

5 TIPS FOR TROUBLE-FREE TRAVEL

Passport? Check. Visa stamp? Check. Cash? Check. Luggage? Check. Airplane ticket? Check. Everything you've been preparing for your dream vacation is finally in order! You're ready, you're set, but *don't* go without some words of warning. Common travel troubles can throw your perfectly-planned vacation for a loop. Here's a refresher for your mental emergency kit...just in case that dream turns out to be a living nightmare.

1. Stolen/Lost Passport

Beware of this Public Enemy Number One. There's nothing worse than being stuck between borders with no way out, no identity, and no way back in. Before travelling, photocopy all of your most important papers and include:

- a) Passport (with stamped entry-page)
- b) Birth Certificate
- c) Airline Tickets (Plus your outbound booking confirmation)
- d) Extra Passport size ID Photos
- e) Travel Insurance
- f) Upload all this info somewhere online, (like in your email "Drafts" Files) to have it digitally stored

Lastly, keep these papers in a separate place than your actual passport. If you should lose your passport, immediately file a police report, contact the issuing authority and get in touch with your embassy. Present your emergency papers to prove your identity together with passport fees.

2. Missed/Delayed Flights

Purchasing online bookings can save plenty of time lining up at the travel agency. But double check your time-table, first with a pre-call to the airline, and then at the airport itself, where flight-changes are updated.

In case of an actual missed flight, contact the airline desk immediately and look for the next schedules, inquiring whether you can get discounted tickets or additional service from the airline you've booked. If all flights are full till the next day, then pull out your blow-up pillow, buy a couple cold ones and get to know the airport...it's gonna be a long night.

3. Lost Luggage

Depending on where and how (or for how much!) you booked your ticket, the airlines may or may not reimburse you for lost goods. But all of your pleading will be useless if you've also lost your baggage-claim ticket! Make sure you carry this tiny tag with you at all times, to save hassle later.

4. Illness/Accidents Abroad

Basic health problems like stomach upset or diarrhea can be prevented from simply NOT drinking tap water, and being a little less experimental with new cuisine. With a full travel health insurance policy, you can be better secured in the event of sickness. If you know your basic itinerary beforehand, make a copy of it to leave back home with family or close friends, so they know where you intend to be in case of an emergency.

5. Stolen Wallet/Cash/Cards

Carry plastic money and travelers checks when you can. And be leery of strangers on the street offering help with carrying luggage or cheap hotels. So much of your life essentials could be in your wallet—not just cash, but driver's license or credit cards. If you do lose your wallet, file a police report immediately, then call the credit card number or your bank to freeze your account, preventing identity thieves from getting what they want most.

Sometimes travel mishaps happen because of our own stupidity, carelessness, or naivety, but sometimes they happen just because. Hope for the best and expect the worst, but don't go overboard with too much paranoia, which can take the spontaneity out of what might just be an unforeseen adventure. Stay alert, use discretion, pack a sense of humor, and then accept what can't be avoided.

If the worst does happen, at least you'll have a more exciting travel tale to tell for years to come.--Like the time I spent the night sleeping on the Hong Kong airport floor due to a typhoon, and then was taken in the next morning by Chinese police for (accidentally!) having pepper spray on my carry-on. They made me sign documents, took my thumbprints, took pictures of the "criminal content", and appeared to be very scary.

But that's another story...

--By Nyx Martinez