

PREPARING FOR INTERNATIONAL TRAVEL, PART 3

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DISCLAIMERS, WARNINGS AND ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Please see the disclaimers, warnings and acknowledgements relating to the whole of the Wanterfall eBooks Travel Health series, as stated in [*Travel Health Series - Introduction*](#), which may be read or downloaded at www.wanterfall.com.

Please note that the early articles in this series will be very general in nature. They will therefore, inevitably, leave many questions unanswered. Later articles in the series will provide more detail about selected aspects of travel health.

SERIES CONTEXT

In the first of these three articles about travel preparations, [*Preparing for International Travel, Part 1*](#), I discussed various issues relating to personal health, under the headings "Service and Repairs", "Jabs and Tabs" and "Insurance". In the second article, [*Preparing for International Travel, Part 2*](#), I wrote about a variety of more general travel preparations. In this article, I will consider some specific issues relating to departures and arrivals, and the next article will be devoted to some useful [*Travel Checklists*](#).

DEPARTURE

Essential documents and requirements relating to departure vary from country to country. Although the following headings cover important examples, they are not exhaustive and must be supplemented by specific information from your travel agent and/or the government departments, embassies and consulates relevant to your own particular itinerary.

Documents

Documents required on departure include passport, tickets, outgoing passenger card and boarding pass. In addition, documentation relating to duty free purchases and valuable items, which should be registered with Customs on departure to allow free importation on return, is necessary where relevant. Exit tax is often included when purchasing travel tickets, but in some countries a separate exit tax receipt may be needed. Visas for the countries to be entered en route must usually have been obtained in advance. For more information about essential documents see [*Preparing for International Travel, Part 2.*](#)

Luggage

Items which cannot be carried by air depend on restrictions imposed by the country, the airline and the airport itself. Information is usually displayed in the departure area, but in general terms all potentially dangerous objects and substances are prohibited in the aircraft cabin, while fewer restrictions apply to unaccompanied baggage which will be checked in.

Travel agents, airlines and relevant government departments provide local information, which is usually available online. For example, information specific to the U.S.A. is available at <http://www.airsafe.com/danger.htm>. If you are in any doubt about whether an item may be prohibited, always bring it to the attention of the official conducting security screening, or, in the case of unaccompanied baggage, enquire at the check-in desk.

Typical restrictions – all areas

As a general guide, the items mentioned in the next paragraph are usually **completely banned**. In other words, they may not be carried on your person, in your carry-on luggage, or even as checked in (unaccompanied) baggage. Indeed, they should not

be brought into the grounds or buildings of any airport, even if you are not a passenger, unless required for an official purpose.

Anything which is or may become **flammable, explosive, poisonous, infectious, caustic, corrosive, radioactive, chemically reactive, strongly magnetic, highly pressurised, very hot, extremely cold, or in any way potentially employable as a weapon** (including realistic replicas of weapons) is usually prohibited. There may be limits on the size of printer or toner cartridges. Even harmless liquids and gels are limited to very small volumes, as discussed below, because it is possible to manufacture explosives in liquid or gel form.

Carry-on items

Carry-on baggage is restricted both in size and contents. Size limits vary, and must therefore be checked with your travel agent or airline. In general, the items must fit under the seat in front of you or in an overhead locker, but items fulfilling these criteria may still be rejected at the discretion of airline officials if they are considered to be potentially hazardous.

The *contents* of carry-on baggage are severely restricted, in order to minimise risks to the aircraft and passengers. Small harmless items such as books, magazines and items of clothing are generally allowed, as are various other items mentioned in the following paragraphs. Airlines usually provide more comprehensive advice online. When there is any doubt, specific advice should be sought from the airline.

Personal care items in liquid or gel form may usually be carried in volumes of **100 ml or less**, though they often have to be packed together in a transparent container for easy inspection. Larger volumes of some medical or baby-care liquids may be permitted, but local regulations should be consulted. (An empty water bottle may be filled with water **after** entering the secure

departure area. In addition, various other liquids and gels for use during the flight may usually be purchased in that area.)

Small scissors with a cutting edge less than 10 cm long, and some other small tools which are not sharp or otherwise potentially dangerous, are often allowed. A single book of **safety** matches (not "strike-anywhere" matches) is usually allowed, as are many common types of cigarette lighter.

Most small personal battery-powered devices, such as cameras and laptop computers, are usually allowed, but they must be satisfactorily protected against accidental activation. Small numbers of spare batteries for such devices are also allowed, as long as they are protected against damage or short circuiting.

Most implanted medical devices are usually allowed, but should be declared to security personnel. However, medications and other medically essential items which may be needed while in the air **cannot be assumed to be allowed**, especially if they include needles, so enquiries must always be made in advance. In some cases, unfortunately, restrictions on such items may preclude air travel altogether.

Care of valuable items

Items which are very valuable, essential or irreplaceable should be carried with you in the aircraft cabin whenever this is both permitted and practicable. Examples include cash, credit cards, travellers cheques, blank cheque books, securities, jewellery, laptops, cell phones, cameras, passports and other identification, keys, important documents and permitted medical supplies. However, spare medications, and spare copies of all important documents, should also be carried in checked baggage, in case your carry-on luggage is lost.

Separate packing of essential items

On full or almost full flights, there may be insufficient room in the aircraft cabin for carry-on luggage of the size normally allowed. In this situation, you may, *quite unexpectedly*, be required to check in your carry-on bag at the time of entering the secure departure area. You should therefore pack it in a way that allows quick removal of a much *smaller* bag containing the most fragile, valuable and essential items.

Checked baggage

Most items which are not subject to the universal restrictions previously discussed may be checked in for carriage in the aircraft's baggage hold. Items which may be carried in the aircraft cabin may usually also be carried in checked luggage, but there are some exceptions, such as matches, lighters (unless empty) and the spare lithium batteries mentioned below. Luggage restrictions are variable and subject to change, so you should always check the local regulations before packing.

Sporting goods, knives and most other sharp objects, realistic replica firearms, unloaded firearms or parts thereof, and separate ammunition, may often (but not always) be checked in for carriage in an aircraft's baggage hold, though military weapons are usually prohibited on non-military aircraft.

A limited number of small, sealed, **non-lithium** batteries may be packed in checked baggage, as long as they are protected from damage and short circuiting, or are installed in a device which is satisfactorily protected against accidental activation. However, **spare lithium batteries may not be placed in checked luggage**, though they may usually be carried in the aircraft cabin. Any large batteries may be subject to restrictions, and batteries which could leak acid are prohibited.

Small amounts of "dry ice" (frozen carbon dioxide) employed for the purpose of preserving perishable goods such as meat or

fish are also allowed. However, super-cooled substances, such as liquid nitrogen, are prohibited. (As mentioned previously, anything which is or may become very hot, is also prohibited).

Items which must be declared

Items which you must declare on departure depend on the country. A list may be provided by your travel agent, but must otherwise be obtained from the relevant government department. For example, when leaving Australia, you must declare native animals or plants, artefacts of cultural significance, currency amounts of \$A10,000 or more, firearms, ammunition, and any military equipment.

Goods purchased duty or tax free prior to departure must usually be inspected at the departure point, and will also need to be declared on return, if not already consumed. When departing with expensive items (such as computers, cameras and video cameras) which you intend to bring back again, it is best to register these items with Customs on departure. For jewellery and other goods which are not readily identifiable, carrying proof of ownership in the form of receipts or insurance documents may also be necessary.

Mandatory access to luggage

Easy access to the contents of checked-in baggage is usually a requirement. For example, if travelling to or from the U.S.A., note that the [Transportation Security Administration](#)¹ requires access to air passengers' luggage for security screening, sometimes without the passenger being present.

¹ Transportation Security Administration is a U.S. government law enforcement agency within the U.S. Department of Homeland Security, which is responsible for security in all modes of transportation. Its website at <http://www.tsa.gov/travelers> provides travel advice.

In order to allow luggage to be locked for (partial) protection against theft or the insertion of contraband without your knowledge, the TSA has approved certain locks, which are identified at the point of sale by a special logo.² TSA personnel can open these locks with tools and information supplied by the lock manufacturers. Luggage locked with any other type of lock, or covered with the plastic wrapping available at some airports, may be forced open to allow inspection of the contents.

Behaviour

From the moment you enter the departure airport, and until you have left the arrival airport, even the most harmless joke about anything related to terrorism may result in arrest and criminal charges. Any other action which is considered offensive or potentially dangerous to people or an aircraft, such as drunken or otherwise intrusive behaviour, may have similar results.

ARRIVAL

Essential documents and knowledge relating to arrival also vary considerably from country to country. The information given here is again not exhaustive, and must therefore be supplemented by specific information from your travel agent or the government departments, embassies and consulates relevant to your own particular itinerary.

Most of the points mentioned under this heading are relevant when entering any country, even if you only leave the aircraft to wait for a connecting flight, or leave it because of an unscheduled delay. Of course, they are also relevant when arriving home at the end of your journey.

² Examples of approved locks at the time of writing include the Travel Sentry and Safe Skies brands.

Documents

Documents required on arrival include passport, visa, completed Customs declaration form and incoming passenger card. The latter two are usually distributed during the flight. In some cases, a return ticket, and/or evidence of sufficient funds to support living expenses and eventual transport out of the country you are entering, may be requested.

Any documentation supporting the importation of medications or other essential medical items should be submitted. The type of documentation required, and whether the items concerned may in fact be imported at all, should have been ascertained before departure, as import regulations vary considerably from country to country. Documentation relating to duty free purchases, or valuable items which were registered with Customs on departure to allow free importation on return, should also be submitted where relevant.

Incidentally, in some countries, officials no longer stamp passports on entry as a matter of course. However, should you require evidence of travel, you may ask the officer to do so.

Luggage

Whenever entering any country, even if only to wait for a connecting flight, or because of some unexpected problem, the most important thing is *not to have any prohibited items* either on your person *or* in your luggage. The most important of such items, as discussed under the next heading, are **drugs** (*including some prescribed drugs*). However, many of the restrictions mentioned under Departure also apply when entering a country. When there is any possible doubt, always make enquiries before departure, or else leave the item behind.

Risk of baggage tampering

To guard against the placement of prohibited items in your luggage without your knowledge, always carefully search each item before checking it in prior to departure from any country. Luggage locks or plastic wrapping, as discussed under Departure, may then provide some, albeit limited, security against tampering by airline staff or other persons.

Similarly, always carefully search your carry-on luggage and clothing before leaving the aircraft, and then keep them under your constant supervision until after clearing Customs. This precaution is absolutely essential, because in most countries, the presence of prohibited drugs in your luggage guarantees a guilty verdict, *whether you put them there or not*, and in many countries, the penalty for importing prohibited drugs is death.

Items which must be declared

Goods purchased duty free or tax free prior to departure must be declared on return, if not already consumed. They may also need to be declared at Customs inspections en route. When returning to your home country with expensive items (such as computers, cameras or video cameras) which you took with you on departure, exit Customs registration and/or proof of ownership, as discussed under Departure, may be necessary

Other items which you must declare on arrival vary, depending on the country you are entering. Before leaving your aircraft or other conveyance, you will usually be given a declaration form to fill in for later presentation at Customs. This may be accompanied by a list of prohibited and mandatory declarable items, but when in doubt, it is always better to declare an item.

Depending on the country you are entering, virtually any item might need to be declared. Examples include the following:

- Drugs, including prescribed medications *and* some medications which are available without prescription (especially cough and cold remedies and pain killers)
- Firearms, ammunition and all other hazardous items
- Alcohol
- Tobacco
- Perfume
- Many foods
- Currency
- Lottery tickets
- Ivory, precious stones, precious metals etc
- Ornaments and jewellery
- Most manufactured goods, such as cameras or watches
- Seeds, bulbs, and living or dead plants or parts thereof
- Living or dead animals or parts thereof, including biological materials such as blood and blood products
- Antiques and items of special cultural significance to their country of origin
- Any goods from countries with a poor diplomatic relationship with the country you are entering
- Pornographic material (definition varies with country)
- Seditious material (definition varies *enormously* with country)

Behaviour

As mentioned above under Departure, even the most harmless joke about anything related to terrorism may result in arrest and criminal charges. This applies whether you are travelling by

air, or by any other method. Again, any other action which is considered offensive or potentially dangerous, such as drunken or otherwise intrusive behaviour, may have similar results.

Delayed Illness

As discussed in [the first article in this series](#), illnesses contracted while you were travelling may first occur long after arriving home safely and (apparently) in perfect health. The incubation period of some infections can be as short as a few days, but in other cases it may be a number of months or years. In a few rare cases, the first signs of an illness contracted during foreign travel may not appear for some decades.

This simply means that *any* illness which occurs at *any* time after one or more trips abroad might be travel-related. This is much more likely during the first month after returning home, and becomes relatively uncommon after the first year. However, the possibility that a new illness might be related to previous travel remains for the rest of the traveller's life.

Unfortunately, it is quite common for doctors to forget to enquire about, or even to think about, this possibility. It is therefore very important to inform your doctor about your travel history, and to mention it again whenever a new problem occurs, and also if an old problem gets worse. This is more important when there is a history of travel to Africa, Asia, South America, the Middle East or any developing country, but any travel is always worth mentioning.

TRAVEL CHECKLISTS

See

<http://www.wanterfall.com/Travel-Health/Travel-Checklists.htm>

for a useful collection of checklists which can greatly facilitate preparation and packing for your trip.

USEFUL WEBSITES

Some very useful Travel Health websites are listed at <http://www.wanterfall.com/Travel-Health/Travel-Health-Series-Introduction.htm#App1>.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

A partial bibliography for the whole Travel Health series can be found at <http://www.wanterfall.com/Travel-Health/Travel-Health-Series-Introduction.htm#App2>.

DECLARATION OF INTEREST

None

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COMMENTS

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