

Canadians Travelling Abroad

Be Prepared

- Plan ahead; organize your itinerary as far ahead and as completely as possible.
- Check Government of Canada website for travel warnings and advisories; reconsider travel plans if necessary.
- Be very clear about your trip purpose and goals especially if it involves Servas Other Programming such as volunteerism, language, or cultural experiences.
- Your passport must be valid for at least six months after returning to Canada.
- Apply for all visas, noting some visas are available at airport arrivals.
- Purchase trip cancellation and travel insurance.
- Consider impact of language and cultural differences in all communications.
- Give copies of significant documents (passport, credit card numbers, PINs, prescriptions) to a friend or family; pack extra set in your luggage away from originals.
- Know contact information for Canadian embassies/high commissions overseas.
- Review websites, guidebooks, maps, and language resources.
- Depending on the countries you are visiting, it may be cheaper to buy transport, event, or activity tickets in advance; cheaper options for European and British rail tickets if purchased in North America.
- Empty wallet or purse of unnecessary items.
- Travel as light as possible.
- Bring unmarked and clean US/Euros cash; small denominations for tips, gifts, etc.; larger denominations for currency exchange.
- Pack extra set of clothes in carry-on luggage.
- Bring small snacks for travels until settled at destination.

Planning takes Time

- Plans can change; be flexible and patient.
- Always have a Plan B; expect the unexpected.

Communications can be Complicated

- Email is not the best way to communicate especially if there are language issues; consider follow up with other communications (e.g., phone calls, text).
- Learn to read basic signs - e.g., exit, entrance, store signs, toilets.
- Learn some language phrases such as greetings, pleasantries, numbers, and shop talk.
- Familiarize yourself with local customs, holidays, and cultural traditions from people, business books, or local writings.
- Note that toll-free numbers may not work outside of Canada or the U.S; insurance and credit card companies will accept collect calls at a designated number.

On Arrival

- Confirm contents of your luggage.
- Register with the Canadian Embassy or High Commission in case of emergency or disaster, especially if staying in a country for more than a week.
- If required, register with the local police, especially if staying in a country for more than a week.

Security

- Be aware of your surroundings, especially if traveling alone.
- If a situation does not feel comfortable, remove yourself from the circumstances.
- Do not get involved in civil disobedience or unrest.

- Remember in an unfamiliar location, rules may not be the same as at home and cues you normally depend on may be missing or different.
- Stay informed by getting current news from a reliable source.
- Learn about social norms, especially gender relations, and the political and social climate.
- Note that local police may not act in your best interest.
- If you feel pressured beyond your comfort level by someone, be polite but increasingly firm.
- Take woman's intuition seriously.
- Don't bring valuable jewellery; if you do, put it in your carry-on luggage.
- Use closed baggage tags where your details cannot be quickly viewed.
- Consider Transportation Security Administration (TSA)-approved baggage locks.
- Carry a camera or smartphone that fits into a small bag.

Health

- Speak to your doctor or public health centre about required vaccinations, prescriptions etc. Some vaccinations require several shots over several months prior to departure.
- You might need a letter from your doctor for medications you are carrying.
- Be aware of health insurance exclusions and limitations for foreign travel.
- Speak to your insurance carrier about international and supplementary health coverage.
- Bring more than enough prescriptions and medications for duration of travel.
- Prescriptions and medications should be in original containers and placed in carry-on luggage.
- Note: some prescriptions not available in Canada are found in other countries (e.g., UK) at cheaper prices.
- If you need syringes, include a letter from your doctor; always declare syringes before going through security.
- Consider bringing Acidophilus and Pepto-Bismol to reduce stomach upset.
- Bring extra pair of prescription glasses.

Finances

- If out of Canada for an extended period, inform your bank and credit card provider of your travel.
- Know foreign exchange rates; estimate travel costs in local currencies.
- Bring alternate finances: credit/debit and bank cards, cash card, local and US/Euros cash.
- Note that secure chip-and-PIN technology is replacing magnetic-strip cards.
- Know your spending habits.
- Be aware of country arrival & departure fees.
- Banks, ATMs, and often airports offer government-based exchange rates.
- Bank, credit card, and ATM fees often higher for international transactions.
- Travellers' cheques not commonly used.
- If you use your credit card, check online credit card statement regularly.
- Keep all receipts, including foreign exchange statements. Note: receipts may be written in local language.

Emergencies & Crime

- Know what to do and who to contact in an emergency.
- Do not purchase or exchange on the black market.
- Remember, being foreign makes you visible.
- You are subject to the laws of the country in which you are travelling. Ignorance of the law is not a defense in most courts.
- Degrees of punishment may be vastly different than in Canada.
- If you are arrested, know that it is rare for the Canadian Government to assist individual travellers. See <https://travel.gc.ca/travelling/publications/guide-for-canadians-imprisoned-abroad>

Culture: Attitudes

- Remember you are a guest in the country in which you are travelling.
- Local people will recognize you as a representative from Canada; be prepared to be that person.
- Keep your voice low and your speech polite; be respectful.
- Do not judge, or present colonial attitudes, or assume your culture is superior.
- If engaging in political dialogue, most people recognize that a government's actions and the beliefs of an individual are not always the same.
- Never speak negatively about the government of the country you are visiting.
- The concept of personal space means different things in various countries.
- Anti-smoking is a North American crusade; be somewhat tolerant of smoking.

Culture: Behaviours

- Never take photographs of people without asking. If they say yes, you may need to pay for that privilege.
- Consider different cultural perceptions of personal space and touching, especially members of the opposite sex.
- Don't point your feet at people or touch anyone on the head.
- Use your arm and hand, not your fingers, to point.
- Watch hand gestures, including "thumbs-up" or "a-OK;" may be viewed as obscene.
- Visit Guide.CultureCrossing.net to learn about common local gestures and taboos.
- Do not make promises you don't intend to keep.
- Know who to tip and how much.

Culture: Clothing

- Bring natural fibres: cotton, wool; avoid synthetics especially in tropical countries.
- If travelling to a place where you take your shoes off frequently to enter sites, pack slip-on shoes.
- If staying in an unfamiliar place, dress to blend in.
- Keep in mind local customs, attitudes, and religious beliefs, when choosing attire.
 - In the west, black is worn to wakes and funerals; in Asia, it is white.
 - Consider conservative hues like navy, blue, tan and gray.
- In a conservative country, do not wear revealing clothing (e.g., shorts, tank tops).
- Pants and long skirts are appropriate; women consider a shawl.
- Cover shoulders and knees when entering holy sites; keep feet and ankles covered.
- Avoid baggy or ripped clothes especially at holy sites.
- Bring comfortable leather walking shoes, not sports sneakers; keep polished and in good shape.
- Avoid clothing with religious or military symbols, swear words, or large brand names.
- Dark colours (e.g., black and blue) attract biting insects.

Electronics

- Reduce downloading or roaming charges by downloading travel (e.g., Travelzoo) or language translation apps before departure.
- Check voltage of your electronics; bring appropriate adaptor or voltage plugs.
- If your phone has global capability and if you choose to use it, activate it. Check with your service provider to know what it will cost. Consider buying an international data SIM card.
- Consider other inexpensive phone alternatives such as Skype, local or international phone cards.
- Save digital copies of documents to your device, so access is available without Internet.
- Reassess security of your passwords.
- Extreme temperature changes can affect battery life and operation.
- Carry devices near your body.
- Don't get distracted when using electronics in public spaces.
- Purchase insurance for your devices.

- Keep electronics locked when not in use.
- Don't log into sensitive accounts while using public Wi-Fi.
- Back up devices before you depart and when staying with friends while travelling.
- Keep back-ups current by syncing with web storage like Dropbox.
- Install applications to help retrieve lost electronics or to delete data remotely.
- Consider protections against RFID (Radio Frequency Identification) skimming.

Local Travel

- Consider an international driving permit/license.
- Car rental insurance can often be part of your own car insurance.
- Consider taxi hires away from airport and hotel entrances for cheaper fares.
- Never assume the taxi driver knows your destination. If doubt, ask someone before you depart.
- The universal rule of taxi haggling is that once both sides agree on a fare *before setting off*, neither can reopen negotiations.
- Consider various local travel options.

Culture Shock

- ...Is defined as having strong emotions in response to a different environment.
- Bring something that reminds you of home (e.g., teddy bear, photographs).
- Remember different cultures look at things differently: importance of family; social class mixing; gender interactions; humour; individualism; time; materialism; personal space; and etiquette.
- ...Can lead to stress, depression, being homesick, loss of appetite, irritability; stereotyping, and physical ailments.
- Coping strategies are: identifying source of these emotions; talking to others; and staying in contact with home.