Appendix D - UNIVERSITY HONORS PROGRAM SENIOR PROJECT - APPROVAL

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PROJECT TITLE: URBAN BACKPACKING: WHAT EVERY BEGINNING BACKPACKER NEEDS TO KNOW

I have reviewed this completed senior honors thesis with this student and certify that it is a project commensurate with honors level undergraduate research in this field.

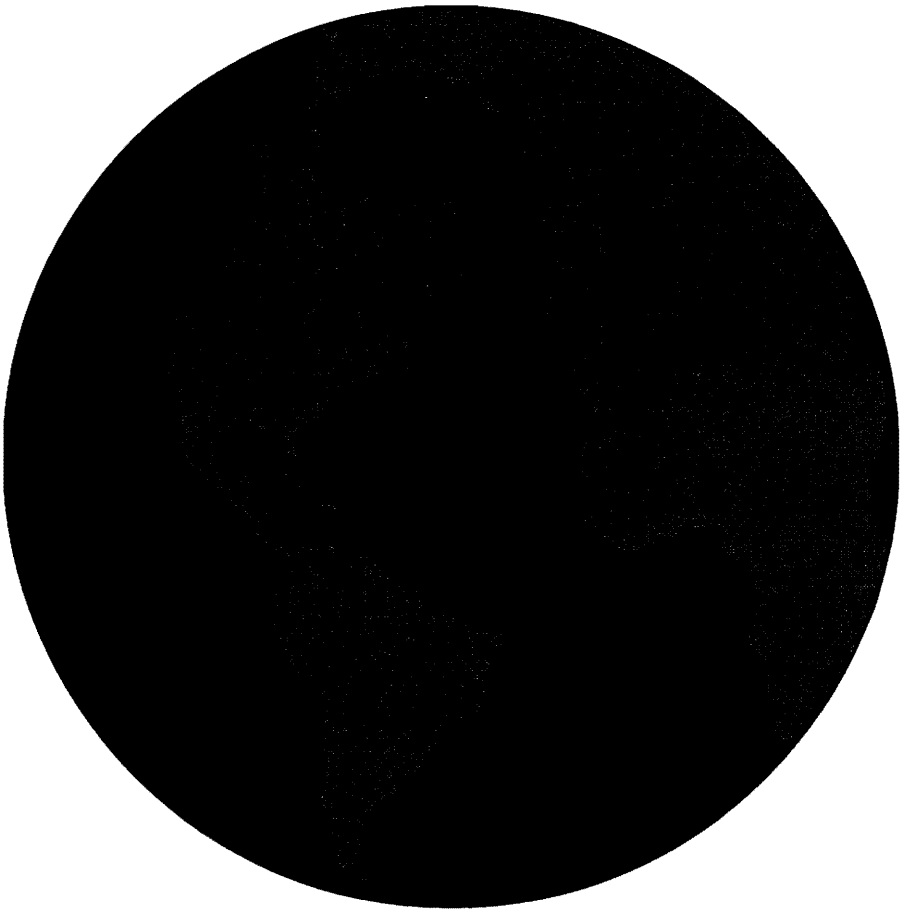
Signed: James C. Crook, Faculty Mentor

Date: May 12, 1997

Comments (Optional):

Bethany's senior project in book publishing has been completed and I have reviewed it. It meets the standards of independent work in the College of Communication and it has a practical aspect that shows her awareness of the publishing industry. The work includes selecting a publishing company, preparing an annotated table of contents for her book idea, writing a sample chapter, drafting a cover letter to present her idea to the book editor, and presentation of the project in a sales proposal. The completed work shows her understanding of the book publishing industry in America and indicates that she can be successful as a freelance writer.

Urban Backpacking



What every beginning backpacker needs to know.

by

Bethany Taylor

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I have been fortunate enough to go on two backpacking trips during my college years. On my first trip, I spent five weeks backpacking across Europe. I traveled the first week with a friend and independently for the remainder of the trip. During this trip, I visited 18 cities in 11 countries. It was possibly the most incredible experience of my life. The trip was educating, entertaining and liberating. When I started the trip, I was totally unprepared. I did not have a backpack and had no idea what a hostel was. I learned about backpacking the hard way -- by experiencing it. Over the course of my trip, I gained an incredible amount of knowledge on how to backpack

I used this new-found knowledge the next year when I traveled to New Zealand and Australia. This trip went much smoother because I packed better and knew what to expect. My backpacking knowledge continued to grow, however, on my second trip. You learn a lot through experience. You can also learn a lot from talking to others who have different experiences. I learned so much from other backpackers I met along the way.

I thoroughly enjoyed my backpacking experiences and have encouraged many of my friends to take their own backpacking adventures. I often sit down with friends who are planning trips and tell them what to expect, where to go and what to take. I have even given advice to people I don't know who called me because they heard I had backpacked. I wrote this handbook to help first-time backpackers. I included everything I wish I would have known before I ever went backpacking and everything I learned on my two trips. I hope this book is helpful to you and aids you in preparing for your adventure of a lifetime.

PRE-DEPARTURE PLANNING

One of the biggest advantages of a backpacking trip is the ability to be spontaneous. A key component of a successful trip is to not overplan. However, before you set off on your adventure of a lifetime, there are many preliminary preparations that need to be made.

Any backpacking trip is going to require an ample amount of preparation. Some of the first decisions you will need to make are:

- Where you are going?
- How long you will go for?
- How much money are you willing to spend?
- Who are you going to go with?

Where are you going to go?

Choosing your overall destination is probably one of the easiest decisions that you will have to make. Chances are that you already know where you want to go. When making your choice, there are several factors to take into account. You need to decide what is more important to you -- the country's history, culture or landscape? Another important consideration is expense. If you are uncertain of where you want to go, study the different regions in which you are interested and then make your choice.

Once you have selected your general destination (Europe, Asia, Australia, etc.), then you need to consider more specific destinations. The key to planning your trip is to keep your options open. Do not overplan. Have a general idea of cities you would like to

visit, but do not hold yourself to an pre-arranged plan. Plan the first week of your trip ahead of time, and then always try to have in mind the next three cities you would like to visit. Keep an open mind and remain flexible. Talk to other travelers; they may know of exciting places that you would like to visit.

When I was backpacking in Europe, I had a general idea of cities I wanted to go to, but I did not have an itinerary. I enjoy traveling with such flexibility. I was always free to change my mind at the last minute. For example, I had no intention of going to Hungary, but I met a lot of travelers who absolutely loved it and recommended that I go. I decided to go to Budapest for two days. I ended up staying five days because I loved it, too. I'm glad I did not limit myself to some pre-arranged plan because I would have missed out on a truly exceptional place.

How long are you going to travel for?

Now you need to decide if you are going to be a short-term or a long-term backpacker. Short-term backpackers only travel for a few months and usually limit themselves to a single region or continent. They are usually students who are traveling during their summer vacation or adults who are taking a leave of absence from work. Long-term backpackers, on the other hand, travel for extended amounts of time, often over a year. They also frequently embark on around the world adventures after finishing college or quitting their jobs.

There are two ways of deciding how long to make your trip. First, you can list all the cities or towns that you want to visit. Beside each city, write how many days you'd like to spend there. Then add up the days and take into account travel time between cities. You might also want to add a few days to give yourself a little leeway. Remember that this number is just an estimate. Some places will warrant longer stays, while you

will not want to linger in others. Do not hold yourself hostage to the estimate you gave to each city.

Once I got to Switzerland, I knew that I could not stay there for very long. Everything was far too expensive for me. So I cut my Swiss travels short. However, I stayed longer than I had planned in many other countries, so in the end, it all worked out.

You may prefer to plan you trip in the opposite fashion. Decide how long you want to be gone, and then fill your allotted time with a list of the cities you want to visit. This method works best for people who only have a limited time in which they can travel. Neither method is perfect for planning how long to backpack; however, they will both help you estimate a realistic duration for your trip.

I went backpacking in Europe for five weeks. This was definitely not enough time for me to experience everything I wanted to experience. I was bummed the last few days of my trip because I just wasn't ready to go home. When I backpacked in Australia, on the other hand, I could not wait to get home because I had come down with pneumonia during the last month of my trip. My experiences go to show that you never know how long you will really want to be away when you are planning your trip. The best you can do is try to make a reasonable estimate and then enjoy the time you have.

How much money are you willing to spend?

Of course, another element that you must take into consideration when determining how long your trip will be is how much money you can afford to spend on your trip. First of all, you will have some pre-departure expenses such as your passport, a guidebook and, perhaps a backpack. You should be able to buy all of your trip necessities for under $300. Your largest expenditure will be your initial travel costs (see chapter 2). You will have paid for your pre-departure and travel costs before your trip. When budgeting for your trip, you must consider your daily expenses.

The main components of daily expenditures are food and lodging. Other expenses to consider when planning include ground transportation, entertainment, postage, and entrance fees. A general estimate for daily expenses is $30 - 50 per day. Of course, the amount spent each day will vary depending on what kind of spending habits you have and what country you are visiting. When budgeting for your trip, do not underestimate. Your trip will be ruined if you run out of money or are constantly worrying about that possibility. It might help to keep a log of how much you spend each day. That way you can see how much you are spending and how much you have left.

How many people should you travel with?

The biggest question to face may be whether you want to travel alone or with friends. A lot of experienced backpackers prefer to travel alone. Backpacking on your own allows to be more flexible and gives you much more freedom in your plans. You can go wherever you want whenever you want for however long you want. Being on your own forces you to interact with people you meet along the way. It encourages you to spend time with other backpackers and to learn about other cultures. If you decide to travel alone, you can always pick up partners along the way with whom you can share par of your journey. In addition, a bonus of traveling alone is that when you have completed your trip, you will experience a feeling of personal accomplishment and gain an enhanced sense of self-confidence.

I traveled the first week of my first backpacking trip with a friend, and then I backpacked for a month on my own. I'm glad I traveled with a friend to begin with because it gave me a chance to get a feel for what I was doing. I'm also very glad we separated when we did. Traveling by myself gave me the flexibility to change my plans, go where I wanted to go, and stay for as long as I wanted to stay. In each city, I would

make new friends who I would explore the city with. I loved the freedom and the sense of self-confidence I gained from traveling on my own. Backpacking on my own has given me the confidence that I can do just about anything.

Traveling with others also has its benefits. Traveling with other people provides added security. It is also possible to lessen the weight of your bag by sharing equipment. A companion can watch your bags as you go to check on the train schedule or pay for your bus tickets. A partner provides insurance that you will not be lonely. Traveling with other people can also be very stressful if you are not compatible. You often end up going places you do not want to go and not being able to do the things that you want to do. Before you embark on your trip, make sure you and your companion(s) have similar interests, personalities and budgets. While traveling, spend some days apart. Explore a city on your own. You will need time apart in order to keep your sanity. Also discuss the possibility of going your own way during your trip if things are not going well with you and your companion(s). It is hard to spend 24 hours a day with someone for an extended period of time. Sometimes splitting up is necessary to save a friendship.

I traveled with a close friend on my second trip. She was a planner and had a firm idea of where she wanted to go and what she wanted to do. I was pretty laid back and didn't really care where we went, so we got along fine; however, if I also had had a list of places to go, our plans would have surely conflicted and resulted tension between us. I gave up a lot of the freedom I enjoyed on my first backpacking trip by backpacking with a friend on my second trip. Luckily, it worked out because we were very compatible. We had a great trip and are closer than ever.

When people travel in groups, they often do not branch out and meet other people. Do not fall into this trap. Regardless of how many people you are traveling with, make sure to also make the effort to meet other backpackers along the way.

Once you have made the decisions that define your backpacking trip, you must begin to get your documentation together. There are some administrative tasks that you need to handle. Give yourself a few months to take care of these tasks. Some of the important things that you need to take care of before you leave are:

- Getting a passport
- Determining if you need any visas
- Upgrading you health insurance
- Being vaccinated

Passports

A passport is an official identification document which governments issue to their citizens. You will need a passport in order to leave and enter countries, including your own. American passports are valid for 10 years for citizens over the age of 18. You can apply for a passport at many U.S. post offices, as well as at any federal or state court. You must apply for a passport in person. A U.S. passport costs $55 with an additional $10 processing fee for first-time passport applicants.

When applying for a passport you will need proof of U.S. citizenship. A birth certificate, naturalization certificate or a consular report of birth of a U.S. citizen can serve as proof of citizenship. You will also need two recent identical photographs. The photos should be 2" by 2" headshots with a white backdrop. You can get these photos at Kinkos, Sears or many other photo shops. Passport applicants also need a proof of identity, such as a driver's license. Besides your payment, you will also need to complete

a passport application, known to the government as a DSP-11 form. Apply for your passport a few months in advance to guarantee that you will have it on time. It generally takes three to four weeks for the processing of passport applications, but it can take much longer during the peak travel season of March to September.

Visas

A visa is official permission to enter a country. Some countries do not have visa requirements for Americans, but others do. Before leaving for your trip you need to determine how many visas you will need. Visa requirements vary from country to country depending on what you plan to do (work, study, travel) and how long you plan to stay. You can check with travel agents about visa requirements or find them in an up-to-date guidebook. When it comes to obtaining special travel or work visas, plan ahead. This process can sometimes take up to two months.

When I was traveling to Australia to study in Melbourne for a semester, I applied for my visa as soon as I received my official acceptance to the university. I applied the required two months in advance, but when the time came for me to leave for Los Angeles (I was staying with family for a week before leaving for Australia), I still hadn't received my visa. My mom had to send it to me overnight a few days before I left. If I would have sent my application in a few days later, I would have had to cancel my flight and wait for my visa before I could have gone to Australia.

If you are getting an ordinary travel visa, it will not take as long to obtain the visa. On longer trips, you may want to get your visas as you go because visas often expire after a certain amount of time. Make sure that you are not required to obtain them in your home country and that you will be able to obtain them at embassies in neighboring countries. For example, you can get a visa for Spain at the Spanish embassy in France. If

you get your visa at an embassy you can sometimes get it within a few hours, but you might have to return to pick it up the next day. Some embassies are only open for visa applications on certain days and for limited hours. Look in your guidebook to see when they will be open. Carry several passport photos with you as well as copies of your passport, just in case you need them for your visa applications.

When I was backpacking in Europe, I did not need a visa for any of the countries I visited because I was an American. However, many of the Australians and Canadians I met during my trip did need visas for certain countries. When I was on a train headed for the Czech Republic, many Canadians were escorted off the train at the border because they did not have visas. They were left in Austria as the rest of us continued on to Prague. Unfortunately for them, they did not realize that Canadians needed visas to enter the Czech Republic.

Insurance

Before you leave on your trip, make sure you have sufficient health and accident insurance. Research the travel provisions of your current insurance and consider obtaining supplemental coverage if needed. If you are a student, your best bet might be to buy a International Student Identity Card. An ISIC card, which costs $18, gives students access to student discounts and special airfares. In addition, it supplies the student with additional travel insurance. The card has sickness and accident insurance that includes $25,000 emergency evacuation coverage, which covers special travel expenses home such as a nurse or a flight on a stretcher. Teachers can get an International Teacher Identity Card, and people under the age of 25 can get a GO 25: International Youth Travel Card. You can obtain an ISIC card at Council Travel offices and most university travel abroad centers.

Vaccinations

Some countries recommend or require vaccination certificates and other personal health information before allowing you to enter the country. Ask your travel agent or look in your guidebook to see if you need to receive any vaccinations. You can obtain an International Health Certificate on which to record your vaccinations from your doctor or local government health department. If you need to receive vaccinations, seek medical advice at least six weeks prior to your departure.

Important Tips

1. Have a general idea about where you want to go on your trip, but be flexible while you are traveling.
2. Set up a budget before you go on your trip, and then stick to it while you are traveling.
3. If you decide to travel with a friend, discuss where you want to go and what you want to do ahead of time. Make sure you have compatible objectives, interests and budgets. Also discuss the possibility of separating if things are going badly.
4. Apply for your passport and special visas ahead of time so that you will not be left waiting for them.
5. Make two copies of all your important documents, such as your passport and visas. Take one copy with you but keep it separate from the original document. Leave the other copy with a family member or friend at home so that if you lose both the original and your copy, another copy can be faxed to you.
6. Carry your passport and visas in a zip-loc bag so that nothing will smear if it rains.

TRANSPORTATION

In all likelihood, the greatest expense of your backpacking trip will be your transportation costs. Not only will you incur the initial cost of traveling to and from your first destination, but you will also spend a substantial amount of money traveling around the area once you get there.

Because such a large portion of your expenses will derive from the travel costs, it is important to weigh your options. Countries have different mass transit systems; therefore, the most cost effective mode of transportation for you will vary from country to country or region to region. Consult an up-to-date guidebook and see what it recommends for the countries you plan to travel in.

Airplane

In all probability, you will want to travel to and from your initial destination by plane. You can find a good airfare rate if you plan ahead of time and are flexible in choosing a route. If it is not imperative that you go to a certain city first, then allow your travel agent to find the cheapest arrival point. For example, if you are planning a backpacking trip to Europe, it might be cheaper to fly into Amsterdam or Madrid over than the usual favorites of Paris and London. Also be flexible about the airport from which you depart. You might be able to save money by driving a few extra hours to another airport with direct flights to your destination. Keep an open mind and look for bargains!

Book in advance because airlines give better fares to people who book their seats early. Buy your ticket at least 21 days before your flight. Another way to save money is to travel during off-peak hours and on low volume days. You can save even more money if you reserve your ticket during an off-peak season. Airplane tickets are cheaper in late-August and from March to mid-June because air traffic is the lowest during these times. Basically, if you are willing to be flexible on your departure date, you will be able to save yourself a considerable amount of money.

If you are staying more than three months, your flight will be more expensive. When planning long trips like this, you should always get an open round-trip ticket. This allows you to plan your return trip at a later date. However, do not wait until the last few days of your trip to make reservations for your return flight. The airlines may have already booked all their flights.

Remember to check out the airfares of several different airlines. In addition, if you will need several connecting flights, consider flying on different airlines. For example, if you are traveling to an unpopular destination, it may end up costing you several thousand dollars more to stay with the same airline. Finding the least expensive airfare can be like a maze where you are trying to find the cheapest cities to connect.

I was once considering traveling to Madagascar. I began looking into airfares. The cheapest fare the travel agent was able to come up with was over $5500. He had me flying through Moscow! I decided to do some investigating on my own via the Internet. I found that I could get an inexpensive flight to London on one of the major airlines, but I would have to pay much higher prices to fly on these airlines to Madagascar. Therefore, I started looking at African cities with reasonable airfare costs from European cities as well as to Madagascar. I eventually found a route that would only cost me $2700. After flying to London on a major airline, I would fly to Nairobi on a French airline and then to Madagascar on a respectable African airline. It took some time to find the cheapest route, but saving more than $2500 is definitely worth an hour or two of my time.

Be sure to ask your travel agent about student discounts. Most airlines give students discounted fares. A variety of discounts are available with an International Student Identity Card (ISIC). Check with travel agencies on or near college campuses; they are often very familiar with how to obtain students the cheapest fares. In addition, there are several national travel agencies that cater to students. Council Travel (1-800-2COUNCIL) and STA Travel (1-800-777-0112) are the largest. They usually have branches at major universities and in major cities around the world.

Stopovers are an option worth looking into if you are traveling to a destination that is very far away. Stopovers are prolonged stays in connecting cities. A stopover will cost you anywhere from $20 to $100 extra; however, you will get the opportunity to see new places and break up your trip somewhat.

When flying to Australia, I had a three week stopover in New Zealand and a three day stopover in Fiji. These stopovers were definitely worth the extra money for me. I was able to experience two more cultures and explore two more countries. It was also a great way to break up the long flight. Instead of traveling 17 hours straight, I was able to take two shorter, more bearable flights. Besides, who wants to spend five hours in Auckland's airport if you could spend a few weeks trekking around New Zealand's beautiful countryside?

If saving money is worth a little inconvenience, you can consider flying standby. In order to fly standby, you buy a pass that is valid only for a certain period of time. You are then eligible for an airline seat on a standby basis, which means that you will get a seat only after all the people with tickets get seats. While most airlines no longer offer standby tickets, some foreign airlines do for students. You can save a lot of money by flying standby, but you can also end up spending a lot of time in the airport (sometimes days). If you are flying standby, arrive at the gate early so that your name will be on top

of the standby list. Also, do not plan to fly standby during busy travel time such as the weeks before and after Christmas.

Consolidator companies are another option for cheaper airfares. Consolidators buy blocks of tickets at wholesale prices. The week before you plan to leave, the consolidator will contact you and give you a list of flights that they have available. You are obligated to accept one of these flights. Consolidator tickets can be very inconvenient because the tickets are non-refundable, the flights often have indirect routes and there may be long layovers.

Once you have arrived at your initial destination, you can usually find more inexpensive modes of transportation, such as trains and buses. However, if you are still traveling long distances, flying may continue to be a viable option. In addition, some airlines offer special student travel passes in which you are allowed to fly a designated number of times during a specific time period. Check with the airlines in the area you are traveling in to see if they have special deals for students.

One of the airlines in Australia offered a student travel pass. It was a good deal if you only planned to travel to three cities and they were all far away from each other. I decided not to get it because I worked my way around the country stopping at many places. I ended up flying once while I was in Australia. My friend and I randomly decided to check on airfare from Ayres Rock to Perth because we were dreading the three-day bus ride. As it turned out, it was only going to cost us $20 more for the three-hour flight. Needless to say, we paid the extra $20.

Train

Trains are a mainstay for backpackers. In Europe, for example, a train will get you anywhere. Trains can be expensive. However, if you plan ahead and purchase a rail pass, they are very affordable. If you buy your rail pass before you go to Europe, you will

save even more money. You should be able to buy a pass at any travel agency, particularly agencies that cater to students. There are two types of rail passes. One will let you travel an unlimited number of times during a certain period (more expensive). The other allows you to travel on a certain number of days within a two-month period (less expensive). The second type of rail pass is a better bargain unless you intend to visit a new town every day. If you are planning to travel more than the allotted number of days, buy regular tickets for your short trips and save the long, expensive trips for your pass. You can buy these passes for either first or second class compartments. Stick with second class. Not only is it much cheaper, but the people are also much friendlier. Second class is still very comfortable, too. Do not try to cheat on your pass and alter the days because the conductors will confiscate them and you will have to buy individual tickets from that point on.

When I was traveling through Switzerland, I accidentally wrote that it was the 25th instead of the 26th. The conductor noticed my mistake and allowed me to change the date. However, a month later in the Netherlands, the conductor noticed that I had previously changed a day and threatened to take up my pass. It took me a long time to explain the situation and convince him to not keep my rail pass. The next day I met two American girls who were not so lucky. A conductor confiscated their passes because he had discovered they had cheated on them. They lost hundreds of dollars because they had to buy tickets for the rest of their trip.

Trains are comfortable and convenient. You have plenty of room in the compartments and can enjoy the scenery as you travel. Another advantage of trains is that they provide you with the option of traveling overnight. You can sleep in the regular compartments or pay an extra $15-17 for a couchette compartment. A couchette is a second-class bunk. Couchette compartments usually contain six couchettes, which are stacked three high. Couchette compartments are a good investment because they have

locks and because you will get a better night's sleep. In addition, an attendant collects your passports when you are in a couchette compartment so that you will not be awaken when the border patrol is checking passports. Regular compartments do not have locks, and if they are full, you may not be able to lay down.

I loved taking trains, especially night trains. I liked the idea of utilizing my time even if I was sleeping. I felt like I accomplished something over the course of the night. I always paid the extra money for a couchette. I slept better and felt safer. Besides, I figured I would have spent that money on accommodations if I stayed in the city.

Bus

Buses are not as comfortable as trains, but they are often much cheaper. In addition, they may be your only option. Buses often travel to locations that trains do not service. You will still get all the great scenery and have the same companionship with fellow passengers. Some buses even show videos during the trip. You can also take overnight bus rides; however, expect to awaken with a crick in your neck. Do not let your views of the American bus system, which many people look down upon, affect your decisions about traveling by bus in other countries. Some countries have very good bus systems with special discounts for students.

I traveled around most of New Zealand and Australia by bus. I had misgivings at first because of my preconceived notions based on the American bus system; however, I had no complaints about the buses in New Zealand and Australia. In effect, the train system in Australia only covers the east coast. The bus systems service the entire country and enabled me to travel west.

Another bus alternative is "adventure buses." Adventure buses are like guided tours for backpackers; however, they are more relaxed and informal. The adventure buses generally service a limited area and take the backpackers to places "off-the-beaten-

path." These trips, which can last for a few days or a few weeks, are designed for budget-oriented backpackers who want to have some unique experiences within the country they are visiting. Other advantages of adventure buses are that someone else is making arrangements for you and that the guides shares their knowledge about the region with you. Your opportunity to meet local people also increases because the guide will be friends with many of them. The best thing about adventure bus trips is that traveling with the same group of people for a period of time enables you to make a lot of new friends.

I traveled down New Zealand's south island's west coast on an adventure bus. Taking that bus was one of the best decisions I made on that trip. During the trip, which lasted one week, I kayaked, went hiking on a glacier and visited a gold town. I also went to many small towns that I would have probably skipped over if I had not taken the tour. Our guide arranged our accommodations for us but provided us with a lot of freedom during the week. I became friends with people on the bus from Germany, Israel, Norway, Denmark, Switzerland, Sweden, England, and the Netherlands (just to name a few). I have recommended the same service to friends, all of whom had good experiences, too.

Car

You have two options when it comes to traveling by automobiles. You can rent a car, or you can buy one and then sell it later. Renting a car can be very expensive. When looking for a rental car, call every agency in the phonebook and ask how much the cheapest car they have costs. Inquire if the agency has any age requirements. Many rent-a-car companies will only rent to people over the age of 25. It is also very important to ask if the daily cost of the car is also the total cost. Rental agencies often also charge for insurance, taxes and fueling. In addition, they often have mileage limits. After you exceed the limit, they charge you extra for each mile. In most circumstances, renting a car is only practical on a short-term basis when you are not traveling long distances.

When I was in Australia, my friend and I considered renting a car to travel through the Northern Territory so that we could travel a more direct route to our destination. However, after calling all the rental agencies, I realized that it would not be practical because they charged extra for each kilometer over the first 200, and we had planned to use the car to travel long distances. We did rent a car, however, once at a national park. The bus from our hostel to Ayres Rock, the park's main attraction, cost $15. We opted for renting a car so that we could also see other parts of the park at any time we wanted. In addition, we shared the cost with two other people we met at the hostel. In the end, not only did we gain convenience by renting the car but we also saved money.

If you are traveling for a few months, you might consider buying a car. This method of travel can be quite inexpensive, but it can also be quite dangerous. First of all, make sure the car you buy is in good mechanical condition. You must then pay for registration costs and insurance. However, you can get much of your money back in the end when you sell the car. However, buying a car may be more hassle than it is worth. It could continually breakdown or you might not be able to sell it at the end of your trip. In addition, it might be hard to find affordable insurance. If you decide to buy a car, it would be advisable to learn a bit about fixing cars beforehand and to plan extra time at the end of your trip to sell the car.

Hitch-hiking

Many backpackers choose to hitch-hike. While it can provide a very inexpensive means of transportation, you should be wary of this activity. People foolishly believe that hitch-hiking in countries other than the United States is safe. While it may be safer, it is still not entirely safe. For instance, several hitch-hikers were killed in Australia in the early 1990s by a serial killer in what is now known as "The Backpacker Murders."

One alternative to hitch-hiking is finding rides on the hostel bulletin boards. Backpackers who have a car or who are renting a car often post notes offering a ride in order to share costs. Check out your hostel bulletin board and see if anyone is heading the same direction as you. You can also place "seeking ride" notes on the boards. Meet with the people beforehand. After talking with them for awhile, you should be able to determine if you would be comfortable traveling with these people. Trust you instincts and decline the ride if you feel wary of this person. Introduce your ride to people who work at the hostel. This way, if they have any bad intentions, they will think twice before harming you as there are people who can identify them.

Another option is organized ride shares. An organized ride share is an agency that matches drivers to passengers. Many cities have these agencies. Once you pay a small fee, you will have access to the agency's database. Make sure that the agency requires identification for all drivers and passengers so that it can pass the information off to the police should any foul play occur.

If you do decide to hitch-hike, be smart about it. Do not hitch-hike alone or at night. Do not place your bag in the truck first because many backpackers have lost all their belongings that way when the driver sped off before the hitch-hiker had gotten in the car. To be on the safe side, try to keep you bag next to you in the car. As it is illegal in some countries, know the different countries' laws on hitch-hiking. Only take rides to large cities because if you get left in a small town, you might just get stuck there. When you are in the car, keep your map out and make sure that the driver is heading in the right direction at all times.

I accepted a ride to my hostel once in Switzerland. The hostel was several miles from the train station and I had already walked around for half an hour and could not find it. I was a little wary at first, but the man seemed so nice. I kept ahold of my bag the entire time so that I could make a quick escape at a stop sign if necessary. I also kept my map out and made sure he was traveling the right streets. The man was so sweet; he would even stop every once and a while to show me where we were on the map. He even made sure that I was able to get a room at the hostel before he left. Taking that ride saved me from having to carry my backpack around for another hour and allowed me to meet a very nice man; however, it was also very stressful and not something I would necessarily want to do again.

Important Tips

1. Regardless of the mode of transportation that you plan to use, shop around and always ask if the company offers student discounts.
2. Buy your airfare at least a month in advance. Be flexible on the route and the dates you are willing to travel in order to save money.
3. If you have an open-ended airline ticket, make sure that you reserve a seat home before the airline books all its flights.
4. When buying airplane tickets, check prices from many different airlines and consider flying on a combination of airlines.
5. If rail passes are available, buy them before you leave for your trip.
6. Take overnight trains and buses to save time and money.
7. If you buy a car, make sure that you allot time at the end of your trip to sell it.
8. Do not hitch-hike alone. If you do hitch-hike, keep ahold of your backpack.

MONEY

Deciding how you are going to finance your trip is a very important decision you will need to make before you leave home. Your decision has the potential to either save or cost you hundreds of dollars. When weighing your options, remember that you can use a combination of these methods when paying for your trip.

Credit Cards

Credit cards are the most economical and convenient way to finance your trip. Credit cards are widely accepted in most developed countries and will give you the best exchange rate. The obvious problem with credit cards is that they charge interest; however, you can overpay your credit card bill before you leave so that you will not be paying any interest.

When I traveled, I always paid for everything possible with my credit cards. I gave my mom access to my savings account before I left so that she could take money out of my account to pay my bills when I was gone. This arrangement worked out well for me because I trust my mother.

You can also obtain cash advances from your credit card. When getting cash advances, remember that credit card companies charge you interest on cash advances from day one. Learn your personal identification number (PIN) before you start traveling. If you do not know your number, you can request a new one. Many banks will give you money that is charged to your account if you do not know your PIN number. This process takes longer because a teller must complete the transaction.

Mastercard, Visa and American Express are the most commonly found credit cards worldwide. Discover is not accepted outside the United States and Canada. Carry a few credit cards with you just in case you "max out" one of your cards. It is also important to carry an additional credit card in case you lose one. Keep the credit card companies' international phone numbers with you and your account numbers so that you can cancel any lost or stolen cards.

I accidentally forgot one of my credit cards at my hostel in Darwin when I was in a hurry to pay for my room so that I would not miss my bus. I did not notice that I was missing the card for several days. At this point I was too far away to go back and get it. I called the hostel and had them cut up my card. I also called Visa to cancel my card. It took a month to get a new card. If I had not had my other credit card, I would have had trouble paying for the remainder of my trip.

Automatic Teller Machines

Automatic Teller Machines (ATMs) are popping up all around the world. They are a great way to get cash because they offer good rates, are convenient, and do not charge interest. You will, however, be charged a small transaction fee each time you use your ATM card. Plus and Cirrus are the two largest international networks for debit cards. Make sure that your ATM card is on one of these systems. If your ATM card does not have a four-digit PIN number, ask your bank to issue you a four-digit PIN because many ATM machines abroad only accept four-digit numbers. In addition, some ATM machines will not let you choose if the money comes out of your savings or checking account. Therfore, it would be smart to place extra money in your checking account before you leave in case the ATMs always deduct the money from your checking account.

Do not rely entirely on your ATM cards because you might arrive in a city without ATM machines or the transaction might not be able to go through because of a bad connection.

When I first got to France, I tried to use my ATM card, but the transaction would not go through. After trying a few times, I became convinced that my ATM card did not work outside the United States so I quit trying to use it. I was running out of money towards the end of my trip. My cards, which had small limits, were maxed out and I was running out of traveler's checks. Out of desperation, I decided to try my ATM card again. I was shocked and relieved when it worked. I could have saved myself a lot of stress and money had I tried to use it earlier, but I am glad I learned early not to rely entirely on ATMs.

Traveler's Checks

Using traveler's checks is the safest method of financing your trip. Traveler's checks can be replaced if they are lost or stolen; however, they are not the most economical or practical way to pay for your trip. Keep a record of your traveler's check numbers and the company's toll-free hotline number separate from your checks so that you can have lost or stolen checks replaced.

Exchange rates for traveler's checks are worse than those for credit cards or ATM cards. In addition, unless you cash your traveler's checks in at a branch of the check supplier, you will be charged a commission. For example, if you cash in an American Express check at an American Express office, you will not be charged a commission. However, if you cash it in at a bank, they will charge you extra for the service. Before exchanging any checks ask what commission you will be charged. Many times you might think that you have found a good exchange rate, but then the exchanger will charge you a large commission.

Shop around for the best exchange rate. When cashing in traveler's checks, remember that the best exchange rates are at banks in major cities. The worst rates are at hotels, restaurants and border crossings (train stations, airports, etc). If you are using traveler's checks, you would be smart to have some currency of a country before you arrive. Otherwise, you will be forced to exchange a check at a bad exchange rate in order to have enough money to pay for your immediate needs such as ground transportation and accommodations. Buy small denominations (tens and twenties) so that you will not have to trade large amounts of money at these poor rates. Remember that you may not be able to exchange checks late at night, during weekends, or on holidays that you did not even know existed. Traveler's checks are more inconvenient compared to credit cards or ATM cards because you have to shop around for good exchange rates and sometimes have to wait in long lines to exchange your money. Exchange rates will be best for a currency in the country in which that currency is used. For example, you will get the best exchange for French francs in France.

American Express traveler's checks are the most accepted worldwide. American Express has offices in most European cities. Other companies that offer traveler's checks are Thomas Cook, Citicorp, Barclays Bank, Visa and Bank America.

Cash

Relying entirely on cash should be your last option. First of all, if you lose cash, it is gone forever. Only carry as much cash as you will need pay for what cannot be charged. Secondly, you will receive the worst exchange rates for cash. However, there

are times when it is smart to exchange cash. If you are leaving a country and have money left over, it would be smart to exchange that money for currency in a country that you have not yet visited so that you will have money to pay for your initial expenses once you arrive. Definitely get rid of weaker currencies such as Polish zlotys before you leave the country. German marks, French francs, English pounds and U.S. dollars are strong and widely used currencies that can be exchanged in most countries. In addition, you might want to take one "untouchable" big bill ($50) with you in case of an emergency. Keep this bill separate and only use it if you absolutely need to.

I planned to travel to Salzburg after leaving Florence, so I planned ahead and got some Austrian marks. However, when I arrived at the train station that night, I found out that the train I had planned on taking was canceled because of a strike. Since it was 11 p.m. and I had no accommodation, I decided to take another night train to Bern. I had to pay for my couchette on the train because the cashier stations were closed for the night. It wasn't until an hour into to trip when the conductor came to collect my money did I realize that I did not have any Swiss francs to pay for my couchette. Luckily for me, the conductor accepted American currency and I had a twenty dollar bill set aside in case of an emergency.

Important Tips

1. Charge all your purchases to your credit card.
2. Take several credit cards with you.
3. Either overpay your credit card bill before you leave or arrange for someone at home to pay your bills for you.
4. Know your four-digit PIN numbers.
5. Have a small amount of a country's currency prior to your arrival so that you will not need to exchange money at the border crossing poor exchange rates. Consider

exchanging any extra currency you have left over for currency from countries that you have not yet visited.

6. Keep a record of your credit card account numbers, traveler's check numbers, and the companies' hotline phone numbers separate from your credit cards and traveler's checks so that you will be able to easily replace lost or stolen cards.
7. Buy some traveler's checks in denominations of ten and twenty so that if you have to exchange a check at a bad rate, you will not lose a lot of money.
8. Do not carry too much cash with you, but keep an "untouchable" bill with you for emergencies.
9. Exchange extra money you have in weak currencies before you leave that country.
10. Do not rely entirely on any one method of financing your trip because you never know when an ATM machine won't work, your credit card will be left somewhere, or an exchange service will be closed.

PACKING

The most important preparation for your backpacking trip is packing. Knowing what and how to pack is critical in ensuring a comfortable trip. The most important rule is to **pack lightly**. Limit yourself to one backpack. Instead of taking everything you think you might need, only take what you plan to use. Remember when packing that **YOU** will be the one carrying your bag. Traveling light has several advantages. It offers you security because you are able to carry everything on your body. You will also be more mobile. With only one bag, you will be able to walk the shorter distances or take public transportation for the longer ones. If you have several bags, you will have to take cabs a lot of the time. In this way, having only one bag also saves you money.

The biggest advantage to traveling lightly is your comfort. Since you will be carrying your bag, the lighter you travel, the less aches and pain you will get over the course of your trip. In addition, your hands will be free to open doors or carry a map. Try to keep your load under 25 pounds. People always say to decide what you are going to take and then cut that in half. This is good advice. Another good idea is to pack your bag as you plan to carry in on your trip and then walk around with your backpack on for a few miles to see how it feels. When you finish your walk, repack your bag to make it more comfortable. Always be thinking of what you could eliminate when you are packing. Pick a bag smaller than you think you need as a way to discourage you from overpacking. When you leave, your pack should not be full because you are quite likely to pick up some souvenirs along the way.

I cannot stress the importance of packing lightly. Although I only had one bag the first time I backpacked in Europe, I was constantly kicking myself for how much clothing I brought. As it turned out, I wore a lot of the same clothes over and over and some not at all. I learned from my mistake and packed well for my trip to Australia. My backpacking partner, however, packed way too much. I tried to warn her before the trip not to pack so much. Her response was that there was no way I could survive with so little belongings. Throughout the trip, she was constantly complaining about the weight of her bag in comparison to mine. She vowed never to take so much stuff on another trip. I have never met any backpackers who wished they have brought more stuff, but I have met many people who realize they brought way to much.

What to Pack in

It makes sense that if you are planning to go backpacking that you would want to have a backpack; however, you would be surprised how many people try to go backpacking with a suitcase or shoulder bag. Do not make this same mistake. If you do not have a backpack, buy one. Suitcases are only feasible if you plan to stay in two or three cities and plan to always take a cab to and from your accommodations. You will not regret investing in a backpack. You will, however, regret fooling yourself into believing that your suitcase will do. A decent backpack will cost between $100 to $200.

The biggest mistake I made on my first backpacking trip was thinking that a shoulder bag would suffice. I had to carry that bag several miles every other day, and my shoulders and back were constantly killing me. When I decided I wanted to go backpacking again, the first thing I did was buy a backpack. A good backpack can make all the difference on your trip.

When choosing a backpack, consider quality and transportability. Make sure the backpack has strong seams and zippers. Buy a backpack with adjustable, padded straps. Good backpacks have a hip strap as well as shoulder straps. When you are purchasing a backpack, have the bag fitted to you correctly in order to avoid backaches on the road. Avoid backpacks with external frames. Although they achieve the best weight

distribution, they are awkward and less flexible then internal frames, and they could possibly break.

In addition to a backpack, you will need a daypack. On your day excursions, you will want to carry your journal, guidebook, camera and other valuables in this daypack with you. Buy a backpack that has a zip-on/zip-off daypack. This will make carrying your backpack so much easier.

Backpacks generally have one main compartment. Bags that lay flat and allow you to zip open the whole compartment are much easier to use that bags with the opening at the top. If the backpack only has an opening at the top, then you will often have to take everything out of your backpack to get what you need. If the whole compartment zips open, you can simply grab what you need without having to undo your packing. Also buy a bag that has internal straps as well as external compression straps.

One type of backpack that is becoming more popular is the travel pack. Travel packs are usually soft-sided and made out of tough nylon (similar to the material used to make regular bookbags). Travel packs have a shoulder strap as well as handles on the side of the backpack so that the traveler can have several options on how to carry the bag. In addition, travel packs have a cover that zips on over the hip and shoulder straps, which is important because straps often get torn when being placed in and taken out of airplanes, trains, buses and lockers.

I believe I bought the perfect backpack for my second trip. It was a travel pack with a zip-on daypack. My friend who I was traveling with also had a backpack, but her bag was huge, opened from the top, and did not have a zip on backpack. She always had to take everything out of her backpack to find what she needed and had to carry her backpack and daypack separately. After the trip, she decided that if she went backpacking again, she would need a new backpack similar to mine because it was so much more convenient for traveling.

How to Pack

The most simple way to pack is to roll your clothes. Rolled clothes take up less room, do not wrinkle and can be taken our and returned to your bag without sifting through everything else. In addition, if you are carrying something valuable and/or breakable, you can place it inside a rolled towel or sweatshirt to cushion it. When packing, place your heavier belongings in the middle of the bag to avoid backaches.

Organizer pouches are also very helpful. Organizer pouches are nylon bags that help backpackers separate and organize their belongings. They come in different colors and sizes so that you can differentiate what you have in each bag and can always take out the pouch you want the first time. For example, take a large organizer pouch for dirty clothes. You will also want to have a bag for any extra shoes and one for your towel, which will often still be damp when you are packing your bag.

Zip-loc bags are also a great idea because they are sealed. Anything in them that spills will not ruin your other belongings in your bag. In addition, these bags are great for small items that could easily get lost. Carry your toiletries in a freezer bag. This will save you a lot of space since toiletry bags are often bulky. Buy the bags that actually zip close because they are easier to close and much more secure than the ones that snap closed. Take several Zip-loc bags with you (both the sandwich and freezer bags). You may want to carry food, pens or film in them. You never know when you will need one.

I used my Zip-loc bags over and over. I had all my toiletries in one, which saved me a lot of space. I also packed food in some. I became a pistachio and dried fruit freak when traveling around Australia. I would buy snacks in bulk and then transfer them into my Zip-loc bags for the long bus trips.

Always utilize all the room you have. Pack small items inside your shoes or your camera bag. Empty space is wasted space. Also remember to repack you bag continually throughout your trip so that the weight will remain properly distributed and your belongings will be easily organized. If you are traveling with somebody else, "buddy pack." Many of the items that you need can be shared with your companion(s). For example, you will only need one guidebook, one flashlight, and one first-aid kit. Before your trip, sit down together and decide what you can share and then decide how to separate who will carry the shared belongings.

What to Pack - Clothing

When selecting the clothes that you want to take with you on your trip, consider coordinating the colors so that every item matches the others. This way you will have more combinations of clothes to wear. Another way to limit the amount of clothes that you pack is to select clothing that you can layer. By layering, you can adjust to the weather without packing extra clothes. Pack comfortable clothes that are easy to clean. Lastly, consider traveling with "disposable" clothing. Towards the end of your trip, you might need room for all the souvenirs that you bought along to way. You can obtain that needed room by throwing out some old T-shirts or pair of shoes. In addition, if you take all your old socks and underwear, you can just throw them out along to way instead of washing them. Here a suggested list of clothing to take on a backpacking trip:

- **2 pairs of pants/skirts** (Avoid jeans. They are bulky and hard to dry.)
- **2 pairs of shorts**

- **3 T-shirts**
- **2 long-sleeve shirts** (one heavier than the other)
- **1 swimsuit** (can double as shorts for a guy or underwear for a girl)
- **1 sweater or sweatshirt**
- **1 windbreaker or coat** (make sure its somewhat heavy but not bulky)
- **5+ pairs of socks**
- **5+ pairs of underwear**
- **1 set of lightweight long underwear**
- **1 long T-shirt** (can double as sleep shirt or cover-up for the beach)
- **1 nice outfit** (You never know when you will decide to go someplace nice. Plus, after wearing the same clothes all the time, sometimes you will want to dress up)
- **1 pair of walking shoes/boots**
- **1 pair of dressy shoes/sandals** (make sure they can be worn with your nice outfit)
- **1 pair of flip-flops/shower shoes** (optional)

Remember that comfort is the key. Pack clothing, especially socks, that can dry fast. Also make sure that your shoes are good quality since you will be walking in them so much. Resist the temptation to pack more. You will be surprised at how easy it is wear the same clothes over and over again. Besides, you in a new city every few days. Nobody will know that you are wearing the same clothes over and over (plus, they will all be wearing the same clothes, too).

What to Pack - Toiletries

All you toiletries should be able to fit into a Zip-loc bag. The key to packing toiletries is to eliminate what you do not need and minimize they size of everything you do need. Use travel-size containers; do not take regular size bottles. Stock up on small travel bottles whenever you or a friend stays at hotels or buy travel-sized bottles at the store. By taking several travel-sized bottles of shampoo, for example, you are saving space because every time you finish a bottle, you can throw it out. Women should also minimize their make-up. Here is a list of suggested toiletries to pack:

- **1 brush/comb**
- **1 toothbrush**
- **toothpaste**
- **deodorant**
- **shampoo/conditioner** (2-1 brands, travel-size containers)
- **liquid body wash** (travel-size containers)
- **1 pair of nail clippers**
- **a razor and shaving cream**
- **dental floss**
- **1 small tube of sunscreen**
- **a medium sized towel**

If you wear **contacts** or **glasses**, take an extra pair and your prescription. Pack a trail-size of contact solution that you can use to clean, rinse and soak your contacts in. Females should also pack **feminine hygiene products** such as tampons and maxi-pads. Some

countries simply do not sell tampons and some do not sell tampons with applicators, so you might want to pack some before you leave. If you plan to be sexually active, remember to pack **birth control**, such as condoms and the pill.

You will also want to pack **laundry supplies** in a Zip-loc bag. You should take a sink stopper, detergent, spot remover and a clothesline with you so that you can do laundry in the bathroom. These items will come in handy because you will often run out of socks and underwear before you need to do a full load of laundry.

What to Pack - Backpacking Essentials

Pack a small **first-aid kit**. Your kit should include: bandages, Q-tips, aspirin, antihistamines, motion sickness tablets, antiseptic, tweezers, insect repellent, water purification tablets, and any prescriptions you may have. You can pack your first-aid kit in a Zip-loc bag. If your lucky, you will never need to use it, but you'll be glad you brought it the first time you cut yourself.

You may want to consider packing a **sleeping bag** or a **sleep sheet**. Some hostels will require that you have a sleeping bag or a sleep sheet, while other hostels will provide sheets and blankets for you. If you decide to take a sleeping bag, buy one that compresses and can be tied to your backpack. A sleeping bag is optional. In the spring, summer, and fall you can generally get by without one, but sometimes you will wish you had one. If you decide against taking a sleeping bag, pack a sheet. You probably will not need it often, but you will need it sometimes (and it doesn't take up very much room).

There are many small items that first-time backpackers do not think about needing until the middle of their trip. Go ahead and buy these items before your trip (in all probability they will be much cheaper to buy in the United States). Here is a list of the often unthought of backpacking essentials:

- **a flashlight** (for those mornings you have to pack your bags at 5 a.m.)
- **a pocket knife**
- **luggage locks**
- **travel alarm clock**
- **a plastic water bottle** (you will always want to carry water with you, especially when traveling by train or bus)
- **a journal/notebook**
- **address book**
- **reading materials** (pack a paperback book and then trade your book(s) people you met along the way)
- **camera, film, batteries**
- **a money belt**
- **a calculator** (it will come in very handy when trying to figure exchange rates)
- **several pens**
- **a walkman and cassettes** (optional)
- **playing cards** (optional)
- **backpack rain cover** (optional)

- **a roll of toilet paper** (optional - you cannot always find toilet paper in developing countries)

Do not pack electrical equipment. Each country has its own set of power outlets, which means that if you were traveling to more than one country, you would need several power adapters. In addition, electrical appliances add a lot of weight to your belongings. Get a no fuss haircut before you leave for your trip. You'll be glad you did.

What to Pack - Guidebooks

A guidebook is the backpacker's Bible. Do not even consider traveling without buying a guidebook for the area you are visiting. Guidebooks provide you information about the cities' accommodations, sites, and restaurants. They also give you information on each country's history, currency, and telephone systems. Guidebooks contain several useful maps and all the addresses and phone numbers that you will ever need. You will learn about several great adventure ideas from your guidebook as well.

Make sure that you buy a guidebook that is written specifically for backpackers. The most common backpacker-oriented guidebooks are *Berkeley Guides*, *Let's Go*, *Lonely Planet*, and *Rough Guides*. *Lonely Planet* is considered the best guidebook by serious backpackers. It is published in Australia and written by long-term, expert backpackers. *Lonely Planet* has guidebooks for every country and most regions. It has special "shoe-string" travel guides for extremely low-budget trips. Most backpackers recognize that *Lonely Planet* has not only the most but also the best information.

Berkeley Guides are written by students of the University of California at Berkeley, and *Let's Go* guides are written by Harvard students. These guidebooks are updated each year but only cover European and North American countries. They do not have as much information as *Lonely Planet*, but they have much more youthful humor.

Take your time when selecting a guidebook. Spend time in the travel section of your bookstore comparing the different books. Your guidebook will be your best friend. You will constantly be referring to it throughout your trip. Shop around until you find the guidebook that is best for you.

Important Tips

1. PACK LIGHTLY! PACK LIGHTLY! PACK LIGHTLY!
2. Walk around several miles with your backpack on before leaving for your trip to make sure that it is a good weight.
3. Always ask yourself if you really need each item you pack. Constantly look for items you could eliminate.
4. Buy a backpack (travel pack) with adjustable, padded straps, sturdy seams and zippers, a large compartment that fully opens and a zip-on daypack.
5. When packing, roll your clothes.
6. Use organizer pouches and Zip-loc bags to separate your belongings.
7. Pack clothes that you can coordinate and layer.
8. Pack comfortable, easy-to-clean clothing.
9. Use travel-size toiletries.

10. Buy all the items you need before you travel because they will be much cheaper.

11. Do not take electrical equipment with you.

12. Shop around for the guidebook that you think is best.

HOSTELS

Next to transportation, accommodation is the largest expense a traveler will incur. Many people assume that their choice is limited to a staying in hotels, but backpackers can find much more inexpensive places to stay -- HOSTELS. Next to a guidebook, a hostel is a backpacker's best friend. Hostels, quite simply, are low-cost lodgings in which travelers share facilities in order to cut costs. Hostels are also able to provide cheap accommodations because they do not provide all the "extras" that most hotels do. Hostels, however, do provide the bare necessities, which is all a backpacker needs. In addition, hostels are popular because they are often the hub of backpacker activity, providing a way to meet new people.

Backpackers stay in dormitory-style rooms that are shared by anywhere from two to 30 people. Rooms are usually outfitted with a series of bunkbeds and separated by gender. Hostels also offer singles or doubles for travelers who would prefer not to share a room with other people they do not know; however, these rooms will obviously cost more.

People also share bathrooms at hostels. Some hostels have a bathroom for every bedroom, but some only provide one bathroom for each sex. For the most part, the bathrooms are very clean, but you should be aware that some bathrooms might not meet your personal standards of hygiene. Most hostels are fairly clean, so do not hesitate to find a new hostel to stay in if your current hostel is not up to your personal standards.

The first hostel I stayed at cost $5 a night. Everyone slept in the same room (the hostel had been an old gymnasium). The bathrooms were communal and not very nice. Of course, I began to have doubts about hostels. However, once I realized how much money I was saving and how many great people I was meeting, I decided it was worth

having to take a gross shower every once in awhile. I soon found out most hostels are nice and that I couldn't base my opinion on all hostels by my experience at one bad one .

Other shared facilities include lounges, kitchens and laundry equipment. The lounges usually include a television, tables, couches and chairs. Backpackers often hang out in the lounge when they are at the hostel because it is a great place to meet other backpackers. Backpackers can also use the lounge to eat in, catch up on correspondence, or check out the television shows in the different countries. In addition, lounges often contain games, books and traveling information for the backpackers to use.

Most hostels have kitchens. The kitchens are equipped with the standard appliances such as refrigerators and stoves. Hostels also provide the basic cooking utensils, pots, pans, dishes and silverware. Backpackers often prefer to cook their own food in hostel kitchens because it is cheaper than eating out every meal. The kitchens have a food storage area for the guests and a store of communal food, usually staples that are too bulky to travel with, such as sugar, butter and cooking oil.

When I first started backpacking, I always ate out. Eating out all the time can get very expensive. Then I began to just eat bread (whether it be a baguette or an ordinary loaf) -- cheap but not very nutritional. In the end, I realized the best thing to do was to buy my food at a grocery store and cook at the hostel. Sometimes I'd even buy food with people I meet at the hostel, and we would make a big feast. I ate better and cheaper using this method. I just wish I would have thought to do it sooner.

Some hostels also have laundry facilities. Be aware of when you will be needing to do laundry. When laundry time comes, try to choose a hostel that has a washing machine and a dryer. Otherwise, you will end up having to lug your backpack across town and waste a few hours at a laundromat.

In general, hostels create a communal atmosphere for travelers. Hostels have a very open and welcoming feel about them. The staffs at hostels are often young and laid-back. They are willing to help the guests in any way possible and are knowledgeable resources for backpackers. Often hostels will arrange activities for the guests to partake in, such as a trip into the beach, a rock-climbing experience or a communal dinner in the courtyard. The scenes at hostels vary, largely depending on the location of the hostel. Prepare for a loud, party hostel if it is located in the center of the city and for a tranquil, relaxing one if it is on the outskirts of town.

Who Stays at Hostels?

Although travelers of all ages stay at hostels, the majority of the guests will be young backpackers. People traveling alone, in pairs and in groups all stay at hostels. The people staying at hostels are usually very outgoing and friendly. Backpackers often hit it off immediately with other people staying at hostels because they are all sharing the same incredible experience of traveling to new countries, learning about different cultures and meeting great friends. Backpackers often exchange stories and travel tips with the people they meet at hostels. Take this opportunity to learn more about places that you are planning to go and to also share your knowledge with others.

I made so many great friendships with people I met in hostels. Traveling alone, I met wonderful people to hang out with in the cities I visited. I personally think that the best part of my backpacking experiences was not all the wonderful places I got to see but all the incredible people I met. I also know that I would not have made half of the friends I made if I would had not stayed in hostels.

How Does a Hostel Work?

Hostels are able to provide inexpensive accommodations for two reasons. First, guests are sharing the costs by sharing rooms and facilities. Secondly, hostels provide "no frills" lodging. The cost for hostels varies from $5 to $30 a night. Different factors that influence the cost of a room include how many people are sharing the room and how well the hostel is maintained. Another important determinant of cost is what country, region or city the hostel is located in. Some countries, such as those in Eastern Europe or Southeast Asia, are very inexpensive for the foreign traveler; therefore, the accommodations will also be less costly.

For the most part, hostels do not require reservations; however, if it is the peak of tourist season, your best bet is to call ahead and make reservations. Sometimes the workers at your current hostel will book ahead for you at other hostels, particularly if they are members of the same hostel affiliation. If you don't speak the language, don't be afraid to call yourself. People who work at hostels almost always speak English, the universal backpacking language. However, sometimes it is difficult to call ahead, especially if you are crossing national borders because the country code long-distance system is often difficult to understand, and some hostels do not accept reservations. In such situations, arrive in the city as early in the morning as possible in order to get a room before they are all booked.

All hostels ask guests to abide by certain rules. Most of the rules involve common courtesy, and even if the hostels do not specifically ask you to follow these rules, you should still do so. First, clean up after yourself. As mentioned before, a hostel is a no

frills accommodation, but that does not mean it cannot be a nice and clean place to stay. Backpackers are the ones who can keep it from being a nice and clean place to stay. It takes very little time to clean up after yourself, and a clean environment is something that all the guests can enjoy.

People staying at hostels also need to be quiet at night. While hostel guests should expect some noise at these establishments, they should also expect to be able to fall asleep at night. A small portion of backpackers tend to prefer to go out at night and sleep during the day. This is fine as long as they respect the other backpackers who are wanting to get a good night's sleep so that they can get an early start for their exploring the next day. When people are in the room sleeping, other backpackers should respect that and remain relatively quiet even during the day.

Common courtesy is very important at hostels. I was woken up several times when people who had been out drinking came in. That is one of the down sides of sharing a room. I, in turn, probably also woke people up when I had a 5 a.m. flight home. In the end, I didn't mind the noise as much. It is one aspect of backpacking that you just have to accept.

Some hostels have curfews and lockouts. Backpackers need to be aware of these times so that they do not find themselves out on the streets. Most hostels do not have curfews, but those which do require guests to be inside by a certain time at night. After this time, the door is locked. A lockout, on the other hand, is a time during the day that the hostel locks its doors so that the workers can give the place a thorough cleaning and ensure the safety of its guests' possessions. Lockouts generally only last for an hour or two and do not affect most travelers who are out seeing the city or experiencing the culture.

Lastly, hostels sometimes require guests to leave a form of identification at the desk as a deposit. It is, therefore, advantageous for backpackers to bring along an extra form of ID. Ideally, this identification will be something that can be lost or accidentally left behind without causing a great deal of trouble. You definitely do not want to remember that you left your passport at the hostel as you are crossing a border into another country.

I had to leave my passport at the desk of a hotel (I couldn't find a vacancy in any of the hostels!) in Florence as a deposit. When I left the next morning I forgot to get it back. For some odd reason I decided to go ahead and convert a traveler's check into Swiss currency. As I went into the American Express office, I went to take out my passport and realized I had left it at the hotel. Lucky for me, I had just enough time to run back to the hotel and get my passport before my train left. If I had left without my passport, I would have been kicked off the train at the border and would have had to travel back to Florence to get my passport. That would have been a tremendous waste of time and money. I learned to always remember to get my identification back when I checked out of my hostel or hotel.

How Safe Are Hostels?

Hostels are generally safe, but guests should take extra precautions to ensure that they do not become the victim of crime. First of all, use your intuition. Don't stay at a hostel if you feel that it will be unsafe. Be aware of what doors can be locked and how easy it would be for people who are not staying in your room to enter it. In addition, if you feel uncomfortable sharing a room with the other people staying in your room, ask the management to switch your rooms.

In general, you can leave your backpack with non-valuables in your room. Hostels sometimes provide lockers to store your belongings in. Nevertheless, make sure you lock the zippers of your backpack together so that no one can open it easily.

Remember that backpackers are not looking to carry anymore items along with them than they already have, so the temptation to steal other people's towels or T-shirts is not great. Do not, however, leave any valuables in your room during the day. Either carry your valuables with you in your daypack or have them stored in the hostel's safe if the hostel has one. Definitely do not leave any valuables lying around your room, even if you're just running to the bathroom down the hall. Occasionally things will be stolen. Be aware of what you have at all times, and immediately report any stolen belongings to the management.

How Do You Choose the Right Hostel?

Backpackers have two main resources to help them decide which hostels are right for them. The first is a guidebook. All backpackers should take with them an up-to-date guidebook to the country or region in which they will be traveling. The guidebooks will list all the hostels located within the city. The books will also give a brief description about the hostels' atmospheres, prices and locations. The guidebooks also provide the hostels' phone numbers in order to make reservations and maps in order to find the hostels.

The other resource available to backpackers is other backpackers. Ask travelers who you meet at hostels, train/bus stations or on the street if they have been to any of the cities you intend to visit ,and if so, ask them what hostels they have stayed at in those cities. They can give you first-hand accounts on the hostels that are very helpful. In addition, hostels sometimes have comment books that backpackers write advice in. Scan

through these books and see which hostels people seem to keep recommending or warning others about.

Some of the best hostels I stayed in were ones that other backpackers recommended to me. I figured that if they loved them, I probably would, too. I was never disappointed. I was also happy to recommend good hostels to the people I meet. Talking to other backpackers and asking them questions is one of the best ways to help plan your trip.

How Are Hostels Organized?

The most prominent hostels are often members of hostelling affiliations. These affiliations are organizations that have set standard requirements for the hostels they govern. The affiliations generally sell membership cards to travelers who can then stay at the member hostels at a discount. Hostels that belong to affiliations often have more rules for their guests. The largest affiliation is American Youth Hostels. You can often buy memberships at the hostels and can sometimes purchase them before you leave. Refer to your guidebook to determine what other affiliations exist in the region you are traveling too and how you can buy a membership.

Hostels that do not belong to affiliations sometimes join together in their marketing efforts and to offer additional services to their guests. These networks are often regional in focus. In addition, many hostels are independently operated. Independent hostels are often just as good if not better than hostels that are members of affiliations and networks. The most important determinant in the quality of a hostel is the individual management at each hostel.

I preferred staying at independent hostels. Hostels that belong to affiliations often have more rules and the management can be uptight at times. I never bought a membership to an affiliation, as I thought it was a waste of money. The affiliations will let you buy your membership as you travel. In other words, instead of paying $20 to join

before you travel, each time you stay at an affiliation hostel you count the $2 extra that non-members pay towards your membership. After staying at 10 affiliation hostels you have a membership. I never stayed at more than three or four hostels of a particular affiliation.

Are Hostels Your Only Option?

Of course, backpackers have other options besides hostels. Hotels are not always expensive. In Eastern European and Southeast Asian countries, many hotels are quite affordable for the average backpacker. Another option is camping out. Campsites are often a few dollars cheaper than a night in a hostel; however, camping out requires that you carry a lot of equipment with you. In addition, you must consider personal safety in regards to camping. Guidebooks will provide a list of campsites. Before planning your trip, you will need to decide whether you would like to camp out and make sure that there are campsites throughout the area you will be traveling.

Important Tips

1. Meet as many people as possible. Hang out in the lounge and initiate conversation. In addition to getting tips from other backpackers, you can learn about different cultures and make friends from around the world. As an added bonus, next time you go backpacking, perhaps you will have made friends you can stay with during future travels.
2. Always remember to be courteous and respectful to other guests in the hostel.
3. You can save a lot of money by buying your food at grocery stores or markets and preparing it in the kitchens at hostels.

4. Try to book rooms in advance, but do not book too far ahead because backpackers often change their plans as they travel. Make reservations in one city at a time.
5. Arrive in the city early in the morning. The earlier you get to a city, the better your chances are to get into the hostel of your choice. In addition, it is not advisable to arrive in a city at night because it can be dangerous to wander around a city in which you are not familiar.
6. ALWAYS CLEAN UP AFTER YOURSELF!
7. At first, you might not be very impressed by the concept of hostels, but keep an open mind about staying in hostels. Chances are that after you have stayed in a few, you will be quite used to them and enjoy the atmosphere immensely.

SAFETY

Now that you are set for the adventure of a lifetime, you need to make sure that you take the necessary precautions to ensure your own safety. Backpackers are rarely the victim of serious crime. However, they are not immune to the crime problems of the area in which they are traveling. Travelers should educate themselves on the crime problems of the countries that they are traveling in. Research the customs, the crime trends and political situations of the countries you plan to visit before you leave on your trip. Read travel warnings published by the U.S. State Department (www.stolaf.edu/network/travel-advisories.html). It is also important to keep abreast of international current events in the news. Remember that while many countries are very safe, crime can happen anywhere at anytime to anyone.

While tourists are seldom the victim of serious crime, they are an easy mare for smaller crimes such as pickpocketing and theft. Backpackers are often the targets and subsequently victims of petty theft. Thieves often target travelers at train stations and tourist areas. Therefore, it is important that you do not take anything with you that is irreplaceable. Accept the idea that you will not be returning with everything you take. This realistic outlook will prepare you for the worst and can only produce a sense of appreciation if nothing is stolen.

The first time I went backpacking, I spent the first half of the trip stressing over whether or not my new camera would be stolen. I soon realized that I was experiencing the trip of a lifetime and that I was letting the anxiety over my camera put a damper on the whole trip. I decided not to worry about my camera anymore. I realized that my camera only cost $300 and that I could replace it. Changing my mindset in this way allowed me to enjoy the rest of my trip (and I was pleasantly surprised when I arrived home with my camera!).

It is the backpackers' responsibility to take measures to protect themselves. There are several simple steps that backpackers can take that will improve their chances of making it through their trip unscathed.

How should money be carried?

The best way to protect your money, credit cards and valuable documents is to carry them in a money pouch. Money pouches are worn under clothing. They can be tied around the waist, worn around the neck or pinned to the waist of pants. Because pouches are located under clothing, they are not very accessible to thieves. However, it is important to make sure that they are secure and cannot easily fall off of you. Because it can be awkward to continually be taking your money pouch out, you might want to carry a small amount money in your pockets to pay for the miscellaneous purchases that you will be making during the course of the day.

Where can belongings be left?

Normally, you can leave the majority of your belonging in your hostel or place of accommodation. It is important, however, to make sure that you lock all of your bags shut. Buy locks before you leave home and always use them to lock zippers together so that no one can open your bags. Hostels sometimes have lockers for your bags or special rooms to in which to lock guests' bags.

If you are not staying in a city for the entire day, yet want to explore without having to lug you backpack around, put your belongings in a locker at the train/bus

station. Be aware of the amount of time the locker will remain locked. Some lockers pop open when the time you have paid for expires. Make sure that you retrieve you bag before your time runs out! Otherwise, your belongings will likely be taken by a passerby.

Never leave any of your valuables behind in your backpack. Carry them with you at all times or leave them in a safe at your place of lodging. Carry your money, credit cards and important documentation in your money pouch and place other valuables, such as a camera or a walk-man, in your daypack. Always keep your daypack locked, too.

What should you do with your bags when you are sitting around or waiting?

When backpackers are just sitting around in a park or waiting for a train, they are often not paying attention to what is going on around them. If you are just hanging out at a cafe or in a garden and only have your daypack with you and do not want to wear your daypack, place it on the ground and put one of your feet through a strap so that you are still holding on to it. If your daypack cannot be connected, try to intertwine the straps so that the two bags are connected. The most important rule is to always be aware of your possessions and be prepared for someone trying to grab them. NEVER leave your bags outside unattended!

When I went backpacking, I liked to go to different parks or gardens to relax and write in my journals. As I sat down, I would put a leg through on of my daypack's straps. That way, my bag was just laying around, and I felt comfortable enough to do whatever I was doing without worrying about my bag.

How can you travel around a city safely?

Know your surroundings. Use the maps provided in your guidebook. Study them before you arrive in the city so that you will be familiar with the area. Avoid walking around alone at night. If you do go out at night, stay close to your accommodation and try to stay in lighted areas. Learn how to use the cities' mass transit systems during the day and know when it stops working at night. The last thing you want to do is get lost on it at night and be stuck across town when it shuts down.

Do not arrive in a city late at night. It will not only be hard to find a place to stay, but it is also not a good idea to walk around an unfamiliar area when it is dark. By looking lost while carrying all of your belongings, you will appear to be an easy mark.

One time a friend and I arrived in Wellington, New Zealand, well after dark. We walked to several hostels, all of which were booked. We finally were able to find a room in a hostel a few hours later; however, it was across town in a bad neighborhood. Needless to say, the two of us were very scared as we walked through the rough and unlit section of town with our packs on our back and our maps in our hands. From then on, we always tried to arrive in new cities as early in the day as possible.

What should you do to ensure the safety of you possessions when traveling?

First of all, ALWAYS lock your bags up whether traveling by airplane, train or bus. If the bags are locked, the luggage handlers will be less likely to look around in them. Once again, always have your daypack with you, as it contains your essential documents and travel funds.

Many backpackers prefer to travel overnight on trains to save time and money that would have been spent on accommodations. Thieves often travel on these overnight trains, so travelers should be cautious during these night trips. If you are staying in a

compartment with couchettes, take the top couchette. This action will make you less accessible to thieves. If you are sleeping in a regular compartment without couchettes, sleep with your body against the door so that you will be awakened whenever the door is opened.

I loved traveling by overnight train because I arrive at my destination in the morning; however, I talked to many backpackers who had been robbed on these trains. They had often slept in the regular compartments. I always paid the extra for compartments with couchettes not only because they were more comfortable but also because they had locks on the doors. One time I couldn't get a couchette compartment because they were all already full. I got very nervous. As I waited for the train, I saw what looked to be a very nice family was also waiting for the train. I struck up conversation with them. We shared a regular compartment. I purposively slept by the door, leaning my body up against it. I always awoke right away when the door was opened. Knowing I was with ordinary people and that I would wake whenever the door opened, made the trip much safer in my eyes.

Important Tips

1. ALWAYS keep your bags locked.
2. Know your surroundings and be aware of everything that's happening around you.
3. Do not take anything with you that you cannot afford to lose. If you would die if something happened to your grandmother's ring, leave it at home.
4. Have the mindset that something will be stolen. The only questions are what and when? This mindset will also keep you on your guard.
5. NEVER leave you valuables unattended. When in public, always have a hold of your bags.
6. Remember that you are subject to the laws of the country you are visiting. Do not use illegal drugs. If you break a country's laws, there is little that your government can do to help you.

7. Get plenty of food and sleep so that you will be more alert (and have plenty of energy to explore!).
8. Avoid getting intoxicated. If you are going out to drink, go to an establishment close to your accommodation and walk in lighted areas. Continue to be on your guard.
9. Avoid areas that have bad reputations. If you go to them, do not go alone.
10. If you find yourself in trouble for any reason, call your country's nearest embassy or consulate for help. A list of embassies and consulates should be located in your guidebook.

When writing this handbook, I used several webpages to augment my own backpacking knowledge. These webpages may also prove to be very beneficial to you. This list is by no means a complete list of backpacking webpages. If you explore the Internet on you own, you will surely find much more information.

Air Traveler's Handbook: www.cis.ohio-state/hypertext/faq/usenet/travel/air/handbook

The Compleat Carry-On Traveler: members.aol.com/ddyment/travel.html

The Internet Guide to Hostelling: www.hostels. com

Lonely Planet: www.lonelyplanet.com

The Money Abroad FAQ: www.inria.fr/robotvis/personnel/laveau/money-faq/moneyabroad.html

Round-the-World Travel Guide: www.solutions.net/rec-trave/rtw/html/faq-rtw-52.html

Shoestring Travel: www.stratpub.com/shoe1.html#icons

Travelite FAQ: www.kva.net/~lani/travel.html

Universal Packing List: www.solutions.net/rec-travel/general/packing_list.html

U.S. State Department Travel Warnings: www.stolaf.edu/network/travel-advisories.html