

Preparedness for International Travel

Disclaimer: Please don't misconstrue anything in this article to as legal advice or medical advice. This article is intended only to express the opinions of the author.

Tips for Being Prepared While Traveling by Commercial Air

- First off, permitting anything aboard a commercial flight is at the discretion of the TSA screener. I would like to think that most of them are honest, hardworking security professionals, but some of them steal things, so don't bring anything on your trip you can't live without.
- If your checked luggage doesn't get stolen in its entirety at the baggage claim by a non-binary Biden official, it will have to run the gauntlet of TSA, airline security, customs personnel, and baggage handlers, so don't bring anything you can't live without. (Noticing a trend yet?)
- Start with what you wear. Fortunately, as of this writing, the TSA hasn't banned clothing yet.
- The TSA isn't a fan of strike anywhere matches, kitchen matches or lighters unless they are empty of fuel. They will permit a single book of matches in your carry on, but not in checked baggage. I haven't had any problems with ferro rods, but all decisions are up to the agent.
- The TSA aren't fans of pointy things either, but they will let you wear or carry rocks or flint knapped projectile points and such, some of which are exceedingly sharp, especially those made of obsidian. They are essentially surgically sharp stone-age lapel daggers.
- Strangely, they also now allow scissors with blades

under 4" from the pivot point, but they should be sheathed or wrapped to prevent TSA inspectors from injuring themselves. (They are only trained to use children's safety scissors.)

- I recall Kevin Reeve mentioning that coins are allowed on planes so you can always put one sock inside another and add a couple handfuls of coins for use as a sap.
- A stout pen is another improvised weapon allowed just about anywhere but prison.
- All told, you can make a decent TSA-compliant Pocket Survival Kit making a couple of substitutions in the fire starting and edged tools departments.

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Clothing

I once saw a guy dash from his vehicle into a store in shorts, a t-shirt, and flip flops. He ran because it was -14 degrees Fahrenheit out, -40 after windchill. If his vehicle broke down on the way home, he would have had frostbite before he could walk to an occupied structure, or help could reach him if his phone worked. His obituary would say he died from exposure, but he really would have died because he mistook the world for a children's playground with Nerfed corners.

When I was about 12 years old, I flew to England on a direct flight over the pole. I remember looking down and seeing the icebergs and then the polar sea ice. Even as a boy, I thought, "Man, we're really screwed if this plane goes down."

Even if your plane goes down at a warmer latitude, what you wear could impact how you fare in a plane crash or any other emergency where exposure is a factor. Dress in layers and wear comfortable closed-toed shoes with wool socks.

Fire is another danger, not to mention that survival often involves using fire for heat, cooking and as a tool. Avoid wearing polyester and other synthetics that burst into flame and drip burning goo on your skin at the slightest spark. Go with merino wool or flame and flash-resistant fabrics like modacrylic.

The TSA also hasn't banned hats or eye protection yet.

Big Brother & Identity Theft

In Reagan's day, the nine scariest words in the English language were, "I'm from the government and I'm here to help!" Now they may well be, "You've been selected for random screening. This way, please."

When I was a kid. "Your papers, please." was a standard comedic trope that invoked images of Nazis conducting searches. Today, cameras, facial recognition software, and automated license plate recognition systems, RFID skimmers and cell-site simulators/IMSI catchers all search you without your permission or even your knowledge.

Your Fourth Amendment rights are suspended at ports of entry. Everything you bring with you is subject to search, including your phone. If you get stopped at a border and the CBP agent doesn't believe your story, they'll ask you to open your phone, call people you are meeting or staying with, and check your messaging history to see if you are entering as a tourist but have a job lined up or some other violation.

Use RF shielded wallets, wallets, passport covers, pocket liners, forensic IT bags, or Faraday bags to prevent RFID skimming of your bank cards, credit cards, passport, and enhanced ID and to protect your cellphone from cell site simulators/IMSI catchers. Watch the next time you pass through customs, and you'll notice that everyone is funneled through a narrow checkpoint optimized to capture data.

I don't like to create a larger digital footprint than necessary. I figure I might as well make them work for it.

Preparedness Tips Once You Are In-Country

Street Crime

Research the types of crimes that occur in the country you are visiting. Crime varies greatly from country to country, and it helps to understand the local patterns of crime to avoid them or survive them.

I travel to South America and common crimes there are lighting kidnappings at bank ATMs and in taxis, kidnapping for ransom, home invasion, carjacking, mugging, and armed robbery of buses.

- Don't flash large amounts of cash or display wealth.
- Don't exchange or withdraw large amounts of cash from any one place. It is safer to make multiple, smaller transactions even if it means paying fees.
- Dress like the locals.
- If your hair color stands out, wear a hat.
- If your skin color stands out, wear long pants and long sleeves.
- Take extra care as you leave the airport and secure transport. Where possible, arrange transport in advance with someone you trust. If you exchanged too much currency or showed signs of wealth, that nice teller at the currency exchange may tip off a crew that will pick you up in a Taxi or Uber outside the airport. Don't get in a vehicle unless you are sure it is safe.
- Carry a small amount of covert restraint escape gear and learn to use it in case you are kidnapped for ransom. It is best if it doesn't look like restraint escape gear and should be accessible with your hands restrained in front or at your back.

Muggings and armed robbery are usually carried out by minors because the gangs know they'll get light sentences. When they rob buses, two guys will board the bus. One puts a gun to the driver's head and the other walks down the aisle with a bag and tells everybody to drop their phone and wallet in the bag. Anybody who doesn't comply gets a bullet to the head.

Carry a drop wallet and drop phone in case you get mugged. Your drop wallet should be believable and have enough money in it that the criminal will take it and leave. The phone should work. It is fairly normal for people to carry their new phone in their underwear and their old phone in their hand and hide most of their money. Even though many people take these precautions, the criminals are often young, scared, stoned, and in a hurry.

Carry a trauma dressing or small pocket trauma kit and know how to use it. My brother-in-law was with some missionaries when they got mugged. Most of them understood what he was saying but he was speaking slang and one of the missionaries was an American and had trouble understanding. Because of this, the American was slow to comply, so the criminal shot him in the head.

Like most people shot with a handgun during a criminal assault, he survived, but having a trauma kit on hand and knowing how to use it improves your chances.

His story also illustrates how important it is to maintain situational awareness and to learn to speak the language. Either one could have spared the young man a traumatic brain injury. If you don't speak the language, carry a civilian pointee-talkee so you can communicate with locals in an emergency.

- Make copies of the contents of your wallet and passport so you can cancel bank, credit cards, and notify the State Department if your passport is stolen.

- Save important information like the copy of your wallet contents and passports to a safe place online.
- Keep your passport in a safe place or carry it in an RF shielded neck wallet or some other pickpocket countermeasure. Carry a laminated color photocopies of your passport when walking around. It is all you will need to do most things, in most countries.
- Don't store all your money and ID in one big pouch or wallet. Invest in a shielded neck wallet, a SERE belt, underwear with hidden pockets and other countermeasures that you can spread out across your body under layers of clothing.

In-Country Preparation

Budget to purchase certain things in-country after you land, especially if you don't check a bag.

- Local Clothing – Look like the locals, or at least like you live there.
- Knife – Preferably one that is both legal to carry and won't raise any suspicions. Sometimes it is mainly about pretext. Fisherman, for instance, are permitted to carry small bait and fillet knives in most countries, so you might carry a handline and couple of lures in your pack so you can tell authorities you intended to try your luck at the beach.
- Chemical Spray – Use only where legal. OC spray is illegal to use on humans in Brazil (it is believed to cause heart problems), but certain other irritant sprays are legal to use against people in self-defense.
- Small Cooler – Makes an effective, inexpensive water-resistant cache container that doesn't attract attention.
- Pre-paid SIM Card, Phone Cards.

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In-Country EDC Gear

- XL Bandana, Shemagh, Scarf or Other Cotton Fabric – Too many uses to list, but it can block light while sleeping, dress a wound, serve as a container to carry things, a napkin, a towel, keep the sun off your head or neck, keep you cool or warm. Can be rigged as a baby carrier or baby hammock.
- Ear Plugs
- Signal Mirror – Ladies can carry a makeup mirror. Useful for observing without being observed. Using them effectively is a skill.
- Whistle
- Sunscreen
- DEET Lotion & Arthropod Netting
- Water Bottle with Filter
- Prepaid Cell Phone for Travel with SIM, MicroSD, solar USB charger, universal charge cables.
- International Chargers & Adapters
- Emergency Contacts
- Notebook & Pen
- + Aid Kit – I will just include the highlights for travel.
 - Treatment Info Card
 - Benzoin Tincture – Skin protectant, improves adhesion of dressings and tape.
 - White Petrolatum – Skin protectant, mix with medical cotton for tinder.
 - Moleskine – Hot spots, blisters.

- Second Skin – Blisters & burns.
 - Aloe Vera Gel – Burns, sunburn.
 - Witch Hazel – Astringent, relief for hemorrhoids and insect bites.
 - Scissors
 - Tweezers
 - Nail Clippers
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- Cash (domestic & foreign)