:** This pass covers main Australian cities and is good for seven days to three months. If you've ever tried over landing it in Oz, you'll appreciate how valuable this pass really is. Note: the pass also includes international airfare from select cities in the United States.

<http://www.qantas.com.au/regions/dyn/am/specials/us/aussie-airpass-index-us>

**Star Alliance South Pacific Air Pass:** Covers New Zealand, Australia and several Pacific islands. The pass is good for 90 days and you only have to confirm the first segment ahead of time.

<http://www.staralliance.com/en/fares/regional-fares/south-pacific-airpass/>

## **Oneworld's Visit Australia and New Zealand Pass:**

This appropriately named pass covers New Zealand and Australia. Best part about this pass? There's no maximum stay, so you take your time and enjoy! And if you're

looking for a broader scope, Oneworld's Circle Pacific pass covers select cities in Asia and the Americas as well.

<http://www.oneworld.com/ow/air-travel-options/multi-sector-intercontinental-fares/circle-pacific-fare>

## Europe

**Star Alliance Europe Air Pass:** Covers major European cities and parts of North Africa. The pass is good for up to 90 days; you only need to confirm the first segment.

<http://www.staralliance.com/en/fares/regional-fares/europe-airpass/>

**Sky Team Europe Pass:** An excellent, flexible air pass (over 40 different countries) with no maximum stay restrictions. You only need to confirm the first segment ahead of time.

<http://www.skyteam.com/about/products/europe.html>

**Oneworld's Visit Europe Pass:** Like Sky Team, this air pass has no maximum stay requirement, and you only need to confirm the first segment. You can also book as many segments as you want. Why all air passes aren't this simple, I'll never know.

<http://www.oneworld.com/ow/air-travel-options/single-continent-fares/visit-europe>

## North America

**Sky Team's America Pass:** Good for Canada, Mexico and the United States (but not the Caribbean). The pass is

good for sixty days and you only need to confirm the first segment.

<http://www.skyteam.com/about/products/america.html>

**Star Alliance's North America Air Pass:** Extensive coverage of the U.S., Canada, Mexico and the Caribbean. Maximum stay is 90 days and you can book your next segment as little as two hours before departure. How's *that* for flexible?

<http://www.staralliance.com>

**Oneworld's Visit North America Pass:** The largest North American pass, it covers over 200 cities in 28 countries (including the Caribbean and Central America). The pass is good for up to 60 days and you can book each segment as you go.

<http://www.oneworld.com/ow/air-travel-options/single-continent-fares/visit-north-america>

## **South America**

**Aerolineas Argentina's South American Pass:** Covers major South American cities. You can select between 3 – 12 destinations over a 90 day period.

<http://www.aerolineas.com.ar/arg/main.asp?idSitio=nz&idPagina=49&idIdioma=en&id=894&categoria=C>

**LAN's South American Air Pass:** Based in Chile, LAN's pass offers flights to 49 South American cities. There is no limit to the number of destinations and is good for up to 12

months. It's the most flexible option for long term travel in South America.

[http://plane.lan.com/promociones/data/norteamerica/us/todo\\_el\\_mundo/sudamerica\\_airpass/descripcion/index-en-us.html](http://plane.lan.com/promociones/data/norteamerica/us/todo_el_mundo/sudamerica_airpass/descripcion/index-en-us.html)

**Oneworld's Visit South America Pass:** Like the LAN air pass, Oneworld's lets you travel throughout South America for up to twelve months. You do need to specify your destinations ahead of time, though reserving flights are not required. While it may not serve as many cities as LAN, it's a viable option for long-term travel.

<http://www.oneworld.com/ow/air-travel-options/single-continent-fares/visit-south-america>

## **ARE AIR PASSES RIGHT FOR YOU?**

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It's a tough question. Air passes are generally great if you're looking to visit lots of places for a relatively short period of time. For those who travel slower – and are willing to “rough it” – taking local transportation will ultimately save you more money than flying.

In short: if you're going to fly anyways, air passes are right for you. And if you're open to overland travel, consider purchasing an air pass with overland segments built in.

For example, you could purchase an air pass which flies into Buenos Aires, then take the bus across to Santiago, Chile and fly to Quito, Ecuador. Speak with a travel agent

and make sure you understand the specific restrictions for your air pass.

## Travel Insurance Explained

Like car or mortgage insurance, travel insurance promises to cover certain expenses during a worst-case scenario.

Like all forms of insurance, it comes with lots of fine print, loopholes and a nagging feeling that your coverage won't apply when you need it most.

Fear not.

Let's take a look at *why* you should consider getting it, and what it costs to buy.

### WHY BUY INSURANCE?

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The two biggest reasons to buy travel insurance are to **cover costs** if you cancel a trip, or **obtain medical coverage** while traveling abroad.

And even if you currently have health insurance, it rarely offers coverage abroad ... even in emergencies.

## **TRAVEL INSURANCE BENEFITS**

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These usually cover a single trip and provide numerous benefits as listed below:

### **Trip Cancellation**

This lets you cancel a trip and receive a percentage of your expenses back (as determined by the policy). However, in order to qualify for the refund one of the following criteria must be met:

- death of a family member (while the definition of “family” varies by policy, common inclusions are parents, grandparents, spouses, siblings and children)
- inclement weather or other natural disaster which disrupt service
- jury duty
- terrorism (though this is usually in specific instances as outlined in the policy; acts of war are generally not covered)
- unexpected injury or illness (though this does not apply to people with pre-existing medical conditions)
- strikes which affects service (e.g. airline attendants, pilots, air traffic controllers)

## **Trip Interruption**

Similar to trip cancellation, trip interruption lets you cut a trip short and receive reimbursement for changing your tickets. The reasons are usually the same as those listed under the trip cancellation policy.

## **Travel Delay**

This usually covers meals and action item hotel ET flight cancellations or other major reasons which delay your trip, usually up to a specified amount (e.g. \$500 total, not per day).

## **Travel Emergency Assistance**

Provides access to 24-hour support should you require passport replacement, visa assistance or find a doctor.

## **Medical Expenses & Emergency Medical Evacuation**

Similar to your personal health insurance plan, your policy covers certain medical procedures up to a specified amount for one or multiple trips in a twelve month period. You will probably have to pay a deductible.

Medical evacuation insurance pays for transportation to a reputable hospital should you need it. This policy is ideal for rock climbers, mountaineers, SCUBA divers and other adventurous types.



## POPULAR TRAVEL INSURANCE PROVIDERS

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The following is a short list of insurance providers in the United States.

- Access America: [www.accessamerica.com](http://www.accessamerica.com)
- CSA Travel Protection:  
[www.csatravelprotection.com](http://www.csatravelprotection.com)
- International Medical Group: [www.imglobal.com](http://www.imglobal.com)
- Medjet Assist: [www.medjetassist.com](http://www.medjetassist.com)
- Travel Guard: [www.travelguard.com](http://www.travelguard.com)
- Travelex: [www.travelex-insurance.com](http://www.travelex-insurance.com)

**Bonus:** *InsureMyTrip* is an excellent website which compares top travel insurance policies in an easy-to-understand interface.

## Special Discounts: Saving Money Because of Who You Are

### STUDENT DISCOUNTS

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It broke my heart when I turned in my student ID card. Sure, it was great to be out of school, but what about those great discounts?

Because if you *are* a student, you can save a bundle.

These discounts are available for both domestic and international flights, often with lower change fees and longer stays.

For example, students may start school in August, then fly home for the holidays. These special rates apply to certain flights home, and generally don't count for frequent flyer miles.

However, the devil is in the details.

Each airline has their own definition of who a “student” really is: some student discounts apply to high school, college and graduate students, while others apply only to those between 16 to 25.

[This FAQ from Student Universe](#) provides specific information on airlines, fare types, and general questions about booking and insurance.

### **Travel Agencies for Students:**

- **STA Travel:** The de facto standard for student travel - <http://www.statravel.com/>
- **Student Universe:** Simple booking system designed for students - <http://www.studentuniverse.com/>
- **ITravelosophy:** Provides information on student discounts, ID cards (definitely worth it), and rail passes - <http://www.itravelosophy.com/>

## **SENIOR DISCOUNTS**

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Some airline carriers still offer senior fares, or special discounts on existing fares. This article lists all major airlines that still offer these programs, the minimum age, and contact info for each airline.

If you're over 50, consider joining the American Association of Retired People (AARP). Members of the AARP receive a wide variety of travel discounts including flights, car rentals, hotel rooms and cruises.

Now that we've discussed booking, the last thing to do is pack.

# PACKING

## The Ultimate Guide To Packing (Or ... A Violent, Vehement, Nearly Inexcusable Rant Against Packing Too Much)

How big is *your* bag?

The fact is: you can spot how well-traveled someone is by the size of their bag. If it's one medium sized pack, well... they've been *around*.

But if they're sporting a monstrous sized beast on their back, another nursing their front side like a starving ape and (god *forbid*) a rolling suitcase....then it's probably their first trip.

Understandable. Learning curve and all.

But let me make one thing perfectly clear: **when it comes to packing, less is more**.

Big backpacks are heavy. They're a hassle to stuff into airplanes/buses/taxis/motorbikes, etc. And besides, you can purchase nearly everything in small stores around the world. Toothpaste, deodorant, toilet paper, feminine

products ... these basic necessities are available everywhere.

So please – for your sake - pack lightly.

But if you *are* heading to undeveloped countries, there are a few items you'll want to pack before you leave.

## **What to Pack**

When preparing for your adventure, shop at two places: an outdoor travel company (e.g. REI) and your local department store.

From the outdoor store, purchase one high quality piece of the following:

- One decent quality backpack. Honestly, a high quality brand-new backpack only makes you a target. Go for something plain but effective.
- One long sleeve shirt which breathes well and absorbs sweat from your body
- One Swiss army knife
- One pair of long pants
- One pair of Teva sandals
- One pair of sneakers/boots

Got it? Good ... let's move on to the department store.

You'll need:

- 1-2 short sleeve shirts
- 1-2 pairs of shorts
- 1 bathing suit/swim trunks
- 1 pair of flip flops
- 2-3 pairs of socks
- 3-5 pairs of underwear

All set?

Now, take every single one of those items and place them in your backpack (medium size, preferably). Add toiletries, a small flashlight, book, freezer zip lock bags, a color copy of your passport (email it to yourself too), and optional electronics (laptop, iPod, digital camera).

*Done.*

Seriously. That's it.

Everything else is - as [Vagabondish.com](http://Vagabondish.com) owner Mike Richard would put it - *ephemera*.

Not convinced? Perhaps I haven't explained myself.

Backpacks are heavy. Very heavy. And their contents could probably be purchased for less than what you paid at home.

So why bother? What type of masochist voluntarily lugs around one, two, even (*gasp!*) *three* oversized packs

around God-knows-where in order to avoid a trip to the local version of a 7-11?

Who *indeed*? Atlas?

So if you take just *one* piece of advice from this guide/eBook/rant, let it be this: pack lightly. Your shoulders, neighbors and wallet will thank you.

Now, we must summarize what we've learned here. In order to avoid imprisonment or overpaying for hostel beds.

I know! How about lists? Everyone *loves* lists, right?

But not just any list ... it's gotta be ...

## **The Ultimate Checklist For Packing Your Bags And Getting Your @\$\$ In Gear ...**

The following is a general guide for **long term travelers**.

### **Budgeting and Money**

- Sit down and make a monthly budget you can stick to. Then add 30% to that, just in case.
- Create an account with [Mint](#) before you go. It makes tracking your current budget a breeze.

- If need be, cut back on certain expenses. Ask yourself: would I rather have “this” ... or three days on a tropical beach in Thailand?
- Set up online banking
- Sign up for a credit card with no foreign transactions. Capital One has a number of these, several with cash back options.
- If you plan on working online, set up a PayPal account and/or direct deposit through your employer.

## **Your Stuff**

- Go through your stuff. Create three piles: sell, donate and keep. The last one should be the smallest.
- List major items on Craigslist and/or hold a garage sale (note: you’ll make more money on big items with Craigslist ... garage sale patrons are the vultures of capitalism).
- Look at air passes vs. point-to-point tickets. If you’ve got more time than money, purchase a one way ticket to your destination and overland the rest. Otherwise, look at air passes and see if they’re worth it.

## **Mail**

- Go paperless with your mail statements. This will drastically cut down on your mail while you’re away.



- Have a friend or family member accept your mail for you. Barring that, you can sign up for an opening service, where they open your mail, scan it and email it to you - <http://www.mailboxforwarding.com/>

## **Health and Immunizations**

- Create a master list of required and recommended immunizations. Get started on them ASAP (preferably six months before you leave).
- Keep your proof of immunization with your passport.
- Schedule an appointment with a travel doctor and request malaria pills (optional outside of Sub-Saharan Africa) and antibiotics for stomach issues.
- If you take prescription medicine, ask for extra from your doctor.
- If you're on birth control, stock up before you go.
- Condoms can wait to be purchased abroad (though you may want to pack a few beforehand).

## **Accommodations**

- Review a few hostels online to get a feel for what to expect.
- Book a reasonably nice, western style hotel for your first night. It makes for a soft landing (especially after long and/or delayed flights)

- Depending on your timeline, look at monthly rental options. A furnished studio apartment usually costs slightly more than a nightly hostel on a per night basis. I'll take the former.

# AFTERWORD: HITTING THE ROAD

Congratulations. You've reached the end of the beginning. Now all that's left is to board that airplane and ride off into the sunset.

Adventure certainly awaits ... and I wish I could see it happen.

But you know what? Maybe our paths will cross someday. I'm currently in Nicaragua (headed to Guatemala next) then down to South America to round off a very good year on the road.

So if you happen to be in Latin America, drop a line. I'd love to hear about your travels.

And of course, keep reading [Vagabondish.com](http://Vagabondish.com) for the latest travel news, tips and advice!

To your next adventure,

**Adam Costa**

Editor-in-Chief

Trekity.com

# ABOUT ADAM COSTA

Thanks for reading!

I'm Adam Costa, co-founder and Editor In Chief of [Trekity.com](http://Trekity.com), a website which helps you find, plan and share your next adventure.

It's quite frankly the best travel website you'll ever see (besides Vagabondish, of course).

I also run [Travel Blogger Academy](http://TravelBloggerAcademy), which teaches bloggers how to make money with their travel site.

You can visit us on [Facebook](https://www.facebook.com/trekity) or [hit me up on Twitter](https://twitter.com/trekity).

Cheers,

Adam Costa

Editor in Chief

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[TravelBloggerAcademy.com](http://TravelBloggerAcademy.com)

