

CAMELS  CHOCOLATE

# TRAVEL ESSENTIALS



One girl's guide to packing,  
photography and other travel tips  
+ bonus travel hacks from top experts

# CAMELS CHOCOLATE

**Hey y'all!**  
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**at Camels & Chocolate**

If you've made it this far, it's because you're a valued reader of Camels & Chocolate. After nearly a decade of blogging, I figured it's high time to cull some of the insight I've garnered throughout my travels, so I put together a free guide of tips and hacks as THANKS for all your support over the years. The following pages are packed with a wealth of information, from photography gear to packing advice from experts I've interviewed to how to travel with a significant other.

Hope you enjoy!

Kristin Luna



## WHAT'S

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## INSIDE

From camera lenses to packing for life on the road, you'll find a little bit of everything right here in this handy section.

Looking to stay healthy on the road or in the air? Seeking money-saving advice from industry experts? Need practical travel tips? Search no further.

Wary about trying Airbnb or CouchSurfing? Read all about being a first-time guest—or host—before coming to a decision.

An up close and personal look at my life as a traveler, from favorite destinations to the (many) snafus I've made along the way.



A woman with long, wavy blonde hair is smiling and posing in front of a dense green hedge. She is wearing a teal-colored dress with a yellow cardigan over her shoulders. She is holding a bright red handbag with a gold-tone clasp. She is also wearing sunglasses and a necklace with a large circular pendant. The text "01. What's in My Bag?" is overlaid on the image in white, bold, sans-serif font.

01.  
What's in  
My Bag?

# TRAVEL PHOTOGRAPHY

## WHAT CAMERA SHOULD I USE?

Other than “[how did you get this job?](#)” the question I most commonly get from readers is about my photography equipment. Now, I don’t claim to be a professional photographer, but I do have a passion for it, wind up photographing many of my magazine stories and also hold a minor in photojournalism. Regardless, all the equipment I use is my own, rather than owned by a publication, so in a nutshell, I shoot with what I can afford.

## THE BODY

Photographers will argue that it’s not about the body, it’s about the lenses. And sure, that’s true to an extent: If you want to spend a lot of money on any one thing, lens investments are where your focus should be. You’re paying for the glass, and quite simply, the better the glass, the higher quality the image. That said, I recently upgraded from a cropped sensor to a full frame, using my same lens kit I’ve had for years, and I’ve seen a noticeable difference in quality.

**If you’re a beginner**, the Canon EOS Rebel series can’t be beat. It’s affordable, it’s functional, it’s lightweight, it’s not overwhelming but offers a lot of room for you to learn and expand your skills. At the time of publishing this book, the [Canon EOS Rebel T6i](#) was the most recent to debut, but I also suggest going with the latest model, whatever that may be.

**If you’re an experienced photographer** but not quite a professional (yet), you should really look into the full-frame [Canon 6D](#). This is my go-to camera, and I’m so happy I upgraded over the holidays last year (when it was on sale for \$1200). My images have never been better, and you can also [buy it with the 24-105mm lens](#), which would be my recommendation.

**If you’re a pro**, then you needn’t even read this section, though you probably want to look into the Mark series. The [Canon EOS 5D Mark III](#) is my dream camera, but at this time, I can’t afford the high price point, nor does the hefty weight make sense for what I’m using it for (travel photography vs. portraits). With the Mark, you’re getting more pixels and more focal points. But if you’re not shooting portraits, you’ll likely be fine with the Canon 6D.

*Camera tip: If you want to test out a camera or lens before making the purchase, [Borrow Lenses](#) is a helpful and affordable way to do just that.*

## LANDSCAPE LENSES

The very first lens I bought beyond the kit that comes with many DSLRs was the [17-85mm](#). This is a great starter lens for newbies: It's not too heavy, and it's extremely versatile—you can shoot a closely cropped portrait or use the wide angle for landscapes. I primarily shoot beaches, mountains, oceans and other landscapes; as such, the 17-85mm was the only lens I carried for many years.

The next big lens investment I made was [24-105mm](#), which offers a similar range as the 17-85mm with better glass and added functionality. I've owned this lens for five years and it continues to be my go-to, often the only one I pack on my travels, mainly for the zoom capabilities, great depth of field and wonderful bokeh. It's more expensive, but it's a long-term investment worth making.

## WIDE ANGLES

My favorite fun, frivolous photography accessory is my [10-20mm](#). The super wide angle gives it almost a fish eye effect, making it perfect for cityscapes. It's also good for dramatic effect, interiors and tight city spaces. Now that I have a full-frame camera, I'm looking at investing in either the [Canon 10-22mm](#) or the [Tamron 15-30mm f/2.8](#) to fulfill my wide-angle needs.

## ZOOM LENSES

My [70-300mm](#) is a Tamron, which isn't the fanciest of models. Unfortunately, my Canon 70-300mm (a much better lens) was stolen in Cape Town, so I had to make due with what I could find (and afford) as a replacement. When I went to the Galapagos, I rented a fixed zoom, the [Canon EF 400mm f/5.6](#), and I was so happy I did to catch the wildlife far in the distance, though it's so big and bulky, I definitely couldn't haul this piece of equipment around on a regular basis.

For low-light and food/up-close photography, a 50mm is always a great piece to round out your repertoire of lenses. When I first purchased the [50mm f/1.8](#), I was obsessed. I used it like crazy to take pictures of my friends' babies, who were always a blur when I captured them with other lenses. It's an easy lens for making an amateur look like a professional thanks to the lack of depth of field, and it's also one of the only lenses I've been able to use without the flash in basically non-existent light to get a clear image. But I quickly tired of it, as it wasn't the best quality and wound up upgrading to the [50mm f/1.4](#) for a cool \$350. It's definitely superior to the 1.8, but I can't help but covet the [50mm f/1.2](#), the ultimate in fixed lenses. At \$1,500, it's not in the cards for me now, but maybe someday.

## UNDERWATER SHOOTING AND POINT-AND-SHOOTS

When I started diving, I bought the [underwater housing](#) for my pocket camera, the [Canon SD870](#). It was fine in perfect natural light, not so fine indoors and in low-light settings. When my sister went on her round-the-world trip, we gave her the Canon G10, at which point I became obsessed with the G series, as it offered a solid low-light

setting, multiple ISO options and pretty advanced features for what is essentially a point-and-shoot.

Then, I became a more serious diver and needed a more diverse camera for the varying conditions underwater shooting poses. I didn't want to fork over the money it would cost to buy [the housing](#) for my DSLR, nor did I want to have to deal with the bulkiness. As luck would have it, I had just enough reward points through my credit card company to get the [Canon G11](#) for free, then purchased [the housing](#) for it for \$185.

## GOPRO

I have owned every version of the GoPro from the start, from the original model to the [HERO4](#), and while they're definitely fun accessories to have, I don't think they should ever be your primary camera if you want a nice range of diversity in your shots. For one, you can't zoom. Also, the quality (in my opinion) isn't nearly as good as you'd get with a nice DSLR, especially if you do any post-processing to it.

That said, I'm a huge fan of GoPros for sports and any kind of action photography. We primarily use ours for skiing, though we also take it diving with us, as well. While the 1 and 2 didn't capture great underwater shots, the 3 and 4 have been vast improvements, and I'm having a lot of fun with the mini [GoPro HERO4 Session](#) in shallow waters (it only works to a depth of 33 feet, and yes I tested that claim and indeed it's true).

## CAMERA BAGS

For several years, I had a series of Slingshot bags before settling on the [Canon Deluxe Photo Backpack 200EG](#), which at 40 bucks is almost disposable in the camera bag world. I've been using them for six years and have only destroyed two of them. They're the perfect size for my DSLR, an extra lens or two, my GoPro and accessories, as well as charging cords, batteries, memory cards and the like. It's also like a high-school backpack, which makes a huge difference on a long day. I also have an [Epiphanie](#) camera/laptop bag that I use day to day and as my carry-on when flying.

## WHERE I SHOP

I pretty much purchase all my equipment from [Amazon](#). Why? Well, truth be told, I've found the prices to be lower than anywhere else; plus, there's free shipping if you spend more than \$25. Also, if anything goes wrong, their customer service rocks.

# PACKING 101

Packing is one of those things that stumps most people—preferably women—myself included. But after many years on the road and some trial and error, I now try my hardest to only take the essentials and cram everything into one carry-on and a single personal item when at all feasible (e.g. a trip of 10 days or less). Here are my top five tips to packing light:

## CHOOSE COLORS WISELY

I usually pick one overall color family—in this case, gray; oftentimes, it's tan/light brown—and match all outfits to it. This significantly cuts back on the number of shoes I have to take, which are the number one thing that weigh down my luggage. In this instance, I have one pair of flat gray boots that fold up rather nicely to wear over jeans during the day, one pair of silver-y pewter flats to dress up outfits for nighttime, and [my gray TOMS](#) to wear on the plane and around the city on days with a lot of walking. Ditto to accessories. Since I'll be wearing all gray complements, this rules out gold jewelry entirely, and I can simply pack a pair or two of silver hoops and studs and one bracelet and wear them with all ensembles.

## LAYER UP

For trips when it's going to be cooler than most and I'm going to be out and about in the thick of it, I bring two tees, two long-sleeved shirts that fit easily under the tees, two sweaters, two cardigans and a winter coat. All can be stacked and inter-mixed so I can get more wear out of the few items I brought and also won't be cold as I always have another layer handy to throw on top. I don't normally get dirty enough to need to wash things while traveling, but many hotels do offer laundry services. If I'm doing a lot of trekking, as was the case [in Rwanda](#), I can always send my soiled duds out and have them back the next morning in time to wear again.

As far as on the bottom, I bring one pair of casual Gap jeans, another dark wash pair that can easily be dressed up, and a pin-striped denim skirt. Again, they all go with every top I brought, shoes too. I pack one dressy Language tank well suited for the dark jeans, and a dressier Anthropologie cardi for dinners. Sometimes, if I have room, I slip in one thin Anthro dress (that match the pewter flats), just in case I decide to mix things up one evening.

## HEAVY LOAD

Wear your bulkier items on the plane. I take a wool pea coat for the 45-degree nights, as I have zero room left in my bag for such heavy items. Airports and airplanes are always freezing anyway, so I'm more often than not happy to have it on me.

## GO AU NATUREL

Once I finally learned to leave the curling iron and straightener and make-up I never end up wearing in the first place at home, it freed up loads of space in my bag. You're

traveling! Go with it! You don't have to look like you stepped off the silver screen. Not to mention, in this day and age, you'll be hard-pressed to find a hotel that doesn't offer hair dryers, so you can still pack light and be slightly high maintenance with your locks (though I tend to air dry out of sheer laziness).

### SKIMP ON TOILETRIES

Again, every hotel—whether two stars or five—offers shampoo and body wash and lotion and bars of soap, and restocks your room daily. Conditioner, on the other hand, is not always a given, so while I often leave the others at home, I will still pack a hotel-sized bottle (or two) of conditioner along with me in case. Insider tip: If you don't want to surrender your liquids to the security belt, quite simply, don't. Just hide them really well. Typically, I bury my toiletries in the middle of the bag to hide them from the X-ray (still ziplocked, just in case), and in the three years since the liquids rule went into effect, I have been caught all of once. Just sayin': It saves you time. Most of the bottles I need in three-ounce containers are available at my local grocery store or Walgreens or I'll purchase generic plastic bottles of that size and fill them up with my own liquids; however, you can buy pretty much anything that comes in minis online via [3FLOZ](#) if you use more obscure products than my basic drugstore brands.

*Money-saving tip: Did you know you can also implement this strategy with booze when you travel? Simply purchase a Nalgene leak-proof plastic bottle of three ounces or smaller (they really work!). Fill 'er up with the liquor of your choice from your at-home bar for an in-flight cocktail at a tenth of the price the airline sells them for. You can thank me later.*

# HOW TO PACK FOR A CRUISE

Just when I feel like I've got packing down to a science, I go and throw a whammy in the plan: Eight weeks on a cruise ship in a dozen different countries with varying climates. Case in point: It started with rain and cold in [Barcelona](#), then gave way to sun and heat in [Italy](#) and Portugal, then was downright freezing (40 degrees) and pouring in [Benelux](#).

But most of you going on cruises are not going to experience such extremes in weather, as I venture to guess you will be gone one week to two, tops—and likely in one of two locals: the Caribbean or Alaska. That said ... let's talk about packing for your typical cruise, shall we?

**The first thing to keep in mind is packing in one color palette (see [Packing 101 for more on this tip](#)). This is always going to save you room in the end and make it easier to put together outfits as everything (ideally) will match and can be worn interchangeably.**

## SHOES

I always start with the shoes, which take up the most room. I'm a big fan of neutral-toned sandals that can be worn by day if needed but that go with everything by night. On these trips, I take two pair—both made by [Sam Edelman](#), which I find comfortable, stylish and durable—but you really only need one for a shorter vacation.

I also take a pair of running shoes, and as those can be bulky, I'm loving the [Merrell Barefoot Pace Glove](#) that my sister gave me for Christmas. They fold up quite compactly in your bag if you don't wear them on the plane (which I do). I also pack a pair of flip-flops ([Havaianas](#)) and a pair of [TOMS](#), always.

Of course, taking closed-toed shoes means packing socks, so I stuff two pairs inside the shoes if packed (knowing that I can wash them in my sink if I wear them more than two or three times). My intimates all go folded up as small as possible in a gallon-sized Ziploc bag that is lain flat on top of everything else, that way I can find them immediately when I inevitably shower the second I get off that long plane ride and settled in my cabin. All of my toiletries are three ounces or less, packed in a see-through Ziploc and transported in my carry-on. That way, if my bag is lost by the airline (a common occurrence), at least I can brush my teeth.

## CLOTHING

I'm a dress girl, as most of you know by now, so my suitcase is dominated by cotton frocks that fold up quite small, and once I have the majority of my necessities in the bag, I fill the excess space with a mix of short sundresses and maxi dresses. I interviewed celebrity stylist Petra Flannery—who styles Emma Stone, Mila Kunis and other starlets—for a *Glamour* feature, and she told me she hangs every outfit together on a hanger, wraps it in plastic then folds it over once in the bag to eliminate wrinkles.

But most of us “normal” people don’t have the luxury of so much space, so I roll my clothes as tight as possible to save space and prevent wrinkles and then keep a small bottle of [wrinkle release](#) (which you can buy at Wal-Mart or Target) in my toiletries bag to fight wrinkles on-site. Works like a charm.

I also pack a couple cardigans—usually one in a neutral tone and then go bold and pack something like yellow and cranberry that I can pretend match each ensemble—as it’s often cold at sea at night and even colder inside a cruise ship. On this particular cruise, I took a jean jacket and a hoodie, which you might not need in the Caribbean but which were crucial in late spring in Europe.

And though I loathe jeans, I pack a pair just in case of cold. And then, of course, a top or two to go with them. Gap’s bright, colorful tees (or tanks) that come in a rainbow of hues are always a safe bet.

This trip, too, I vowed to work out—something I never do on vacation—and I did: I made it to Zumba almost every day at sea. But don’t reserve too much space in your one suitcase for workout gear; one outfit will suffice, and you can re-wear it each time you hit the gym (you’re going to get sweaty anyway, right?).

## **ELECTRONICS**

Electronics are a whole other beast—for me, if checking a bag, then one [carry-on](#) is my camera bag, while the other is relegated to my laptop and Kindle—but everything I mentioned above should easily fit into a standard suitcase. I mean, I packed all of that and more in my [Tumi](#) to get me through eight weeks, and I hit the 50-pound weight limit exactly (try not to, though, if you can avoid it as you will be hauling that thing around for some time!). Personally, if I’m traveling for 10 days or less, I make it my mission to only take one rolling suitcase that is carry-on size to avoid checked bag fees and the possibility of the airline losing it.

Of course, my motto is always this: Leave something at home? Excuse to go shopping! And speaking of leaving things at home, forgo the heels, ladies, and also the excess accessories like handbags, scarves (aside from one, maybe), etc. You think you’re going to use them, sure, but you’ll get on that ship and realize that less is more. You’re traveling; you’re not appearing in a fashion show!

# PACKING FOR LIFE IN A TRAILER

Are you a traveler of the permanent variety? Do you live out of a trailer—or are you thinking of doing the camper thing for a short time? Then, read on!

It's no big secret that packing is a pain in the ass. You know what's even more tiresome? Packing for six weeks when you haven't a clue what the weather is going to be like. I'll be the first to admit that we struck out in many packing arenas before our [Great American Road Trip](#). For some reason, I thought it was going to be warm—oh, I don't know, maybe because we were traveling in May and June, traditional spring months, you know—and I can count on two fingers the time I wore something that wasn't long sleeves and pants.

Here's the thing: We kind of just threw a whole bunch of crap in bags and stuffed every nook and cranny of the trailer with said crap. This is so not the way to go. [The trailer](#) isn't exactly full of ample storage space, so a lot of time these bags were just tossed under the table or on the benches (where we spent a lot of time given the rain), and because we brought so much, I never could locate what I needed. If we were to do it all again, here's how I'd do it...

## HIKING SHOES

I love my Merrell hiking shoes. As I had also packed my running shoes, I wasn't sure if I would also need hiking shoes (turns out it was the other way around). The extra grip on my Merrells proved handy on the slick sandstone of [the Canyonlands](#) (particularly when jumping).

## RICE COOKER

Yes, we brought our rice cooker on the trip. And as small as the kitchen was, it was completely useful. Do you know how many meals rice goes with? Practically everything. Putting a pot of rice on to cook and making some kind of meat like baked chicken and a vegetable like roasted cauliflower made for a lot of easy—and healthy—meals without eating processed food.

## FRENCH PRESS

We love gourmet coffee and loathe instant. We replaced our eight-cup French press for a smaller four-cup model and used the heck out of that thing.

## STAY COSY

I always pack a couple of fleeces, a hat and my puffy coat. I started collecting jackets during my time in the freezing Bay Area and now have two mid-weight North Face fleeces and a North Face down coat (what can I say? I love their stuff) that get a whole lot of use. I pretty much lived in these three items of clothes the first three weeks of the trip when it didn't get above 60 degrees during the day and got as low as 30 most nights.

## STAY DRY

Remember to pack a waterproof jacket and rain boots. Last minute, SVV coaxed me to throw in my parka and my rain boots. (I was being overly optimistic, way too optimistic in thinking I wouldn't require warm or waterproof clothing.) Need I even say they barely came off my feet the entire time?

## DRESSES

Pack one nice dress. We only went out to eat at nice restaurants twice in six weeks; still it's always handy to have one dressier item of clothing with you—just in case.

## TEES & TANKS

I have a stock of the classic Gap T-shirts, as well as the ribbed tanks, in every color of the rainbow. I often take a whole stack on any given trip, as I wear them underneath skirts or fleece or just paired with a cotton skirt. They always get worn. Always.

## LOTS OF UNDERWEAR

Always pack lots of socks and underwear. That's a no-brainer. Still, I think I brought a two-week supply and still found myself doing laundry pretty frequently. Next time I'll allot less space for clothes and more room for undergarments.

## KINDLE

When has my [Kindle](#) not been a smart thing to pack? The answer: Never. I read books anytime I have a spare moment, and it's such a small device to pack, too.

## HOODIES

You may have seen [my purple hoodie](#) I bought in Canada years ago make a frequent appearance on the blog as it's part of my Official Flying Outfit and I wear it everywhere; however, early in our trip when we realized how cold it was going to be, we made a pit stop at [Cabela's](#) and I also bought two heavily discounted Columbia hoodies and a North Face one as well (for around \$30 each—total steal!).

## PANTS

[ExOfficio](#) insect repellent pants, to be exact. I'm famously not a pants wearer—if you've noticed, I wear dresses more often than not—but I bought these bad boys when I went to [Rwanda](#) to ward off mosquitoes, and they've been a godsend ever since (especially since they're the only non-yoga pants in my casual clothing collection).

## AUDIO BOOKS

Prior to this trip, I hadn't listened to an audiobook in my life, but after loving [Game of Thrones](#) on TV, we downloaded the first book on my iPhone. That was an immediate 35 hours of entertainment while driving and the second book in the series got us through our cross-country move from California to Tennessee.

### **SIRIUS CAR KIT**

I have Sirius in my Altima, but the truck didn't have satellite so we bought a [portable player](#) for the road (which can be tacked onto your account for an additional \$10 a month). While Howard Stern was on vacation much of our trip—what is up with that anyway?—we still got uninterrupted service, even in the boondocks where we wouldn't even have had regular FM radio channels.

## *What I could have done without:*

### **HAND WEIGHTS**

As predicted, they were used twice in six weeks. Oops.

### **17 SUNDRESSES**

That's probably a conservative estimate; I'd venture to say it was more accurately 37. If my photos of our road trip are any indicator, the number of sundresses I wore during my time on the road is embarrassing (the weather was mainly to blame but still).

### **3 BIKINIS**

Not like these consume a whole lot of space, but one bikini would have sufficed given the only day I used it the entire time was to lay out by [Lake Coeur d'Alene](#) in Idaho.

### **COWBOY BOOTS**

I had not one but two pairs in the trailer, and they didn't get worn at all (not even at the Jackson rodeo!). While I will always take a pair of boots on vacation for when I'm wanting to look cute, on a road trip they weren't necessary.

### **COFFEE GRINDER**

While we prefer to grind our own coffee at home, on the road it was just a pain with the cleanup. You can still buy the beans ground for French press and leave the grinder at home.

A photograph of two skiers on a snowy mountain slope. The skier on the left is wearing a red jacket and dark pants, holding a selfie stick. The skier on the right is wearing a white and pink jacket and pink pants. They are both smiling and wearing ski goggles. The background shows a snowy mountain with a line of evergreen trees under a cloudy sky.

02.  
Travel Hacks  
& Expert Advice

# STAY HEALTHY WHILE FLYING

We've escaped one of the worst flu seasons yet, but travelers still have to get from Point A to Point B for that [board meeting](#) and need to do so without catching the sniffles. How do you keep your [health](#) intact when trapped in an incubator for various microbial agents at 40,000 feet? It takes some careful thought and advanced planning, but below our health experts dish on precautions you can take to keep the germs at bay.

## BEFORE & AFTER BOARDING

Protect your immune system. Take care to wash your hands a minimum of five times a day and also shower as soon as possible after deplaning to remove the dirt from your body, clean the pores, and rid your hair of any unwanted bacteria that might have collected during your travels, advises Rick O'Shea, president and COO of [ByoPlanet](#), a Florida-based company that has developed a patented system for disinfecting airplanes.

If using hand sanitizers, avoid those containing alcohol, O'Shea adds. "These products break down your body's virus defense mechanism by drying out your skin and allowing viruses to penetrate through the cracks in your dry skin."

## ON THE PLANE

Disinfect, disinfect, disinfect. It comes as no surprise that the seat you're occupying could be crawling with germs—and that most often air travelers get sick from something they touch. But don't neglect your arm rest, window shade, overhead bins and tray tables, advises [Bobby Laurie](#), a flight attendant for a major U.S. carrier. "Those are all parts of the plane that are not cleaned during 'quick turns,' when the plane arrives and only has 45 minutes to one hour to deplane," says Laurie, who is also a travel correspondent for The Daily Buzz.

Laurie suggests carrying anti-bacterial wipes and disinfecting the entire area around your seat—all the places people routinely touch—as well as bringing a disposable mat if you plan to use the tray for snacking or working. Likewise, carry a pack of tissues and use them as a barrier between you and the lavatory door handle or toilet flush and avoid unnecessary contact with others, such as handshakes.

Phones are a cesspool for germs, and chances are you don't wipe yours down nearly as often as you should; an article in LiveScience reported that cell phones have 10 times as many germs as toilet seats. "Electronics can be the breeding ground for bacteria and other germs such as E. coli, Staphylococcus, and Salmonella or Pseudomonas," explains Hank Lambert, chief executive officer of [PURE Bioscience](#), a California-based company that has developed a non-toxic, antimicrobial disinfectant. He suggests that travellers wipe down their phone and other electronic devices daily or after placing them on public surfaces. Electronic-friendly products like [Sani-Screen Wipes](#) will do just the trick and are portable and individually wrapped.

## FOOD ON THE GO

Mind your food and beverages. Food consumption is a major cause of airborne illness, Lambert says. He advises avoiding the in-flight tea and coffee service and—if you need that caffeine fix—bringing your own on board instead. [Test results from the EPA have found that in 2012](#), 12 percent of commercial airlines tested positive for a bacteria that's a strong indicator for E.Coli. O'Shea says that don't airlines don't always heat the water to the temperature that kills bacteria. In some isolated cases, passengers have fallen ill after drinking coffee or tea from water that hasn't been properly heated and was contaminated. “Drink through a clean straw after removing the paper to avoid mouth contact on touch surfaces,” says O'Shea.

Lambert also suggests not putting food in the seat pocket—an area of the plane not frequently cleaned—in front of you if bringing on your own snacks or meals. “You often see people store food in the pocket in the seat in front of them. That's an area where bacteria could accumulate and be transferred from the pocket to the food or utensil you're using.” Similarly, keep your food and beverages covered with a clean napkin to prevent airborne germs from tainting them. “When you're in a closed environment and you have people who might have the flu, they're exhaling, coughing or sneezing into the environment,” Lambert adds, “and that also can contaminate your food.”

*This story appeared on Entrepreneur.com.*

# TRAVELING AS A COUPLE

SVV and I met while traveling in Europe more than a decade ago, and much of our relationship is deeply rooted in those early years of exploring new countries together. We were both graduate students in Holland and a large part of our first year as friends was traveling with each other and our classmates—from Germany to Romania and everywhere in between. We saw each other at our highest highs (like landing my first guidebook deal in Spain) and our lowest lows (uh, drinking bad water in Portugal...you can guess what happened from there). I knew by the time our year was up that we were compatible travel partners—and that's when we started dating, at least officially.

Since then, we've visited more than 30 countries as partners. Traveling as a pair can make or break your relationship—thus, it's important to identify each other's strengths and weaknesses early on. For example, I never let him navigate—given a 50/50 scenario, he will choose the wrong direction every time and that led to at least one break-up while we were still dating!—but much of the problem solving falls on him. I'm the Type A planner, the one who has an internal calendar permanently etched in her memory, so I handle all logistics, bookings, and miles hacking (we use the Chase Sapphire and Ink cards to book several flights and rental cars for free each year, FYI).

The more we travel, the more laid back we both become. We know that there will be road blocks, that inevitably flight delays and cancellations are going to happen, and we account for such when plotting out itineraries and don't let such hiccups get our spirits down (and if it gets really bad, we air our airline grievances on Twitter, as that's been the only way I've successfully gotten compensation for canceled flights and lost baggage in the past!). Our itineraries are more flexible than they once were, as I know that, for our own sanity, building in free time to wander is essential, as is scheduling downtime at the hotel or rental for my husband, who must have his afternoon nap. Sure, we sketch out things we'd like to do in each city before we visit—mostly restaurants and bars we hope to visit—but more importantly, once there, we let things unfold as they will. After traveling extensively with friends (who weren't friends by the trip's end), I've learned the stricter the agenda, the quicker a potential feud develops.

On the practical side of things, we have saved money by staying in Airbnb rentals all over the world. Not only do they tend to be cheaper, but I love the option of making our base in a locals' neighborhood that might not traditionally have any hotel options. We love eating out and discovering new places through their coffee shop culture; however, I'll always stock up on Kind bars and nuts before traveling, which can serve as airplane snacks and even a meal replacement—particularly for breakfast when I'm usually not all that hungry—and allow me to spend more on brunch, lunch and dinner (or at the bar!). Similarly, I keep a stock of Starbucks' VIA instant coffee on hand; they're such tiny packets, they pack well and they almost taste like the real deal.

Ultimately, though, it's about figuring out what works for you (and your significant other). There's no formula to follow, no right or wrong way to do it, just what's going to make you most comfortable—it will take time and work on both your part to reach a happy medium.

# 10 TIPS TO SUMMER TRAVEL

## 01. PROTECT YOUR IMMUNE SYSTEM

Take care to wash your hands a minimum of five times a day. Some like it hot—go where the weather is less desirable (to some). New Mexico, Arizona or Palm Springs may be steamy in summer months, but if you can handle the (dry) heat—literally—you'll find lower prices and fewer crowds in the desert regions during June, July and August.

## 02. KEEP COPIES OF TRAVEL DOCUMENTS HANDY

Never leave home without back-up copies of your driver's license, passport and other important documents. I recommend scanning and inserting such images into your cloud (I use OneDrive because it's free with the Microsoft Office suite).

## 03. BRUSH UP ON TSA RULES

Those traveling with small children ages 12 and under will be happy to learn that kids are no longer required to remove their shoes when passing through security (neither are adults over the age of 75)—but always check [the TSA site](#) before you go as the prohibitions are ever-changing.

## 04. RESEARCH THE "LOCAL'S" EXPERIENCE

I'm a huge fan of both Trip Advisor and Yelp for crowdsourcing restaurants, bars and hotels when I travel. And when in doubt, ask your concierge—they are there to serve you, after all—or your social media network if you have a well-curated following of fellow travelers.

## 05. CHOOSE YOUR LUGGAGE WISELY

[Flight 001](#) co-founder Brad Johns offers up four things to look for in the perfect suitcase: lightweight (with airlines charging for overweight bags, this is of utmost importance), layout (i.e., do you need a piece of luggage with dividers and pockets, or do you prefer to pack a case that is just one big open space?), sturdy wheels (with a carry-on, you want wheels that have a low profile; for a check-in, the wheels need to be strong enough to withstand being tossed around), and an unconventional-looking piece (so you can spot it easily as it comes down the beltway).

## 06. EXPLORE YOUR OWN BACKYARD

So often travelers forget about the experiences in their own backyard. Use summer as an excuse to check out that town two hours away you've always heard about but never visited or to take a road trip rather than flying. A campsite in a national park is far cheaper than a hotel room—plus, the views are way better.

## 07. PACK IN ONE COLOR SCHEME

I've always adopted the single-palette tip to cut back on the number of extras like shoes, bags or jewelry needed, often choosing a color scheme of neutral accessories to

match everything. A well-known celebrity stylist, who packs for actors and musicians going on long jaunts, recently told me that when it comes to summertime, pick things that are light and fresh and all go together. For example, bring a white jean or skirt that will go with every top-tank, tee or cardigan-you pack.

## **08. SEEK OUT FREE WI-FI HOTSPOTS**

Want to save on data packages with your cell phone provider? You don't need to pay for Internet when so many chains like McDonald's and Starbucks now offer it up for free to patrons. For those who travel via car rather than plane, most RV parks and campgrounds also include complimentary Internet access (and cable, too).

## **09. CARRY ON WHEN POSSIBLE**

Not only does it save you the money of checking a bag, it also prevents the hassle of having to wait for your bag to come down the luggage belt-while eliminating the risk of the airline losing your bag entirely (something that has happened to me far too many times). As a result, I've learned to pare down my necessities and cram it all into a carry-on if I'm traveling for 10 days or less.

## **10. DRESS FOR COMFORT, NOT STYLE**

We're no longer in the golden days of air travel where frequent fliers are expected to dress to impress. Comfort reigns supreme. Dress in layers, wear materials like cotton or cashmere that breathe well and will keep you cozy, and be sure to don footwear that slips on and off easily for security check. If you have bulkier pieces, save space in your luggage and wear them on the plane instead-after all, they can always double as a blanket or a pillow (both things that airlines are skimping on these days).

*This post originally appeared on Office.com.*

## WHAT THE EXPERTS SAY



***How early do I need to buy airline tickets to ensure I'm getting the best rate?***

Sorry to disappoint, but I don't think there is a best time of the week or day to buy airfares. The best strategy is simply to follow tweets sites like [Airfarewatchdog.com](https://www.airfarewatchdog.com) and [Travelzoo](https://www.travelzoo.com), and also sign up for free airfare alerts (just google the term) and then pounce when a fare goes down. These alerts are usually good for travel over many months but often must be bought immediately. Many travel sites offer them.

- *George Hobic* | *Founder of [Airfare Watchdog](https://www.airfarewatchdog.com)*



***What's the best website to find airfare deals?***

No website always wins in the search for airfare deals. But for the best shot at getting a good rate, I recommend going to the sites that don't sell travel, but simply present a search of the rates offered by the "seller websites" (the airline sites, Expedia, Orbitz, etc.). These specialized search sites include [Hipmunk.com](https://www.hipmunk.com), [DoHop.com](https://www.dohop.com) and [Momondo.com](https://www.momondo.com).

- *Pauline Frommer* | *Co-President of [Frommer's Media](https://www.frommers.com)*



***How early do I need to buy airline tickets to ensure I'm getting the best rate?***

For domestic flights you should start price shopping two to three months prior. For flights to Europe, you should start looking about five months before; for flights to Mexico and the Caribbean, about three months before. [Google Flights](https://www.google.com/flights) is a great source. You can search any date and a list of all carriers flying that route will populate instantly. I also like [Kayak.com](https://www.kayak.com)—it's a fare comparison site that recommends you to either "book now" if the ticket price is expected to rise in the next week or to "wait" if the price could drop.

- *Claire Newell* | *Founder of [Travel Best Bets](https://www.travelbestbets.com)*



***I hear about people scoring free upgrades all the time. How do they do that?***

I've been upgraded for free in the past even though I have no status in the airline frequent flyer programs. I will tell you that if economy class is oversold and there's an empty seat in business or first class, the flight attendants or gate agents are not going to upgrade the person wearing the dirty T-shirt and flip-flops. You have a much better chance of getting that tap on the shoulder if you're presentable. Of course, these days airlines are selling last minute upgrades at the gate or the check in kiosk, so the front cabins are usually full. The last time I was upgraded on United, I was the only person in the United lounge wearing a suit.

- *George Hobic* | Founder of [Airfare Watchdog](#)



***Sites like Groupon sell travel packages now. Legit or no?***

From what I understand, Groupon charges a hefty fee to the companies that use its site to move merchandise. That means the product you're getting is either very distressed—i.e. it needs to sell now—or from a new company that's using Groupon to get its name out. So sometimes the deals will be terrific, and sometimes not so much. Do your due diligence before making any travel purchase.

- *Pauline Frommer* | Co-President of [Frommer's Media](#)



***Any tips to landing upgrades?***

Use social media! Send a note to the company through Facebook or Twitter. Write on their Facebook wall or send a Tweet about how excited you are to visit their hotel or resort. Your enthusiasm may be noticed by the property manager who can pull up your reservation and arrange for an upgrade.

- *Claire Newell* | Founder of [Travel Best Bets](#)



***Anything new to report in TSA rule changes within the last year that would be applicable/interesting to women?***

The fact that young children no longer have to take off their shoes to get through security will come as a relief to a lot of moms. If your kids are like mine—or at least like they were when they were a bit younger—getting them to put on their shoes in the first place is a huge chore (when they were under 8, they would have lived barefoot if they could). Taking them on and off? Oy, nightmare!

- Pauline Frommer | Co-President of [Frommer's Media](#)



***What's the best way to find good restaurants in the city I'm staying?***

Concierges are usually a good source for recommending great restaurants. I also like the app [Find. Eat. Drink.](#)—it sources recommendations from restaurant industry insiders like chefs, sommeliers, bartenders and bakers. This way you can choose from local restaurants loved by those who know best.

- Claire Newell | Founder of [Travel Best Bets](#)



03.  
Alternative  
Travel

# HOW TO BE THE BEST AIRBNB GUEST

As someone who has been using [Airbnb](#) for years, I'm always surprised when people either a) don't know about the vacation rental company (it launched in 2008, after all) or b) have no idea if it works. The good news is that I'm about to divulge all you need to know about booking your first Airbnb.

***Get \$25 in travel credit when you sign up via [this link!](#)***

How is Airbnb different than other sites like VRBO or HomeAway, you might ask? Well, first of all, it was founded by a couple of students who were living in San Francisco and renting out air mattresses in their flat to others coming through town when hotels were all full. As such, it tends to skew younger in demographic and is full of more apartments and condos than actual houses. That said, you will find houses but they're less common, particularly in urban areas, or else on the fringes of town, like in Nashville where you'll find the majority of standalone structures out in Brentwood or Franklin. Oftentimes, it's the primary residence of a person who travels a lot and rents it out while he/she is gone or, in many cases, is a second home/investment property. I've also had much better luck with Airbnb in big urban areas like Los Angeles or New York and not as much as Savannah or Charleston (for the smaller towns, one of the older vacation rentals services is more advisable).

Airbnb is a trust-based system that relies heavily on user reviews, social media network verifications and the like. (This will become important later on in my tips section.) The search process for finding a flat to book is pretty streamlined, so if you're at all proficient with the Internet, you shouldn't have any trouble. First, I always set my parameters for "entire place," then enter the number of people I'm traveling with, the maximum amount I wish to spend and the dates I'll be visiting. From there, you can zoom in or out on the area of town in which you'd like to stay, and Airbnb will adjust the search results accordingly.

If you see one that piques your interest, you can always bookmark it for later by clicking that handy little heart icon on the top of each listing to create a new board or add to an existing one. I'm a huge fan of creating Airbnb wishlists by destination, as I spend a lot of downtime watching American Idol and dreaming up future trips based on where I've found cool homes to rent.

Once you've found your ideal place, here are some basic unspoken etiquette tips you should follow before and after you book:

## **FILL OUT YOUR PROFILE IN FULL**

This is so very important! Craft a bio that sums up the essence of who you are, pop in a photo and add as many verifications as possible, including your driver's license and

bank account. This will help you be an attractive prospective guest to hosts because, remember, you are asking to stay in their home, and unlike a hotel, they can turn you down if they feel you aren't a good fit or that your bio doesn't contain enough information. Reviews are equally important when hosts are approving or denying guests, so if you're brand new to the community and don't have any reviews yet, I recommend asking fellow friends who are on Airbnb to leave you a reference (this is different than a review and you'll need to connect your profile to Facebook to do this but it's a quick and painless process).

## **READ THE LISTING THOROUGHLY**

Most hosts have pretty thorough listings that spell everything out from parking to the general location of the property, so don't write and say "is there a parking spot?" before reading the full listing and making sure that nugget of info wasn't included. It will make you look incompetent, and no host wants an incompetent guest who can't take time to read a basic listing! Also don't ask for the exact address of the place before you've booked; remember, this is someone's home and they're not going to want to share that until the days before your arrival for the sake of privacy. Also be sure that the property has everything you need, like Wi-Fi or cable or other amenities you might require while traveling.

## **DON'T TRY TO BEND THE RULES**

If a house says it accommodates eight people, do not email that host and say, "hey, I'm coming to town with a group of 12. Is your place available?" Homeowners set a capacity for a reason, whether it's the number of beds or bathrooms or the building's fire code or the fact that they just doesn't want that much wear and tear on his/her home. It's their home; they have the right to decide who and how many stay there. And don't assume this is like a hotel where you can break the rules, like squeeze in two extra people: Treat your stay like you're a house guest, not like you're a hotel guest. Respect the space and your host.

## **SEND A NICE INTRODUCTION**

When you're submitting a request to stay, it's always nice to lead off with why you're coming to town and who you'll be coming with. For example, "Hi, I'm Kristin! I live in Nashville and often use Airbnb while traveling. My husband and I are low-key travelers who love to spend our holiday weekends visiting new cities and checking out the local restaurant and bar scene. Your place looks perfect for our needs!" Once you've booked, feel free to use your host as a concierge of sorts to find out their favorite local hangs; often, they'll have a guide already drawn up that they can send your way.

## **FOLLOW THE HOUSE RULES ON ARRIVAL**

This is a biggie. If a host asks you to strip the beds and take out the trash, do it. Would you want to come back to your house and find food rotting in your trash can? No, no you would not.

## **HELP IS AT HAND**

Know that if something goes wrong, you have support. Airbnb has an excellent customer service department. The one time that we arrived at a rental, and it was not at all what we thought—the trash hadn't been taken out, the windows were caked in dust, there was the owner's dog running around the property, trying to get into the house—they refunded us immediately, and we went out and booked a hotel room immediately. If it's something that the homeowner can fix (like a wonky Internet connection or a busted water heater), then call, text or email your host immediately so he or she can tend to the problem. It's always a good idea to program the host's number into your phone so you can get in touch if anything does go awry.

## **LEAVE A REVIEW**

Now that your trip is done, there's one step left: Leave a review. Be honest, but also realize that for many hosts, this is a business. If there was something you think the host could have done better—like provide basic cooking necessities such as olive oil and salt and pepper—leave this in the private feedback section or email them directly. There's no need to make that a part of your review unless it's a huge part of the stay (like there was no lock on the door or there was a meth lab operating directly across the street—in other words, things that would make a huge difference for other travelers).

# HOW TO BE THE BEST AIRBNB HOST

More and more of my friends are [signing up to be an Airbnb host](#), and being a long-time user of the vacation rental service—not to mention a frequent traveler, period—I'm never lacking for tips to give them. I love me some Airbnb, but I agree, hosting can be risky. Just last week, in fact, someone close to me had his third group of guests, and they left vomit all over his bedroom (and the guest was in her 50s, too!). Definitely not the kind of welcome you want to come home to.

However, by carefully vetting your guests—requiring three verifications or more, including a driver's license, so you can verify their existence offline—and a little Internet sleuthing, you can prevent the majority of problems before they surface. Regular communication leading up to the visit can build trust and rapport with a guest so that they respect your home as much as you do.

But what about ensuring your guests have a killer time and not only want to come back but also refer them to your friends and to their friends' friends and so on? As a regular [Airbnb guest](#), here are a few things that I always appreciate out of a top-notch host.

## TYPE UP A GUIDE

Type up a guide to your home, your neighborhood and the city at large. This can be as brief or as detailed as you like, but it's always nice if you're new to a city to have a booklet that directs you to the nearest grocery, pharmacy, hospital and other important landmarks. Our host in Rome last summer left us a map guide with some of the restaurants circled and written up on a printout of the area. The result? We ate at her favorite spot every single night because it was convenient, good and the true locals' experience in Italy. It probably only took her 20 minutes to do, but niceties like that go a long way. Bonus points if you send this to your guest prior to their check-in so they can make any necessary plans in advance.

## CLEAN THOROUGHLY

Ensure your space is spic and span—especially the bathroom. There's nothing worse than a hair in the sink or dust on the end tables. As a host, you set your own cleaning fee, so factor in the cost of a housekeeper or cleaning service, give them a detailed list of instructions, and make sure that your home is so clean your guests could eat off the floor when they arrive.

## MAKE CHECKING IN AND OUT AS EASY AS POSSIBLE

The best places we've stayed are ones that have keyless locks like this [Nexia system](#). We don't even have to see our hosts ever, which is nice—it makes it feel more like a hotel in that sense and less like you're sleeping in someone's home. Sure, it might be a little bit more money upfront, but it saves everyone the hassle of the awkward key exchange. The experiences that stand out—and not for the better—are the ones where we had to

drive 20 minutes out of the way to a management company office to pick up the keys, not to mention deliver them at the end of the weekend. Moral of this story: Make it as easy as possible for all parties involved (both yourself and your guests).

## LEAVE CLEAR INSTRUCTIONS

You can't very well be angry with a guest for not taking out the trash if that was not specified, nor were directions given to your dumpster. Be as specific as possible; it's not ludicrous to ask your guests to do reasonable things like strip the beds and take out the trash before they leave. However, threatening to charge them for not leaving the place spotless is not cool. That's why you charge a cleaning fee.

## HAVE BASIC AMENITIES HANDY

We rented an Airbnb cabin in [the Smokies](#) last fall, and I was shocked to find the cupboards were so bare, they didn't even have salt, pepper or olive oil. I'm not saying leave a picnic lunch for your paying guests, but at least provide them with some basic amenities so they don't have to stock up on so many cooking necessities just to make a quick meal or two. Supplying them with coffee, sugar and creamer, as well as a few bottles of water, is also a must.

## PROVIDE SNACKS

Nothing is worse than getting in late at night after a long day of travel and not knowing where the closest convenience store is—or if there's even one still open—when all you want is a handful of Goldfish or two. The best hosts are the ones who provide a little snack basket, and maybe even leave some complimentary booze if you're feeling extra generous. (People hardly ever take advantage of that, trust me.) Even if it means you have to up your rates \$10 a night to cover the cost, the small act won't go unnoticed and you'll get better reviews because of it, I guarantee you.

## BE ACCESSIBLE DURING THE VISIT

You never know when something might go wrong like a blown fuse, a clogged drain, a power outage. Exchange cell numbers with your guest in advance so they can get a hold of you in an emergency—and be sure you answer those unknown call during the duration of their stay, too.

## REVIEW YOUR GUEST AFTER THEY LEAVE

They're the ones traveling and very well might forget to write up what an awesome stay they had at your place once they return to their own home. So much of the trust-based system Airbnb cultivates relies on reviews and user feedback, so wait until a day or two after they've checked out, write up a fair and honest review, then submit it. They won't be able to see what you wrote until they've submitted a review of their own, which will further prompt them to review your place.

***Thinking about becoming an Airbnb host? We both get credit.  
Winning! [Sign up here!](#)***

# HOSPITALITY EXCHANGES

I checked my watch nervously, as my travel companion frantically tried to pick up a cell signal so we could call and alert Vincent to our delayed arrival. After difficulty in navigating Paris' complex transportation system, we just missed our southern-bound train and didn't want our host to sit out in the cold at Marseilles' uncovered station for hours waiting on us to find our way.

In retrospect, it now seems a bit odd (sketchy even perhaps) that we had never before met Vincent, but were taking a risk and staying with him anyway. I didn't know even know the most basic things about him: his place of birth, pets' names, setting of his first kiss—things I generally knew about even the most casual of my acquaintances. But not Vincent. No, Vincent was just a fellow member of an online travel group of which I was a part. I stumbled across his profile while researching ways to finance a month-long assignment in France. The most interaction we had prior to our meeting on his turf was an e-mail exchange or two. Yet, he was retrieving us at the station and taking us to his secluded Provence villa for four nights. The setting for a made-for-TV, Texas Chainsaw Massacre-esque slasher flick perhaps, but we were edgy girls accustomed to taking risks. On the contrary, had my mom back home in my conservative Tennessee town known what I was doing, she might have croaked.

That was the reaction I initially got—and often still do—from many friends and acquaintances when they hear I am using "backpackers clubs" like [Couchsurfing](#) as means of budget travel. My former roommate referred to the travelers I would meet up with as my "Match.com dates," when in reality that couldn't be further from the truth. These services stress that they are not a dating service (Match.com enthusiasts, read no further), and should you try to use it as such, your messages to other members will not be delivered.

Couchsurfing was started with the intent to unite the globetrotters of the world and those who thrive on exploring it. Anyone can join, and it can be used for as little as getting recommendations when visiting a new town to finding a free place to sleep or a local tour guide. Vincent turned out to be a wonderful host and someone I would like to get to know better. After hitting a home run with him, my friend and I moved eastward along the Cote d'Azur, staying each couple of nights with a different Couchsurfer. A month later, we had spent no money on accommodation and gained several new friends.

I continued to use these convenient services throughout the duration of my time living abroad. When I finally returned to the United States, I fell into post-travel depression. No longer could I pick up on a whim and fly to Morocco or hop a train and be in Germany in an hour. Grounded by a real job and lack of travel funds, I sadly changed my profile status on each web group from whatever exotic locale it had previously said back to New York. That's when the e-mails really started pouring in. I had never before

thought of using these sites from my home base to get my travel fix. When you're in Europe, you get used to meeting backpackers everywhere you go. In the States, it's generally just the overly obnoxious tour groups and retired couples who block your path, not the fun-loving Aussie or pint-drinking Brit backpackers you so frequently encounter around every corner in other countries. Because the United States is so big and we lack an array of transcontinental transportation options (i.e. cheap cross-country trains, budget air carriers), I couldn't really envision someone "backpacking" across it. However, much to my surprise I discovered that the backpacker community does, in fact, live on in my own country—and dominantly at that.

Excited by my influx in correspondence, I began reading through my inbox. Among others, there was a Korean businessman coming to town for work, a Finnish guy who wanted to ditch his parents and see the real New York, and two Canadian girls just border-hopping for a weekend of fun. I eagerly replied to each e-mail, and before I knew it my social calendar was full for the next three months.

That's not to say I never had a strange experience or two. Due to the law of probability, with every barrel of apples, you're likely to find a rotten one. Tim from New Zealand was the worm in my barrel of otherwise untainted fruit. He showed up at my apartment, joined my friends and I for a night out, and proceeded to offend everyone but perhaps the bartender by his lack of tact and opposition to American foreign policy. We all have our opinions, but someone should have explained to Tim the significance of the expression "when in Rome"—particularly when he was openly bashing the very country he was visiting.

Luckily for me, those Tim occurrences have been few and far between, and I chock them up to cultural differences. My next two years in New York were full of such Couchsurfing meetups: lunch with an Icelandic couple, coffee with a Chilean, after-work drinks with a bunch of unruly Greeks. Many even resulted in lifelong friendships, such as Emma, an Australian Couch Surfer, who I so quickly hit it off with, she temporarily moved into my living room.

These days, now that I'm a career woman (if you want to call it that), living back in Tennessee, I'm no longer active in Couchsurfing, though I miss the days I was. And for those traveling long-term—solo or with a friend of significant other—it can be not only a way to save a few bucks, but also get to know a place and even develop a friendship or two along the way.

*This piece is modified from the original story I wrote for Frommers.com.*



04.  
Up Close  
& Personal

# ABOUT KRISTIN'S TRAVELS

Over the years, I've also been on the other side of the microphone—as the subject rather than the interviewer—plenty of times. Here's a best of comprising many frequently asked questions regarding my own travels, from money-saving tips to my very favorite destinations.

## WHAT'S YOUR MOST BELOVED TRAVEL PURCHASE?

I had the craziest thing happen when I was in [Ghana](#) a few years back. I had taken a bus from the cruise port to the local market when a young Ghanaian approached me and said he knew me. I figured it was all a ploy to get me to his shop, so I pulled away. He stopped me. “Take your sunglasses off,” he said. I did, and he responded: “no, not you, but I've met someone who looks like you before. Maybe it was your sister?” Indeed, my sister had been to Ghana a year and a half prior. I was still skeptical, though, so after getting back to the ship that night, I emailed and confirmed that she had been to that very market and spent hours there learning how to drum the African way.

The following day, I returned to that market. I didn't know where to find the man, but again was approached by throngs of merchants peddling their wares. “Can you point me toward David's booth?” I asked. They stopped, pondered that question, then one disappeared and returned 10 minutes later with David in tow.

For the rest of the afternoon, SVV and I hung out with David in his workshop. A very talented woodworker, he made a necklace for me and earrings for my sister—and never asked for a penny in return. I then asked if I could see the merchandise he sold to tourists, so he led me through the maze of the other shop owners and took me to his storefront.

SVV and I collect unique globes from around the world—we have 60 and counting—and what was in the middle of his booth but a gorgeous, hand-painted wooden sculpture of the world. We bought it on the spot, and I love that not only is it a beautiful work of art but it reminds me of such a chance occurrence: meeting someone in an African nation I've never visited who recognized me because he'd also crossed paths with my sister some time before. What are the odds?

## WHAT'S YOUR BIGGEST TRAVEL MISTAKE?

SVV and I honeymooned in [Borneo](#) for three weeks nearly five years ago. Toward the end of our trip, we were out at the famed Sipadan island for a day of diving. On our final dive of the day, I took a safety stop at 15 feet and floated along over coral and rock as I waited out my mandatory three minutes before surfacing. There was so much to see there even at 15 feet, that I kicked around with prying eyes, trying to see every last marine creature before leaving the Celebes Sea.

I felt something bump into me, turned around and a large fish was swimming away. I

didn't think much of it until I surfaced and got back on the boat; at that point, my Achilles was burning something awful. After removing all my gear, I took off my 5mm long wetsuit, which was layered over a bootie, and there was a hole the size of a quarter right near my ankle. It stung like a bitch and was bleeding heavily under the skin.

SVV asked, "did you see that triggerfish trying to punk you? He kept going at you every time you swam near his nest (editor's note: triggers have a conical-shaped territory and are known to be aggressive in these parts of the world), warning you to back off." Not only did I not see it, but that little jerk left me with a lasting memory of my honeymoon as I've still got a deep hole and noticeable scar on my left leg!

Moral of this story: Watch your back while diving. Don't be careless like I was. And if you spot a trigger, SWIM THE OTHER WAY. (You can read the full recap of the incident [here](#).)

### **BEST TIP TO SAVING MONEY WHEN YOU TRAVEL?**

Back in my single days, I CouchSurfed my way around Europe as means to save money while still traveling extensively. But my travel style has evolved—for example, I haven't stayed in a hostel in at least eight years—and your mentality changes when you're traveling with a significant other. So these days, in lieu of CouchSurfing or hostels, [Airbnb](#) is our preferred method. It can be much cheaper than a hotel room if done wisely, and you'll often be able to stay in much cooler neighborhoods with nary a hotel in sight that offer you a more authentic experience than had you gone the traditional lodging route.

### **DO YOU TRAVEL HACK WITH CREDIT CARDS?**

I use credit cards for all things—while a financial adviser might disagree, I figure if I'm already going to do the spending, I might as well get the points! I do think Chase Sapphire Preferred is the best universal credit card for travelers because there are so many partners with whom you can use your points, though we also have the Chase Bold/Ink.

### **DO YOU TRACK YOUR SPENDING? IF SO, HOW?**

I have all cards and accounts plugged into Mint.com, which more or less does the work for me. My husband and I own a couple different small businesses on the side, and as he works at a CPA firm by day, he keeps track of all of that income and expenditures via QuickBooks. Since I'm an independent contractor, I get paychecks from as many as 50 employers annually. I use Excel spreadsheets to track payments and invoicing (you can read more about the method to my tracking madness [here](#)).

### **WHAT'S YOUR KEY TO EATING WELL AROUND THE WORLD?**

So many cities have really great food markets where you can get a full meal of varying local delights for a song. Of course, this can be tricky with the potential of food-borne illness; however, if it's a market vetted by locals (or the media) and you're extra-cautious—taking two Pepto Bismol tablets a half an hour before every meal while traveling is a favorite health tip I've adopted from a traveling physician—it can not only be inexpensive but delicious.

## WHERE ARE THE BEST PLACES TO VISIT FOR CELEBRITY SIGHTINGS?

All the obvious places: Los Angeles, Orange County, Southern California as a whole. Recently, I happened to be in Santa Monica over the same weekend as the Golden Globes, and saw the Apatow family—Leslie Mann and her kids—and Ryan Phillippe during one brunch at Farmshop. That night, I saw Steve Coogan at Eveleigh in Beverly Hills. Any nice spot along Sunset or hotel bar in West Hollywood, such as the Chateau Marmont, is generally a safe bet for celebrity sightings. I wrote a story about this very topic that can be read [here](#) for a more comprehensive list of go-to spots to see stars.

My hometown of Nashville is also rife in A-listers. With the show of the same name filming here eight months out of the year, you're likely to see Hayden Panettiere, Connie Britton or another cast member on the rotating roster of the Opry's regular shows or out and about at popular restaurants like City House or 404 Kitchen. Not to mention, musicians of all genres—from the Black Keys to Jack White—call Nashville home. Hunter Hayes loves Whiskey Kitchen and the Southern, Taylor Swift is a frequent visitor to Fido and Virago when she's actually in town, Keith Urban and Nicole Kidman are frequently spotted at the Starbucks near Green Hills, and the Kings of Leon love themselves some Adele's.

## WHY IS SEA TRAVEL AN IDEAL WAY TO SEE THE GLOBE?

I love the simplicity and ease of sea travel, and after four voyages with [Semester at Sea](#), I'm completely hooked. You can only take what you can fit in your suitcase, and once on board, someone cleans, cooks and does your laundry for you. And who doesn't love that? Plus, you get to avoid TSA, long layovers in airports and flight delays—and carry on liquids more than 3 ounces (small victories). We also were fortunate to visit places like Ghana and [Mauritius](#) that would be quite costly and difficult to reach by other methods of transport. Plus, as a diver, it was nice not to have to deal with the PADI-regulated flight times that prohibit you from diving within 18 hours of a flight—we could just get off the ship, do a dive or two, then get right back on and head to the next port!

## WHAT IS THE ONE QUESTION YOU ARE LEAST HAPPY BEING ASKED?

"What's your favorite country?" I'm not a mom, but I assume that's akin to being asked "which is your favorite child?" I've visited more than 100—some on quick day trips, others for months at a time—the bulk of which I'd love to return to...someday. How is it even possible to pick just one that I liked that much more than the rest? I tend to give a laundry list answer when tasked with that query: "South Africa for the full package. Switzerland for the adventure sports. Australia for the beach life, nature and diversity. The Bahamas for diving...the list goes on."

## WHAT'S YOUR NUMBER ONE TIP FOR LAUNCHING A TRAVEL BLOG?

Don't try to do what everyone else is doing or be who everyone else is being. You'll stand out more if you stay true to yourself and create a unique voice in a community oversaturated with SEO-driven sites vying for pageviews and trying to produce as much click bait as possible.

### **WHEN IT COMES TO PACKING, WHAT CAN'T YOU TRAVEL WITHOUT?**

An iPhone, a GoPro kit, a Canon DSLR and various lenses, my MacBook Pro Retina—all the staples of a must-be-connected-at-all-times traveler! I have this awesome, thick Gap scarf that unwinds into blanket size and is perfect for those chilly airplanes, and I have a pair of leggings and thick J. Crew boyfriend-style cardigan that usually round out my “plane outfit.”

### **IF YOU COULD ONLY KEEP ONE TRAVEL BOOK, WHAT WOULD IT BE?**

The Princess Bride, no contest (both the book and the movie). Tales of giants and swash-buckling pirates and six-fingered men and R.O.U.Ses and far-off mythical places—how can you read (or watch) it and not find yourself under its spell? If only Florin and Guilder really did exist...

### **WHAT SONG ON YOUR PLAYLIST INSPIRES YOU MOST?**

I'm an unabashed Taylor Swift fan (sorry I'm not sorry), and her song “Long Live” forever makes me feel inspired, as if I can take on the world all by myself.

### **WHERE IN THE WORLD MAKES YOU FEEL LIKE YOU TIME-TRAVELED?**

I've been to [Morocco](#) several times, and it always feels like a different era and world to me—so foreign to the life to which I'm accustomed. Similarly, my family and I visited [Montenegro](#) last summer, and I'm not sure if it's because the geotag on Instagram read King's Landing, but I definitely did feel like I stepped into some medieval world.

### **WHAT PLACE MOST RESEMBLES A MOVIE SET FOR YOU?**

[Scotland](#) is forever that place I'll keep returning to every chance I get. I don't think you can visit the Highlands and not feel like you're starring in your own movie sequence. The whole country is pure magic.

### **WHY DO YOU LOVE SCOTLAND SO MUCH?**

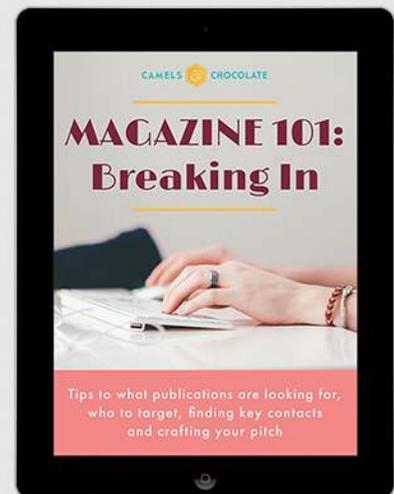
It was my first true experience as a long-term international traveler when I studied there as a student in 2003, and you never forget your first love. Scotland is that place I will return to time and time again and never grow bored—each visit, I discover something new to love about it. Plus, it has everything you could possibly want, crammed into one tiny little nation: gorgeous coastline, rolling hills and highlands, cosmopolitan cities, a whole lot of wildlife (I'm quite fond of the Heilan Coo), amazing people, a deeply ingrained love for sports and a pub culture to top all others.

### **I'M VISITING SCOTLAND FOR THE FIRST TIME. WHERE SHALL I GO?**

Perfect itinerary would start with a few days in [Edinburgh](#). Swing over to the coast for a night in St. Andrew's. Drive due east to [the Highlands](#), soaking up the splendor of Glencoe and the soaring, craggy mountains. Spend a few nights in the Isle of Skye, making your base in Portree. Loop up to the northern bits and check out Inverness and Loch Ness, hitting up a distillery or two along the Malt Whiskey Trail as you wind back down to Edinburgh via Aviemore and the Cairngorm Mountains.

THANKS FOR READING!  
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