

Get Organized with a Pretrip Checklist

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OK, we know not everyone is a compulsive list maker, but trip details have a way of spinning out of control. Here is a general list of the steps you need to take to ensure nothing goes unattended at the last minute. Print this out and save it

One year ahead

- Start research, using Web sites, guidebooks, travel agents.
- Create a budget. Figure out, realistically, what you'll need per day for room, food, sightseeing, entertainment.
- Start saving furiously. Open a savings account just for your vacation.
- Consult a calendar of events to see whether there are places you want to be — or avoid — on your trip.
- If you're going abroad, consider taking a foreign language course.

Six months ahead

- Check your passport if you are traveling outside the United States. Make sure it is still valid. (Some countries require a passport that's valid for at least six months from dates of travel.) Apply for a new one or renew it, if necessary.
- Buy hiking or walking shoes, so you have enough time to break them in.
- Do you need shots? Check with a doctor or a travel medicine specialist early, because some vaccines require several shots over a period of several months.
- Contact destinations to get information and maps.
- Take a look at your camera equipment and consider what else you might need to record your memories.
- Request time off from work (Some workplaces may require longer lead times.)

Three months ahead

- Visit a travel agent and book tickets. Or use the Web to book tickets and hotel. (Do this earlier if you're going during a peak travel time.)

- At work, make sure you've requested time off and begin trying to accumulate information that will help your replacement do your job.
- Apply for visas, if needed.
- Sketch out a rough daily itinerary of what you'd like to see and do and include phone numbers, addresses and costs.
- Start a file of important papers (with copies of confirmation numbers) and keep it in a safe place (and one place only).

One month ahead

- Set up an e-mail account accessible anywhere in the world.
- Check with your bank to see whether your ATM card will work abroad.
- Check out your luggage: Is it appropriate for your destination? Figure out a way to distinguish it from all the other black suitcases on the baggage claim belts.
- If going abroad, check with your cellphone service to see whether you can make/receive calls abroad.
- Make kennel reservations for Fluffy and Fido or arrange for pet-, house-sitting service, earlier if it's a peak travel time.
- Finalize air, rental car and hotel reservations.
- If this is a driving trip, have the mechanic check your car and get maps from the auto club or a bookstore.
- Consider your wardrobe. Do you have appropriate clothing for your destination? If not, go shopping or plan to shop at your destination.

One week ahead

- Put a vacation stop on your newspaper.
- Request a hold on mail delivery.
- Give copies of your itineraries to two or three trusted relatives or friends who will help if there's an emergency. Also give a copy to a neighbor so you can be reached if there's an emergency at your house.
- Check your prescriptions. Refill if needed. Make copies and put them in your important papers file.

- Verify again hotel, car rental and airline reservations.
- Ask a neighbor to put out your trash and take trash tubs back in.
- Call for shuttle service (or go online) or arrange a ride to the airport.
- Make sure all your trip documentation is in one folder. (Use a brightly colored plastic closable file folder so that you can easily spot it in your carry-on.) Include copies of reservation confirmations, copies of passports, maps, telephone numbers and addresses and prescriptions for medications and eyeglasses.
- Print yourself a copy of emergency contacts at home and put it in that same folder.
- E-mail yourself scans of your important documents, such as your passport, to that e-mail account you set up.
- Going out of the country? Call your credit card companies and let them know.
- Get some local currency through a bank, auto club or currency exchange house.

Two days ahead

- Put lights on a timer.
- If you're driving, make sure you have games, audio books and music to amuse yourself and kids, and emergency items (flashlight, spare tire) in case of problems.
- Check the long-range weather forecast (weather.com) and make sure you have appropriate clothing.
- Pack. Take out half of what you packed and leave it at home.
- Get rid of perishables in the refrigerator.
- Make sure you have a carry-on bag with essentials, in case your checked luggage doesn't arrive. This includes medication.
- Put a copy of your itinerary in your suitcase, along with your name, address and phone number.
- Get cash or traveler's checks.
- Check the camera batteries; put the camera manual in your bag and pack extra batteries or a battery charger.

One day ahead

- Take pets to kennel.
- Turn down furnace or turn up air conditioner.
- Put water heater on "vacation" setting.
- Water plants.
- Print your boarding pass.
- Put snacks and bottled water in your carry-on.
- Stay calm and get a good night's sleep.