

Tropical Living Travel Tips



For Safe, Easy, Worry-Free Traveling



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Introduction

As early as I can recall, I have been fascinated with exotic places. Traveling was a big part of my family life when I was growing up and every year we would travel to places like Belize, the British Virgin Islands and Guatemala, which were off the beaten path and relatively untouristed then.

I'm very thankful and appreciate how blessed I am to have been brought up in a family whose parents not only enjoyed traveling but had the courage and willingness to take my sister and me along on their journeys. There's no doubt my parents helped spark my curiosity and relentless desire to explore the world.

I have since been around the world 10 times, searching for the most breathtaking islands on earth. For me, traveling is inspiring, empowering, and fascinating. It gives me a breather in the whirlwind of everyday life and has made me more aware and appreciative. If you are a would-be wanderer who longs to travel, be it for a week, a month or a year, I hope these tips will be of help to you.

Alison Tilley
Island, Spa and Tropical Lifestyle Expert and Founder of Tropical Living, Inc.





First Things First Passport

Your passport permits you to enter foreign countries around the world. Count on needing a passport - and possibly a tourist visa - every time you travel outside of your own country. Also bear in mind that some countries require an ongoing or return ticket, as well as evidence of sufficient funds for the duration of your stay. Tourist authorities want to know that you will be able to support yourself without having to work illegally, and that you will be able to afford to leave their country at your own expense.

Apply for your passport as early as possible, allowing at least eight weeks before your departure date. During the first half of the year and throughout peak travel periods, many passport offices can be overwhelmingly busy, so plan ahead, be patient and allow yourself plenty of time for processing. You can generally speed up the processing time if you apply in person at a passport office instead of applying by mail.

If you plan on extensive international travel, request a "business-size passport," which has extra pages for stamps and visas.

Get extra copies of your passport photos for visa applications and for an International Driver's Permit.

Keep extra passport photos with you during your travels in case your passport is lost or stolen and you have to replace it.

If you already have a passport, check its expiration date. Be sure your passport is valid for a reasonably long period of time. Some countries require that a passport is valid for at least six months even if you are only planning to visit their country for a few days.

It is very important to make several photocopies of the data page of your passport. I photocopy the front cover of my passport, the photo, my passport number, the date and place of issue, and the expiration date. I keep the photocopies separate from my passport, leaving one set

of copies in my luggage, one set in my toiletry bag and a third set with a relative back home.

If your passport is lost or stolen while you are traveling, immediately report the loss to the local police and your nearest embassy or consulate. Bring along a set of the photocopies you made in advance with all of the relevant information. You will get a new passport much faster if you can provide the consulate or embassy with the information that was in your passport. **REMEMBER:** If you lose your passport en route and are issued a new one, photocopy the data page of the new passport several times in case it happens again!

If you have an old, expired passport, consider bringing it along with you as well. If your valid passport is lost or stolen while you are traveling, you can take your expired passport to your embassy or consulate and they may be able to issue you a new passport much more quickly.

Remember to fill in the "next of kin" details in your passport. Include their current address and complete phone number, including their area code. This will enable the authorities to contact your family members or friends quickly if anything (knock on wood!) should happen to you while you are traveling and you are not able to call them yourself.

If you travel abroad frequently, or stay for extended periods of time, ask your relatives and or a friend back home to keep their passports valid. If you become seriously ill or involved in an accident or other emergency, they will be able to travel to help you without any delay.

After registering in a hotel in some countries of the world, you may be asked to leave your passport at the reception area until you check out. If this happens, place your passport in a sealed envelope with your name on it and insist that it be stored in the hotel's safe deposit box. When it is time for you to check out, don't forget to ask for it back when you leave and take a moment to confirm that it is actually your passport.





Alison's Anecdotes

Several years ago I spent three months backpacking and sailing around the Greek Islands. I was staying at a hotel in downtown Athens, Greece, for a few days and had to check out of the hotel around 4:00 am in order to take a taxi to the docks for a ship that was departing at 5:30 am. When I went down to the lobby early that morning, there was a sign on the counter indicating that the office was closed until 6:00 am. I knocked on several doors on the ground floor that said "manager, staff, employee." I finally woke up one of the cleaning women and explained that I was checking out and needed to get my passport back immediately. Much to my surprise, she happened to have a key to open the hotel safe deposit box. She scrambled around in the safe for a few minutes and preceded to hand me a passport of a young Australian woman who happened to look quite similar to me. (Both of us had blonde hair, teeth and two eyes.) It was a good thing I looked at the passport before leaving, otherwise I would have departed with the wrong one. Nowadays, if I am checking out of a place early in the morning, I pay my bill and have my passport returned the night before.

Tourist Visas

Your travel agent or airline should know if the countries you are visiting require a tourist visa. To be absolutely sure on current entry requirements, it is best to call the embassy or consulate of each country you plan to visit. They will be able to tell you where to obtain a visa both locally and abroad, and whether it is necessary to obtain one in advance.

Allow yourself at least 8 weeks' lead time if you are applying for a visa in advance and inquire into how long it is valid for. Determine if the time limit on the visa starts ticking the day they issue the visa or if it gets activated upon your arrival to their country.

Be sure to take extra passport-size photos with you in case you need or plan to get your visas en route.

Alison's Anecdotes

I prefer to obtain all of my tourist visas before I depart on my trip. Some countries will hold your passport for sever-

al days in their offices while they process your visa application. I remember how vulnerable I felt many years ago, not having my passport with me for the 6 days it took to issue my tourist visa to Prague. Another time, I had forgotten to exchange more of my traveler's checks before I dropped my passport off to the tourism office in Bangkok and found myself strapped for cash while I waited to get my passport back. It was virtually impossible to find a bank or exchange bureau in Bangkok that was willing to cash my traveler's checks without my passport. It also meant that I had to stay in town while I waited and pay for accommodation for the additional time. More importantly though, had I been in an accident of any kind and needed to get on the next flight out, I would not have been able to do so without my passport in hand.

Driving Permit

Make sure to check the expiry date of your driver's license well in advance of your trip. Imagine the disappointment you would feel upon arriving in New Zealand, for instance, where you planned a month long RV road trip around the beautiful South Island, only to find that your driver's license was expiring in a few days and the rental agency could not legally rent you a vehicle.

Consider calling the embassies or consulates of each country you plan to drive in regarding their driving laws.

If you plan to drive abroad, consider getting an International Driving Permit from your local automobile association before leaving. It is usually valid for approximately one year.

Remember that it may be necessary for you to show proof of liability insurance if you plan to rent or lease a car overseas. Ask your insurance agent for an International Insurance Certificate to cover this purpose before you head off.

Health Records

Check with your local public health office at least 10 weeks before departure to determine which inoculations you may need, if any, depending on where you are traveling to and where the nearest travel inoculation clinic is.





As some shots require repeat visits over a period of several weeks and can make you feel slightly ill, be sure to have them well in advance of your departure.

Carry updated medical records, noting immunizations, medications and allergies, as well as a copy of your health insurance policy and health plan number at all times.

Have complete medical and dental examinations well before embarking on any long trip.

Researching Your Destination

It is often hard to decide where you may want to travel, especially if you have never been to a particular country before, don't know anyone who has been there and have absolutely no idea what the country even looks like.

Be sure to check out all of the properties and thousands of photos available on the Tropical Living website to help you determine where you would like to visit. I know you will find them inspiring and will be able to imagine yourself enjoying an exotic, tropical adventure.

Look at a map of the world and write a list of countries you think you would like to visit, even if you know nothing about the places.

The Internet is an amazing tool for researching your travel destinations and can provide ample information on the local attractions.

Your research could include weather, maps, itineraries, local timetables and events, airline, train, ferry, and cruise schedules.

Check the dates of national and religious holidays of each country you plan to visit to ensure they don't interfere with your travel plans.

Write down what you want to do and see in each place. Consider what your special interests are and consider planning your trip around them. For example: art and photography classes, gardening, birding, walking, hiking, biking tours, history, architecture, massage, meditation, yoga or cooking classes.

In order to get the most out of your travel experience, be sure to familiarize yourself with the customs and protocols of your chosen destinations. It is also a good idea to learn some basic words and phrases. The more research and information you can gather in advance, the better prepared you will be and the more you will enjoy your trip.

Keeping Your Home Safe

Make Your Home Appear Occupied

There are several things you can do to keep your home safe while you are away, including the following suggestions:

Make sure that your home looks as if you are still there.

Provide sufficient lighting at all of your doors and windows.

Install motion detectors, which will illuminate the outside of your home when activated.

Use automatic timers that turn lights and radios on and off. Stagger the times for lights to go on and off in different rooms.

Set your radio dial to a talk show station, as voices may help to deter burglars.

Encourage a neighbor to use your driveway to park their car while you are away.

Have your lawn cut or snow shoveled as required while you are away.

Burglar Deterents

To eliminate a hiding place for burglars, have your shrubbery trimmed to a height below the first floor windowsills.

Avoid publicizing your trip.

Continue Services

Arrange for a trusted friend or neighbor to collect your mail or have it held at the post office.

If you do decide to stop the newspaper or mail delivery, do not give a time limit.





Arrange for some garbage and trash to be put out for pickup as usual.

Other Precautions

Arrange for someone to pay your bills due in your absence or prepay them yourself in advance. I prefer to prepay my bills in advance, so I know for sure that they have been looked after. I feel more at peace knowing that my credit rating will not be damaged if someone I entrust accidentally forgets to pay a bill.

Be sure the message on your answering machine does not imply that your home is vacant.

Turn down the volume on your telephones, as unanswered ringing could be evidence of your absence.

Avoid disclosures that indicate you own items of special value. Store all of your jewelry and other valuables in a safe deposit box while you are away.

Consider using a neighborhood patrol or watch during your absence. Place Neighborhood Watch and other security system decals on the windows at the front and back of your home. These decals are a proven deterrent to burglary.

I have read that about 80% of all stolen property recovered by the police cannot be identified and returned to you. To make sure you can identify your property, use an electric engraving pencil, and inscribe your driver's license number on all of your valuables. On the outside doors, consider posting notices that your valuables have been marked for identification.

If you have an alarm system, make sure to have it checked before your departure. On the exterior doors of your house, place notices listing the phone number of someone, other than yourself, who can be contacted if the alarm is set off. When police respond, the alarm will have to be deactivated and reset. Otherwise, a smart burglar could set off the alarm, vanish, and then re-visit later.

Arrange for your pets to be fed and watered at home rather than be kept in a kennel.

Set thermostats, or utilize timers for climate controls suitable for the weather conditions.

Leave your itinerary with someone in case of an emergency.

Check that all doors and windows are securely locked and that you have all of your necessary keys.

Insurance Coverage

Ask your insurance agent about home checks while your home is unoccupied. You may not be covered if your home has not been visited at regular intervals while you are away.

Ask your insurance representative to provide you with a homeowner's inventory checklist.

Conduct a personal property inventory to help you determine how much insurance you should carry. This could save you thousands of dollars in the event of fire or theft.

Consider videotaping and photographing in color, the exterior, interior, and contents of your home. Leave the tapes and photos in a safe deposit box.

Packing Tips

There are many types of travel cases available. Be sure to select the right one to suit your needs. Much will depend on the age and strength of the carrier.

Suitcase and duffel bags are not very practical if you will be moving around a lot. Your arms can only carry so much weight, which is why backpacks or suitcases with wheels are preferable.

I have tried duffel bags, backpacks, suitcases and combination backpack/suitcases and found that a combination backpack works best for me. My backpack works three ways: it is a backpack, a shoulder bag and a suitcase. The shoulder straps zip inside the pack when they are not needed (during airline flights), and it has a shoulder strap plus a handle in the middle.

One advantage of a combination backpack/suitcase is that you can carry it hands-free. It looks more like a big bag than a backpack, holds a lot and is much easier to carry than most duffel bags or suitcases.





If you prefer a large suitcase, consider one with sturdy wheels that are replaceable (since they can wear down) and which pivot (for turns in elevators), or use a good quality, portable, folding carry cart.

Zippered side pockets provide useful extra space, but avoid using them to store valuables, as they are obvious targets for light-fingered folks.

Select luggage with combination locks, or use a small padlock to lock the zippers shut. Make sure your traveling partner carries a spare key or, if you are solo, tuck the spare into your money belt or Tilley secret pocket.

What to Pack

Over-packing can seriously ruin a trip. Try to take half the clothes and twice the money!

To avoid feeling overwhelmed by your impending departure, allow enough time to prepare, logistically and mentally. If you are going on an extended trip you may need six months or more to prepare. You will greatly reduce the stress associated with your departure if you begin the packing process several days in advance.

Pack only what you can comfortably carry yourself. The ideal is one bag that fits under your airplane seat. Add a small carry-on daypack and you can travel the world!

Eliminate any item that has only one use unless it is essential. If I don't think I will wear or use an item at least twice a week, it stays at home. Be ruthless. It is far better to have too little than too much.

The secret to keeping it light is to make a list. Include as many multi-purpose items as possible. Always select a wardrobe that will match the climate of the countries you plan to visit.

Look for lightweight, easy-to care-for, hand-washable clothing. Test each item for comfort by sitting, squatting, and kneeling when buying. Try to co-ordinate separates, which will combine to make various outfits. (See tilley.com; my father makes the world's finest travel clothing. No kidding.)

Your clothes often indicate the level of respect you show

for the cultures you are visiting. Consider the customs of the country you are visiting and dress accordingly. Culottes or long skirts are suitable just about everywhere. Long shorts are frequently appropriate when short ones are not.

Get the most out of ensembles. Arrange clothing choices around two neutral colors. Make certain all your tops can be worn with all your bottoms. Dark or medium colors are easier to keep spotless than light ones.

Dress for the weather. Choose clothing of various weights so that you can layer appropriately for the weather.

Pack those items you dare not lose (medication, toiletries, camera, etc.) in your carry-on bag in case your luggage goes missing.

Pack toiletries and cosmetics in plastic (not glass) and seal them in a Ziploc bag.

Select a basic shoe that is suitable for both day and evening wear, and never take new shoes on a trip.

Pack shoes in a breathable cloth bag. Baking soda in exercise shoes helps to control odor.

When buying hiking boots, buy at least a half a size too big. This prevents blisters and black-and-blue toenails when going down steep hills.

Consider bringing clothespins and a long cord to make your own clothes line.

A calculator is handy for converting foreign currency. Or prepare a small card with what \$1, \$5 and \$10 are worth in the local currency.

Photocopy and take only essential pages from guidebooks. Use both sides of the paper to save space.

Things to consider packing for warm weather trips:

A Tilley Hat

2 pairs of long shorts

3 shirts

Comfortable sandals, which can be worn with everything

A water-repellent, hooded windbreaker





- Running shoes
- Rubber thongs for the beach or shower
- 2 bathing suits
- Tilley socks
- Underwear
- A light sweater
- Camera, case, film and lens cleaner
- Sunglasses, neck cord, case and cleaning cloth
- Beach bag
- Mask and snorkel
- Sunblock with an SPF of at least 15
- A travel alarm clock
- A pocket currency conversion calculator
- A small, pocket flashlight
- A small, inflatable neck pillow (useful for long plane trips)
- A first aid kit
- Bug repellent and mosquito net (for countries where malaria is present)
- Biodegradable laundry soap
- Pen, paper, small notebook
- A couple of good paperback books
- A spoon and a Swiss army knife
- A pair of scissors
- A miniature sewing kit with thread that matches your travel wardrobe
- Safety pins (which can be used to close hotel drapes or secure pockets against pickpockets)
- Facial or toilet tissue
- A small, sturdy daypack
- A Face cloth
- A sink stopper
- Dental floss

If you pack an electric razor, hairdryer or computer, you will need both a voltage converter and a wall-plug adapter for them to function outside of North America. An extension cord would also be useful.

For extended walks, bring a small daypack made out of a sturdy nylon fabric. (Thieves can slash lightweight ones).

Security

The most important possessions you need to protect are your passport, traveler's checks, money, and airline tickets. Carry these items with you at all times in a Tilley secret pocket or a money belt; otherwise, keep them in a secure place like your hotel safe.

Remain alert to what's happening around you. Be aware of loud arguments, bumps, and other incidents. These may be staged to distract you while someone else lifts your wallet or handbag.

Avoid advertising your wealth. Keep expensive cameras hidden in a small daypack and leave costly jewelry and watches at home — well hidden!

Imagine how upsetting it would be to take a bus 10 miles across town and then have your wallet stolen, along with all your ID, money, credit cards and bus pass. Now picture how much more upsetting it would be to have this occur 10,000 miles away from home, which is what happened to me on a trip to Bali, Indonesia.

Alison's Anecdotes

I was exploring the island of Bali in a rented Jeep when I saw a shop selling beautiful stone-carved frogs. I had been looking for one for a while and hoped to bring it back to Canada with me. I pulled over, parked the jeep at the side of the busy road, and locked the Jeep with my daypack in it. I walked about 40 feet to the stone frog and realized that it was far too heavy to transport back home. I turned around and walked back to the Jeep, noticing as I approached that one of the doors was unlocked. In less than two minutes, someone had jimmed the lock, opened the door and took off with my daypack. My pack contained my passport, all of my traveler's checks, all of my cash, my credit cards, my driver's license, my birth certificate, my medical information and my return plane tickets home.

The first thing I did was to call the Canadian consulate. I soon found out that there isn't one on the island of Bali, so I called the British consulate. They informed me that the Australian consulate was in charge of matters con-





cerning Canadians. I had more passport photos taken and ultimately it took about three weeks to get a replacement passport. Fortunately I planned on staying in Bali for several weeks, so I was not as inconvenienced as someone who would only be passing through for a few days. I was also fortunate that I had recorded the serial numbers of my American Express traveler's checks and left the list at the hotel. The most obvious lesson from this is to never leave anything of value in a rental car (even if it is for only one minute), as well as the old saying about putting all of your eggs in one basket. By the way, my travel-wise father had a similar loss of a backpack filled with valuables in Guatemala, and of a Tilley shoulder bag (passport, tickets, camera...) in the Quito airport.

Flying Tips

When booking your plane tickets, allow yourself enough time between flights to comfortably clear customs if necessary, re-check in and get your baggage transferred to the next carrier.

In order to avoid the risk of missing your flight or being too late to check in and possibly getting bumped from the flight, always arrive at the airport earlier than you think you need to. Check in immediately and proceed directly to the boarding area.

Flying More Comfortably

Drink plenty of water before, during and after your flights to help to prevent dehydration.

Avoid consuming alcohol and caffeine while flying, as both can cause dehydration and disrupt your sleep pattern. I can't think of anything worse than getting sick to your stomach on an airplane toilet and arriving drained, pale, hung over or jittery from a caffeine buzz.

Request a blanket and pillow as soon as you board the plane to help ensure that you get one. Many years ago I flew from Moscow to Amsterdam wearing shorts, a T-shirt and sandals. There were no more blankets left and I arrived shivering with blue lips, and ending up battling a cold for several days afterwards.

Dress in layers and wear comfortable, loose fitting clothing with an expandable waistband in case your body retains water and swells during the flight.

Take a jacket or sweater and a pair of socks onboard with you because the air temperature may fluctuate.

Earplugs are a good idea for uninterrupted sleep and to help tune out the sounds of the engines and other passengers.

Try to have pre-arranged accommodation for the first night or two. After a long flight this will help to minimize the stress upon landing and allow you some time to relax, adjust to the time zone and recover from jetlag.

As a safety precaution, try to book all your plane tickets so you arrive at your destination during daylight hours.

Plane Tickets

Charging your airline tickets on a credit card not only provides proof that you purchased the tickets, but can also provide benefits, including free flight insurance and frequent flyer miles.

Check your plane tickets carefully against the details of your itinerary to ensure there are no errors. Also make sure that your full name has been spelled correctly, or you may have difficulty boarding.

Flying Tips

"Direct" flights often have multiple take-off and landings, which can be problematic for people with sensitive ears, so try to schedule "nonstop" flights whenever possible.

Always reconfirm your onward journey 72 hours in advance. In some countries, failure to do so allows the airline to take your name off the passenger list and give your seat away to another person.

Another reason it is important to re-confirm your flight in advance is the possibility that the departure time has changed or the flight has been cancelled. Remember to provide the airline a phone number where you can be reached leading up to the flight so they can notify you of any changes that may occur.





Baggage Tips

Here is what you can do to help ensure that your baggage doesn't go astray:

Remove all old airline tags not related to your immediate travel.

Remove hand-straps before placing luggage on a conveyor belt.

Attach tags both inside and outside your bag with your name, your business address and your complete phone number. Avoid using your home address.

Make sure the check-in agent puts a correctly coded destination tag on each one of your bags.

Select luggage with combination locks or a small padlock, and lock the zippers shut.

If you are concerned that your baggage may not make the connecting flight, ask the ticket agent for "door storage," which means your bags will be last on and first off.

Try to make your bag distinguishable from others by using brightly colored ribbons or tape.

Claim your luggage as soon as possible and examine all baggage as it comes off the carousel. Report immediately to the airline's baggage representative if your baggage is damaged or missing.

For insurance purposes, list the contents of your bag, or photograph them with your digital camera.

Money Matters

Carry only one or two credit cards with you to avoid the risk of losing all of your credit cards. Check all of their expiration dates and credit limits.

Before you go, get the fax number of your bank and the manager's name. If you need more money while abroad, fax him or her to send you a draft. Specify the city you are in, the bank, the exact address and transfer information.

Carry some personal checks. Otherwise, you may have trouble buying traveler's checks or getting a cash advance.

Carry a combination of traveler's checks, cash, ATM card and credit cards.

Always check in advance about the refund policy for lost or stolen traveler's checks.

Write down the serial numbers of your traveler's checks and keep the list in a different place from your checks. Your record of the numbers will speed up any claim reimbursement.

Carry your money with you at all times, but not all cash and traveler's checks in the same pocket or money belt.

I find it better to exchange larger amounts of currency infrequently, rather than smaller amounts more frequently, because it reduces the exchange and service fees charged when converting money.

Carry small bills and change, and never flash large bills.

Take US\$40 in one-dollar bills for tips and cab fares.

Start out with a small amount of cash (the equivalent of \$50) in the currency of the country you will be visiting. This will be enough for taxis, tips and other incidental expenses on arrival.

Find out about the local tipping customs from your hotel staff.

Take a moment to estimate how much you should pay, or receive, before making any monetary transaction. When changing traveler's checks, watch the teller count the money in front of you, then count it back carefully in front of him or her before leaving the counter.





Carefully examine any items you purchase in a foreign country before signing the charge slip. Insist that the merchant write a detailed description of the item on the invoice, including the model number.

Calculate the approximate amount of a credit card charge in your own currency, and record it at the bottom of the receipt. This way you can check it against your next credit card statement.

Expect to pay a service charge to cash traveler's checks at exchange offices.

The worst exchange rates are found at borders, railway and airport exchange offices, hotels, and restaurants.

Often the best exchange rate you will find is through ATMs because they provide local currency while debiting your bank account at home. In addition, a bank or credit card company often will not charge any exchange rate at all.

Buy most of your traveler's checks in denominations of hundreds and fifties, with about \$200 in twenties and tens. You may want to change a small check to get you through the last few hours of your trip.

Be prepared to present your passport when changing traveler's checks abroad. Be sure to immediately put it back into your security pocket or money belt once the transaction is complete.

Keep all of your receipts for airline tickets, hotel stays, car rentals, and restaurants, because most of them will have your credit card number on them.

In some foreign countries, you cannot convert local currency back into U.S. dollars when you leave. If so, pay for your purchases with small bills, or consider using a credit card.

Save the receipts from all the money you change. When you are departing, some countries require that you show these receipts if you want to convert their local currency back into U.S. dollars.

Traveling with a pocket calculator can help you familiarize yourself with the currency and exchange rate.

Try to take 20% more money than you think you will need.

Automatic Teller Machines (ATMs)

ATMs automatically take funds from your account, but determine any daily withdrawal limits before departing.

Be sure to transfer enough money to your account before leaving home.

Have your bank issue you a second ATM card in case your card becomes demagnetized.

Since ATM card reactivation is difficult from foreign countries, it is important to tell your issuer of your travel plans. Some smaller banks and credit unions automatically deactivate cards used "excessively" (more than 6 times a day) in order to prevent their use if stolen.

Use a 4-digit PIN (Personal Identification Number) since many countries only accept PINS of 4 digits.

Know the number translation of your PIN since some countries assign different symbols or use only numbers on their keypads.

It's safer to use an ATM during the day, instead of at night.

Shopping Tips

Avoid shopping at night, since there are more pickpockets, robbers, muggers and drunks, as well as fewer store clerks.

Shop with a friend whenever possible.

Don't carry cash while shopping if you can avoid it. Use traveler's checks and credit cards instead.

Don't overdress while shopping and avoid wearing any jewelry.

Try to purchase the expensive items last to minimize the time you will need to safeguard them.





Keep an eye on your purse, bag and other packages at all times.

Do not place your wallet on top of your bag or inside a pocket where it is visible.

On a busy street, carry your purse or briefcase on the side farthest from the curb and walk close to the buildings.

Carry a shoulder-strap purse so that it hangs right down from your shoulder. The strap should never cross over your body.

If your purse or handbag has short straps, carry it under your arm with your arm placed through the strap.

Never place your purse on a store counter or on the floor of a dressing room or restroom. Also avoid using the hooks in the bathroom stalls, since it is very easy for a thief to reach over and steal your purse.

If you pay for items with a credit card, be sure to check that the clerk gives you your card back and does not switch it with another card that may be stolen.

Select random, difficult-to-guess identification numbers for your credit cards and bank cards.

If you utilize several different cards, select different ID or PIN numbers for each.

Avoid walking the streets alone after dark, and use taxis whenever possible.

Health Tips

Pre-Trip Health Planning

There are several things you should do if you are going on a long trip:

IAMAT

I cannot stress enough the importance of becoming a member of IAMAT (International Association for Medical Assistance to Travelers). Membership includes a small booklet that lists over 850 English-speaking, western-trained doctors in over 120 countries around the world. Many of them will even make hotel-call visits.

IAMAT is a non-profit membership organization established in 1960. Our aim is to advise travelers about any travel health risks and to make competent medical care available to travelers by western-trained doctors who speak English besides their mother tongue.

Since its founding, IAMAT has been a leader in the field of travel medicine, advising travelers about health risks, the geographical distribution of diseases, immunization requirements, sanitary conditions of water, milk and food, and environmental and climatic conditions.

IAMAT maintains a network of physicians - general practitioners and specialists, hospitals and clinics around the world - who have agreed to treat IAMAT members in need of medical care during their journey. Our aim is to make competent care available to travelers anywhere in the world, even in very remote locations, by doctors who speak English and have had medical training in North America or Europe. IAMAT continuously inspects clinics in an attempt to ensure that travelers receive competent medical care.

Any individual traveler can belong to IAMAT. There is no charge for membership, although a donation is appreciated to help support and expand IAMAT's work. For company membership conditions, please contact IAMAT.

Tropical Living highly recommends that you become a member of IAMAT before embarking on your Renewal Vacation to ensure your medical needs will be taken care of in the event of accident or illness.

Please contact IAMAT at:

www.iamat.org

info@iamat.org

1-716-754-4883 for the United States

1-416-652-0137 for Canada

Alison's Anecdotes

My IAMAT booklet has come in handy several times during my years of travel around the world. In the early '90s, I spent several months living just outside Katmandu in Nepal and started a sweater export business called Alison Wonderland. After a particularly hot and dusty day, I ventured out to a new restaurant to order some rice and a big





bottle of spring water. When the water was delivered to my table, I noticed that the plastic seal around the lid of the top had already been removed and that the cap was gently put back on the top. That was unusual because I am generally the one who pulls back the plastic seal myself before I drink the water. For some odd reason, however, I ignored my intuition that something wasn't right and proceeded to drink the entire 1.5 liter bottle of water.

About an hour afterwards, I returned to the house I was renting and began feeling hot and sweaty. I showered to cool off and then proceeded to feel cold and shivery. I thought maybe I was just a little tired from being outside in the heat of the day and decided to go to bed to rest. A few hours later I woke with the sheets so drenched I could have wrung them out. I felt faint and dizzy and looked around my house for another bottle of water or something else to drink. I could not find a thing to drink, but I knew better than to drink the tap water. It was around 11:00 pm by this point and I left my house to look for a store, a stall or a restaurant that would still be open at that hour. No such luck, as everything was closed.

I went back to my house, showered again and returned to bed around midnight. Within an hour or so, I was overcome with the most dramatic vomiting and diarrhea episode I would ever experience. (Until that time, I had no idea how far projectile vomit could travel.) I ran back and forth to the bathroom the entire night assuming that I was probably suffering from food poisoning. I thought that I would just ride it out, hoping that I would feel better in the morning. I managed to get to sleep and, by the time I did finally wake up, I realized that I had slept for over 22 hours. By this time I was severely dehydrated and too weak to make it to the bathroom to continue getting sick. I lay there on the floor, unable to get up, and made a loud enough noise to catch the attention of a passerby on the street below. She walked up the stairs to my house, saw how sick I was, left for a moment and returned a few minutes later with 6 large bottles of water. I drank them all within a few minutes, paid her for the water and sent her on her way.

The next day I felt even worse. I had been sick for sev-

eral days and I realized that I needed to either go to the emergency room at the hospital in Katmandu or look through my IAMAT book to see if there were any English speaking, western-trained doctors there.

Sure enough there were. I called the doctor up, explained the gory details and my symptoms to him over the phone, and within two hours he was at my door for a house call. He gave me some medicine, lots of fluids, and food to snack on. The home visit cost about \$50 and was well worth it. It was so comforting to be able to communicate in English with this doctor and I was relieved that he called me over the next few days to check in and see how I was doing. It is scary being sick alone while traveling, and I am so grateful that IAMAT exists.

Several weeks later after warning many travelers about my sickness and the restaurant, I learned that this particular establishment regularly filled their empty bottles of water with local tap water in order for them to save money. Their tap water happens to come from a polluted river in Katmandu, where several cremation ceremonies take place daily. The bodies are burnt and their ashes and remains are then left floating down the river, contaminating the water.

Learning Lessons

My nine days of sickness could have been avoided if I had done some of the following:

- I should have chosen not to drink the water in the first place because the seal was broken.
- I should have informed my neighbors and some other travelers so they could check up on me.
- I should have looked through my IAMAT book for a doctor who could come to my home as soon as I started feeling the fever and chills.
- I should have kept a supply of bottled water in my house as back up.
- I should have had a complete physical exam as soon as possible after my return to check for any parasites.





Drinking Water Tips

Only drink bottled water that you open yourself.

Avoid drinking all tap water, even if you have been reassured that it is safe to drink.

Don't brush your teeth with the tap water, rinse your mouth out in the shower or allow ice cubes to be put in your drinks.

Health Insurance

Sometimes we take our health care system for granted and assume that similar treatments and services are available worldwide. Unfortunately, that is not always the case. My father, Alex Tilley, says, "Prepare for the worst to occur and smile when it doesn't."

Insurance may seem unnecessary, but it could save you a lot of money in the long run. It can also mean not having to cut your trip short due to medical expenses. Shop around for health insurance that best suits your needs. Try travel agencies, automobile associations and other travel services. Your gold or premium credit card may even provide traveler's health insurance as a perk.

Don't let your insurance lapse. If you decide to extend your trip, find out if and how you can extend your insurance or go about buying more insurance while abroad.

Always carry your insurance policy and health card with you. You may need them to be admitted to a foreign hospital.

Make sure that the type of travel insurance you purchase covers all of planned activities (e.g. scuba, diving, snorkeling, hiking and kayaking).

Determine if foreign hospitals and clinics can bill directly to your insurance company.

Inquire whether all emergency evacuation flights are covered.

Determine whether your insurer has a 24-hour toll-free number in each of the countries where you will be traveling. If not, determine whether you can call them collect.



Alison's Anecdotes

I learned about the value of not letting my health insurance lapse the hard way. Many years ago, I decided to go scuba diving on the outer barrier reef in Australia. While I was 60 feet under, I felt a slight sting on the side of my neck. It did not feel that strange, so I ignored it. However, within a few minutes I noticed that my breathing was constricted. I looked at my regulator and was relieved to see that I still had plenty of air left in my tank. I struggled to inhale for a few more seconds, got the attention of the dive master and signaled to him that I was having a problem and needed to ascend.

When I got up to the surface I could barely breathe. Whatever it was that had stung me on the neck attacked my central nervous system, making it almost impossible for me to open and close my hands. This presents a bit of a problem when you have to remove your weight belt and flippers, and hand your tank up to a member of the boat crew. As I struggled to get back on the boat, the dive master went back under and gathered all of the other divers out of the water within a matter of minutes. Many of them were angry because they had only been diving for about 20 minutes and felt cheated. The dive master kept looking at his watch every couple of minutes and instructed the boat captain to speed as fast as he could back to the shore, which was unfortunately over an hour away.

After about 30 minutes the dive master had a smile of relief on his face, as I lay curled up in a fetal position vomiting on the boat's deck, hunched over in pain and shaking uncontrollably. He said, "Young lady, you were stung by a jelly fish and I am going to get you back to shore as fast as I can and take you to a hospital."

When we finally did make it to shore over an hour later, I then went on a bumpy hour-long jeep ride to the nearest hospital in Mossman. The nurse injected me with morphine and said that I was a very unlucky girl because I had been the first person stung by an Irukandji jellyfish (a relative of the box) that entire season. I was admitted to the hospital in Mossman overnight and given a bill of \$650 for my one-night stay. I paid the bill with my trav-





eler's checks because I had let my health insurance lapse one week earlier.

Tip:

Don't let your insurance lapse. If you plan on extending your trip, make sure you extend your health insurance too.

Alison's Anecdotes

Several years later in April 1992, my father and I were on a trek in Nepal with Sir Edmund Hillary. At the 16,000-foot level, my father slipped on a wet stone while crossing a shallow stream and badly pulled a muscle in his leg. Unable to walk, he was evacuated back to Katmandu in a military helicopter. This cost him about US\$1,000 because although he had insurance, it did not cover this kind of emergency evacuation.

Medical Alert

If you have a medical condition that could present a problem while you are traveling, you should wear a Medic Alert bracelet. Through the Medic Alert Foundation, your vital medical facts become part of a database that can be accessed 24 hours a day from anywhere in the world.

Prepare a Personal Medical History

Keep one copy in your wallet, one in your luggage and leave another copy back home with a relative or friend. Be sure to include the following information:

- Your name, address, home and business phone numbers.
- Your passport and driver's license number.
- Your blood type.
- Your doctor's name, office address and emergency contact numbers.
- Your health plan information, including the names of the insurance company, the policy and contact numbers.
- A list of any chronic health problems, such as high blood pressure, diabetes, and heart conditions.



- All allergies you may have to medications, insects, foods, and plants.
- Your prescriptions for eyeglasses or contact lenses.
- The location of your will and the name and address of your lawyer.

Tips on How to Avoid Getting Sick

Prevention starts well before you leave. Get a complete physical and dental examination before your trip, even if you are feeling well. Go for another physical exam upon your return if you feel ill or were sick while traveling.

Carry updated medical records, noting immunizations, medications and allergies.

Find out if you need to get immunized at least 10 weeks before your departure.

Some of the most common reasons travelers get sick while traveling are:

- Eating contaminated or improperly cooked foods
- Drinking contaminated water
- Being exposed to viruses without proper immunization or medicine
- Overextending themselves and trying to do too much without enough rest periods

Be extremely careful with water, restaurant food and local groceries you purchase yourself.

Avoid eating meat and fish. Consider eating a vegetarian diet while traveling.

Avoid eating fresh salads as they may be washed in questionable water.

Generally speaking, if it isn't cooked and can't be peeled, don't eat it!

To help avoid intestinal distress, eat hot, well-cooked foods since heat will kill most the bacteria.

Eat at well-known, busy restaurants that look clean and





well run. Ask local people and other travelers for their suggestions and any horror sickness stories they may have heard.

As you may not always be able to eat properly while you are traveling, consider taking along some multi-vitamins to supplement your diet.

Malaria

Your best prevention against being bitten by mosquitoes, which can carry malaria in some countries, is to wear a loose long-sleeved shirt, long pants, socks and insect repellent. Avoid wearing perfume, scented deodorants or fragrant hair products.

Sleep under a mosquito net or ceiling fan.

Remember that fevers and headaches that occur even two years after traveling in a region subject to malaria warrant a malaria check from your doctor.

If you are taking malaria tablets and plan to conceive a child shortly after traveling, check with a doctor and the manufacturer of the tablets to verify how long your system should be clean of the drugs prior to conception.

Medication Tips

Carry enough medications to last your entire trip, plus some extra in case you are delayed returning home or are having such a wonderful time that you want to extend your vacation.

Ask your doctor for a letter on his or her letterhead describing your specific health conditions and the applicable prescriptions. This will come in handy in the event that you need to replace or buy more medications while abroad.

Take extra prescription forms listing generic and brand names in case your medication is lost, stolen or ends up getting wet.

If you ever do need help filling a prescription, try calling your embassy or consulate to see if they can recommend an English-speaking pharmacist who may be able to assist you.

If you travel with a syringe (for diabetes, allergies or for personal protection in the event of a medical emergency), ask your doctor for a written statement explaining that you require medication that must be injected. Some countries in the world prohibit the use or importation of syringes, so carrying documentation from your doctor may ease your entry at custom inspections.

Carry your medication either on your person or in a carry-on bag; if your medication is packed in your luggage and the luggage is lost or misplaced, you may have a potentially dangerous problem.

If you start feeling sick, do something about it right away.

Other Health Tips

Always travel with a first-aid kit in your possession. If you are headed for a remote area, your first-aid kit should contain broad-based antibiotics and steroids, gauze dressing, athletic tape, saline eye irrigator, bandages, sun-block, pain reliever, cold and diarrhea medicines, antacid and water purification equipment.

If you wear eyeglasses or contacts, take a spare pair and the prescriptions with you.

If you wear contact lenses, consider using a disposable variety during your trip for their convenience.

To prevent ear infections after swimming in the ocean, rinse out your ears with bottled water or antiseptic ear drops.

In tropical or wilderness locations, check your shoes before putting them on as a precaution against scorpions and other 'nasties'. It is a good idea to shake your clothes out as well to be on the safe side.

To reduce the risk of infection or disease transmittal while on the road, do not engage in ear piercing, acupuncture, tattooing or manicures.





Safety Tips

Women Traveling Alone

Consider taking a self-defense course to learn physical, verbal and mental techniques to protect yourself before embarking on your trip.

Always walk upright with a steady pace and an air of confidence so you appear that you are in control and know where you are going.

Dress conservatively so that you don't draw undue attention to yourself or show a lack of respect for local customs and culture.

When visiting religious sites to always dress modestly and carry a scarf in case you need to cover your head.

Always wear flat shoes, runners or comfortable sandals in case you need to run for any reason.

Never walk alone after dark and cross the street to a busy public place if you see a group of males approaching.

Consider traveling in a group and joining an organized city tour in the evening if you intend to see the city sights at night.

Avoid walking around neighborhoods or areas that have the reputation of being dangerous. Whenever I check into a hotel or travel to a new area, I make a point of asking two different local women and the front desk clerk which areas I should avoid.

Always be aware of your surroundings, including whoever is near you and what is happening around you.

Always trust your instincts. If someone or something just doesn't feel right, it probably isn't. Remember: when in doubt, don't!

Don't be afraid or embarrassed to ask for help.

Be very attentive to voices, noises or footsteps behind you. If you suspect you are being followed, quicken your pace, cross the street, stop in a well-lit store or a busy public place. Call the police and ask them to escort you back to the lobby of your hotel.

Hotel Safety Tips

Be sure to tell the front desk clerk and switchboard operator not to give out your room number under any circumstances, but to take messages for you instead.

If you do plan on renting a safe deposit box, do not announce this upon arrival. Instead, call from your room and do it discreetly.

Do not advertise the fact that you are alone. Women traveling alone may want to consider checking into a hotel as "Mrs.," as well as wearing an inexpensive wedding band. You may also want to carry a photo of a male friend along with you, who you can claim is your husband.

To ensure that your room is not occupied, have a bellhop accompany you to your room, and check the bathroom, under the bed, behind the drapes leading onto the balcony and the closet. Do this when you first check in to your room and also when returning late at night.

Avoid leaving the Maid Service sign hanging outside your door since it advertises the fact that you are not in your room.

Being Pestered

Avoid eye contact and smiling at men who are pestering or leering at you.

If you start being pestered, completely ignore all comments, catcalls, and whistles. Don't talk back or engage the person at all.

Avoid unsolicited conversation with strangers.

Consider wearing a wedding band even if you are not married.

If you are in need of serious help, shout "FIRE" or "POLICE," as people may be more likely to help you if they fear they are also in jeopardy.

Avoid accepting food or drinks from strangers, as there is a possibility that they may be drugged.

Be careful to cover the numbers on your ATM or telephone calling cards in case thieves are watching you.





Be especially careful at bus stops, subways, train stations, airports, outdoor festivals and other crowded places, as these areas are all popular with pickpockets.

If you are approached by a robber, cooperate, remain calm and surrender all of your valuables.

If you become a victim of any crime, immediately report it to the police and remember that your embassy is there to help.

Write down or tape record all incidents while they are fresh in your mind.

In many airport terminals around the world you may find yourself hassled by people offering you cheap transportation into town. Don't accept their offers; instead find a ground transportation desk, which is generally near the baggage claim area, and ask them for assistance.

Learn to recognize the uniforms of local law enforcement officers.

Safety and Security

It can feel a little scary traveling to an unfamiliar place, especially if you are a woman traveling alone or are new to the world of traveling.

I have had my bottom grabbed at local markets, have been leered at, asked if I could be bought as a wife and was woken up one evening by a thief in my room attempting to steal a bicycle I had rented.

To travel with less fear, arm yourselves with knowledge and be prepared.

The following tips are intended to increase your awareness, your comfort level and the power you have to travel safely:

Use your feet to run with and your voice to scream with.

Carry everyday items for use as defensive weapons: a pen or pencil, a key, a ring or an umbrella.

Attack an assailant at the throat, stomach, temples, eyes, groin or kneecaps.



Car Safety Tips

Rental cars tend to be natural targets for thieves because they know you will be traveling with more valuables than the local residents.

Make sure not to leave your possessions unattended in a car.

If you must leave your car, lock your bags in the trunk. Each night, empty the glove compartment and leave it open so thieves can see there is nothing to steal.

Select a secure, well-lit parking spot, especially if your shopping is likely to extend through sundown.

Deliberately park close to the building you will be entering, or park near the main flow of traffic.

Avoid parking in the outer edges of parking lots, alleys and deserted or poorly lit areas.

Avoid parking next to occupied vehicles.

Do not leave any personal ID in your car.

Avoid overloading yourself with bags when returning to your vehicle.

Use the trunk, not the passenger compartment, for storing parcels.

Lock all doors when exiting your vehicle.

If you park in an attended garage, leave only your ignition key with the attendant.

If you are alone, or feel uncomfortable for whatever reason, ask the parking attendant or guard to walk you back to your vehicle, particularly after sundown.

Have your keys ready in your hand before you enter the parking lot so that you can unlock your car door and enter quickly.

Check your car on all sides before approaching the door. Check the back seat of your car before getting into your vehicle, and then lock all the doors.





Never hitchhike and never pick up hitchhikers, no matter how friendly they may look or how rainy it is outside. A US insurance agent informed me that if I picked up a hitchhiker and was to get into an accident with them in my car, I could be held responsible for the hitchhiker's medical costs even if the accident wasn't my fault. (Now that would be a great way to blow your entire travel budget — and your life savings).

Car Trouble

If you suspect that you are being followed, try to remember the license plate number and the description of the car. Sound your horn to attract the attention of the police or other motorists.

Drive to a police, fire or service station. If you cannot find one, then drive to the nearest populated area and call the police.

If your car stalls during the day, get completely off the roadway, have all of passengers leave the car and off the road and signal for assistance.

If your car stalls in the evening and you are alone, get off the roadway, lift the front hood and tie a white cloth or napkin around the aerial. Then lock yourself in the car with your hazard lights on. Police and tow truck companies are alert for cars displaying these signs. Do not accept help from a stranger.

Public Transportation

When using public transportation, prepare your fare or token before you leave your hotel. This will avoid your having to open your handbag or produce your wallet in public.

Sit near the driver or beside a companion. Avoid sitting near the exit.

Water Safety Tips

Knowledge and alertness can prevent needless tragedy. There is so much to see in tropical waters. Here are a few rules to keep in mind when swimming or snorkeling:

Swim in lifeguard-protected areas and check with them regarding beach and surf conditions.

If you are at a beach without a lifeguard, ask local beachgoers how to remain safe there. They can offer a wealth of information and their advice just might save your life. If you see no one in the water, there may be good reason. Use common sense.

Lifeguards, local fishermen, dive shops, surfers and divers are good sources of information about whether an area is safe. When in doubt, stay out!

Watch the ocean for at least 20 minutes before entering. Telltale signs of hazardous conditions are: water moving by rapidly, constant swirling in seemingly calm water and waves breaking far offshore.

Always go snorkeling with a buddy and stay close to each other.

Prior to entering the water, discuss with your buddy where you plan to snorkel and how long you plan on being in the water.

Make sure your equipment fits and is in good condition.

Put your fins on last, just before you are ready to start swimming.

Enter the water at sand channels or beaches, avoiding sharp coral and reef areas that can cut you. Clean coral cuts and scrapes immediately as they can infect badly and ruin a trip.

Check your position in the water frequently by looking to the beach for landmarks.

Swim against any currents during the first half of your snorkeling adventure; this helps you make it back to the beach even if you are tired.

Strong currents are areas that move like a river carrying unsuspecting swimmers away from safety. They are the main cause of drowning.

If you find yourself caught in a rip current that is taking you away from where you entered the water, remember that panicking will only tire you.

- Remain calm; do not panic.





- Go with the flow. Do not attempt to fight the current. Swim across or perpendicular to the current's direction.
- Wait until the current releases you.
- Swim parallel to the shore and then make your way in.

Remember that coral is a living creature. Touching it will destroy it by removing its protective coating.

Look, but don't touch or take marine animals, coral or shells.



Staying in Touch

Let your embassy or consulate know your trip itinerary if you are going somewhere unusual or potentially dangerous.

You should maintain contact with at least one person back home, especially if you are traveling solo. By letter, fax, email, or telephone, let that person know where you are and where you are heading next.

Send email, post cards, faxes, or make phone calls home to keep people up-to-date as your plans develop or change.

If you are off traveling for the day, leave a note in your room explaining where you are going. If you run into trouble, at least there will be clues to follow.

Make sure someone has a way to get in touch with you while you are traveling should there be an emergency back home.

Pack a copy of your address book. Leave a photocopied version at home.

Advise your friends and family to address your letters clearly, printing your name. When you go to collect mail, check under both your first and last names.

Lastly, always try to bring that most valuable travel accessory with you: a sense of humor.