

Travel tips and advice: Common travel mistakes and how to avoid them



and



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Experience, so they say, is the best teacher. You bang in a nail, whack your thumb and next time use a screw. An even better way to stay out of trouble is to learn from the mistakes of others, and when it comes to travel blunders I am rolled gold. I've shunted the family out to the airport to catch a flight on the wrong day (sorry kids), had my passport and all my cash stolen at a crowded festival in India (do not carry it around) and been charged eye-watering sums for overweight baggage (check your allowance).

I've fallen into a drainage canal in Myanmar (carry torch) and once showed up at the airport in Kuala Lumpur without enough cash for the departure tax and had to be bailed out by the kindly check-in crew. **Beware the common traps of travel.**

In Paris I told a taxi driver to take me to the station when I meant the airport (la gare/l'aerogare). On the upside, all these things have happened only once and for this I congratulate myself. Experience has indeed taught me well. Here are the holiday mistakes you might make, each with a strategy that will arm you against misfortune.

If you wanna be safe-get a Travel Agency with lots of valuable advice and experience onside. Could just not only save you money and headaches- but also your life ! read on.

THE MISTAKE

"The apartment I rented doesn't exist."

HOW IT HAPPENS

You've been scammed. Either there's no apartment at that address or else it comes with someone already in residence, who has no idea why you're standing at his front door with a suitcase. Those images of the cute one-bedder at a bargain price in Manhattan's Meatpacking District that you saw on Craigslist? Does not exist. New York is one place where fake apartment rentals are common but if you hire direct from an owner, beware of handing over payment in advance.

THE FIX Rent through an agency or Travel agent in the know, which does not release payment to the apartment owner until 24 hours after check-in. if there's a problem, contact the agency straightaway.

THE MISTAKE

"My passport expires in seven months and they won't let me board the plane."

HOW IT HAPPENS

Some countries insist your passport must be valid for at least six months after the date you plan to exit their borders. If you're leaving Australia and your passport expires less than six months before your return date, you might not get on the aircraft since the carrier will get an earful at the other end if you're denied entry at your destination. Indonesia requires a passport valid for six months from the date of entry rather than exit but check-in staff don't always know this. From time to time, passengers have been wrongly denied boarding.

Get your travelAgent to check and be held responsible for this area. You might get deported , get jailed or worse.....

THE FIXGoogle it, but make sure the information comes from the government's own website.

THE MISTAKE

"I thought I'd score a cheap last-minute flight to Europe."

HOW IT HAPPENS

Short of a meltdown in the world economy or an event that sends would-be travellers to their bunkers, air travel does not get cheaper as flight time approaches. Airlines typically release their fares 11 months in advance. The cheapest fares are the first to go, followed by those higher up the price ladder until all that's

left are the most expensive seats. Airlines are experts at filling their planes and by the laws of supply and demand, the longer you delay the more you'll pay.

THE FIX Book early. Some travel agents allow you to lock in fares with a deposit and pay later, or at least give you the full facts-and not only part of !

THE MISTAKE

"My Louis Vuitton handbag just grew legs and sprinted around the corner."

HOW IT HAPPENS

Expensive accessories, great cameras, sparkly jewellery and classy footwear mark you as a lucrative target to those who seek to separate you from your baubles. You might as well have "Steal from me!" tattooed on your forehead.

THE FIX Leave the bling at home. On public transport in big European cities, get your back against something solid and keep your bag tight. Chic doesn't have to be expensive. Worn right, a scarf can elevate any outfit. Better to look like a bag lady than a no-bag lady.

THE MISTAKE

"I just imagined we'd all be seated together."

HOW IT HAPPENS

If you did not pre-book seats and came late to the check-in desk there is every chance that you and your spouse/children/aged relations are scattered throughout the cabin. Although you might all share the same surname and might have booked multiple seats with a single click of your mouse, no longer can you rely on the airline to seat you next to one another, or the kindness of strangers to reposition themselves to suit your needs.

THE FIX Book your seat in advance and if your airline doesn't extend that privilege, show up early at the check-in desk.

THE MISTAKE

"I just copped a \$900 bill for using my phone overseas."

HOW IT HAPPENS

Global roaming charges are a sucker trap. Use your smartphone to check emails, post to Facebook, listen to music on Spotify and watch cat videos on YouTube and you're on the train to Hurtsville if not prepared. Telstra charges \$3 for each megabyte of data downloaded overseas. Burning through a \$100 download takes no time at all.

THE FIX Turn off data roaming or contact your telco to see what deals they offer before you head off. Telstra's Data Pack starts at \$29 for 100MB, a saving of \$270 if you were to download the same by simply activating global roaming overseas. Other telcos offer similar deals.

THE MISTAKE

"We've got a whole week in France and then 10 days in Italy."

HOW IT HAPPENS

Confronted by so much worldly splendour the temptation is to gallop but travel is best when savoured. You can't see everything so don't even try. Itinerary overload is like shovelling a spoonful of everything onto your plate at the buffet table, you end up with a mess and too little of the things you enjoy. Better to stop for three nights at just one place on the French Riviera rather than trying to pack Nice, Cannes, Saint-Tropez and Monaco into a sprint.

THE FIX Travel slowly. Every stop should ideally be at least three nights, which gives you two full days for exploring.

THE MISTAKE

"I really didn't need that fourth pair of shoes."

HOW IT HAPPENS

Too many T-shirts, a dress-up outfit that never saw the light of day, snorkelling gear when your resort hotel would have kitted you out for free, we all make bad decisions that weigh us down unnecessarily. Slim down and be prepared to wash as you go, as long as you have a clean outfit for tomorrow you're on easy street. Sitting on your case to close it is a dead giveaway and that pillow? Ditch it, they do have pillows in China.

THE FIX Choose a colour scheme, whether it's dark, pastels or puce, and pack outfits that match.

THE MISTAKE

"Can't speak, I think I'm having a heart attack."

HOW IT HAPPENS

Apartments without lifts are common in Europe, and the owner might not disclose this fact on Airbnb even though the apartment is on the sixth floor. This happened to me in Istanbul, panting like a bull while I hoisted my luggage up 12 flights with the apartment owner frantically shushing me because some of his neighbours objected to his apartment rental scheme.

THE FIX Ask the question, "How many floors up, and is there a lift?" Rely on solid Travel Agent to steer you in the right direction. Cannot trust the WEB!

THE MISTAKE

"I didn't know Milan had two airports!"

HOW IT HAPPENS

You've just flown into Malpensa but your next flight is out of Linate. Like many cities, Milan has more than one airport, they're 67 kilometres apart and the shuttle bus takes 90 minutes so you'll probably miss your next flight. Getting caught this way is one of the pitfalls for the DIY traveller.

THE FIX If your trip is complicated, if it's somewhere you're not familiar with, let a travel agent handle your bookings.

THE MISTAKE

"I'd swear that dent wasn't mine."

HOW IT HAPPENS

You've just checked your credit card statement and there's a charge for damages to your hire car. To the best of your knowledge, nothing untoward happened while the vehicle was in your care, but it's your word against theirs.

AVOID IT

Before you drive your hire vehicle out of the parking bay, walk around, take photos or even a video and note any damage. If you collect it from a dark parking station, do this as soon as you're in daylight.

THE MISTAKE

"I just coughed up \$65 for five kilos of overweight baggage on a one-hour flight."

HOW IT HAPPENS

In many countries, the allowance for checked baggage domestic flights might be only 15 kilos, or zero if you happen to have bought a cheap no-checked-luggage fare. Overweight baggage charges are one of the ancillary fees that some airlines rely on to make a profit, the fees per kilo are high and they apply the rules rigorously.

THE FIX Find out the baggage limit before you fly. If you're over, wear your heaviest items to cut down your check-in weight. But avoid the example of James McElvar, member of British boy band Rewind who

collapsed in flight due to heat exhaustion caused by wearing all his clothes to avoid a \$95 charge for overweight baggage.

THE MISTAKE

"The ATM just rejected my card and I'm down to my last cash."

HOW IT HAPPENS

Some ATMs require a 6-digit PIN when your one is four, sometimes the reverse. You might have forgotten to notify your financial institution that you were heading overseas and since the bank suspects a fraudulent transaction your card is now blocked. Or the ATM might just be having off day.

THE FIX Don't rely on just one card to access your funds and don't carry all your cards around with you. If your wallet is stolen you'll limit the damage if you have a backup card safe in your hotel room.

THE MISTAKE

"Doesn't your waiter speak English?"

HOW IT HAPPENS

No, because you're in Chile, Senor, how's your Spanish? The expectation that every hotel desk jockey, street merchant and taxi driver will understand English will cause you to fall on your cultural face. Menus will not always come with an English translation and nor will speaking louder enhance communication between you.

THE FIX At the very least get a phrasebook or a language app and try and get your tongue around Italian, Bahasa Indonesia or whatever. At least you can have a good laugh with your waiter.

THE MISTAKE

"Wow, Phuket isn't like it was last time I was here."

HOW IT HAPPENS

Things change. Places evolve, and not always in a way that you might like. That little beachside shack that did a killer dish of chilli crab and beer for \$5? Now there's a resort hotel and the once-empty beach is now covered with umbrellas and lounges. You're not the same person as you were back then either, so go with the flow.

THE FIX If you go back go without expectations. Either be prepared for a different place and a different experience and embrace it for what it's become or stay away and keep your memories intact.

THE MISTAKE

"The Swiss Guards turned me away from St Peter's Basilica – said my shorts were too short!"

HOW IT HAPPENS

Balinese temples, mosques, some hotels, posh restaurants, Harrods in London and Qantas business class lounges all have dress standards. As a nation of casual dressers by and large we're sometimes caught out by the more rigorous standards that apply in most other parts of the world. Wear thongs in an Italian city and you'll not only provide amusement, the cobblestones will murder your feet. Dressing right not only gets you in the door, it also says you know how to behave.

THE FIX Dress to suit the occasion. Fitting in is not giving in, it's showing respect for another culture.

THE MISTAKE

"This is the third time we've driven past that hotel."

HOW IT HAPPENS

Want to sap every ounce of pleasure from your travels? Try driving in any large continental European city. Not only will you be driving on the right, chances are you will be caught up in traffic snarls, and lost with your GPS nagging you to make a U-turn when you're on a one-way street. If it's a large and old city you're

in truly dire straits since medieval laneways were not designed for traffic. There might come a time when you want to abandon your vehicle somewhere – anywhere – and start walking, when you will find yourself getting further and further from your destination in the hunt for a parking spot.

THE FIX Most European cities have fabulous public transport systems. Leave your car at your hotel, or park on the edge of the city and hit the metro or the trams. Otherwise get your Agent to book a transfer that might cost a bit more but is guaranteed.

THE MISTAKE

"In Paris we saw everything there is to see along the Champs-Elysees and the Seine."

HOW IT HAPPENS

What you didn't see is Paris. You might have trolled through the Louvre, taken the elevator up the Eiffel Tower, goggled at Notre Dame and bought an ice-cream from the Berthillon shop on Ile Saint-Louis but you've never ventured beyond the tourist version of the city. Paris is not just Impressionist art and gothic architecture. It's also the North African market in Place d'Aligre, the chocolate shop that your nose led you to off Rue Mouffetard and the glorious Jardin Naturel next to Pere-Lachaise Cemetery. The guidebook is not the word of God.

THE FIX Wander off the beaten track. Getting lost can also be a happy condition, and now and again you'll strike gold.

THE MISTAKE

"The brochure pictures didn't show the broken tiles around the swimming pool."

HOW IT HAPPENS

Photos lie. Hotels and resorts put their best possible face forward when it comes to photography. When reality falls short they look for a better angles, or throw a beach towel or drape a diverting model over the bad bits.

AVOID IT

Don't be seduced by glossy images. Look at the reviews on TripAdvisor or better still our Agent. Chances are they'll tell it like it is, warts and all.

THE MISTAKE

"Hey – it's not even 5pm and it's already dark!"

HOW IT HAPPENS

That's because you're in London and it's winter. On the shortest days around Christmas, the sun sets before 4pm. That's if there actually is a sun because the golden orb makes only a fleeting appearance in England's winter sky. It's also cold and rains a lot. Therefore you're going to be spending most of your time in museums, theatres and galleries, and is this the holiday you envisioned? The realities of a European winter can be daunting to those used to our own mild affairs.

THE FIX Plan your itinerary with an eye on the weather, or choose a warmer time.

Errors of our ways- *1257: Number of Australians arrested overseas last year.*

1456: Number of Australians hospitalised overseas last year.

20: Estimated percentage of Australians who fail to take out travel insurance

6000: Number of inquiries received by the Australian govt. last year on people's whereabouts overseas.

38,000: Number of Australian passports lost last year. SOURCE: smartraveller.com.au

Most common mistakes of Australian travellers

Smartraveller's Jon Philp, first assistant secretary, consular and crisis division, Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade, lists the top mistakes Australian travellers make when they travel abroad **TAKING**

EXCESSIVE RISKS Australians have a history of intrepid travel. And it seems young travellers in particular often feel invincible. We continue to see Australians in difficulty because they've done something overseas

that they'd never do in Australia. This may be riding a moped in Asia through busy narrow streets without ever having ridden a moped before, much less having a licence. Or it might be that they quickly befriend someone who they know nothing about. Travel is about having fun and new experiences – but not if it endangers yourself or your friends.

INSUFFICIENT RESEARCH ON SAFETY, HEALTH AND LEGAL ISSUES No matter what the destination, there are always risks, whether it's London, Dubai, or Phuket. We continue to see too many Australians in trouble overseas. It's essential that Australians do their research – not just on the hotels and sites, but also on the safety risks, health vaccinations, and different laws that may apply

OVERESTIMATING THE GOVERNMENT'S CAPACITY TO ASSIST Australians are subject to the local laws of the country they're travelling in, including ones that appear harsh by Australian standards. If you're arrested or jailed overseas, the Australian government will do what it can to help you under our Consular Services Charter. But we can't get you out of trouble or out of jail. Your best protection is to research the laws of the country before you get on the plane, especially for an extended stay. And we can't say it enough, never ever carry or take drugs overseas.

TRAVELLING WITHOUT TRAVEL INSURANCE As the Minister for Foreign Affairs [Julie Bishop] has said, "If you can't afford travel insurance, you can't afford to travel overseas." This is a recipe for disaster. Travellers often aren't aware of the high medical costs overseas, which can quickly reach tens of thousands of dollars. It's essential that you buy the most comprehensive policy that suits your needs and activities.

NOT STAYING IN TOUCH WITH FRIENDS AND FAMILY The Australian government had almost 6000 inquires last year on people's whereabouts overseas. Many of the thousands of inquiries we receive on people's whereabouts overseas could have been avoided if travellers stayed in touch with somebody back home just to let them know they're doing OK, especially if there's been some sort of natural disaster. You know who worries about you most – it takes only a few minutes to keep them informed.

New ADVICE : Airline boarding pass photos: Security risk over posting boarding passes online

Your airline boarding pass can reveal a lot of information ,

- Chances are, you've already done it. You're at the airport, checked in and excited to be going on your plane journey to a new destination. So you snap a photo of your boarding pass, with your flight number and destination listed, and share it with your friends and followers on social media.
- If you're really lucky, you might be bragging about your seat number if it's particularly low. 1A means you're in the best seat in the plane, in either first or business class, but generally speaking a low number on your boarding pass is worth bragging about.
- But you should think twice before posting that photo online, a security expert warns.
- Security expert Brian Krebs revealed on his cyber-security blog last week that your boarding pass contains far more information about you than you might think, posting a photo online can make data available for nefarious purposes.
- Krebs says that the bar code or QR code contained on a boarding pass can contain information about you, including your future travel plans or your frequent flyer details.
- Krebs cites a reader, Cory, who contacted his website after discovering how easy it was to access someone's information from a boarding pass. Cory used an online barcode reader to read the code on a friend's boarding pass which had been posted to Facebook.
- Within a few minutes Cory had enough details to access his friend's frequent flyer account. Through this, he could see all future flights his friend had booked and could actually make changes such as cancelling flights or changing seat allocations, as well as accessing his friend's phone number and other details.
- The availability of such data could potentially lead to even bigger problems, such as identity theft.
- Even throwing your boarding pass in the bin is not without risk..



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