

# 10 Mistakes Travelers Make and how to avoid them



# 10 Mistakes Travelers Make



Are you planning a trip abroad in the next few months? If so, then you might already have an inkling of how truly complex the planning process for overseas travel can be. It's all too easy to let something slip through the cracks, whether it's documents for passing through customs, packing all the essentials, forgetting to purchase travel insurance, and everything in-between. Even the most seasoned of travelers can forget to properly research their destination or over-pack their luggage!

If you're looking to travel in the near future, whether in your own country or across the world, you need to be 100% certain you have made no mistakes in your planning, and even more importantly, when you arrive. In this guide, we will walk you through the ten most common travel mistakes, and how you can avoid them.

Ready to get started? Then let's go!

# #1 Exchanging Currency At The Airport

It's always important to remember that airports always offer the worst exchange rates for exchanging your cash; you'd make a better deal throwing your bills directly on a fire! Instead, look to use your credit card and ATMs at your destination, which offers exchange rates closer to the typical interbank rates. As a bonus, you'll rest easy knowing you're not getting ripped off and spending more money on your trip than you initially planned.

Another reason not to exchange your money at the airport is the risk of holding all of your cash on your person at once. It's never a good idea to have large sums of money on you; every country, no matter how high its safety rating, has its own problems with pickpockets. Don't tempt them and only exchange what you need for the foreseeable future.

Some other currency exchange options include:

- **ATMs in your destination city**

If your credit or debit cards can be used abroad, then consider foregoing cash altogether! You can either use an ATM at the airport and skip the exchange counter, or find one (preferably with a sister bank of the one you use at home) around your destination.

- **Exchanging at a bank**

If you can't go cashless on your trip and an ATM isn't an option, then consider going to one of the local banks wherever you are traveling and withdrawing funds there.

- **Ask at your hotel**

If you're staying in one of the larger hotels or resorts in the area, then they may provide their own currency exchange services. Just make sure that you're getting a direct exchange rate and not being charged obscene fees or an inflated rate.

## Mistake #2

# Over-Thinking And Over-Packing

It's pretty easy to convince ourselves "better safe than sorry" and pack our entire house in three suitcases whenever we leave home. It's even worse when we know we're going to be farther away for longer stretches of time. Some travelers like to bring outfits to compensate for any kind of weather they may encounter, but in reality, how likely are you to need a snowsuit in Bora Bora? The truth is, you can actually relax more than you think when it comes to packing, saving you time, mental energy, and physical energy when you're not lugging fifty pound suitcases around the airport!

One crucial element to keep in mind while you're packing for your trip is that the more you pack, the more you have to pay. Airlines are strict on their weight limits for carry-ons and checked baggage, and for good reason: to ensure the plane can take off and land safely. But if you max out that weight on the way into your destination, then there's no room left if you want to bring back a souvenir or two. Think about if it makes sense to bring your heavy sweater with you on the plane, or if this could be a good opportunity to purchase one while you're traveling instead as a souvenir!

Here are some other packing tips you'll want to think about:

- **Consider your outfits with care**

Look over your itinerary and determine how many days you will be actively traveling and when you'll be taking time to see the sights. Then divide those days into anticipated activities, such as a day at the beach in Bali, skiing the slopes in the Swiss Alps, or hiking the Inca Trail in Peru. Decide what you'll actually need, and keep in mind the possibility of laundry amenities at your hotel or hostel. If there aren't any, research if there's a laundry service in the area you can utilize instead.

- **Keep a checklist**

After figuring out what you'll be bringing, make a list to keep track. Break it down however you want, just make sure that you include everything and where you stored it in your luggage. Check it off before you leave, and then check it again and add any purchases before you depart to return home.

# Mistake #3

## Eating At Popular Tourist Spots

Did you know that snacks and meals near major tourist attractions are going to cost significantly more, sometimes as much as twice the cost, as food you purchase further away? What's worse, many of these restaurants that attract tourists are also of lower quality; why put much effort into impressing your guests if none of them are going to be repeat customers? There's no incentive to be the best to people who aren't familiar with the local cuisine to judge it accurately. Most tourists are impressed by the location and don't realize that they are missing out on much more authentic and tastier gastronomic delights, away from the tourist traps.

Instead, look at moving away from the bigger attractions. Even six blocks or so from the crowds can pay dividends on your taste buds and your wallet! The further you are from the overpriced restaurants, the more likely you are to experience bona fide recipes curated and loved by the locals. A quick tip: Avoid restaurants with fancy menus in multiple languages, as they're most likely catering to the out-of-towner crowd and not the locals.

But what if you're not comfortable just strolling into a random restaurant in a foreign country? No problem! There are plenty of websites out there dedicated to assisting you with your search:

- **FourSquare**

This website has been around for hungry travelers for quite a while. The mobile app allows you to search nearby for eateries, cafes, and restaurants.

- **Yelp**

One of the most popular rating websites, Yelp allows locals and tourists to rate local restaurants. This is a great resource to find out what's the most popular dishes to try and what to avoid.

- **OpenRice**

Similar to FourSquare and Yelp, OpenRice specializes in helping travelers, specifically in the Philippines, Singapore, Thailand, Indonesia, Malaysia, and Hong Kong.

# Mistake #4

## Taxis vs. Public Transportation

Taxis can be one of the biggest budget-busters on any trip; the costs can be astronomical. To save your wallet (and your sanity), it's a better idea to skip them, unless you're splitting the fare with a group. Sometimes taxis can be helpful for late-night travel, but if public transportation is available, that will be your more cost-efficient solution. Traveling like a local is the best way to immerse yourself in the culture, and opens up opportunities to make friends and connections that can't be found in the back of a taxi. Before heading out, decide whether you'll take a train or a bus. Do you simply pay the driver for the fare, or do you need to purchase tickets ahead of time? Will you be there long enough to justify a multi-ride pass? All of these questions can be answered by asking your travel advisor, with an online search, or by asking your local guide or the concierge at your hotel. There are pros and cons to buses and trains, however:

- **Buses**

**Pros:** Buses allow you to stay above ground and explore areas of the city you may not have had the chance to see. This allows for more spontaneity and keeps you alert to landmarks, so getting back to your hotel or hostel will be easier. Buses can also take you much closer to your destination, whereas trains have fewer stops.

**Cons:** Finding your bus stop can be difficult if you're not familiar with the area. Bus stops also tend to have fewer amenities or seating options, and you may be standing and waiting for quite a while before the right bus arrives. The bus itself has less room than a train, and you may be standing again on your journey.

- **Trains**

**Pros:** Trains can avoid above ground traffic and get you to your desired stop faster, barring any delays. They also have plenty of room inside, and outside of the normal commuting hours you may have larger spaces to yourself! They also tend to be more clearly marked than bus stops, and some of the largest stations have food courts and shops on the way to your platform. Many stations also stop in the major attractions, like museums and galleries, and create a shorter walk for you!

**Cons:** Trains don't allow much in the way of sightseeing, and one train tunnel tends to look like another. If you're traveling during the busiest times of the day, trains can become quite crowded, and you may be sharing your personal space with more strangers than you're comfortable.



## Mistake #5 Forgetting Your Travel Insurance

Things can happen, no matter where your destination might be. Medical issues can crop up, emergencies cause delays in travel, or luggage and papers can be lost or stolen. It certainly pays to be optimistic, but as they say, “hope for the best, plan for the worst”. Travel insurance will add that extra layer of protection so if anything does go wrong, the impact on you and your trip will be minimal at best.

Some travelers feel that their existing insurance policies are adequate enough to cover them while they're abroad. However, you need to check and make sure that they have sufficient coverage while you're out of your home country. Some insurance plans will require that you add riders onto your policy for travel-related incidents. If you already have a trusted insurance broker, talk with them about what your current plan will cover and what supplement insurance you'll need.

Depending on where you're going and what activities you'll be enjoying, even supplement riders on your current policy may not be enough. Travel insurance can save you a serious headache if the worst should happen. Many policies include emergency and medical services, travel and baggage protection, accidental death coverage, and more. It's worth it to set aside part of your travel budget to make sure that you have ample coverage.

# Mistake #6

## Ignoring Your Security

Even in countries boasting low crime rates, pickpockets and thieves will still find a way to prey on an unsuspecting traveler. Slinging your purse over your shoulder or a bulging wallet in your back pocket create tempting targets. Having your possessions in the open makes it vulnerable to being taken and difficult to protect.

Your purse and wallet aren't the only things that can be victim to a snatching. Anything that can be easily grabbed before you have time to react requires extra vigilance and planning before you leave your hotel room. An easy solution could be pants with a button on the pocket that secures your wallet or a purse that is worn across the body, making it significantly harder for someone to take your possessions without your knowledge. The more difficult you make it for thieves, the less tempting your money and valuables become to them.

While none of these tips will 100% guarantee you won't have trouble with pickpockets, they will help to make you seem like too much work for the payoff:

- **Don't act like a tourist**

Tourists are fertile ground for pickpockets. Tourists tend to carry plenty of cash on hand and are oblivious to their immediate surroundings while they're sightseeing. Take care to make sure you appear alert and aware of what's going on around you and don't let a photo opportunity cost you more than you're willing to pay.

This doesn't necessarily mean that you need to dress and act like a local resident, but it pays to blend in rather than stand out. Try to avoid clothes with high-end branding or logos or flashy watches or jewelry. In general, keep a low profile when you're out in public.

- **Keep only what you need in your wallet**

The less cash you have on hand, the less painful it would be if it went missing. Try to keep it to just one credit card, your ID, and a small amount of cash that will cover your activities for the day. Keep a backup credit card in your hotel room in case you lose your wallet so you can still access your funds.

## Mistake #7

# Using Public Wi-Fi When Online Banking

No matter where you are, keeping your passwords and security measures private should be at the top of your priority list. But what if you have no choice but to use that public Wi-Fi network that could leave you vulnerable to hackers? It's not always feasible or cost effective to find private networks to log in to when you're abroad, and while not as common as pickpockets, can still pose a risk on your trip.

Hacking isn't always an inside job; it could be another hotel guest using that same free, minimally-secured hotel Wi-Fi. For hackers, grabbing your credit card or banking data can be a simple job over public Wi-Fi. Cyber criminals today utilize a "Man in the Middle" attack: they divert the data you transmit from your phone or laptop before it ever arrives at the bank's online platform.

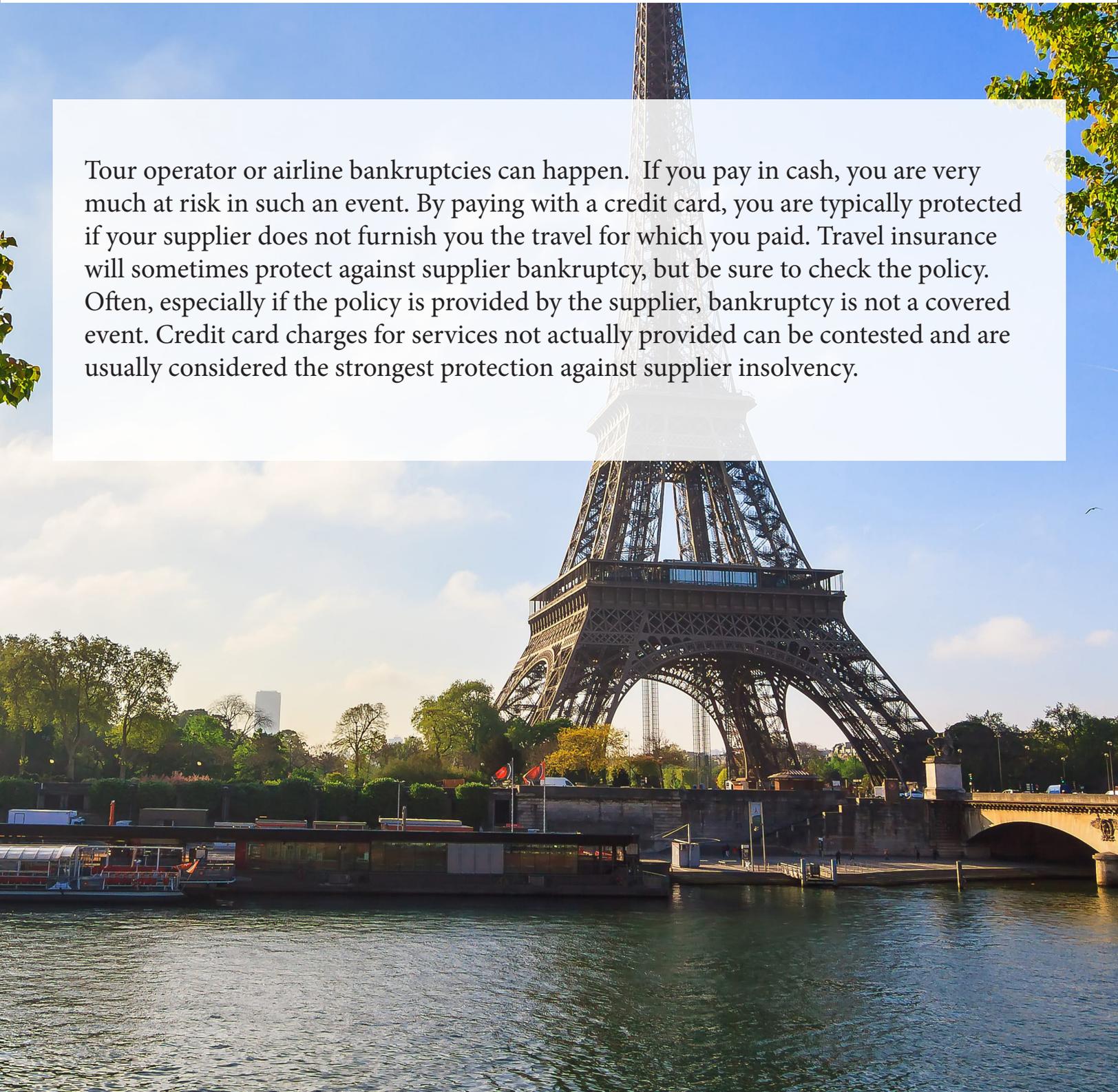
Add an extra layer of protection for your passwords by enabling a firewall before you leave. Most operating systems offer this option as a built-in feature and helps to protect your information from cyberattacks. All you'll need to do is enable the option in your system preferences or control panel. However, a firewall alone won't be enough to stop all cyberattacks, but it's a useful tool in your arsenal.

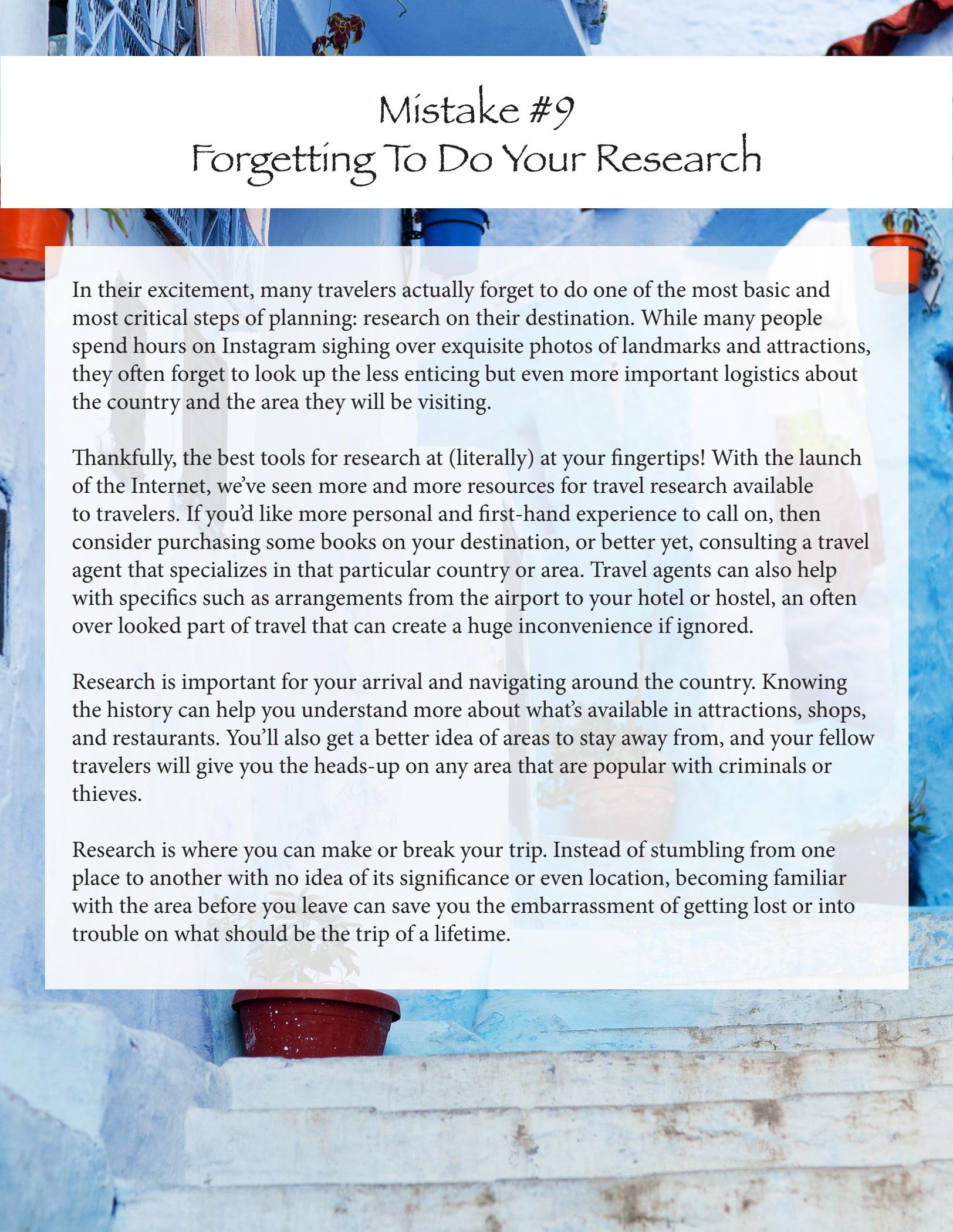
Another way to protect yourself is to utilize an anti-virus software to protect against malware attacks. While this isn't a foolproof solution on its own, it can help make it harder for criminals to access your information. It will take hackers longer to find a malware program that can't be detected by your anti-virus software. While this will buy you more time, it's not a completely fail-safe solution.

The best option is to create your own private and secure network. You can purchase a VPN (Virtual Private Network) program. This will protect all of your electronics that access the web by acting as if the information was being sent in a private network, even when using public Wi-Fi. Corporations use this technology to secure their own sensitive data, and is now available to the public.

## Mistake #8 Booking Using Cash

Tour operator or airline bankruptcies can happen. If you pay in cash, you are very much at risk in such an event. By paying with a credit card, you are typically protected if your supplier does not furnish you the travel for which you paid. Travel insurance will sometimes protect against supplier bankruptcy, but be sure to check the policy. Often, especially if the policy is provided by the supplier, bankruptcy is not a covered event. Credit card charges for services not actually provided can be contested and are usually considered the strongest protection against supplier insolvency.





## Mistake #9

# Forgetting To Do Your Research

In their excitement, many travelers actually forget to do one of the most basic and most critical steps of planning: research on their destination. While many people spend hours on Instagram sighing over exquisite photos of landmarks and attractions, they often forget to look up the less enticing but even more important logistics about the country and the area they will be visiting.

Thankfully, the best tools for research are (literally) at your fingertips! With the launch of the Internet, we've seen more and more resources for travel research available to travelers. If you'd like more personal and first-hand experience to call on, then consider purchasing some books on your destination, or better yet, consulting a travel agent that specializes in that particular country or area. Travel agents can also help with specifics such as arrangements from the airport to your hotel or hostel, an often overlooked part of travel that can create a huge inconvenience if ignored.

Research is important for your arrival and navigating around the country. Knowing the history can help you understand more about what's available in attractions, shops, and restaurants. You'll also get a better idea of areas to stay away from, and your fellow travelers will give you the heads-up on any areas that are popular with criminals or thieves.

Research is where you can make or break your trip. Instead of stumbling from one place to another with no idea of its significance or even location, becoming familiar with the area before you leave can save you the embarrassment of getting lost or into trouble on what should be the trip of a lifetime.

# Mistake #10

## Not Using a Travel Professional

Using a travel professional makes good sense. Here's a fact seldom discussed when the topic of travel agents arises. When the airlines began cutting commissions to travel professionals in the mid-90's, the real problem wasn't commissions. No, the airlines had another reason for wanting travel agents out of the picture. Travel agents told clients how to obtain the lowest fare. Call American Airlines directly and they don't tell you Delta has a lower fare. But a travel agent would.

Know what? They still do. Travel professionals are another research tool. Just like Google, only human and a lot more focused on your needs.

Most people think travel agents sell travel. The fact is, however, a great travel advisor doesn't sell you anything, but instead helps you buy wisely. He or she researches along with you and discusses the options. A good travel professional will steer you away from obstacles and look into nooks and crannies you might otherwise neglect. After all, travel agents are researching travel every day and might have some excellent inside information to share.

A good travel agent will save you time, save you money and provide insights into the logistics of your trip. Good travel agents keep their ear to the ground. They are researching travel every day and know which tour operators to use and which to avoid. They know the difference between a hotel in city center and a cheaper but far less convenient one on the outskirts of town. Don't get me wrong, I also like to research on my own. A good travel professional will welcome your research and questions.

# Enjoy Your Next Journey!

If you avoid these common travel mistakes, you'll save time, money, and yourself from any major inconvenience. You'll get off on the right foot, and in the process, mold yourself into a better traveler. By taking your time to work around these issues, you'll be more confident in going off the beaten trail. As a bonus, the more you save from following these tips, the more opportunities you'll have to keep traveling!

Being proactive is the best tool you'll have in your travel arsenal, along with being flexible. No one can ever know what their trip has in store for them, but careful preparation can turn a disaster into the highlight of the journey and making it unforgettable!

Remember to be savvy and wise about your trip, but don't forget why you're going and to enjoy every moment. These tips will make all the difference on your next tour. Have a fantastic time, and safe travels!

