I was 21 years old when I left North America for the first time, on a plane headed from Vancouver to Paris. I didn't know what would happen - I just knew I wanted to travel the world.
My only experiences outside of Canada prior to that had been weekend trips to Seattle and a vacation in Disneyland, California when I was a kid. But this was different, very different. I had been working two jobs all summer and saved relentlessly, watching my Europe Fund grow bigger with each passing month. I had an over-packed suitcase, a money belt and an excited/nervous ache in my chest that was stronger than every Christmas Eve and first day of school combined. I didn’t sleep a wink the night before I left – I was finally going travelling!

I learned so much on that first solo backpacking trip around Europe that it’s hard to believe it was only for three weeks. I had plenty of mishaps of course – my French friend was an hour late picking me up at the airport which sent me into such a panic attack that I almost jumped on the next flight home. I fumbled with my mediocre French and my first time traveller uncertainty and most of the time I had no idea what I was doing.

But as I dodged bicycles in Amsterdam, picnicked on the grass at the Palace of Versailles, hiked through the Black Forest Mountains in the south of Germany or strolled along the Seine in Paris, I felt such a happiness bubbling up within me. “Here I am,” I thought, “On the other side of the world, seeing the things that I have daydreamed about seeing for so long... and I made it all happen myself!” In an incredibly geeky way, that thought actually made me giggle out loud with glee.
At this point I was delirious with sleep deprivation and fueled only by excitement and Nutella.

The thrill I got from my first taste of travel didn’t go away. As soon as I returned to Canada I went straight back into frugal mode and started saving for my next adventure. I wanted more – not just a three week vacation but a long term...
experience of living abroad. I wanted to travel the world and work in another country so I could fully experience another culture in depth.

I looked through many options, from internships in Finland to teaching drama camps in Italy until I finally found the answer – a Working Holiday Visa in New Zealand. One year later I had saved up enough to go and I celebrated my 23rd birthday while working as a tour guide at a haunted prison from the 1860s perched on a cliff overlooking the ocean on the North Island.

Napier, New Zealand is a pretty cool little place.

One of the first people I met when I arrived at that prison was Lee, a confident, irreverent Northern English guy whom I got along with immediately – especially since when I first laid eyes on him he was dressed in fake blood and zombie makeup for a “Scary Tour” event at the old prison. We became friends immediately, sitting up until 3am talking nonstop about everything and nothing and all the things we wanted to see and do. When we finally kissed I got that rush in my stomach that I get when a plane is taking off, a feeling of almost unbearable excitement and weightlessness.

I spent six months travelling and working my way around New Zealand, some of it on my own and some of it with Lee. I milked goats and fed chickens on a farm, sold
tickets for a pub crawl and even tried fundraising for Greenpeace (but failed miserably). I learned even more about travel and about myself, through both my successes and mistakes. When it came time for Lee to go back to England, he asked if I wanted to go with him and the answer was an obvious yes. Sure, we had only known each other for a few months, but if I didn’t go I would always wonder “what if?”

Six years later, I look back on that as one of the best decisions I have ever made. I got a year-long working visa for the UK and Lee and I flew to his small Northern town of Accrington. We got jobs and a place to live, but we didn’t stop daydreaming about travelling the world. We still stayed up talking until 3am about everything we wanted to see and do in the world.

Soon we had an idea – we would build a travel website and I would establish myself as a freelance writer so that we could work from anywhere and earn money as we travel the world. We would be free to be completely nomadic, living out of our backpacks and slowly making our way across continents.

Well, six years and over 50 countries later, I’m happy to say that the plan worked. We sold all of our stuff, packed our bags and have been without a permanent address since May of 2011. We have swum with sea turtles in Sri Lanka, eaten Guinea Pig in Peru, partied with German football fans in Munich, listened to jazz in the park in New Orleans, gotten soaked by the spray of Iguazu Falls in Argentina, hung out with orang-utans in Borneo and much more – and the journey is far from over.

If you are like me and you have an insatiable urge to travel the world, then this guide is for you.
As a Canadian traveller, you already have a lot of advantages on your side. We live in a developed country with a decent minimum wage, so it is very achievable to save up enough money for a trip. Our Canadian passport offers us a fantastic selection of working abroad opportunities and Canada is well regarded in the world, so you will experience little to no trouble due to your nationality. Everyone loves Canadians – they think we are polite and friendly and as sweet as maple syrup – so you will be greeted with a warm welcome pretty much everywhere you go.

This is the advice that I wish I could go back in time and give to the nervous 21 year old me sitting on that plane to Paris.

It includes lots of practical knowledge I have gained in the years since about travelling, some of which I have learned the hard way. And if I could go back in time and meet that pre-travel version of me I would tell her the same thing I will tell you, “Go for it. Just get on that plane and you will never regret it.”
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Before Any Trip

Planning your trip is exciting because you are starting to see your daydreams turn into a practical reality, but it can also be frustrating, time consuming and confusing. Keep this information handy while you plan to make things a little easier.

There are some things that you will need to book before you leave on your trip, such as travel insurance and flights. However, there are lots of things that you can wait until you get there to figure out – you don’t have to have every day of your trip booked in advance!

Book the first two or three nights of accommodation so that you have somewhere to crash when you get there, but then give yourself some flexibility. When you arrive you might find out that there is a cheaper and better hostel just down the street that wasn’t advertised online, so you want to have the option of moving there if you need to.
You might be talking to some other travellers who tell you about a nearby attraction that sounds awesome, so you will want to be able to adjust your route. Sometimes the most memorable travel experiences are the spontaneous adventures to places that you didn’t even know existed before you left Canada.

**Flights**

Your flight will be a major expense for your trip, so look for any way that you can cut down the cost.

If you can be flexible with your travel dates you will also be at an advantage. Check out [SkyScanner.ca](http://SkyScanner.ca), a website that allows you to look at flight prices over an entire month rather than just on one day. Simply fill in your departure airport and your destination and then under “Date” you can select the “Entire Month” option.

Just for an example, I did a search for one way flights from Toronto to Amsterdam in April of 2017. If you were to fly on Saturday the 15th of April the flight would be $551 CAD but on Friday the 21st of April the flight would be only $291 CAD. You can save about $260 CAD just by flying on a different day, so it really pays to be flexible with your dates!
Opting for flights with one or more stops will also cut your price down significantly. The $291 CAD flight from Toronto to Amsterdam has a stopover for just over an hour in Reykjavik, Iceland which is a bit of a pain but certainly worth it for the savings it offers. You can even look for flights with more than one stopover, which will make for a long journey but will save you even more.

The way I look at it is that taking a longer flight can sometimes be worth it if it reduces your cost enough. For example, if you take a flight with two stopovers and it ends up adding five hours to your flight, but it saves you $300, that’s worth it in my opinion. You are saving $60 for every extra hour you have to sit around in the airport. If someone offered you a job that paid $60 per hour you would probably happily take it!

However, if the difference between the flight with the 6 hour stopover and the one without is only $20 it’s not really worth spending the extra 5 hours to save only $4 per hour. Keep this in mind when you are comparing flight prices so that you can find the best balance between cost and convenience for you.

I have also found that it is cheaper to fly during the middle of the week than on the weekend, as there is less demand. Look on Tuesdays, Wednesdays and Thursdays for
the cheapest rates. Flights with really awkward departure times, such as late at night or early in the morning will also be cheaper, so if you can handle being a tired zombie you could save a few hundred bucks.

Sometimes the difference in price between the dates can be shocking! These two flights are the same duration and arrive at the same times, but one is $390 more. Another strategy is to be flexible about which airport you fly in and out of. For example, when departing from Victoria, BC you will find cheaper selection of flights if you take the ferry over to the mainland (cost = approximately $17 for a foot passenger at the time of writing this) and fly out of Vancouver airport rather than flying direct from the airport in Victoria.

You can be flexible with where your trip starts too. Let’s go back to our Toronto to Amsterdam example. If you plan on backpacking around Europe and you also have Paris on your itinerary, starting there instead would make your flight even cheaper. I just did a search found a flight from Toronto to Paris on April 3rd for only $201 CAD. However, if you are flying on any other day, it seems to be the same price or cheaper to fly into Amsterdam.
Be flexible with your dates, change your departure and arrival airports and try several different airlines and booking sites until you find the cheapest flight that meets your needs. The time you spend searching and trying these different variables could save you hundreds of dollars.

Once you have booked your flight, the next step is to figure out how to get from the airport to your hostel or hotel in the city. You will want to figure this out in advance, because when you arrive you will be exhausted, jet lagged and pretty useless so the easier you can make it on yourself the better.

Usually there will be a public transport option for getting from the airport to city centre, such as a bus, shuttle, subway or tram. This will probably be the cheapest option, although perhaps not the most direct. If you arrive in the middle of the night when transit isn’t running, or if you just can’t handle a bus journey after 15 hours on a plane, you can always take a taxi.

If you do take a taxi, look up in advance what the journey from the airport to the city centre should cost. Taxi drivers know that travellers fresh off the plane have no idea what local costs are, so they are likely to try to overcharge you. Also, do a search for information about taking taxis safely in your destination country... how do you tell the difference between the legitimate and the illegal taxis? What are the common rip-off tricks that taxi drivers use in that country? Being informed will ensure that your trip doesn’t start off on a bad note.

**Travel Insurance**

One of the advantages of being Canadian is our healthcare – most of it is free and if we get sick we don’t have to worry about exorbitant hospital bills like our neighbours to the south. However, when you are travelling outside of Canada and you get ill or injured, this is not the case. If you have to have a hospital stay or, heaven forbid, a medical evacuation, this can cost you thousands and it will come out of your own pocket. Unless you have travel insurance, of course.

Travel insurance also protects you from a lot of things that can go wrong while you are travelling, such as theft, cancelled flights and the airline losing your luggage. It might seem annoying to pay money “just in case” something bad happens, but it’s really a case of “better safe than sorry” and it’s always worth it.

When my British partner Lee visited Canada he fell off a bike and broke both of his wrists. If he didn’t have travel insurance, it would have cost us nearly five thousand dollars. Losing that money would have seriously put a dent in our future travel plans.
Going travelling without travel insurance is like having sex with a stranger without a condom. Maybe you will be fine, but why take the risk when it’s so easy to protect yourself?

Make sure that you get your travel insurance before you embark on your trip – once you leave Canadian soil it will be more difficult and expensive to find an insurance policy that will cover you.

If you are planning to travel in the USA it will increase the cost of your insurance considerably, because the US has one of the most expensive healthcare systems in the world. If your trip includes travel in the USA it might even be worth getting two insurance policies, one for the time spent in the USA and another for the rest of your destinations.

Ask lots of questions before choosing the right travel insurance plan for you. Does it provide coverage for all of the countries you plan on traveling to? Does it cover you for any extreme sports or other activities you might want to try like paragliding or surfing? Are you covered for pre-existing medical conditions? Read the fine print carefully and ask for help if you don’t understand.

Save the details of your insurance policy in your email so that you can access them from anywhere. If you do have to get any sort of medical treatment while you are travelling, get a detailed invoice from the hospital so that you can submit it to your travel insurance company and receive your compensation.
A Few Options for Travel Insurance Policies for Canadians

There are quite a few options out there for travel insurance, so it really depends on where you are going and how long your trip will be. However, here are a few examples of policies available from popular travel insurance companies.

In order to compare them, I came up with an imaginary traveller who is 24 years old, from Ontario and is going travelling for 4 months. Your quotes will vary depending on how old you are and what province you are from, but this should give you some indication of what to expect.

Please note that travel policies and prices can change very quickly, so these prices are just meant as an example. Make sure you do your own research!

**RBC Insurance**

RBC offers several travel insurance packages to choose from, but the best for the long term traveller is probably the Deluxe Package Single Trip or Annual Coverage. It is one of the only Canadian travel insurance policies I have seen to offer unlimited coverage. You must be a client of RBC in order to buy the insurance and you must buy it before your trip.

You will not be required to answer any health questions and stable pre-existing medical conditions will be covered. You can choose between a single trip plan that covers you for up to 183 days or a multiple trip annual plan that will cover you for the entire year. You will be covered for all emergency medical care and you will have a phone number to call that will put you in touch with someone who speaks English and can refer you to the best local facility. You will also be covered for cancellation and loss of damage of your luggage.

You can use the RBC website to fill in the details of your trip and get a quote. Just for an example, for a 24 year old from Ontario travelling for 4 months the Deluxe Package would be $930 excluding taxes.
If you wanted to opt for just the medical coverage without coverage for cancellations or baggage and personal effects, it would be $378. This is something to consider depending on how expensive your items would be to replace if they were lost or stolen – ie. If you are carrying nothing but a few clothes and a cheap camera, why pay over $500 to insure it? Only buy the travel insurance coverage that you actually need and you will save a lot of money.

**Air Canada**

The largest airline in Canada offers a travel insurance plan. One of the advantages is that they will pay upfront for your medical expenses whenever possible, so that you don’t have to pay out of your own pocket and be reimbursed later.

They have seven different travel insurance plans to choose from and you need to be a Canadian citizen to be covered by them. You must buy the insurance before you leave on your trip.

When you buy your Air Canada insurance you will be taken directly from the Air Canada site to the RBC Insurance website to purchase, so the information is the same as above.

**World Escapade**

This is a great option if you are considering doing a lot of adventure sports on your travels such as parasailing, hiking or scuba diving. This company will cover you for many of the sports activities that other insurance companies won’t. They don’t offer
baggage or personal effect coverage, but they do offer 24 hour emergency medical assistance.

Scuba diving on the Great Barrier Reef, Australia.

This is one of the cheapest travel insurance policies I have seen. I entered the details for my imaginary traveller and I discovered they would only have to pay $236.84 CAD to be covered with emergency medical travel insurance for their 4 month trip. This is the “Youth Standard Package” for travel anywhere in the world, except the USA. The package includes hospital and medical, emergency medical evacuation, accidental dental, a medical attendant to $500 and even repatriation of remains up to $25,000.

**Allianz Canada**

Allianz Canada is the Canadian branch of Allianz Global, which has its headquarters in Paris, France and has regional offices in over 34 countries all over the world. They are one of the largest providers of travel insurance and all of their plans include dedicated 24 hour assistance. In order to qualify you will need to be a Canadian citizen with a Canadian Government Health Insurance Plan.

However, the policy does not cover any countries for which the Canadian government has issued an official travel warning. Also, this option does not allow for a trip length that is longer than 30 days – which automatically rules it out if you are going for a long term travel adventure. However, if you are going on a shorter trip it
is one to consider. The price for medical coverage for 30 days is $75.08, which includes emergency travel assistance and support.

**Vaccinations**

Depending on which country you plan on travelling to, you might need vaccinations to protect you from various diseases. Talk to your doctor before your trip or visit a travel clinic and let them know where you are going.

There is a helpful page from the Public Health Agency of Canada that lists all the countries in the world and the vaccines that are recommended for each one. It can be found at.

Keep in mind that there are some instances that it might be worth getting your vaccinations in the destination country when you arrive. When Lee and I went to Thailand we were able to save hundreds of dollars by getting our vaccinations for Typhoid, Japanese Encephalitis at the Queen Saovabha Memorial Institute in Bangkok.

Getting my vaccinations in Bangkok (they were filming a promotional video for the hospital)
The vaccines were identical to what I would have received in Canada – as they were pre-packaged by the Red Cross – but the entire visit cost $25 compared to the $525 that the same shots would have cost in Canada. We even went back to get a Yellow Fever vaccination while we were there because we knew we might need it for other countries and it lasts for 10 years. Make sure you check whether you are better getting off getting your shots before you leave or as soon as you arrive!

**Saving Money**

Unless you are a millionaire professional hockey player or you have been earning $40 an hour on an oil rig in Northern Alberta you will probably need to save up your money for a little while before you will be able to afford to go travelling. It’s not as tough as you might think, as long as you make a plan and stick to it.

**Making a Budget for Your Trip**

The first step is to figure out how much money you need for your trip. Do some research into the typical prices of your destination country to get an idea of what you might spend on the average travel day. Come up with a number per day that will include your accommodation, three meals, a couple of beers in the evening and the admission cost for a typical attraction.
Be generous in your estimate so that you have a little wiggle room later, rather than not having enough. Then, multiply the cost by the number of days you will be travelling and add it to the cost of your flight.

Next, if you will be visiting multiple destinations add in the cost of your buses or trains between each one. Add the cost of any expenses you will need to incur before you go, such as buying a backpack, getting travel insurance or renewing your passport. Once you have added everything up you will have a total of how much your trip will cost you.

**Making a Plan to Save Up Money**

Okay, so now you are staring at a big scary number and thinking, “how in the world am I ever going to save up that much money?” One loonie at a time, that’s how. To make it less intimidating, break up the total into smaller chunks.

For example, let’s say that you are an Albertan travelling around Southeast Asia for two months. Your return flights from Calgary to Bangkok might cost around $1000 and your travel expenses might be $50 per day, which is a generous budget for that part of the world and gives you enough to include buses and attractions. So in total, you decide that you need to save $4000 for your trip.
If that seems like a lot, think of it as $333 per month for a year, or $83 per week. What you have to do now is figure out how to adjust your lifestyle so that you either spend less or earn more (or both) each week so that you can put an extra $83 per week in your travel savings fund. Here are a few ideas of ways you could save for travel:

- Pick up a side job and work a couple evenings a week. (When I was saving up to travel I bagged groceries at Planet Organic in the evenings.)
- Take on some overtime hours at your main job.
- Find fun things to do in your city that are cheap or free so you can enjoy yourself while keeping your entertainment budget low.
- Limit eating in restaurants and cook cheap meals at home.
- Buy food in bulk, cook a big pot of cheap food (stew, casserole, etc.) and store it in the freezer to microwave later.
- Drink with your friends at home instead of paying for expensive drinks in bars. (It’s easy to spend more than $83 on a night out on the town!)
- Move into a house shared with other people to decrease your rent.
- Clean out your closet and sell the stuff you don’t need on Ebay or Craigslist.
- Watch movies at home instead of paying $15 to go to the movie theatre.
- Cancel your gym membership and go running/do crunches in your living room instead.

These are just a few ideas, you can find other ways to save that will fit with your lifestyle. When I was saving for travel I constantly reminded myself that every dollar I earned bagging groceries at my second job or saved by cooking at home was going straight into my travel fund and would be used to pay for a train across Germany, admission to the Louvre in Paris or a walking tour in Amsterdam. It was so worth it!

For more helpful tips on making a budget for your trip and saving up money - check out this post: “I Want to Travel But I Can’t Afford It!”

**Sorting Out Everything at Home**
There are a few technical details that you will need to figure out before you leave Canada that are quite important.

**Give Up Or Sublet Your Home?**

If you are renting an apartment or a room in a house, should you give it up and find a new place to live when you return or sublet it to someone else while you are gone? The answer will depend on how long you are travelling for and whether or not you want to find a new place to live when you return. When I went on a working holiday in New Zealand I decided to give up the one bedroom apartment that I had in Victoria, BC. I didn’t want to worry about subletting it while I was gone and I knew that I could find another apartment when I got back. Of course, I never came back... so it worked out quite nicely.

That’s a question that you will need to ask yourself when you are leaving on your trip – “Is there a chance that – if I find an amazing opportunity while travelling – I might not come back to Canada for quite some time?” It’s a hard question to answer, because you don’t know what will happen to you when you are on the road. If you know for sure that you want to travel for 6 months and then come home, then that’s fine. However, as soon as I was a few months into my working holiday in New Zealand I realised that was pretty open to whatever happened when I was on the
road. The possibilities for my future opened up to include the entire world. I was willing to take a chance and see where the adventure took me.

What to Do With Your Stuff?

If you are going to give up your place of residence, you will need to figure out what to do with your possessions. Your clothes, furniture, dishes and other things – should you sell them all and buy new ones when you return? Can you keep them in boxes in your parent’s garage? If you have large items such as a motorbike or a set of skis, should you sell them to pay for your trip or let a trusted friend use them while you are gone?

If you do plan on coming back, it probably won’t be worth selling valuable items that you will just need to buy again when you come back. If you have friends or relatives you can store them with who don’t mind, you can avoid the extra expense of paying for storage space.
Another option is to sell them and use the proceeds to pay for your trip. You can use Ebay or Craigslist to advertise your items, or sell them among your friends.

I found that when I went traveling my priorities and my perspective changed. Things from my apartment that I had carefully boxed up and saved, such as lamps and tablecloths, meant nothing to me when I returned. I wondered, “Why did I keep all of this crap?” When I decided to start a life as a digital nomad I got rid of 90% of it and now the only thing in storage at my parent’s house is a small box of old journals, photos and priceless keepsakes.
Reduce your belongings to a small box of keepsakes and memories and store them with family or friends.

**Receiving Mail**

If you won’t have an address in Canada while you are gone, you will need to receive your mail somewhere – such as the address of a friend, relative or your parents. Make sure that you change your address well in advance so that you don’t miss any important mail.

**Cancel Any Subscriptions**

Do you have any subscriptions, memberships or other bills that you will not have to pay while you are travelling? Cancel them before you go so that you are not spending money needlessly while abroad. This will include your internet, phone bill, cable, gym membership, magazine subscriptions, etc. Usually you can cancel online, but for some companies you might need to call them and speak to customer service directly.

**Tell Your Bank you will be Travelling**

When all of a sudden you start making transactions in Rio de Janeiro or Istanbul your bank might get suspicious that your card has been compromised and block your access – which can be a huge headache.
Let your bank know which dates you will be travelling and where you will be, so that this doesn’t happen. Also, find out the international helpline number that you should use if you need to contact your credit card company or bank while you are travelling – just in case your card is stolen or stops working.

**Figure Out Taxes**

Figure out how your travel will affect your Canadian tax return. If you are going travelling for 2-3 months it won’t make a difference, but if you are working abroad for a year you should know whether you will still need to pay taxes in Canada while you are gone.

There are many tax treaties in place that will ensure that you don’t have to pay taxes in two countries at once – for example if you are working abroad in the UK you will pay taxes there and you will be exempt from Canadian taxes for that time. If you end up living outside of Canada for a significant amount of time, your tax residency might change. Check up on the country you will be living and working and if you are confused you can always ask your accountant to clarify. [Here is a link](#) with more information about taxes for Canadians traveling or working abroad.

**General Packing Tips**
Now that you have booked your flight and gotten all of your affairs in order, it’s time to pack your bag. It can be challenging to find the balance between bringing everything that you will need, while avoiding overpacking! What you will pack will of course depend on where you are travelling to and what you are doing there, but I can offer you a few general packing tips.

**What Type of Luggage?**

I’m partial to backpacks and I think that they offer a lot of advantages compared to wheeled luggage. You don’t have to drag them down cobblestone streets or dusty roads, you can run for a bus more easily and they are easier when going up and down stairs. I took a huge wheeled suitcase on my first trip around Europe and I regretted it, especially as I lugged it up and down the stairs of the Paris Metro.

There are lots of excellent outdoor shops in Canada where you can find a high quality backpack. I got mine from Mountain Equipment Co-Op and I can’t believe how well it has lasted. The thing has been through hell and back for the last 4 years of travel – strapped to the top of buses in Cambodia, thrown into boats in Thailand, crammed into trains on Sri Lanka – and it has not had a single rip, tear or broken zipper. Here’s hoping it lasts for a few more years, because I have a lot more travelling to do!

**You Don’t Have to Take Everything**

Don’t worry, they have shampoo and soap in the local shop no matter where you are going. You don’t have to take every necessity and you will be able to buy everything you need at your destination. Also, you don’t have to take a lot of clothes since you
will be laundering them as you go. All of the clothes I own fit into one of those canvas shopping bags you get at the supermarket and that’s more than enough. Also, there are things that you just don’t need – like pyjamas. Wear a t-shirt and shorts to bed instead - clothing that has a double purpose and can also be worn during the day.

Don’t fill your backpack to the brim. First of all, it will be super heavy and when you are walking around Bangkok in the sweltering heat looking for your hostel you will be cursing yourself for your aching back and shoulders. Secondly, you won’t have any room for bringing back souvenirs and gifts. Also, the lighter and easier your bag is to carry the less vulnerable you will be, as you will be able to move more quickly.

But You Definitely Should Take...

- Prescription medications if you need them – get enough in advance to cover you for your trip.
- A tiny sewing kit, so that you can fix rips in your clothes.
- Condoms and birth control pills if you are travelling with your partner or you think you might hook up on the road with a sexy local or another backpacker.
- A small first aid kit.
- Your prescription glasses/contact lenses if you wear them.
- Earplugs, for sleeping on planes and in noisy hostels.
- Some type of camera, you will want to capture those memories.
- Plug adaptors – make sure that you research which ones you will need for the country you are going to.
- A tiny flashlight – great for finding your way to bed after lights out in the hotel.
- A padlock – sometimes the hostels will offer lockers but won’t always supply you with a lock.

Also, ladies, I absolutely recommend a sarong. It’s the most versatile item of clothing I own because it can be a scarf, skirt, dress, bathing suit cover up, towel, pillow, blanket and something to cover your shoulder when visiting temples and other religious sites. Don’t buy one before you go – you can buy beautiful and colourful sarongs in street markets all over the world for cheaper than you can find them in Canada.
The same sarong that I used as a swimsuit cover-up and skirt in tropical locations, worked as a scarf in Bolivia.

Remember that when you first set off on your trip, the contents of your bag might not be perfect. It’s hard to anticipate what you will need before you have any experience of travelling. When you are on the road you will naturally adapt your backpack to suit your surroundings. For example, you might bring a towel only to find that all of the hostels in your destination offer free towels. Or, you could bring your hair dryer thinking that you might want to feel glam, only to find that all of the other girls let their hair dry naturally and it’s really not necessary.

As you go along, you will give away the items that you don’t need and pick up items that you do need. You can give away excess items to other travellers, or donate them to charities in the countries you are travelling in. Over time your backpack will naturally be whittled down to the exact right collection of items that you need for your particular travel style. When you get to the point where everything you need to live fits in one backpack, it’s a pretty amazing feeling of lightness and freedom.

**Bag-Ception**

Here’s a travel packing tip that Lee and I like to call Bag-ception, which comes from the concept of a dream inside of a dream in the movie Inception. When you have a backpack that opens at the top, it quickly becomes a huge pain in the butt when you want to reach something at the bottom of your backpack. You have to take everything out and make a huge mess, get the item, then pack it again.

A few years ago Lee and I figured out that we should put all of the items in our backpack into bags to avoid this. My clean clothes are contained together in a bag, my dirty clothes in another bag. My toiletries are in their own bag. Now whenever we need to find anything at the bottom of our bags, we can pull out three or four neat smaller bags and put them back in quickly and easily. For these bags-inside-a-bag
you can use plastic bags, canvas shopping bags, packing cubes or anything else. It will save you a lot of headaches, trust me.

Responses You Will Get When You Say You Are Going Travelling

Kings Canyon, Australia
You’ve got your bags packed and you are buzzing with excitement – you’re going travelling! Be warned though, not everyone in your life will be as enthusiastic about your trip as you are.

Hopefully your friends and family will be supportive of your travel dreams. However, there is a chance that they might be skeptical or worried. Keep in mind, most of the people who have these attitudes are people who have never travelled before. They don’t know what it is like, but they have an opinion anyway. If they have no experience with long term travel take their advice with a pinch of salt and listen to those who have travelled.

Some people might respond to your announcement with:

“It’s Too Dangerous”
Yes, there are dangerous places in the world, but you could also find yourself in danger in your hometown. You are likely not going to war-torn places on your first trip, you will be in safe places filled with plenty of other travellers where the risks will be low.

There will be pickpockets and scam artists, but they are easy to avoid with a little bit of awareness and common sense. Bad things are only more likely when you forget common sense, such as walking down unfamiliar streets alone or getting too drunk to make it back to your hostel safely. Basically, don’t be an idiot and you will be fine.

“\textit{It Will Harm Your Career}”

Are people telling you that you shouldn’t take a year off to travel because it will harm your career? Tell them that’s nonsense. If you plan to be pursuing a career for the next 30-40 years, what does it matter if you start it right after you graduate, or a year later? Travelling will not look bad on your resume, so don’t worry.

In fact, having travel experience on your resume actually reflects well on you. It shows that you are capable of planning, resourceful, able to manage money well,
open-minded, sensitive to other cultures and willing to step outside of your comfort zone. All of these traits are positives in the eyes of an employer.

Plus, travel might lead you towards a career. You might find your calling in a different country, or you might learn skills on the road that you can use to make a living. Even if the only thing you gain in travel is a change in mentality, it can still help your career.

For myself, I found that travel gave me a huge boost in confidence that helped me to work towards my dream career as a freelance writer. When I went travelling, I took a big goal, broke it down into steps and made it a reality. Once I knew how to do that, I could do the same thing with the goal of establishing myself as a freelance writer.

“*It’s Expensive*”

Since you have already made your travel budget and your savings plan, if someone tells you travel is too expensive you will be able to prove them wrong with the actual numbers. They probably don’t know that you can get a private hotel room in Ecuador for $13 per night, or a meal for two in a restaurant with drinks in Thailand for $5. Travel is less expensive than many people think, so they will be surprised when they learn about your costs.

“*You Should Be Thinking About Your Future*”

This one comes up a lot in Canadian culture, as there is quite a bit of pressure on us to have our future all planned out. You should be on the property ladder, saving for your retirement, getting married... that sort of thing. If you are vagabonding around the world with no plan for what comes next, it will freak some people out. They will ask you when you are going to “settle down” and have the normal life you are expected to have.

But who’s to say you are not thinking about your future? Perhaps your future just doesn’t fit out in the blueprint that has been laid out for you. Maybe your future involves trekking in the jungle in Borneo, or learning to surf in Australia, or learning Spanish in Chile or working on an olive farm in Italy. Your future involves travel, adventure, exploration and not really knowing that is coming up around the next bend. Let me reassure you, there is nothing wrong with that and this is a perfectly valid future to have.

The truth is that I have talked to hundreds of people on my travels around the world and I have never heard anyone say that they regret going travelling. In fact, I have
I have heard many people tell me that it has been the best experience of their lives and that it has changed them for the better.

The idea of going travelling is unconventional, so some people in your life won’t understand it. Don’t let these myths and misconceptions scare you into deciding not to travel, as many of them are not based in reality and are expressed by those who don’t have travel experience themselves. If you don’t know anyone who has travelled, reach out to travel bloggers online (send me an email!) so that you can learn about the realities of travel from people who are actually doing the things you want to do.

While You Are on the Road

The first few days and weeks of your trip will be a ridiculously steep learning curve. It will take you a while just to get used to the sheer novelty of being outside of Canada for the first time.

The currency is different, people babble all around you in foreign languages and there are so many sights, sounds, smells to take in – it’s pretty overwhelming! You will also have quite a few moments where you stop, look around at your surroundings and say to yourself, “Oh my god, I’m here! I made it and I’m actually travelling the world right now!” You’ll want to high five yourself and do a little dance, but try to refrain because well... it might look a little strange.
In this section I will share some advice based on my experience of being on the road, which will hopefully make your travels go smoother.

**Managing your Money**

When I first went to Europe I took traveller’s cheques with me. Yes, that’s right, traveller’s cheques. No, it wasn’t 1988 – I just had no idea what I was doing. I thought they were the most secure way to keep my money, but I struggled to find anywhere that would accept them and I ended up using my credit card for the entire trip and just cashing the cheques back in at my bank when I returned home.

Pretty much anywhere you visit in the world will have ATMs where you can withdraw money, so all you will need to take is your credit card and your debit card. One thing you should keep in mind is withdrawal fees – sometimes they can really add up when you access your account in another country. You worked hard to save up your travel money, so you probably don’t want to give it away to your bank!

For example, if you bank with HSBC they charge $3 for withdrawals from international ATMs. BMO offers a Premium Plan that costs $25 per month, which includes 10 free international debit transactions on any ATM on the Mastercard network. TD Canada Trust offers an All-Inclusive Banking plan that is similar to what BMO offers, but it doesn’t limit the number of foreign withdrawals you can make. It has a monthly fee of $29.95 but this is waived if you have at least $5,000 in your account.

Scotiabank offers free withdrawals if you are travelling within the 40 countries with Global Alliance ATMs, which include Chile, Peru, France, Italy, the UK, Germany, Spain, India, New Zealand, Australia, South Africa and many more. If you are planning on going to one of the countries with Global Alliance ATMs, a Scotiabank account might be the cheapest option.

Of course, there might be other local banks or credit unions in your province that offer better deals, so shop around and compare!

It’s worth calling your bank and asking them how much it would cost you in fees if you used your card in an ATM in your destination country, as well as if you used your credit card to make a purchase there. You might find that you can save yourself a considerable amount of money over the course of your trip by switching your account before you go. GreedyRates.ca put together this handy chart comparing Canadian credit card foreign transaction fees.
While you are off travelling in all exotic corners of the world, your parents are probably going to be worried sick about you and will want to hear from you every now and then to be reassured that you are okay. The best way to stay in touch with friends and family at home is via Skype, which is a free program that you can download on your computer or smartphone. It allows you to make free voice or video calls to anyone who also owns the Skype application.

If your parents and relatives are complete luddites who don’t use a computer, you could also use Skype to call them on the phone. You will need to buy credit for the application, but it will usually give you cheap long distance rates compared to calling them on the phone.

Sometimes the Wifi connection at your hostel or hotel won’t be fast enough for Skype, which will cause a lot of problems during the call such as cutting out, long delay times and distorted voices. This can be very annoying and you might need to head to an internet café or a coffee shop to find a stronger connection so that you can
call home. If your connection is a bit slow, try turning off the Skype video and using just the voice call feature – some connections are fast enough to handle audio but not video.

Skype also has a text chat feature, which you can use to instant message your contacts. It is also possible to create a group chat, so that you can add all of your friends and family on Skype and update them all at once. You can also send SMS text messages through Skype at cheaper rates.

If your friends and family want to be able to call you, but you don’t want to incur the costs on your cell phone, you could consider setting up a Skype Number. This is a number that your family or friends back in Canada can call you on at local rates.

**Phone**

Speaking of phones, if you bring your smartphone with you it might be worth buying a local SIM card for it in your destination country. You will then be able to use it to make local calls, such as calling the hostel to confirm a reservation or calling a bus company to arrange tickets.

When we are travelling Lee will often buy a local SIM card for his iPhone so that he can have a data plan and use Google Maps. SIM cards work slightly differently for every country, but you can usually buy them in supermarkets, convenient stores or phone shops.
This is extremely handy and has helped us find our way many times after arriving in an unfamiliar city. Also, having Google Maps on your phone will help you to avoid getting taken for a ride by a taxi driver who thinks that they can drive you the long way to your destination and charge you more. You will be able to see immediately that you are venturing off the right path, so that you can say something.

Camera

Another important device you will want to have while travelling is a camera. You will witness so many incredible things on your travels and you will want to capture them on film so that you can preserve the memories, share them with friends and perhaps even publish them on your travel blog.

The first question to ask yourself is how serious you are about photography and what your budget is. If you just want to snap photos of yourself and the friends you meet, you may only need a basic point and shoot camera. In fact, the cameras on most smartphones these days are good enough so that you may not need anything else.

If you are serious about photography and you really want to capture high quality images of your trip, consider investing in a decent DSLR camera. The camera that Lee invested in is decent quality, because we have the need to take good photos for this blog. Also, Lee really enjoys photography and has a lot of fun capturing great images. With those factors in mind, the camera was a worthwhile investment for us.
If you see yourself doing a lot of water sports on your travels, such as snorkelling, surfing, etc. it might be worth buying a waterproof camera. I took one with me on my New Zealand trip and I had a lot of fun taking photos at the beach, under the water at the swimming pool and on our white water rafting trip. It’s nice to be able to capture your water-based activities without worrying about ruining your camera.

Another option is to bring a GOPRO or other small video camera. I have seen a lot of travellers using them, especially those who like sports and adventure activities. You can attach the camera to your helmet while white-water rafting, bungee jumping, hiking, mountain biking, horseback riding or rock climbing and make some pretty impressive videos. These video cameras also have waterproof cases, so that you can use them while participating in watersports.

Ultimately, the camera you bring will depend on your budget, your level of interest in photography and the types of situations you will be using it in. If you aren’t sure, go chat with someone at your local Future Shop or other electronics store so that they can explain the features of each camera. Consider your options, but don’t let them convince you to pay more than you need to if all you want is a simple camera for sharing your travel snaps on Facebook.

**Safety Tips**
The best advice I can give you for keeping yourself safe when you are traveling is to educate yourself about the potential dangers in the destination you are visiting. Your destination may or may not be safer than in your hometown, but in your hometown you know what neighbourhoods to avoid and what streets not to walk down at night. It is that knowledge that makes it less likely that you will be at risk.

When you are a tourist in a new city, you don’t have that awareness – which is what makes you vulnerable. Scam artists, pickpockets and other unscrupulous people prey on that vulnerability because they know you will be confused, disoriented and distracted. The best way to protect yourself is to use a combination of advance research and gut instinct.

Before you travel somewhere, head to Google and search “Top 10 Dangers in (Your Destination)” and “Top 10 Tourist Scams in (Your Destination)”. You will find information that is specific to the country you are visiting, so that you know what to watch out for.

For example, in Bangkok there is a common scam in which tourists are sold “valuable gems” at a “discount price” and are told that they will be able to make a profit if they resell that jewellery back in their home country. In reality, the “gems” are worthless and it’s a huge rip off. If you didn’t know that in advance, some smooth talker in Bangkok might be able to convince you to buy the jewellery. However, once you know about the scam and someone tries to sell you gems you will simply say, “Yeah, right,” and carry on walking.

As well as internet research, locals are a great source of information about keeping safe. They know their city well, so if they give you advice about where to do and what to do – make sure you follow it!

Also, make sure that you pack your common sense with you while you travel and trust your gut. If you feel like something’s not right in a situation, listen to that feeling.

More General Safety Travel Tips

Here are a few more important travel safety tips you should know:

- Avoid answering questions from strangers about what hotel you are staying at or what your plans are for the day, as they might be trying to get clues for
scamming you. Answer vaguely with the name of the district your hotel is in, rather than offering the specific hotel name.

- Always be wary of a stranger who is trying to persuade you to leave and go with them to a different location.
- Ladies, you will be catcalled and harassed by men on the street – there’s not much you can do to stop that. Simply walk quickly and confidently, pretend they don’t exist and don’t make eye contact.

Remember, if someone makes you uncomfortable the best thing to do is to say to them politely and firmly, “No thank you, I’m not interested.” If they refuse to leave you alone after you have politely stated this, you don’t have to be polite or friendly to them.

I know us Canadians are raised to be polite in all interactions, but if someone is putting you in this position they are being the rude ones – not you! Be assertive and if you have to shout at them to go away, don’t be afraid to shout. Usually telling them loudly to go away will draw the attention of others and will make the person stop harassing you.

Common Scams
Before you go travelling it is a good idea to be informed about the common scams that happen in many parts of the world. Although every scammer is different, most scams will follow a certain formula for manipulating travellers and tricking them out of their money. If you are aware of these scams your alarm bells will start ringing right away and you will be able to get yourself out of the situation.

Here are a few of the common scam formats from around the world:

**The Bird Poo Scam**

A lovely young American backpacker I met in a hostel in Buenos Aires was a victim of this scam. She went for a sightseeing walk and arrived back at the hostel in tears, with her iPhone, camera and purse stolen.

She had been walking down the street and someone had approached her to alert her that she had a streak of bird poo down the back of her shoulder. Naturally, she stopped to assess the damage, placing her bag down on the sidewalk so she could get a better look at the stain on her shirt. In an instant, someone grabbed the bag and ran into the crowd. Her expensive electronics, as well as her priceless travel photos, were gone forever.

It probably wasn’t even real bird poo on her shoulder. The way this scam works is that someone in the crowd sprays your back with a white gooey substance when you
aren’t looking, then someone else points it out to you. When you are distracted by wiping it off, they take that opportunity to pickpocket you or snatch your bag.

The best thing to do if a stranger points out that you have bird poo or any other type of stain on your clothing, is to say thank you and keep on walking. Even though you may feel a little gross, wait until you have arrived back at your hostel to clean it off.

The Passport Ransom

Another unfortunate incident happened to a German friend of mine when she was travelling in Vietnam. She checked into a hotel and asked what the price of the room was per night. They told her it was $15 per night, so she stayed for three nights. However, when she tried to check out of the room they told her the price was actually $25 per night.

She tried to argue, but it was her word against theirs and she had no proof of the originally quoted price. She could have just paid the agreed price and left, but the hotel owners had her passport. They had requested it from her on the first day she arrived so that they could “keep it on file” and now they were holding it for ransom in order to get more money from her.

How can you avoid this happening to you? There are a few important things you should do when checking into a hotel, especially in places like Vietnam and other destinations in Southeast Asia where this type of scam is common. First of all, if the hotel owner tells you the price when you check in, pay up front. This way, they will not be able to change the price on you later. Ask them to write a receipt for proof that you have paid. If there are any arguments later, the written proof will be on your side.

Secondly, don’t let any hotel keep your passport. They might need to take it when you check in so that they can copy down your information, but they shouldn’t need to hold onto it for any reason. What I would usually do is let the receptionist take my passport when I check into a hotel. Then, a few hours later I would approach the front desk explaining that I am booking flights online and I need my passport back so I can enter the information. Then, I keep the passport with me after that point.

Accommodation Recommendation
When you get into a taxi or tuk tuk from the airport or bus station after you arrive at your destination, be wary if your driver or guide tells you that the place you are heading to is closed and that he knows somewhere better. Chances are, the “better” hotel is offering him a commission for referrals. He’s likely suggesting it not out of the goodness of his heart, but for the good of his pockets.

Make sure that you have the correct name of your hotel or hostel written down, so that you can make sure the driver is taking you to the right hotel. Sometimes, especially in Southeast Asia, I have noticed that a new hotel might copy the name of a successful hotel in an attempt to take some of its business. If you know the exact street address of the hotel you can make sure that you are going to the right one.

“That Attraction is Closed”
Don't believe what anyone says... the Grand Palace in Bangkok is never closed.

If you are on your way to a popular major tourist destination and a “helpful” local tries to tell you that it is closed, be very skeptical. This person will usually offer to take you to another attraction, which usually ends up being their friend’s shop where they will get a kickback on anything you purchase.

Usually, the attraction really is open for business. Don’t listen to these people and go see it for yourself. Even if they are telling the truth, their suggestions of where to go instead will usually only benefit them and not you. It is better to make your own backup plan.

The Bracelet Scam

In this situation, the scammer will approach you and start to tie a bracelet around your wrist. They will distract you by talking to you and asking questions as they tie it on, but once it is on you won’t be able to get it off and they will demand that you pay them money for it. The best way to avoid this is to not let them get a hold of your arm in the first place.

The Dishonest Taxi Driver

Taxi drivers all over the world are notorious for trying to rip off travellers. They aren't all bad, you will encounter many kind and friendly taxi drivers who will charge
you a fair price and will take you where you are going with a smile. However, some taxi drivers will try to take advantage of the fact that you are a clueless visitor and will try to pull one over on you.

**Always Use the Meter**

In almost every taxicab in the world there will be a meter, which tracks the distance driven and the amount you owe. This is generally the fairest and safest way to calculate your fare. If the ride is short and easy, you pay a cheap price. If you are stuck in traffic and it takes longer, you pay a bit more. It’s a reasonable rate for the driver and for you.

So why is it that taxi drivers in many locations in South America, Asia and Europe will immediately quote you a fixed rate to your destination rather than using the meter? The answer is almost always because they are trying to overcharge you. The taxi driver offers you a fixed rate that sounds reasonable, but he knows the route and the time of day and knows he is quoting you more than you would pay if he used the meter. He would never quote you a rate less than what he would earn while using the meter, so you can assume that he is trying to overcharge you.

For example, the other day we arrived in Quito, Ecuador and hailed a taxi from the bus station to our hostel. At first, he quoted us a fixed price of $8 (Ecuador uses USD as currency). We insisted on using the meter, even after he lowered his offer to $7. When we arrived at our hostel, the metered fare was $3.99.

Sometimes taxi drivers will flat out refuse to use their meters, knowing that they can get a higher fixed price from another traveller who is not as savvy as you. They aren’t supposed to do that, but just let them go and find another cab. The metre is a fair way to determine a price and you don’t have to feel obligated to use the services of a cab driver who will not be fair to you. Some have claimed to me that their meter is broken, until I started to walk away and it magically started working again. It can be frustrating if you have to go through a few different cabs until you find one who will use the meter, but it’s worth it.

Also, when the taxi driver is using the meter keep an eye on it. Sometimes they will fail to start it at zero, or charge the more expensive one for night time services even if it is in the day. Sometimes they will have a meter that is rigged to go faster than usual, while gesturing and pointing to things outside the car to take your attention away from the super-charged meter. Pay attention and if they are do something suspicious, don’t be afraid to speak up.
Taking the Long Way

One common taxi scam is for the taxi driver to take the long route to your destination and rack up a very large metered fare. They assume that you don’t know the area and won’t realise that they are taking you for a ride. The best thing to do to avoid this is to look up the route in advance on Google Maps.

This will give you an idea of where you should expect the taxi driver to take you, as well as roughly how long it should take. You can also ask your hotel how long the ride should be and how much it should cost. If the taxi driver is taking you the wrong way, don’t be afraid to say something!

Switching Bills

Sometimes you will hand the taxi driver a bill and they will do some tricky sleight of hand, giving you back a smaller bill and insisting that you didn’t pay enough. Make sure that you look carefully at the bill you are handing over and say the amount out loud.

Unlicensed Taxis

Anyone with a car can claim to be a cab driver and these scam taxis sometimes hang around at airports and tourist attractions. They might even have cars with stickers on
the side that make them look like a real taxi. These taxis might offer you cheap fixed rates, but using them is very dangerous because they are not licensed or regulated. They are not answerable to anyone, which means that they are free to scam you or steal from you.

To avoid unlicensed taxis, do some research to find out which taxi cab companies in the city are legitimate and stick to using those companies. When you are heading out somewhere, you can ask the reception of your hotel to call a taxi for you from a legitimate company. If you are out at a bar or restaurant, you can ask the staff there to call a cab for you. Look at the taxi closely and make sure that you check that the ID within the cab matches with the driver.

**Per-Person or Per-Journey?**

Another scam that I have seen taxi drivers try to pull in the past has been offering you and your travel companion a price, only to reveal when you get to your destination that the price they quoted is per person. This is simply manipulation and you can avoid it by using the meter, or (if it is a tuk tuk or a rickshaw) clarifying whether the rate is per person or not before you set off. It also helps to have the correct change, so that you don’t have to have any hassle with a taxi driver who refuses to pay you back change.

**Claims of Damage on Rental Cars or Scooters**
If you rent a motorbike, scooter or car on your travels, make sure that you check it over carefully for any prior damage including dents and scratches. It is a good idea to take photos of the condition of the vehicle before you rent it.

A common scam is for the rental company to accuse you of damaging the vehicle when you return it. They will insist that you caused a dent or a scratch that was there before and they will demand that you pay for the repairs. Being able to show photos as proof of the condition of the vehicle before you rented it is very valuable in this situation.

The Dodgy Tour Company

I met some young Canadian backpackers in Kandy, Sri Lanka. They were around 20 years old and were on a break from studying abroad in Singapore. These travelers were lovely and sweet - but incredibly naive.

One morning, I had a chat with one of the girls over breakfast.

Me: What do you guys have planned for today?

Her: We’re going on a tour!
Me: Oh that sounds great, what is the tour?

Her: Well, it’s not like, with an official tour company or anything. We just met this really nice guy at a bar last night and he was telling us about the tour company he is starting up. So, he offered us a really cheap deal on a sightseeing tour. He’s going to pick us up soon in his van with his friend and drive us to the sights.

Me: What?

Her: Yeah, it’s going to be great! We are excited!

Me: Does the tour company have a website? Does it have any Tripadvisor reviews? Did he even have a business card?

Her: Well... they are just starting the company so they didn’t have anything like that...

Me: Ok, so let me get this straight. You were at the bar last night when you were approached by a random guy. He says that he owns a tour company, but they have no website or reviews. He and his buddy are going to pick you up in their van and just “drive you around?”

Her: Well... when you put it that way it does seem a little sketchy.

Me: No kidding.

So I asked whether she had searched for “Common scams in Sri Lanka.” She hadn’t, so I had a quick Google on my laptop. Within seconds I was reading out loud to her from the page that I had found on the Rough Guides Sri Lanka website:
“It specifies that scammers do this with tuk tuks,” I said, “but they could also do this in a van too.” Her eyes grew wide. She realised what she had agreed to and how unsafe it sounded. At that point, the “tour guide” gave her a call to let her know that he would be a little bit later than expected. She tried to figure out why, as he seemed a little off. He finally said that he was delayed because he had to retrieve his business partner from jail!

The young Canadian traveler immediately canceled her trip.

Now, it may have been the case that Sri Lankan guy was legitimately starting up a tour agency and did not have any ill intentions. However, because he went about it in such a dodgy way I still would have discouraged those travellers from going with him. If he is really going to be a tour operator that visitors trust, he needs to establish a little more professionalism and accountability in his business so that he doesn’t appear scammy. An established tour company with a Tripadvisor page, legitimate reviews and a website is always a better bet than a “friendly” guy with a van.
Be Informed to Avoid Travel Scams

When it comes to travel safety, the very best thing you can do is to be informed. Read about your destination and know what to look out for. Find out typical scams and which areas of the city are best to avoid after dark. Ask people who have actually been there. Research, research, research.

So many people are fooled by tourist scams because they assume that “it’s just the way things are done here.” If you can arm yourself with the knowledge to know better and a dash of common sense, you will be vastly reduce your chances of being taken advantage of.

The Foreigner Price

My cousin and his girlfriend recently went on their first major backpacking trip – an around the world adventure that began in Mexico. A few days after he arrived he sent me a text:

“First night tacos were $35 CAD. Second night only $6 CAD.”
He learned fast about the foreigner price. I can imagine exactly what the restaurant where they ate tacos the first night was like. It was probably on the main tourist strip, with English speaking hosts and a glossy menu. The restaurant they ate at on the second night was probably full of local Mexicans, perhaps had slightly less fancy décor and offered much better and more authentic tacos for a fraction of the price.

The great news is that now that they have discovered that the two of them can have a meal for $6, they can eat for five nights for less than they spent on one night’s dinner. If they didn’t figure it out and carried on paying the inflated tourist prices, they would be burning through their travel savings five times as quickly.

The trick to figuring out the difference between the foreigner price and the local price is to understand what the price should be. Do your research into what the typical costs of things are and go beyond the tourist shops and restaurants to see where the locals are shopping and eating.

Sometimes the inflated tourist price will still be cheap in comparison to what things would cost in Canada. For example, to take you from Khao San Road in Bangkok to the MBK shopping centre the taxi driver might quote you 200 baht ($7.75CAD). For the distance, this is much less than you would pay for a taxi in any major Canadian city. However, the taxi drivers in Bangkok are legally required to use their
meter and if they quote you a set price you can be sure they are trying to rip you off. On the meter, the same trip should cost between 70 and 90 baht depending on traffic. ($2.70-$3.50CAD). Many people will accept the inflated foreigner price because it still sounds cheap to them. But even if the price is cheaper than in Canada, why pay twice as much as you should for your cab ride?

**What to Do if You Get Sick**

Getting sick while you are traveling really sucks, but it can happen. Whether it is food poisoning, an infection or a bad cough, it is important to slow down and treat the problem. There are simple issues, like headaches or a mild bout of traveller’s diarrhoea which can be treated by the over the counter pills that you keep in your first aid kit, but there are some issues that you should get proper medical care for. I learned this the hard way in Southeast Asia.

When I was in Malaysia I developed an infected mosquito bite on my foot, probably from swimming in a waterfall then hiking in closed toe shoes through a humid jungle. What I should have done was treat it right away and make sure the infection was cleared. However, I was hesitant to see a doctor and distracted by my busy travel and work schedule so I simply ignored the problem.
My infected mosquito bite festered in the tropical heat and humidity and got worse. It grew into a bacterial skin infection called Impetigo, which causes disgusting pus filled sores to spread up my foot and lower leg. Stupidly, I kept trying to treat the problem myself and avoided going to the doctor. I didn’t realise the severity of the situation until I was eating dinner with some friends in Kota Kinabalu and I felt a tingling sensation in my foot. I looked down and it was grotesquely swollen – the infection was starting to spread to the second layer of skin underneath.

I went to the doctor first thing the next morning. She spoke perfect English and the treatment room was similar to any doctor’s clinic in Canada, so I felt stupid for avoiding it for so long. She looked at my foot with horror, cleaned out the wounds while I screamed in pain and immediately prescribed me antibiotics. Thank goodness my foot was fine and all I have now are a couple of tiny scars on my lower leg from the deepest sores.

I was an idiot for leaving my infected foot for so long and I’m lucky that I didn’t suffer from permanent damage. However, I’ve seen a lot of other travellers make the same mistake. They let a bad cough fester for weeks or they ignore an infected wound because they are too nervous to visit a foreign doctor or they don’t want to stop partying and having fun while they rest for the time it takes to heal. But you are not invincible. If you get sick – get the treatment you need, take a day or two off and let your body recover.

Don’t worry about the cost of getting treatment at a foreign clinic – that’s why you have travel insurance! Ask the doctor to provide you with a printout of the charges so that you can claim it back.

**Transport - Getting from A to B**
On a night bus in Vietnam.

Unless you plan on spending all of your trip in one place, you will need to figure out how to get between destinations while you are travelling. Of course, this will depend on the transport options in the country you are visiting.

Buses are generally the cheapest form of transportation, but sometimes trains can be equally affordable or cheaper. Check out both options and compare the prices and travel times for the destination you are trying to reach.

For long journeys of 8+ hours, I recommend taking the train or bus at night. There are a few advantages to this – the main one being that you will save yourself the cost of a night of accommodation by sleeping on the train or bus instead. Most night buses will have cushy seats that recline and many night trains will actually have bed compartments where you can lie down. Another advantage is that you won’t waste a full day of your trip in transit just staring out the window – giving you more time for sightseeing and activities. Sleeping on a night bus or a train is never a great sleep, but it’s enough to keep you going for a day and you can always catch up on sleep the night after.
Be careful when sleeping on buses and trains. Bring your valuables (phone, camera, wallet and passport) with you to your seat rather than checking them in the luggage compartment under the bus. Keep these valuables close to your body with your arm around them so that if someone tries to steal your bag it would wake you up. I met a guy who had been robbed on a bus in Ecuador, but he had fallen asleep with his bag and wallet in the luggage compartment above him. It’s terrible that someone would take his money, but he could have protected himself by keeping his bag under his arm while he slept.

Accommodation

How a Hostel Works

I have spent a significant chunk of my adult life staying in hostels. While travelling through New Zealand, Europe, Southeast Asia, North America and South America over the last five years I have probably stayed in more than a hundred different hostels.

I think hostels are fantastic. They offer a cheaper option than hotels, they have a kitchen which allows you to save money by cooking your own meals and they create the perfect environment for socialising and making friends.

Every hostel will have its own unique features, but it will almost always feature a common area where people can hang out, such as a living room, computer room, roof garden, outdoor patio or even a swimming pool in some countries. There might be a bar onsite, or you might be able to buy snacks and beers from reception. Also, a
hostel will almost always have a kitchen for guests to use. You can buy your own groceries, keep them in a bag with your name on it in the fridge and use the kitchen to make meals – just make sure you’re not the jerk who leaves their dirty dishes in the sink!

Many hostels will also offer group activities, such as pizza night, barbeque night, movie night, walking tours, pub crawls and other events. These can be a fun way to make friends with other interesting travellers from around the world.

If you have never stayed in a hostel before, the idea might be a little strange to you but this is your chance to give it a try! Look through online reviews on Tripadvisor as well as websites such as HostelWorld and HostelBookers to find a hostel in your destination that gets great reviews. Try it for a few nights and see if you like the experience... you just might love it!

Here are some of the questions you might have:

**Aren’t hostels noisy party zones where I can’t get a good night’s sleep?**

Not necessarily. Every hostel is different and while there are loud party hostels there are also quiet and peaceful ones too if you are not the party type. Read the online descriptions and reviews to get an idea of whether the hostel has an atmosphere that you will enjoy.
Is it dangerous to share a room with other people?

A hostel dorm room is a cheap option because you share it with 3-10 other people, usually in a bunk bed situation similar to summer camp. This might feel a little weird at first, but remember that your hostel roommates are other travellers just like you, not psychopaths that want to kill you in your sleep. Say hello to them and soon you will be staying in a room with new friends rather than strangers.

You will have a locker where you can safely secure your valuables, so you don’t have to worry about theft. The only danger will be the loud snoring from the Australian guy in the bunk above you, so bring ear plugs.

You will usually have a choice of the size of your dorm room, from 4 bed dorms to 16 bed dorms. Of course, the more people in the room the cheaper the bed will be. If you are a female and prefer to stay with other women, there are all-female dorms available in many hostels around the world. Also, many hostels will have private rooms too which will cost more than a dorm, but might still be cheaper than a hotel.
Aren’t hostels dirty?
It totally depends on the hostel. I have stayed in hostels that are spotless and beautiful and hotels that are filthy and disgusting. A good, well run hostel will be kept clean, but a poor quality badly run hostel will have cleanliness issues. Check the reviews before booking and see how other guests have rated the hostel when it comes to cleanliness.

How can I find the best hostel?
There are so many different hostels to choose from and it’s not really about finding the best hostel, it’s more about finding the right one for you. Some people prefer a very social atmosphere in a hostel while others like a quiet place where they can be solitary and reflective. Before choosing a hostel, think about what’s important to you. There are a lot of factors to a hostel such as price, location, cleanliness, amenities, etc. It is not often that you find a hostel that performs well at all of these aspects yet is still cheap, so you have to ask yourself which features are most important?

Is it most important for your hostel to have the cheapest price, or are you willing to pay a little more for a better location? Is it important to you that the hostel has a fully equipped kitchen, or an all-female dorm? Are you content with staying in a 10 bed dorm, if it is much cheaper than a 4 bed dorm? Are you happy to go without Wi-Fi in your room to save a bit of money? For Lee and I, Wi-Fi is one of the most important aspects of a hostel because without it we can’t get our work done – so we are happy to pay a bit more for a hostel with strong internet. However, for you it might not be essential and you might be happy to save money and check your emails at a coffee shop or an internet café.

Once you have determined which features are most important to you, read the reviews of the hostels to find out which ones suit your needs the best. No hostel (or hotel or guesthouse) will ever be perfect and affordable. That’s why luxury resorts are so expensive – they provide you with the absolute best for all aspects of your stay. When you are choosing budget accommodation it’s all about figuring out where you are happy to compromise and what is most important to you.

How Couchsurfing Works
Couchsurfing is a beautiful thing that demonstrates the wonderful generosity that human beings are capable of. There are hundreds of thousands of people out there who would be happy to let you stay for free on their couch or in their spare room, simply for the pleasure of your company.

Couchsurfing is a “hospitality exchange” website where members create a profile and then indicate whether they are travelling or “hosting”. Those who are hosting offer travellers a place to sleep completely for free. Not only can you save a lot of money on your travels, but you will also have a local host who will be able to give you insider information about the city you are visiting.

As a guest there is nothing required of you, but you should certainly show your appreciation for your host by perhaps taking them out to dinner during your stay, helping with the dishes or cooking or contributing in some other way. Perhaps bring some Canadian treats with you to give your host as a thank-you gift.

Lee and I have Couchsurfed many times and have had wonderful experiences. Our hosts have been warm and welcoming, taking the time out of their schedules to show us around and spend time with us. Couchsurfing is more than just a free place to stay, it’s a way to meet other interesting people around the world and interact with them. If you are interested check out the Couchsurfing website, make your profile and start connecting with people in your destination country.

Is it dangerous to stay at the home of a total stranger? Not necessarily. The Couchsurfing website has strong security features such as a vouching system. You will be able to see reviews from other travellers who have stayed with your host, so you can verify what they are like. You can communicate with your host beforehand and if they have negative reviews (or no reviews at all), you don’t have to stay with them. Also, just like when meeting anyone from the internet in real life, meet them in a public place so that if they are not what you expected you can safely bail.
That said, the vast majority of people on Couchsurfing are wonderful, friendly, generous people. Take your time and message someone a few times so you get a feeling of what they are like before you go to see them. When you click with the right Couchsurfing host, they can make your experience in a destination so much more enjoyable and meaningful.

How AirBnB Works

Another option when you are travelling is AirBnB, which is a website where property owners can rent out their space to travellers. Sometimes it’s an entire house and sometimes it’s just one room in an apartment. You can search for a place to stay on the website and make a specific agreement with the homeowner.

We have used AirBnB a couple of times. Once was in Montreal, where we rented a room in a house with another couple for a few days. It was nice, but slightly awkward as we sometimes felt like we were encroaching on their space.

The second time was in La Paz, Bolivia, which was a fantastic experience. We rented a huge three bedroom apartment for two weeks at a very affordable price and we had the place all to ourselves. It was the entire top floor of an old house and the sister of the owner lived downstairs. They were a friendly family and really made us feel welcome.

AirBnB might work for you, especially if you plan on staying in a city for a while. Take a look around at the prices, sometimes they are similar to hotel prices but you might find that they offer better value because you will have a kitchen, laundry facilities and other conveniences. Also, if you are travelling as a couple or with a friend, it can sometimes be cheaper to split the cost of an AirBnb apartment.

Mistakes to Avoid

There are a few big pitfalls that you might run into on your first trip. What are some of the major mistakes to avoid when you are travelling?

Spending Too Much Time on Skype/Facebook

Ok, I understand, you’re feeling a little homesick. You are in a hostel in Berlin watching your little sister open her birthday presents on a tiny webcam screen and you wish that you could be there with your family. It’s fine to be a little bit homesick while you are travelling and to spend some of your time chatting to your friends and
family on Facebook, Whatsapp, Skype and all of the other apps we have to link ourselves together.

However, don’t spend too much time glued to your screen. It’s good to keep in touch, but too much can actually make you miss your friends and family more. Plus, you will miss out on the chance to enjoy your surroundings and to make friends with the people there around you!

**Not Trying the Local Food**

Me in Penang, Malaysia slurping up some delicious noodles.

Okay, so it might look completely different than the Kraft Dinner and poutine that you are used to – but it is comfort food to someone out there. A huge part of the travel experience is trying the local cuisine, even if it seems a little strange to you.

I was a little nervous about trying haggis in Scotland – after all it’s some pretty odd pieces of a sheep (heart, liver and lungs) minced with onion, oatmeal, fat and spices and cooked in the sheep’s stomach. It sounds a little intimidating, but I really wanted to try it while I was in Scotland since it is such a characteristic dish of that country, so I ordered it at a pub in Edinburgh. To my surprise, it was actually really good! Warm,
hearty, comforting and very satisfying – especially with the whiskey gravy, mashed potatoes and rutabaga. It was certainly better than the guinea pig I ate in Peru, or the maggots in the Amazon Jungle. You never know until you try!

**Working Too Much While Working Abroad**

Going on a working holiday is a great way to travel long term, because you will be able to earn money as you go. But don’t fall into the trap of working every day when you are away and failing to experience your destination. You don’t want to return home from a year working abroad and feel like you didn’t get a chance to enjoy the country you were visiting. Remember, with a working holiday visa the work is supposed to support the travel – not the other way around.

**Feeling Peer Pressure to Visit Certain Attractions**

When you tell people about where you will be travelling, there will be the odd person who will want to tell you exactly where you should go and what you should see. However, this is your trip and not theirs, so you don’t need to feel obligated by what you “should” do while travelling.

Some people will make helpful and useful suggestions, but others will make you feel like if you don’t visit the Sistine Chapel in Rome or go Bungy Jumping in New Zealand you will be completely missing out on the experience of your destination. You will be left feeling like you need to check off a list of attractions or you will be a failure.

Don’t worry about it! Every destination has its most popular attractions, but it is only worth visiting them if you are actually interested in them! If you have no interest in art or museums, the Louvre won’t be that exciting for you – but there is enough to see and do in Paris that you will find something to suit your interests. When you travel, do what you want to do and see what you want to see – and don’t worry what others think.

**Trying to Cram Too Much In**

Just a couple of weeks ago in a hostel in Quito, Ecuador I met a friendly young Canadian traveller on his first big backpacking trip. He had a typed itinerary containing all of his travel notes and ideas for where he wanted to go. He excitedly listed all of the countries he wanted to cover – Ecuador, Peru, Bolivia, Chile, Argentina and Brazil – pretty much the majority of the entire continent of South America.
“So how many months do you have?” I asked.

“Six weeks.”

“Wait... what?”

I tried to tell him that there was no way he would be able to cover that much distance in only six weeks. He would have to take incredibly long bus journeys every other day and he would never have long enough in each place to relax and enjoy himself.

I suggested that he cut his trip down by at least half – it’s better to actually enjoy three countries than to rush like an exhausted maniac through six countries. I’m not sure if he took my advice because he had left Quito on a bus to Banos by the following morning!

**Finding Budget Friendly Things to Do**

While in Argentina I went on a hike with some girls from the hostel.

Travel budgeting is simple math – the less you spend every day the longer you can stay on the road. One of the best ways to help with this is to find budget friendly things to do on your travels, rather than overpriced package tours and
hop-on-hop-off buses. There are a lot of fun things that you can do that will be free or will cost you very little money, such as:

- Going for a hike to a lookout point or along a local trail.
- Walking through a local marketplace and treating yourself to street food or fresh fruit for less than a few dollars.
- Spend an afternoon chilling out on the beach with a good book.
- Go on a walk with your camera and find beautiful scenes to photograph.
- Going on a free walking tour. These are offered in many cities around the world and are often quite interesting! (bring a small amount of cash to tip your guide at the end)
- Getting together with friends from the hostel, chipping in for ingredients at the supermarket and cooking up a simple but tasty feast together in the hostel.
- There are lots of museums, galleries and historic sites around the world that are free or only cost less than $5 to enter.
- Go window shopping. For example, even if you can’t afford the stylish clothes you can still stroll down the Champs-Elysees in Paris and see how the wealthy live.
- Buy some snacks from a local vendor and have a picnic somewhere at a scenic lookout or a pretty park.

One of the things I like to do while travelling is to just wander. Head out the door of your hostel and walk in whatever direction strikes you as most interesting (keeping safety in mind of course). Stroll aimlessly and let yourself be tempted into interesting stores, cute cafes or narrow cobblestone streets.

I find that I tend to stumble upon the most interesting things this way, such as an elaborate changing of the guard ceremony in Rome or that time when a random marching band suddenly came around the corner in New Orleans. Always leave yourself time to wander and just absorb the details of where you are, noticing just how different it is from the world you are used to in Canada.

**Don’t Forget Your Student Card**

If you are a student at a college or university back in Canada you should absolutely bring your student card with you while you are travelling. There are so many art galleries, museums, historic sites and other attractions that offer you discounted entry with a student card. Even if you have graduated right before your trip, bring it along anyway – it will likely still be accepted.
One of the most common apprehensions that I hear from first time travellers is that they don’t speak another language other than English and they are nervous about not being able to communicate in other countries. Unless you are from Quebec and speak French, or you have learned another language while growing up, many Canadians only speak English. I can assure you that not speaking the language shouldn’t stop you from travelling and that it’s less of a problem than you might think.

I’ve travelled all over Europe and Asia without speaking the languages there and I didn’t have any problems. English really is a universal language and a lot of people in other parts of the world speak it, especially those who work in the tourism industry such as hotel staff, tour guides and taxi drivers.

However, just because you can get around in most places with English doesn’t mean that you shouldn’t give the local language a try. In some places, especially the more off-the-beaten-track destinations, it will be harder to find people who speak English. Being able to communicate your basic needs in the local language will make it much easier to navigate everywhere you want to go. Also, the locals will love the fact that you are making an effort to speak their language and you will get a very pleased
reaction. Learning a little bit of the language can help you immerse yourself in the culture you are travelling in, making the experience much richer.

Some of the most important phrases that you can learn in the local language when you are travelling are “Please”, “Thank You”, “Hello” and “Goodbye”. Look them up and memorise them, as you will use them every day. Other important things you might want to learn include asking how much something costs and asking where something is.

If you start to build a basic vocabulary with a few verbs and common nouns, you will be able to make simple requests and ask basic questions. Learn how to say, “Speak slower please,” which will help you to understand the responses. If you don’t catch all of the words someone is saying to you, pay attention to their body language and the situation to help you figure it out.

Ways to Learn Another Language

Picking up another language will not only enhance your travels, but it will be a skill that will benefit you in the future and open up new possibilities in your life and your career. Also, think about how many more new and exciting people you will be able to talk to when you can speak another language! Here are some ways that you can learn another language:

Lessons

If you have the time to take some lessons in your home country before you go on your backpacking trip, this will really benefit you. Learning in a group is fun and social and having a knowledgeable teacher whom you can ask questions to is very helpful. Before we went to South America I took some Spanish lessons in England that really helped me to get a foundation in the language.

Also, when you arrive at your destination you might find language classes available at affordable rates. Also, it’s a fun way to make new friends – especially when you are travelling solo. Just do a Google search for “(Language) Lessons in (City)” and you will have lots of choices.

DuoLingo
Those poets, always walking so slowly....

Another great language learning resource is the app Duolingo, which you can download onto your Smartphone. You will have many bored hours sitting on buses during your trip, so why not use that time to improve your language skills? This app is really simple and fun and it involves matching words with pictures, as well as speaking and writing sentences.

**Rosetta Stone**

Proven to work. Guaranteed.

“If you’re serious about learning a language, Rosetta Stone is well worth your money.” — Macworld, July 27, 2016
This is considered to be one of the best examples of language learning software produced so far and after looking at it with Lee, I can see why. It teaches you by immersing you in the language, without providing you context in your native language. You match up phrases with photographs, so you learn to say what you see – rather than constantly translating back and forth in your head.

**Michel Thomas Language Learning Courses**

Michel Thomas is actually a pretty incredible guy. He survived being imprisoned in a Nazi concentration camp, served in the French Resistance and worked with the US Army Counter Intelligence Corps during World War II. He has developed his own method of language learning called the “Michel Thomas Method” and his educational recordings are available in Spanish, French, German, Italian, Japanese, Dutch, Greek, Polish, Portuguese, Russian, Arabic, and Mandarin Chinese.

Personally, I like the Michel Thomas Method and find that it helps me to learn. He slowly introduces you to short words and phrases, starting with simple sentences and then building up to more complicated phrases. You learn the basic “building blocks” of the language first and then you must think out how to say the phrase, which really helps you to put sentences together.

**Language Learning Podcasts**

Of course, another great way to learn another language is to download one of the many great language learning podcasts available. When you are on that 8 hour bus journey, you can listen to podcasts on your mp3 player or smartphone and make the most of that boring transit time.
Talking to People!

One of the best ways to improve your skills in another language is to practice it by talking to people! Take the time to chat with the people you see from day to day, from the lady behind the counter in the shop to your taxi driver to the other guests in your hotel. At first you will only be able to say the simplest things, but after a while you will be able to hold more complex conversations. The more you practice by actually talking to people, the quicker you will learn.

Yes, it can sometimes be very frustrating when you just want to ask something simple and you can’t seem to get your point across to the other person. Yes, it can be lonely and isolating when everyone is chatting in another language and you don’t know what they are talking about. Yes, it can be difficult and time consuming to learn a language. But don’t give up – and certainly don’t cancel your trip!

Embrace the challenge and learn the basic words and phrases you need to get around – and don’t stress yourself out about it. Relax, enjoy your travels, giggle when you use the wrong word and talk to people as often as you can. Not only will you be exploring new foreign lands, you will also be learning a new skill and developing yourself outside of your comfort zone – isn’t that what travel is all about?

Benny the Irish Polyglot

Another fantastic resource for learning languages is Benny’s blog. He is an Irish traveler who has become fluent in seven languages and offers a ton of helpful tips for learning new languages.

What to Do When Someone Assumes You Are American
First of all, stay calm. Take a few deep breaths. Chances are, the person didn’t mean to insult you and simply doesn’t have enough experience with North American accents to tell the difference between a Canuck and a Yank. Hey, I sometimes can’t even tell the difference – it’s not like we all walk around calling each other “Hoser”, saying “eh?” after every sentence and wearing hockey jerseys. Simply correct their mistake and politely smile. The politeness will confirm for them that you are in fact, truly Canadian.

According to a survey by CBC.ca, two thirds of Canadian respondents said they would be very offended if they were mistaken for Americans. I have personally seen a lot of Canadian travellers get annoyed when mistaken for Americans, but it’s not something to get bent out of shape about. Would you be able to tell the difference between an Australian accent and a New Zealand accent? There are differences of course, but it takes someone familiar with both countries to spot them. When someone says to me, “So, what part of the States are you from?” I never fly off the handle with them, nor go into a long rant. I simply smile and say, “I’m from Canada” and then carry on the conversation.

Why? Because there is no need to be insulted! Even though we take great pains to let everyone know how different from Americans we are, like pretending not to be related to your embarrassing sibling on the first day of school, we are actually quite similar at first glance.

Also, when Canadians get super offended by being called American, it makes us look pretty hostile and prejudiced against Americans. Why is it so insulting to be merely mistaken for a Yank? Sure, our southerly neighbours have their flaws as a nation, but
it’s unfair to characterise all Americans in a bad light. Every country in the world contains a fair mix of jerks and wonderful people – the USA is no exception.

Instead, just see it as an opportunity to educate people. To most people, our country is a vast and mysterious frozen wilderness associated with moose, Niagara Falls and Justin Bieber. When people from other countries meet you they will very likely ask stupid questions about Canada, which is totally fine.

Countless people will tell you that they have relatives in Toronto, even if you are from Vancouver which is practically the entire length of Europe away. Don’t give them a condescending geography lesson right off the bat; they are only trying to connect with you.

When people ask you if it snows all year round, if you have seen a bear, or if you speak French, don’t roll your eyes and give a snarky answer. They are just trying to verify the image that they have of our country and gain an understanding of what it is like to live in. Take the time to answer their questions and let them know what life in Canada is like. Then, ask them about where they are from and find out a little more about them – this type of friendly cultural exchange is what travel is all about.

**Great Destinations for First Time Travellers**

One of the big questions that you will have to answer is – where in the world do you want to go? Perhaps you already know. Many aspiring travellers I know have that dream destination that they have wanted to visit for years. Maybe you have always dreamed about seeing the Taj Mahal in India, learning to surf in Australia or visiting the house where Shakespeare was born in Stratford Upon Avon, England. But what if you know you want to go somewhere, but aren’t sure where?

There are some destinations in the world that are easier for first time travellers to visit than others. Going travelling for the first time is enough of a challenge, you don’t want to go somewhere that is difficult and dangerous for travellers.

If you are looking for ideas, the following destinations are all places where a first time traveller will have no problem making their way around. Consider them for your first trip, then once you have some travel experience under your belt you can look at some of the more obscure and challenging locations.
Also, a great post to read when you are choosing where to go is this guide to [The Five Most Awesome Gap Year Destinations](#).

**Southeast Asia**

I love Southeast Asia so much. It’s the perfect place for a traveller. The culture is fascinating and totally different than what you are used to back in Canada, the locals are polite and friendly and it’s easy to get around. The food is fragrant and flavourful (Pad Thai! Vietnamese Pho! Malaysian Nasi Lemak! Cambodian curries!) and a full meal from a street vendor will cost you less than a dollar. You can easily live on $40 per day, even including buses and attractions. This is a place where your money will really go far, especially when you are drinking 25 cent beers on the street corner café in Hanoi.

One of the main reasons to travel to Southeast Asia is that the culture is just so incredibly different there and you are sure to see something every day that makes you say, “What the hell is going on?” Whether it’s someone walking a monkey down the street or a motorbike carrying a fridge, things are a just a bit bizarre in a fascinating way.

The people are lovely, warm and welcoming. Some of them will try to scam you, especially the tuk tuk drivers, but as long as you know what to watch out for you can wave them away with a smile. A lot of the time, people are happy to help you if they can. Most people speak at least enough English for basic communication with you and many people speak excellent English, so you will have no trouble making yourself understood.
Make sure that you are respectful to the local beliefs, such as covering your shoulders and legs in a temple and avoiding pointing your feet at people as this is considered very offensive. The people here are generally polite and seek to avoid confrontation, so they might not tell you if you are being inappropriate – it’s up to you to make sure you act respectfully especially when visiting sacred sites.

During your travels in Southeast Asia you can enjoy trekking in the jungle, visiting ornate temples, watching the Buddhist monks pray in their saffron-coloured robes, shopping in the bizarre and colourful markets and so much more. There is just so much to choose from in this part of the world, from the amazing beaches of the islands of Southern Thailand to the natural wonders of the national parks in Borneo. Angkor Wat in Cambodia is the largest temple complex in the world and watching the sun come up there is one of my favourite travel memories.

Be warned – while in Southeast Asia you won’t always find the kind of infrastructure you are used to in Canada. Of course, Bangkok has gleaming modern shopping malls and hotels, but once you get into parts of rural Thailand, Cambodia, Laos and Vietnam you will that things are a lot simpler. Don’t expect high speed wifi, buses that run on time or Canadian levels of organisation, service or safety. You might find yourself in a simple hut with not much more than a squat toilet and a cold shower (but who wants a hot shower when it’s 30 degrees and humid outside?). You might find yourself sandwiched between an entire family and half a dozen live chickens on a bus clattering down a dusty road – but its all part of the adventure.

Southeast Asia is a vast part of the world and there is so much to see and do here that I could write about an entire book about it!

More Reading on Southeast Asia:

- A Complete Guide to Visas in Southeast Asia
- 26 Things I Have Learned While Travelling South East Asia
- 20 Tips for Not Getting Ripped off in South East Asia
- Southeast Asia Tuk Tuk Tips – How Not to Get Taken for a Ride

South America
South America is another massive continent filled with great adventures for the first time traveller. You could hike to Machu Picchu, learn to salsa in Colombia, take a 4x4 tour across the otherworldly Salar de Uyuni in Bolivia (google it), eat steak and red wine in Argentina, drink caipirinhas on Copacabana beach in Brazil and go trekking deep in the Amazon jungle. It’s a huge continent, so you should give yourself at least a few months or travel time or limit your focus to a couple of select countries that interest you the most.

One of the added challenges of South America is that it is harder to get around without speaking the local language. In our 10 months of travel around Southeast Asia we were fine just speaking English, but as soon as we arrived in Peru we realised that a basic level of Spanish was incredibly helpful. Some people will speak English, but many of them won’t. Take some basic Spanish lessons before you go and use an app like Duolingo to help you along. Check out the “Languages” section of this book for more tips on learning another language while travelling.

South America can be nearly as cheap as Southeast Asia, but it can also be as expensive as Europe – depending on where you go. In places like Bolivia, Peru and Ecuador we have been able to find private hotel rooms for around $15-$25 a night.
However, in places like Argentina, Chile and Brazil the prices can be close to $35-$45 for a similar room. Prices for transport, food, entertainment and other expenses also vary between these countries in a similar way.

There are plenty of hostels to choose from in most destinations in South America, offering dorm rooms that are perfect for budget travellers. When it comes to transport between cities, the main option will be buses – there are very few trains. It is an enormous continent, so don’t try to do too much. It’s just not reasonable to cover it all in a few months. Unless you are spending 5-6 months or more, narrow down your scope and choose a few countries to focus on. That will allow you enough time for the long bus rides and the great distances, while still having enough time in each destination so that you can really get to know the culture and enjoy yourself.

More Reading on South America:
- The Ultimate Backpacker Visa Guide to South America
- Do You Need To Speak Spanish to Travel South America?
- Our South America Post Archives

New Zealand/Australia
New Zealand was where I headed on my first big long term travel adventure and I think either New Zealand or Australia are excellent choices for your first big trip. They are both English speaking developed countries, so there will be little to no culture shock. I thought that going travelling and adjusting to life in a new country would be enough of a challenge without having to also learn a new language, so that was one of the factors involved in choosing New Zealand.

They have all of the conveniences that you are used to in Canada, including modern transport systems, shops, clinics, etc. so life will be really easy. Also, both New Zealand and Australia offer a Working Holiday Visa for Canadians, which means that you could live abroad for a year and work to support yourself while you travel. When it comes to finding temporary jobs as a backpacker, New Zealand and Australia are both ideal. There is quite a bit of agriculture in either country, including plenty of vineyards, farms and fruit orchards. That means that seasonal labour jobs are everywhere and you can make your way around the country while harvesting vegetables, picking fruit or pruning vines.

Also, in both Australia and New Zealand tourism is a large industry. This means that there are many hotels, hostels, bars, restaurants and cafes that are looking to hire outgoing and friendly travellers with customer service experience and the right attitude. Also, since it’s quite common for young travellers to come to NZ or Oz on a working holiday, many companies are used to dealing with people on a temporary work visa and they will be open to hiring you for the short term.

There are plenty of great backpacker hostels in either location to choose from and you will meet so many amazing people from all over the world. Also, the local Kiwis and Aussies are pretty awesome too. They are warm and friendly and have a fun-loving and laid back attitude to life. They will welcome you with open arms and will make sure that you have an unforgettable time in their country.

More Reading on Australia and New Zealand:

- How to Get An Australian Working Holiday Visa
- Why New Zealand is Brilliant for Working Holidays
- 5 Reasons New Zealand Is Great For First Time Backpackers
- Great Ideas for Melbourne, Australia Day Trips
- Australia Archives
- New Zealand Archives

Europe
If you love culture, history, architecture, food and the city life – head to Europe. Imagine yourself sipping coffee in a café in Paris, riding a bicycle around Amsterdam, dancing to live music in a local pub in a small town in Ireland, admiring the riches of the Vatican in Rome, or island hopping in the Greek sunshine. Europe has so many different cultures and languages and so many thousands of years of history, all crammed into a space smaller than Canada. The museums and art galleries here are truly impressive, and because of the historic architecture and sculptures just walking down the street in many European cities feels like visiting a museum.

In Europe the prices will be higher than they would be in Southeast Asia or the cheaper parts of South America, so you will have to save up more money for your trip. Prices in the big popular cities in Western Europe like Rome, London, Paris will be expensive, similar to what you might be used to if you live in Vancouver or Toronto.

However, prices will vary around Europe and there are places in Eastern Europe such as Prague, Bratislava and Bulgaria that will be cheaper. You can also save money in Europe by staying in hostels (you will find them almost everywhere) and cooking your own food. Or, consider Couchsurfing to make your trip even more affordable and have the experience of staying with locals who can show you around and give you an insight into the culture.
There’s An Entire World Out There!

These are just a few ideas to get you thinking about where you want to go, but it’s certainly not an extensive list. These are some of the most common destinations for travellers on their first trip, but there are so many more places to explore. Locations such as India, The Middle East or Africa are a little bit more difficult to travel, but that doesn’t mean that they are off limits. You might want to volunteer there with a group, or travel with an organised tour.

If you have somewhere that you have always dreamed of visiting, the best thing to do is to talk to someone who has been there. They will be able to give you their honest opinion and provide you with an accurate picture of what it is like to travel there. They might even be able to give you contacts in that location or recommend places to stay and things to do.
There is a big world out there, so get out there and start researching your dream destination.

**Working and Travelling**

**How Working Holiday Visas Work**

One of the best ways that you can travel abroad for a long time is to get a working holiday visa. These types of visas will allow you to work and reside in a country for 1-2 years, so that you can pick up jobs as you travel. Usually you have to be below the age of 30, although some visas are valid until you are 35. The great thing about being a Canuck (besides Roll up the Rim, of course) is that Canadians have the option of 32 different countries to work abroad in. That means that you could work in a different country for every year of your 20s and still not even cover half of them.

The point of a working holiday visa is not to get a job that will further your career. If you do happen to get a job that aligns with your interests and matches what you studied in school, that’s a wonderful bonus. However, don’t expect this to happen. Most of the time backpackers work in retail, farm labour, customer service or as wait staff in restaurants or staff in hotels and hostels. These are positions that are likely to hire short term or seasonal staff.

**You Can Apply for Working Holiday Visas on Your Own**

When I applied for my working holiday in New Zealand I used the services of a company that assists young travellers in their visa applications. However, I would not recommend that you do the same. I realised that the company charged hundreds of dollars but didn’t really offer anything that I couldn’t have done on my own. I was really nervous and had no idea what I was doing, so the idea of having a company to arrange things and hold my hand was very appealing. However, the application process for many working holiday visas is not as hard as you might think and you can find all of the information you need online.

Some companies might offer you a couple of nights in a hostel, but this is much cheaper if you book it on your own. Help with setting up a bank account? In my experience, they just showed me on a map where the bank was and I had to set up the account myself. 24/7 help and support? They are just going to direct you to whomever can help you with your issue – whether it is the police or the embassy – so why not just contact those resources for help on your own?
I think these companies take advantage of the fact that first time travellers are really nervous and don’t realise how easy it is to handle things in another country. Take it from me – you are a capable adult and you really don’t need help with many of the things that these companies offer to help you with. Take a close look at what a working abroad program offers you and think critically about whether it is really worth your money. Those hundreds of dollars could go a lot further if you put them towards food, hostels and bus fare instead.

Other Options for Working and Travelling

Teaching English

Here’s another advantage of being born Canadian - English is probably your native language (unless you are from Quebec). The good thing about this is that English is, by far, the most popular language in the world. People all over the world want to learn English, so that they can move abroad and participate in the world’s economy. What this means for you is that there are a vast array of English teaching jobs available out there - from Brazil to China to Bulgaria and everywhere in between.
Teaching English can be a great way to earn money while you travel. Many jobs will offer you free accommodation as well as a salary and the rates can be quite good. Sometimes employers will even reimburse the cost of your airfare. If you love teaching the work will be quite rewarding and it will be a great way to get to know the local people. Also, it’s a great opportunity for you to learn the local language while you are there.

The requirements for obtaining this job are different depending on where you go, but usually it will require some form of TEFL (Teaching English as a Foreign Language) certification. Sometimes you will need to have a bachelor’s degree from a university, but this is not always the case. There are people teaching English overseas without a degree, but they are more often in the smaller rural areas where it is more difficult for schools to recruit. A teaching degree helps, but nearly any degree will do.

The TEFL program takes about 120 hours and includes classwork and lectures, as well as 6 hours of observed teaching practice. It is offered in a range of locations around the world (so you could be travelling while completing it!). If you would like to learn more about teaching English overseas, here are some very helpful links:

- How to Teach English Overseas - from yTravel Blog
- Teaching English Abroad: Are You Qualified?
- Top 5 Countries to Make the Most Money Teaching English Overseas
- How to Teach English Abroad - from Great Big Scary World

**Working on a Cruise Ship**
Another option for working while you travel is to get a job on a cruise ship. The great thing about a cruise ship is that these days they are like floating cities - they have an incredible array of amenities including salons, bars, restaurants, art galleries, spas and much more. This means that there is a huge variety of jobs that you could do onboard.

If your degree is in the Fine Arts, you could consider working in an art gallery on board one of the luxury liners. If you have experience in childcare, you would work in the ship’s daycare and organise activities for the kids. If you have hospitality or bar and restaurant experience, there are also plenty of opportunities.

Other jobs on cruise ships include casino jobs, IT jobs, medical jobs and much more. There are even jobs for musicians and performers. I have a friend who has travelled all over the world working on a cruise ship as a librarian.

The huge advantage of working on a cruise ship is that you will get to wake up in a different destination every day and see the world, while earning money. Also, since your accommodation and food are provided, it can be a great way to save (unless you blow it all on lavish nights out when you are in port). Most ships will offer high quality crew accommodation, as well as gyms, movie nights, theme parties and even language lessons.
If you would like to learn more about working on a cruise ship, here are some helpful links:

- [What’s It Like to Actually Work on a Cruise Ship](#)
- [So You Want to Work on a Cruise Ship](#)
- [Where to Find Cruise Ship Jobs](#)

**WWOOFing**

Another way to work as you travel is to join up with WWOOFing, which stands for Willing Workers On Organic Farms. This is a program that gets you in touch with farms all over the world, from Sweden to Croatia to New Zealand to Argentina. The deal is that you trade a few hours of labour per day for a free place to stay and free food. The typical tasks you will do depend on the type of farm that you are working at, but they will usually include tasks like harvesting, planting, milking, feeding animals, chopping wood, etc.

For example, I WWOOFed on a farm in Hawke’s Bay, New Zealand and I was responsible for milking the goats, feeding the chickens, baking cookies, doing the washing and babysitting the 4 year old. Lee worked on the same farm at a different point and he was given more typically “manly” tasks like chopping wood and moving heavy stuff.
The great thing about WWOOFing is that it gives you a chance to experience a different side of life - far removed from the hustle and bustle of the city. You’ll get to see what the rural life is like in your destination and really get to know a local family. You’ll learn about what type of food is grown, what animals are reared and how farming methods differ from what you might be familiar with. It’s fascinating to learn about this different aspect of life - and the slow pace on a farm is truly enjoyable and relaxing. Plus, the starry skies at night are pretty amazing.

Plus, this is also a great way to make your travel budget stretch further. You won’t have to spend a penny, as your accommodation and food will be covered. Since you are on a farm in the middle of nowhere, you won’t have much opportunity to spend money. When I did it in New Zealand it was a way to essentially “freeze” my travel budget and make my trip longer.

If you would like to learn more about WWOOFing, here are some helpful links:

- [The Official WWOOFing Website](#)
- [How to Travel And Work Around the World with WWOOF](#)
- [Top 10 Tips for WWOOFing](#)
- [Do’s and Don’t: WWOOFing](#)
- [8 Tips for First Time WWOOFers](#)

**Coming Home**
So you’ve had an amazing, life changing travel experience in an exotic and far flung location. You’ve gone outside of your comfort zone, you’ve met people from all over the world, you’ve tried new foods and experienced new things. You’ve had moments of bewilderment, frustration and joy and the experience has changed you in deep and powerful ways.

**Then you come home.**

You walk back through the terminal at Pearson or Vancouver International. It’s been so long since you were here that the Canadian accent now sounds strange and foreign to your ears.

Your friends and family members greet you with hugs. They call you “World Traveller” and they make a few sweet and dorky Canadian jokes about your “adventures.” They ask you about your trip and you share a few stories and photos. They ask you what your favourite countries are and they ask if you were ever scared or in danger. But after not too long their eyes start to glaze over.

They start telling you about the snowfall that you missed last winter, about an event they went to at the local community center, about how Myrtle down the road is having a potluck on Friday. All of your friends are working in the same jobs and make the same tired quips about “Thank god it’s Friday!” or “Ugh, Monday mornings!” People are still asking the same questions - “What do you do for a living?”
“When are you going to settle down?” It’s not usual to suddenly feel a little bit out of place in your hometown.

**Reverse Culture Shock**

Sometimes one of the hardest parts of returning home is reverse culture shock. It’s when you realise that your travel experiences have transformed you so much that you no longer fit into your home culture anymore. This can be a very strange and uneasy feeling.

Now, this doesn’t mean that you are more enlightened or a better person than your friends and family members who haven’t travelled.

It annoys me when travellers get too pretentious about their adventures and start to believe that they are enlightened and special just because they backpacked around South America for 6 months. There is more than one way to live a meaningful life. Travel is important to you, but everyone has different priorities.

Your friends might have prioritised buying a house, or having babies, or getting married - because those things are as meaningful to them as travel is to you. It is important to remember this, so that you don’t end up being a travel snob. Nothing is more unlikeable than thinking that you are better than everyone else.

With this in mind, don’t take it too personally when people aren’t as deeply interested in your adventures as you would hope them to be. Some people will be intrigued, but others won’t understand why you did it. That’s okay. You can answer questions if people need clarification, but otherwise let the conversation flow naturally and don’t worry about it.

**How Not to Become a Travel Show-Off**
We’ve all met that person who rambles on non-stop about their travels in a pretentious way and ends up annoying everyone around them. The truth is – no matter how amazing your travels were - no one wants to talk to someone who is only focused on themselves. Here are some tips for talking about your travels so that you don’t become an annoying cliche:

- Don’t bring it up all the time. You don’t want to be the person who starts every story with, “This one time in Thailand...” It gets old quick.
- Gauge your listener’s interest. It’s hard to believe, because your experience was so meaningful to you, but others might not really want to hear about it in great detail. Not everyone you speak to is interested in travel to the extent that you are, so if they ask you can give them a brief update on where you have been. “I’ve just returned from backpacking in Southeast Asia for 6 months”. If they start asking questions you can share more info, but if they don’t seem intrigued to learn more just move along with the conversation naturally.
- Don’t count countries and brag about your tally. It doesn’t matter if you have been to 20, 50 or 100 countries – what matters is what you did there. Focus on experiences rather than numbers.
- Don’t tell people, “You had to be there.” It sounds a bit pretentious and it makes people feel left out, like laughing at an inside joke without explaining it.
If you want to tell them about something you experienced, do your best to explain it or don't bring it up.

- Ask others what they have been up to recently as well. Don’t assume that their lives have been boring because they have stayed in your home town. They might have gotten a promotion, had a baby or started a new hobby – so listen to their stories as well. Remember that experiences are rich and meaningful wherever you are.
- Choose the most entertaining and relevant stories. You don’t have to tell everyone all the tiny details of your trip, most of the day to day moments such as sitting on buses and buying food from the supermarket won’t be that interesting.
- Save some stories for later. You don’t have to tell everyone everything as soon as you return, as they are likely to be overwhelmed with this barrage of information about your trip. Instead, give them the summary then wait for a natural moment to reveal each anecdote when it suits the conversation.

If you can be humble when you are talking about your travels, you will avoid being the cliche braggart who likes to show off at every opportunity about everywhere they have been. This way, people who are interested in your travels will ask you about them and you can share your stories in a meaningful way with a receptive audience.

You can have an experience that was deeply meaningful and transformative for you - without having to make everyone else feel like they are unenlightened for not following the travel path.

**You Never Have To Stop Travelling**
Now that you’ve had an amazing travel adventure and it’s time to return home, you might be feeling a little melancholy that it’s all over. You might be wondering, “Was that it? Do I have to have a “normal” life now and never go travelling again, aside from the odd two week vacation in Cancun?”

The answer is, “Not if you don’t want to.” If you have enjoyed travelling and it is something that you are passionate about, you can incorporate it into all stages of your life. From your experiences you have realised that you don’t have to be rich or have an amazing job to travel, you simply have to choose to make it a priority in your life.

For example, my Grade 10 English teacher loved to travel and he and his wife would live frugally during the school year so that they could spend their summers having amazing adventures all over the world. I remember sitting in class as he excitedly showed us photos of him trekking and riding elephants in Nepal, realising that I wanted to make travel part of my life too.

As you get older your priorities might change and you might decide to settle down, have a family and have a bit more stability in your life. However, that doesn’t mean that your love of travel has to be stifled. There are many ways that you can keep seeing the world, even if it’s taking a two month trip every couple of years. Whether
you want to take the kids on a week long road trip or home school them for a year so that you can show them the world, there are ways to make travel happen in your life.

The truth is that I don’t think I will ever be “finished” travelling. The idea itself doesn’t make sense to me, because for me to “finish travelling” sounds just as strange as if I were to “finish reading books” or “finish listening to music” or “finish learning new things”. I suppose you could stop reading, listening to music or learning or even travelling, but why would you?

Just as I will never read all of the books in the world and be “finished”, I will never feel I have had enough of going to new places and doing interesting things. Rather than making the world feel smaller, travel only makes the world feel exponentially bigger as I learn about all of the things I would love to see and do.

Travel enriches my life, provides me with endless fascination and excites me to no end, so to decide to “cease and desist” at any point seems silly to me. Just like I plan to keep on reading and learning until I am old and grey, I also plan to make travel a part of my life throughout all of its stages.

I believe that at any stage of my life I will be able to make room for a travel experience. Of course, I realise that our current full time nomadic lifestyle will not be the lifestyle we always have. Someday we may have a house, some kids and a dog, but that won’t stop us from travelling. There is more than one way to go on a travel adventure and I plan to create travel experiences throughout my own life that suit whatever my priorities are at the time.

So the answer to the question of “When do you plan to finish travelling and settle down?” is “Never”. There will never be a point when I hang up my backpack for good and decide that I cannot poke my curious head into any more strange and fascinating corners of the world.

The world is an infinite library and I don't plan to ever stop reading.