

## **Nomadic Matt's Travel Planning Check List**

### **Step 1 – Decide where you want to go**

A lot of people talk about travel without naming where they want to visit – they talk vaguely about places. Picking a place is utterly important. It helps you plan better and makes your trip more concrete. It's a lot easier to say "I am going to Paris" than say "I'm going somewhere in Europe." You need a goal to work towards.

### **Step 2 – Plan how long you'll be away**

How much does it cost to travel? I don't know – how long are you going away for? You can't figure out how much you need to save if you haven't decided on how long you'll be there. Every place in the world is different.

These two are important first steps because you can't know how much you need for your trip if you don't know where you want to go and for how long. When I planned my original round the world trip, I made a list of all the places I wanted to visit and how long I wanted to be there. You don't need to know the exact dates you will be in each place, but you should have a rough idea.

### **Step 3 – Determine what kind of vacation you want**

Budget travel, backpacking, luxury trip, or a honeymoon – because you're going to plan differently for each. You can travel the world on \$50 dollars a day, but not every destination is equal and every type of travel requires a different budget.

### **Step 4 – Research costs**

Research how much your destination costs at the style of travel you

want so that you can create an estimate of how much money you need for your trip. You can begin with my travel guide section or simply go buy a guidebook. All you want to know here is a rough daily estimate. This way you know how much you need for your trip so you can determine the best way to save that amount.

#### **Step 4 – Determine your expenses**

Write down all your expenses. Now that you know where you want to go and how much you need, now you need to save. By writing down all your expenses you can determine where you are spending money and how you can cut back.

#### **Step 5 – Start saving money**

Follow my list of [20 ways to cut your expenses to watch your bank balance grow](#). Put a number to how much you need. For example, if you need \$2,000 dollars for your trip that is in 8 months, that means you only need to save \$8.33 USD per day. Doesn't that make that larger number more attainable? Couldn't you find a way to save \$8 USD per day? Here are some featured tips:

- **Cut the coffee** – That daily coffee costs you \$150 per month (\$5 per coffee). At \$1,800 USD per year, that's two months in Southeast Asia. What's more important – your daily cup of Joe or getting to spend two more months on the beaches of Thailand or exploring the jungles of Borneo in Malaysia?
- **Learn to cook** – We all need to eat but restaurants are getting quite expensive these days. Even with this recession, coming back to the US I've noticed that food prices are a lot higher than they used to be. I learned to cook while in college (a skill that has helped me ever since) and before I left, I cut down my eating

out to two times per week. Every other meal was cooked. I cooked dinner and then used the leftovers to eat lunch, thus saving more money.

- **Lose the car** – Cars cost a lot of money between insurance, repairs, and filling your tank with gas (Current average price: \$4 USD per gallon). Learn to love the bus, take the subway, or walk. It took me longer to get to work using public transportation but you'll find that you don't really need a car as much as you think. I understand that this tip may not be feasible for everyone, especially those in smaller towns that don't have a good public transportation system, but a good alternative is to sell your car and buy a cheaper used car.
- **Get rid of cable** – In the age of [Hulu](#) and free (and legal) streaming TV, there's no reason for you to be spending \$50 USD per month on cable television.
- **Sign up for travel newsletters** – No one likes to clutter up their inbox, but by signing up for mailing lists from airlines and travel companies, you'll be able to get updates about all the last-minute or special deals that are happening. I would have missed out on a round trip ticket to Japan for \$700 USD (normally \$1,500) if it wasn't for the American Airlines mailing list.

### **Step 6 – Get a rewards credit card**

[Get a travel credit card](#). While you're working to save money, get a travel credit card so you can use those sign-up bonuses that I told Jessica about to get free flights. I have accumulated over 600,000 free miles this way and despite all the cards I've acquired, my credit score is still 770. Yet you don't need a lot of cards – you just need one. Do this the moment you decide you want to travel. Don't wait – waiting equals lost miles.

### **Step 7 – Get your passport.**

If you don't already have your passport, apply for one right away. The process only takes a month but you can't book an overseas flight without your passport number.

### **Step 8 – Check for last minute deals**

Before you hit purchase on your flight, check for deals you might have missed. You may dream of Paris but maybe there are great deals to Berlin right now. Maybe you can get a 7 day cruise for 70% off, a package deal to Hawaii for the price of your flight to Paris, or 50% off sailing trips around Greece.

While it may not be your first choice, it can be a good way to save in the long run. I always look for deals. It's a big world, and there are lots of places I want to see.

My favorite sites for deals:

- [Vayama](#)
- [Last Minute Cruises](#)
- [Kayak deals](#)
- [G Adventure last-minute specials](#)

If you find something, adjust your travel plans accordingly. If not, continue on — but it pays to look.

### **Step 9 – Book your flight**

After you have used your travel credit card and received your sign up bonus, use your miles to book your flight. It is harder to use miles

these days due to less availability, so you want to book early to make sure you get your available flight.

### **Step 10 – Book your accommodation.**

If you have a set schedule, there is no reason to wait. If you are going on a long-term trip, book just the first few days. Once you know the dates you'll be in your destination, there is no real reason not to find a place to stay. My view is that waiting will just lead to you losing your top picks.

Love hotels? They won't save you money, but you can sign up for some hotel credit cards and get free rooms, too. Marriott has a great rewards card whose sign-up bonus is equal to one week's free stay. Starwood's AMEX card is wonderful too, but the spending threshold in order to get the points bonus is higher.

The following booking sites offer the best rates for accommodation:

- [Hostelworld](#)
- [Agoda](#)
- [Hotels.com](#)

Alternative: Contact people on hospitality websites like [Couchsurfing](#) and ask if they would be willing to host you. Moreover, you can also consider apartment rental sites like [Airbnb](#) or [Wimdu](#).

### **Step 11 – Plan your activities**

Sketch out the major activities you want to enjoy and how much they cost. Make any last-minute adjustments to your savings so you can

ensure you have enough money. This will also help you figure out if you need any reservations for your chosen tours or activities.

### **Step 12 – Sell your stuff.**

If you are going on a long-term trip (6 months or more), sell your stuff in order to earn extra money for your trip. Start doing this about 60 days before you leave. Sites like Gumtree, Amazon, and Craigslist can help you do so.

If you aren't going away long-term, skip this step. If you are going away long-term but want to keep your stuff, move it to a friend's house or keep it in storage. A good storage company in the U.S. is [Public Storage](#) and starts at \$50 USD per month.

### **Step 13 – Automate your bills.**

Get rid of your mail, go paperless, and set up online bill payment for your recurring bills to ensure you won't miss any overseas. If you are still going to get paper mail, use a service like Earth Class Mail. (If you are going on a two-week trip, you don't really need to do this and you can skip this step, too.)

### **Step 14 – Tell your credit card companies you'll be traveling.**

No matter how long you'll be gone, it is a good idea to let your card companies know you will be overseas, that way any transactions that come up aren't flagged as fraud and your card is less likely to be blocked. There's nothing worse than having to sit on the phone with your credit card company instead of enjoying your vacation.

### **Step 15 – Pack**

Pack for your trip. [Here's a suggested packing list.](#)

**Step 16 – Go have fun**

Go on your trip and have fun! Head to the airport, board your plane (don't forget your passport), and enjoy the fruits of your labor.