

# INSTANT ADVENTURE\*



*\*VALOR NOT INCLUDED*

By Tyler Tervooren

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<http://tylertervooren.com/advancedriskology/instant-adventure>

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## 2 MOUNTAINS, 2 MARATHONS, 2 CONTINENTS

Hi there. If we don't know each other yet, I'm Tyler and I'm on a self-imposed mission to do a whole bunch of things that less than 1% of the world will ever attempt. I call the [1% Club](#), and it's my little way of making sure I spend my life pursuing big, meaningful goals.

This mission will be taking me to a lot of places and I'll be having a lot of really amazing experiences—like a month-long trip through **Africa** and **Europe** this June where I'll be climbing two of the world's tallest mountains and running two marathons.

Here are the main highlights of the escapade:

- \* Running the **Big 5 Marathon** on the Entabeni Game Reserve in South Africa among lions, elephants, buffalo, leopards, and a rhinoceros or two.
- \* Climbing **Mt. Kilimanjaro** in Tanzania—the tallest peak in Africa and the highest freestanding mountain in the world.
- \* Running my own, self-directed marathon in **Warsaw, Poland**.
- \* Climbing **Mt. Elbrus**, Europe's highest peak in the Caucasus Mountains along the border of Russia and Georgia.
- \* Arriving home in Portland hours before I'm scheduled to be in a friend's wedding party (crossing my fingers for no flight delays!)

**My flight itinerary:** PDX -> IAD -> JNB -> DAR -> JNB -> FRA -> WAW -> TXL -> DME -> MRV -> DME -> MUC -> WAW -> MUC -> IAD -> DEN -> PDX

**Funny tidbit:** I'll be in Germany four times over the course of this trip, but I'll never make it out of the airport.

**That's 14 flights, 8 bus rides, 2 mountains, 2 marathons, and a wedding.**

To say the least, I'm extremely excited but more than a bit nervous to set out on such an ambitious adventure on what most would consider a pretty condensed schedule; the whole trip is only a month long.

If that sounds complicated and/or overwhelming, I can confirm it *was* a fair amount of work to put together, but it doesn't actually have to be that *hard*. Over the last month, I'd estimate I've spent around 10–15 minutes a day putting the plans together. When you look at it like that, it becomes a much more manageable task.

Maybe you don't have any desire to climb mountains or run marathons like I do, but if you've ever thought it would be fun to take a trip across the globe and have some unique experiences along the way, I don't think you should let complication get in the way of your fun. It doesn't have to be complicated, and once you know some of the basic strategies for organizing a trip like this, figuring out the details is usually just a few minutes a day of focused planning.

**Here's an 8-minute video** I made to give an overview of the tools I'm using to plan and organize this particular trip. The rest of this piece is dedicated to the details of planning a big, international adventure:



[Click here](#) to view the video.

You probably noticed that I use one single spreadsheet to manage 99% of my trip. I call it the “command center,” and it's extremely useful for keeping my trip's most important info in one place where it can be easily referenced.

Now, let's take a more detailed look at what you'll need to think about before you embark on your life-altering adventure. The main topics you'll need to consider are **budget, air travel, ground travel, lodging, and health and safety**. In some cases, you may need to **hire a tour guide** for certain portions of your trip and, if you plan to

work while you're abroad, then **maintaining an internet connection** will also be important. We'll go over each of these in detail.

## ***ANTI-BUDGETING FOR AN AWESOME TRIP***

Let me start by saying that I don't think your budget should be the most important part of the process. ~~Some~~ Most things in life are more important than money and if you've been dreaming of taking a big trip or doing something adventurous for a long time, then you shouldn't let a big bill stand in your way. However, most of us aren't independently wealthy—*yet*, so knowing how much your trip is going to cost before you head out is a valid concern.

I also advocate using a different style of budgeting for a trip like this than most people typically use. Rather than picking an arbitrary number and deciding not to spend more, I'd encourage you to **piece together your trip first** to get an estimation of how much it'll cost, and then [commit to paying that much for the experience](#).

The reason I say that is because picking an arbitrary number usually means you'll underestimate the cost and end up cutting out important parts of the trip in order to stick to your original budget. That comes with a lot of uncomfortable and unnecessary justifications where you tell yourself it's okay to skip something because you want to save money.

Personally, I'd rather figure out how much it'll cost, and then simply commit to part with that much money to have an experience that will change my life.

In my case, I've committed \$8,000 to this trip and I work a little bit every day to find ways to shave that number down. Right now, it looks like I'll probably get by on closer to \$6,000. Admittedly, that's quite expensive for most people, but don't let that number scare you—about 75% of that is tied to the (mostly) unavoidable costs of my guided mountain climbs and the remotely located marathon. If your ambitions don't lead you to the tops of mountains or out into the African Bush, you can probably get by on *considerably* less.

## BUDGETING TOOLS

I use [Google Docs](#) to keep a rough budget. You can see from mine that I've priced out two different scenarios and I also keep a running tab of what I've already spent:

	A	B	C	D	E	F	G	H	I
2	Airfare	1800	400			Airfare			
3	Guided Climb	1500	2000			Award ticket - PDX/JNB	\$215.00		60k US Air Miles
4						10,000 Dividend Miles (Screw Up)			
5	Tipping	300	200				\$149.00		10k US Air Miles
6	Visa	150	150			Award ticket - JNB/DAR	\$220.00		20k AA Miles
7	Add. Transport	100	100			Transit - WAW/DME/WAW	\$398.00		
8	Vaccinations	200	200			Transit - DME/MRV/DME	\$383.00		
9	Add. Gear	300	300			Big 5 Marathon			
10	Travel Insurance	200	200			Deposit	\$500.00		
11	<b>Total</b>	<b>4550</b>	<b>3550</b>			Remaining Balance	\$1,140.00	Not yet paid	
12						Guided Kilimanjaro Climb			
13	3 Day Safari	1500				Deposit	\$400.00		
14	5 Day Safari					Remaining Balance	\$1,398.00	Not yet paid	
15	Elbrus		1300			Guided Elbrus Climb			
16	Add. Airfare		1000			Deposit	\$338.00		
17	Marathon		1850			Remaining Balance	\$1,054.00	Not yet paid	
18	<b>Total</b>	<b>6050</b>	<b>7700</b>						
19									
20									
21									
22							<b>\$6,195.00</b>		

Since I always purchase everything with credit cards (for the [frequent flyer miles](#) we'll talk about next), I like to make sure I'm keeping up with my budget by having the money I need set aside before I make any big purchases.


I do this by keeping a separate savings account with [ING Direct](#) specifically for my travel costs...

Checking and Savings				
Account Type	Nickname	Account #	Balance	Available
Electric Orange	Checking	64122000000000000000	2,175	2,175
Orange Savings	Advanced Riskology	64122000000000000000	1,000.00	1,000.00
Orange Savings	Armageddon	64122000000000000000	1,000.00	1,000.00
Orange Savings	Home Sweet Home	64122000000000000000	4,000.00	4,000.00
Orange Savings	Chester Investor	64122000000000000000	1.00	1.00
Orange Savings	1 Percent Club	64122000000000000000	1,000.00	1,000.00
Orange Savings	Give o Matic	64122000000000000000	100.00	100.00
Orange Savings	Mandatory Allegiance Dues	64122000000000000000	1,000.00	1,000.00

...and monitoring my progress funding it and tracking expenses with [Mint](#):

Show all goals [+ Add a goal](#)

1 GOAL \$496 PER MONTH

PROJECTED JUN 19 2011 

**Goal Details** [Edit this goal](#)

Mt. Kilimanjaro **on track**

Goal amount	<b>\$7,135</b>
Today's balance	<b>\$4,380</b>
Planned date	<b>6/1/2011</b>
Projected date	<b>6/19/2011</b>
This month	<b>\$4</b>



## AIR TRAVEL

Depending on where you want to go, how you want to get there, and whether you're willing to **do a little legwork to save a lot of money** will dictate how you decide to travel.

### FREQUENT FLYER MILES

For most, simply buying the plane tickets to get from place to place on their big adventure will be the most expensive part of their whole trip. I find that to be a bit of a bummer, so I prefer to travel with [frequent flyer miles](#) that I pay either very little or absolutely nothing to obtain.

If you decide to go this route, you can save a lot of money (often you'll pay nothing but taxes for your flights), but it can be a bit of a hassle learning the ropes.

The first thing to know is that it's typically a good idea to become a member with every frequent flyer program you can (they're free to join). You don't need to pay attention to all of them, just sign up for each airline's email updates so you'll know when they have opportunities to earn easy/free miles. Here are links to some of the most popular programs:

- \* [Air Canada Aeroplan](#)
- \* [Air New Zealand Airpoints](#)
- \* [Air Tran A-Plus Rewards](#)
- \* [Alaska Airlines Mileage Plan](#)
- \* [All Nippon Airways Mileage Club](#)
- \* [American Airlines AAdvantage](#)
- \* [Asiana Airlines Bonus Club](#)
- \* [British Airways Executive Club](#)
- \* [Cathay Pacific Marco Polo Club](#)
- \* [Continental OnePass](#)
- \* [Delta SkyMiles](#)
- \* [Emirates Skywards](#)
- \* [JetBlue TrueBlue](#)
- \* [Korean Air Skypass](#)
- \* [Lufthansa Miles & More](#)
- \* [Qantas Frequent Flyer](#)
- \* [Southwest Rapid Rewards](#)
- \* [US Airways Dividend Miles](#)
- \* [United Mileage Plus](#)
- \* [Virgin Atlantic Flying Club](#)

I use [Award Wallet](#), a free web service, to keep track of all the miles I have in different accounts. As you can see, it makes it much faster and easier to plan award travel. I used Dividend Miles from my US Airways account to book most of this trip:

Airlines				
Award Program	Account	Balance	Expiration	Manage
+ ✓ All Nippon Airways (ANA Mileage Club) ★★★★★		0		check   edit   delete
+ ✓ American Airlines (AAdvantage) ★★★★★		58,770 +150 ↑	✓ 06/20/2012	check   edit   delete
+ ✓ Continental Airlines (OnePass) ★★★★★		0		check   edit   delete
+ ✓ Delta Air Lines (SkyMiles Personal) ★★★★★		750 +500 ↑	✓ 11/30/2012	check   edit   delete
+ ⓘ Southwest Airlines (*Not Supported) ★★★★★		4 Credits		edit   delete
+ ✓ Spirit Airlines (Free Spirit) ★★★★★		5,000		check   edit   delete
+ ✓ United (Mileage Plus) ★★★★★		0		check   edit   delete
+ ✓ US Airways (Dividend Miles) ★★★★★		0 -60,000 ↓		check   edit   delete
Hotels				
Award Program	Account	Balance	Expiration	Manage
+ ✓ Starwood Hotels, etc. (Preferred Guest) ★★★★★		18,845 +2,101 ↑	✓ 12/14/2011	check   edit   delete

## USING CREDIT CARDS TO EARN MILES FAST

Credit cards won't be the right answer for everyone, but if you're responsible with your credit, then it's definitely one of the fastest ways to accumulate points. You'll be able to travel sooner rather than later since the miles you receive simply for signing up are usually quite generous. The credit companies lure you in with a big bonus, hoping that you'll use your new card to run up a bunch of debt.

**I've used credit card bonuses to earn about 335,000 miles in the last few months at no cost to me.**

Credit card offers vary on darn near a daily basis, so you'll need to keep up with them to know that you're getting the best deal (or even a valid one), but here are a few of the most popular airline cards that frequent travelers like to pick up:

- \* [Aeroplan World MasterCard](#)
- \* [Alaska Airlines Visa Signature](#)
- \* [AAdvantage Visa Signature](#)
- \* [British Airways Visa Signature](#)
- \* [Continental OnePass Card](#)
- \* [Delta SkyMiles Amex Card](#)
- \* [JetBlue TrueBlue Amex Card](#)
- \* [Southwest Rapid Rewards Visa](#)
- \* [US Airways Dividend Miles Card](#)
- \* [United Mileage Plus Visa](#)
- \* [Virgin Atlantic Amex White Card](#)

To keep up with the best offers and to get all the knowledge you could ever want about frequent flyer miles and air travel in general, you'll want to monitor the Flyer Talk forums—specifically the [Miles and Points sub-forum](#).

Keep in mind that **many frequent flyer credit cards come with an annual fee**. In most cases, the fee is waived for the first year and you can avoid it altogether by canceling before the renewal date. Sometimes, the bank that issues the card will offer some sort of reward for not canceling—a “retention bonus.” This isn't always the case, but it's worth asking about.

Another thing to remember when you're stockpiling [frequent flyer miles](#) through credit card offers is that you'll normally have to meet some type of spending limit. These vary greatly, but are usually along the lines of “spend xxx in xxx months in order to receive the sign-up bonus” types of offers.

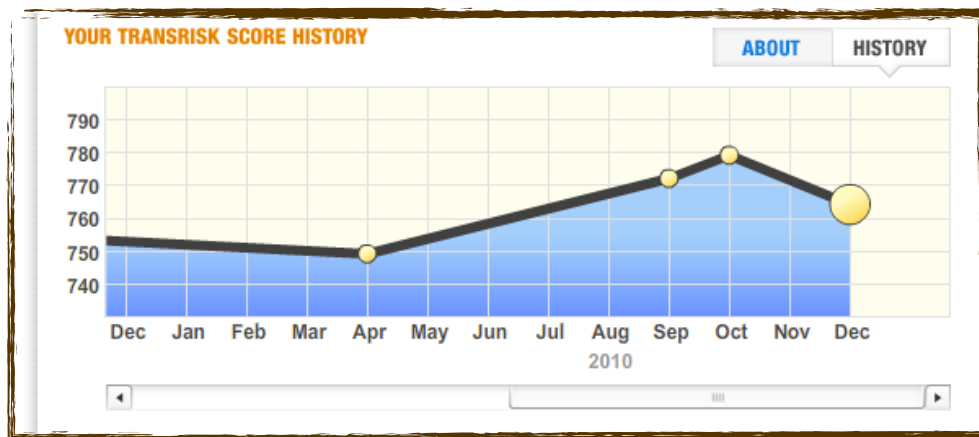
Now, I'm incredibly frugal, so meeting the spending requirements with my normal day-to-day purchases is nearly impossible. The way I get around this is by [purchasing \\$1 coins from the U.S. Mint](#). Since I started doing this in 2009, the rules have changed considerably, and some banks will no longer credit you with points if you use this strategy, but in my case, it still works quite well and every two weeks a box of money shows up at my doorstep that I use to pay a few bills and then deposit the rest in the bank. The net effect is, of course, a bunch of free points.

## CONCERNS ABOUT YOUR CREDIT SCORE

One last thing to keep in mind is that applying for a lot of new cards can have a negative effect on your credit score. Since I'm currently in the middle of obtaining a lot of new cards (and a hell of a lot of frequent flyer miles!), I watch my credit closely using the free credit monitoring site, [Credit Karma](#) (U.S. only).

**Note:** My favorite card for accumulating miles is the [Starwood Preferred Guest Amex Card](#). It's not an airline card, but it allows you to transfer your points to nearly all the major airlines with a **5,000 point bonus for ever 20,000 miles transferred**. I'll eventually cancel most of my airline cards, but this one will stay in my wallet.

From the screenshot below, you can see that my score actually *increased* when I first started adding cards, but as I added more and more, it's started to decrease slightly:



This is mostly because the **average age of my credit file is becoming very young** as I apply for more and more cards. I'm not too concerned about this since I'll be dumping most of the cards that I've acquired before the annual fee comes due, which will positively affect my score (the average age of your credit file is more important than the few points you lose by closing a card).

Also, I have no major purchases to make in the near future where my credit score will come into play, so I don't anticipate any negative effect from this credit card campaign, but if you do, it's at least worth noting.

To keep track of all these new cards, I have a spreadsheet that tells me when I applied, when I received the card, what the bonus is, whether it's posted to my account, and when I need to cancel by:

	A	B	C	D	E	F	G
1	Credit Card	Date Applied	First Year Annual Fee?	Approved?	Cancel by?	Sign-up bonus	Posted?
2	Southwest Chase Visa	7/15/2010	\$59	7/26/2010	7/15/2011	16 credits 40,000 after \$1000 spend	posted
3	Starwood AmEx Personal	7/17/2010	Waived, then \$65	8/2/2010	7/15/2011	40,000 after \$1000 spend	posted
4	Starwood AmEx Business	7/17/2010	Waived, then \$65	8/9/2010	7/15/2011	40,000 after \$1000 spend	posted
5	Citi AA Visa Personal	9/30/2010	Waived, then \$85	9/30/2010	8/30/2011	75,000 after \$1500 spend	posted
6	Citi AA Visa Business	10/7/2010	Waived, then \$75	12/3/2010	11/3/2011	75,000 after \$1500 spend	posted
7	Delta AmEx Personal	12/31/2010	Waived, then \$95	12/31/2010	11/30/2011	45,000 after \$3,000 spend	
8							

I also create events in my [Google Calendar](#) that remind me a few weeks before each deadline so I don't forget to cancel a card and end up paying a renewal fee.

## USING YOUR MILES THE SMART WAY

One of the most valuable lessons I learned on my [frequent flyer mile](#) quest is about airline partnerships. If you have miles with one airline, but it doesn't fly where you need to go, it's likely you'll be able to use your miles to book an award on any of their partner airlines that *do* fly there. That's really valuable.

The three major airline alliances are [One World](#), [Star Alliance](#), and [Sky Team](#).

Personally, I try to target most of my earnings around **American Airlines** (One World) and **U.S. Airways** (Star Alliance). This allows me to go nearly anywhere in the world by using one of those two airlines to book an award ticket through one of their alliance partners.

For instance, neither U.S. Airways nor American fly to *any* of the airports that I'm going to on this upcoming trip, but since they're both part of bigger alliances, I was

able to use my miles in those accounts to book travel with United, South African, British Airways, Lufthansa, and Lot Polish to get to where I needed.

**Side note:** While trying to book a separate award ticket from Johannesburg to **Nairobi, Kenya**, the American Airlines rep told me the only possible routing required a layover in **London!** When I laughed and told him I didn't have time for a stopover 2 continents away, he just sighed and said, "I don't make the rules."

Unfortunately, I don't have time on this trip for an extra stay in London, but maybe you do? These weird routings seem to exist all over the place. Do a little digging and ask around before you book your next award ticket. You just might get a second, unexpected vacation out of it!

Another incredibly valuable thing to know about award tickets is that they often allow you to **book a stopover or open-jaw segment at no extra cost**. A stop-over lets you stay (usually up to a year) at one connecting point on your trip, and an open-jaw allows you to stop at one place and continue on from another.

For this upcoming trip, I used the stopover strategy to basically get a **free ticket to Europe** by routing my flight home from **Johannesburg** through **Warsaw, Poland** where I have a 14-day stopover that will allow me to transit to **Russia**, climb Mt. Elbrus, and return to Warsaw before continuing home. Pretty handy!

My friend, Steve, is using these strategies right now to travel to [4 continents and 10 countries for a whopping grand total of \\$418](#).

## A FEW OTHER TOOLS

One tool that's very handy for finding valid routings is [Award Nexus](#). It just came out of beta and it's a bit clunky, but it's an invaluable tool for quickly finding available award routings on most major airlines.

When I'm not sure if I should redeem miles for a flight or just pay for it, I like to use [Kayak](#) or [Skyscanner](#) to quickly price check; I don't want to waste hard earned miles on a ticket that I could buy cheaply.

When you're accumulating miles, a good rule of thumb is to value them at about \$0.01 per mile (meaning you shouldn't pay more than that to get new miles). If you plan on going to lots of expensive places though, you can get away with valuing them a little higher.

[World Airport Codes](#) is, in my opinion, the best place on the Internet to quickly find airports and airport data around the world as well as the distance between airports.

Chris Guillebeau, on a mission to visit every country in the world, hosts a forum specifically dedicated to [earning frequent flyer miles](#). With four free tickets guaranteed each year, it's worth checking out and I'm happy to be an affiliate for it.

**Warning:** Ryanair and other budget carriers like it *can* be great deals—I've scored free and incredibly cheap tickets with them before—but to make it worthwhile, you need to be traveling light, have plenty of time and access to cheap transportation, and have no desire for comfort. That said, if you're careful, you can get a hell of a deal.

## GROUND TRAVEL

I prefer to travel primarily by plane, but air travel isn't always available when you're going to remote locations, so you might need to hire a train, bus, or private transport if you're headed into the boondocks. Besides, knowing how to get around in a foreign city or even how to get from the airport into the city is valuable because there are usually at least a few options and knowing which is best can save you a significant amount of time and/or money.

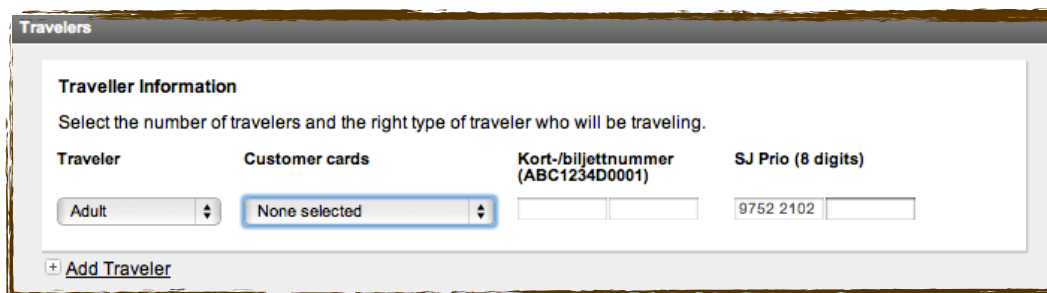
## TRAINS & BUSES

Most ground travel options are, of course, only local or regional, so it's sometimes difficult to find good information about them before you're actually there. One resource I've found quite useful for shaking down ground travel options is [wikitravel.org](http://wikitravel.org). Just like Wikipedia, it's a user-maintained reference guide, and it's filled with pertinent travel info for tens of thousands of destinations. It's been invaluable in putting together my upcoming adventure.

If you're looking for a luxury experience, there's a service, [World Airport Transfers](#), that'll arrange all of your travel from the airport to your hotel at many major hubs throughout the world.

Usually, arranging short ground transit is not something you need to worry about before you show up—just knowing your options when you arrive so that you can pick the best one is sufficient. Occasionally, though, you'll need to take a longer ground trip on, say, an overnight train or a very long bus ride. If it's a popular route, then it might be possible to book ahead of time online. The main problem, of course, is that the online booking system is rarely in English.

My preferred method to deal with this is the [Google translator plug-in](#) for the Chrome browser. The translations are always a little awkward and confusing, but you can usually get enough context to make it through the order process and be sure your travel plans are secured. Here it is in action on a Swedish train site (not half bad!):



The screenshot shows a web form titled "Travelers" with the following fields and options:

- Traveller Information**: Select the number of travelers and the right type of traveler who will be traveling.
- Traveler**: A dropdown menu with "Adult" selected.
- Customer cards**: A dropdown menu with "None selected" selected.
- Kort-/biljettnummer (ABC1234D0001)**: Two empty text input fields.
- SJ Prio (8 digits)**: A text input field containing "9752 2102" followed by two empty digits.
- + Add Traveler**: A button to add more travelers.

This came in handy a few years ago when I needed to book overland train tickets in Sweden and France. Taking an overnight train can also be a good strategy to save money on a night of lodging, though it's unlikely to be as comfortable!

Recently, one of my readers pointed me to [Seat 61](#), which is proving to be quite a useful tool for sorting out train travel in many parts of the world.

## TAXIS

If you don't want to end up like I did in Italy—paying \$50 for what amounted to a five block taxi ride—then remember this little piece of advice: **cab fares should always be agreed upon before you embark.**

My \$50 blunder was caused by a few mistakes on my part:

1. We flew Ryanair (budget carrier) to an inconvenient airport outside of Rome where mass transit options were limited to begin with.
2. We arrived late at night after the bus system was shut down. Taxi service was the only transportation available.
3. I didn't ask how much the fare was before I got in, even though there were lots of other taxis to choose from.
4. I hadn't done my homework and researched how far our hotel was from the airport. Turns out, it was only a few blocks away. *Whoops.*

Throughout much of the world, cab fares are not fixed like they are in most developed nations. Even when they are, it's not entirely unusual for a cab driver to squeeze a little (or a lot) extra out of an unsuspecting tourist. Use [Wikitravel](#) to determine how things work at each destination you're headed to, know where you need to go, and always agree on the fare before you leave because it's no use arguing after you've already arrived.

**In most major cities, taxis are easy to come by, so if you feel like you're getting the run-around, just say “thanks” and look for another one.**

It's also good to realize that, as a traveler, things *will* occasionally go wrong and that's just part of the experience. I paid \$50 for a five block cab ride. I wasn't happy about it, but I didn't let it ruin my trip and now it's just a funny story.



## LODGING

After airfare, lodging and hotel accommodations will probably be the second most expensive part of your trip. If you're up for a bit of a rugged adventure though, that doesn't actually have to be the case.

## HOSTELS

The easiest and most obvious way to experience the world without paying hotel rates is to stay in hostels instead. The image that conjures up for a lot of people—noisy, dirty rooms crowded with 20-somethings partying all night—isn't a valid stereotype anymore. Some hostels are more party-oriented than others, but throughout the world you can find clean, quiet, and even private rooms in hostels for a fraction of the price of a comparable hotel.

While in Rome a few years ago, my girlfriend and I stayed in a hostel outside of town

**Side note:** There's some debate over whether or not buying a membership with [Hostelling International](#) is worth the cover charge.

My opinion is that, at about \$30/year, why not? If you're planning to travel mostly in the U.S., Europe, or other highly developed areas of the world, the benefits are worth much more than the membership.

that was in a converted convent. We paid about \$25 a night to stay in a huge, private room with its own bathroom. I should also mention it was across the street from the Mediterranean Sea; we could roll up the shades in the morning and pick out our spot on the beach.

My friend, Jenny, put together a good tutorial on [how to find great hostels on the road](#). You can get started with your search by browsing on [Hostels.com](#), [Hostel World](#), or [Hostel Bookers](#).

## COUCH SURFING

Couch surfing seems to get an even worse rap than hostels with inexperienced travelers, but I can say—without a doubt—it's my favorite way to travel (and I suspect most people who give it a chance will feel the same way). I couch surfed all across Western Europe in 2008 and I plan to do it again on this upcoming trip because it affords me an experience with locals that I can't get staying alone in a hotel or hostel. I appreciate that. If you don't like meeting new people, it might not be a good fit for you.

I primarily use [Couchsurfing.org](http://Couchsurfing.org) (if you sign up and need a friend, just [message me](#)), but there are a number of other communities out there you can also tap into:

- \* [Hospitality Club](#)
- \* [Global Freeloaders](#)
- \* [Be Welcome](#)
- \* [Tripping](#)

To have the best luck finding accommodations with couchsurfing.org, you'll want to **get verified** (requires a \$25 donation), **start participating on the forums** for your home town and places where you plan to travel, and **host a few travelers** in your own home. If you can, **go to a few meet-ups** in your region to get to know other surfers and build some friendships through the site before you start looking for hosts for your own adventure.

## SLEEPING IN AIRPORTS

I haven't done it yet myself, but many travelers do every day (sometimes involuntarily when their flights are cancelled!). For my upcoming trip through Africa and Europe, I have several stops where I'll be arriving late at night and departing early the next morning, so I plan to do a bit of airport slumber as it'll be either impossible or impractical to find a room for the night.

I'll be referencing the great [Sleeping in Airports](#) website where travelers from around the world share their insights on the best and safest spots to catch a few Zs in airports throughout the world.

If you run into a similar situation on your own adventure, getting into an airport lounge can be a godsend. Some are better than others, but they all offer more secure and comfortable spaces for sleeping than the main terminals. Typically, you'll either need a business or first class ticket to access an airline lounge, but some will allow you to pay if you only have an economy ticket—could be worth the fee to avoid a very short and inconvenient hotel stay.

### Potentially hazardous tactic:

Most business and first class tickets are fully refundable, so if you find yourself in a pinch and can't get into the lounge you want, go to the ticket counter and buy the cheapest business class ticket you can find to wherever, use it to access the lounge, then return the ticket before the refund window expires (hat tip to [Chris Guillebeau](#) for that trick).

## GETTING GREAT DEALS ON HOTELS

Of course, sometimes you just want a good night's rest in a comfortable hotel. Your best bet at finding a deal on a nice room is probably on [Priceline](#) or [Hotwire](#). Personally, I don't do a lot of messing around with hotels, but there are some pretty smart folks that do over on the [Better Bidding](#) forum where you can learn all about how to get the best prices at great hotels all over the planet.

Generally speaking, the [Starwood Amex](#) card and the [Hilton Honors](#) card are the best out there for racking up hotel points like you would with [frequent flyer miles](#). Carrying those two cards will get you access to reasonable rates at great hotels throughout most of the world, and Starwood has a points plus cash program so that you can still get a good discount even if you don't have enough points to redeem for your whole stay.

## HEALTH & SAFETY

Here's one aspect of travel that pretty much everyone worries about but doesn't always get a lot of attention. It's a fair concern, but, to be honest, is probably a bigger psychological barrier than a real threat.

**Yes, people sometimes get mugged on vacation or fall ill to some weird disease, but unless you're traipsing naked through the Amazon, the potential risk is not as big as it might seem.** Similarly, you're more likely to die tomorrow in a car accident than you are by going skydiving, but what are people typically more afraid of? We're scared of the unfamiliar, and adventure travel is usually just that—very unfamiliar.

## DON'T LOOK LIKE A TOURIST

At the same time, there are a few things you can do to significantly reduce your risk, and the number one tactic is to simply avoid looking like a tourist. Obvious tourists are easy targets for pickpockets and scam artists.

When I travel, I like to carry a hidden money belt with my most important documents but never use it in public, keeping my daily money and credit cards in my wallet stored in my back pocket. Fumbling around with a money belt or some type of hidden wallet is one of the fastest ways to broadcast, "Hi, I have no idea what I'm doing. Please come try to take my money."

You might also consider picking up a few cheap pieces of clothing wherever you go. I love good travel clothes, but they'll certainly mark you as a tourist if you spend too much time in them, just like carrying around a giant camera and city map will.

Finally, don't ever exchange currencies with a street peddler offering to help you out. Find a legitimate exchange machine, office, or bank. At best, you'll get a terrible deal, and, at worst, you'll get counterfeit money.

You can get lots of region specific travel safety info by visiting [Wikitravel](#).

## DISEASE & IMMUNIZATIONS

If you're traveling through the developed world, you shouldn't have to worry too much about weird diseases or getting a bunch of extra vaccinations, but if you plan to wander off the beaten path, it's probably at least worth looking into.

For my own upcoming trip, I'll be traveling through the "yellow fever belt" of Africa, so I'll be required to be vaccinated in order to re-enter South Africa. Malaria will also be a concern, but not a serious threat in the regions that I'll be visiting.

Most travel health sites recommend a slew of immunizations for me, like:

- \* Hepatitis A
- \* Hepatitis B
- \* Typhoid
- \* Rabies
- \* Tetanus
- \* Polio
- \* Measles, Mumps, Rubella

I've already been vaccinated for a number of these, but I'll be checking my health history again before I leave.

The vaccinations *you* need before gallivanting off will differ depending on what region of the world you're headed to. Check the [CDC's Travel Health](#) to find out what you need. [MD Travel Health](#) and [Travel Doctor](#) are good resources too. Sometimes you can save quite a bit on immunizations by waiting until you're already overseas; medicine in the U.S. is extremely expensive.

## TRAVEL INSURANCE

If you're in the U.S., you already know how incredibly expensive and convoluted health insurance is, and most policies won't cover you when you're overseas. Thankfully, travel insurance is relatively cheap and easy to get. Under normal circumstances, I wouldn't recommend it, but for a potentially dangerous and

expensive adventure, it might be warranted. In my case, **Russia** requires that I carry insurance to qualify for a visa.

Since it's required when I visit, I purchased mine from [World Nomads](#). They're probably the best bet if you're planning anything wild as they cover all kinds of adventure sports. I'll be glad to know that if I fall off Mt. Kilimanjaro, I'll have someone to put a band-aid on me (but only if I fall from below 15,000 feet; read the fine print!).

What is and isn't covered varies depending on where you're from and what you're doing, so read the fine print to make sure what you're planning to do is covered. A few other travel insurance sites to check out are:

- \* [World Nomads](#)
- \* [Travel Guard](#)
- \* [Travel Insured International](#)
- \* [Seven Corners](#)
- \* [CSA Travel Protection](#)
- \* [Travel Safe](#)
- \* [MH Ross](#)
- \* [HTH](#)

**Remember:** If you're a [Hostelling International](#) member, you already have some limited coverage; be sure you're not doubling up unnecessarily.

## *HIRING TOUR GUIDES THE SMART WAY*

99% of the time, I'd say hiring a tour guide is a waste of money and a loss of an authentic experience—most people are completely capable of putting their own adventures together and will have more fun anyway—but sometimes it *is* necessary and in some cases unavoidable.

In my case, I'm paying a tour company a lot of money so I can run in the [Big 5 Marathon](#) in South Africa. Could I have that same experience without hiring anyone to put it together? Maybe, but I'd probably get trampled by an elephant. There are a lot of logistical issues to consider with an adventure like that, so I'm happy to pay someone to make sure I don't get eaten by a lion while I'm running or get lost, have a heart attack, and be picked over by vultures.

In Tanzania, it's actually against the law to climb Mt. Kilimanjaro without hiring a guide. It's an economic concern that ensures the people of the region have jobs and a bunch of tourists don't just come and trash their mountain without at least paying for it.

If you find yourself in a similar situation, there are a few things you can do to make sure you pick the right contractor.

- \* **Search for reviews on Trip Advisor.** If it's travel related and costs money, someone (or many people, actually) probably has an opinion about it, and [Trip Advisor](#) is an excellent way to find it. I narrowly avoided one Kilimanjaro guide after finding a ton of bad reviews about them.
- \* **Check Internet forums.** If you're hiring someone to guide you on a specific activity like I am, you can usually find more candid reviews in the forums where people hang out to talk about that specific topic.
- \* **Create a comparison matrix.** I learned how to do this when I worked in construction and had to evaluate bids from contractors. If you're courting a few different guides, make a chart so that you can easily see what is and, more importantly, *isn't* included in each outfitter's price. If it's not specifically mentioned, don't assume it's included—you need to ask.
- \* **Trust your first impression.** If you don't like how you were treated on the very first contact you made, don't anticipate that things will get better in the future. Move on to the next one.
- \* **When possible, go local.** This is sometimes difficult to do when there's a considerable language and technology barrier, but most large tour operators simply hire out to local guides. You might save a fair bit if you're willing to do the legwork to cut out the middle man.

## WORKING ABROAD & LIVING IN THE CLOUD

When I tell people about my plans to climb mountains and run marathons all over the globe, one question always comes up:

**“How will you pay for it?”**

It's a reasonable query since I'll be away from home for a long time and my adventures, despite all I do to reduce costs, are still a significant investment.

The answer, of course, is that I'll be working while I'm away. [Advanced Riskology](#) is now a location independent business; while I'm off exploring, I'll be working to maintain the site and perform any necessary business work to keep the cash that funds these adventures flowing.

If you have a traditional job and this all sounds a bit unrealistic, there are people like [Allan Bacon](#) and [Sean Ogle](#) who've done a great job figuring out how to craft a remote work agreement so you can do this kind of stuff without quitting your day job.

## FINDING WIFI

Once I'm actually overseas, though, I expect that working will be a bit more complicated than just sitting down in front of my computer and typing. For starters, finding reliable internet service will be a little tricky. I'll be using coffee shops and internet cafes wherever I can to get some work done. Here are a few websites I'm using to find places to work:

- \* [Cybercafes.com](#)
- \* [Open WiFi Spots](#)
- \* [Jiwire Global WiFi Finder](#)
- \* [WiFi Free Spot](#)

And here's Lifehacker's [definitive guide to finding free wifi](#). If you're feeling mischievous and have low moral standards (or if you're just desperate), here's a how-to on [sneaking into password protected wifi networks](#).

**Warning:** If you have high altitude aspirations like me, don't bring along any devices with spinning hard drives—high altitude will destroy them. Solid state drives only!

But what about when I'm out in the bush or up on a mountain? In case it wasn't obvious, being able to tweet my victory from the top of a mountain is very important!

For that, I'll likely be using an unlocked smartphone coupled with a local SIM card from the country I'm traveling in.

Believe it or not, cellular coverage is becoming prominent in even the most remote corners of the planet. You can even get [3G coverage at the summit of Mt. Everest](#) now.

Working from a cell phone in a tent on a mountain where taking my gloves off could mean losing a finger isn't exactly an ideal set-up, but it'll work in a pinch and will allow me to keep the gears turning at *Advanced Riskology* for as long as I'm away.

That's useful. In a pinch, you can also tether your smartphone to your notebook, giving you more control by using the phone as a mobile modem.

## MAKING INTERNATIONAL CALLS

I rarely ever make phone calls, so I don't anticipate making many (or any at all) while I'm away, but if I needed to, it would probably be to reach someone at home, which would be an expensive proposition whether I'm using a SIM card from home or from abroad, [perhaps even thousands of dollars](#).

In this case, [Google Voice](#) is probably the best bet. Since you can change what numbers your Voice account rings to, it's easy to set it up to receive calls no matter where you are. Remember, if you're using a local SIM card to get affordable cell coverage while traveling, your phone number is going to change every time you change services. Just give people your Google Voice number and they'll be able to get in touch with you via a local number at home no matter where you are. You can also make very affordable outgoing international calls right from your computer or smartphone using a WiFi connection—likely a lot cheaper than any cell provider offers.

[Skype](#) is also an invaluable tool, allowing you an easy way to video chat with anyone in the world who has the service. You can make affordable international phone calls using Skype also and some people use their Google Voice account to forward to their Skype number as it's more likely to work abroad.

## OTHER HANDY CLOUD TOOLS

Here are a few other invaluable web-based tools that that make working on the run a lot easier:

- \* [Drop Box](#) – A free, web based storage box where you can keep critical files easily accessible if you ever have to switch computers.
- \* [Drop it to Me](#) – Drop Box is easy to use by yourself, but if you need to let other people upload to it, it's a little more complicated. Drop it to Me simplifies the process by giving you a unique upload page where anyone can go and upload a file to your Drop Box.
- \* [Crash Plan](#) – This is one of the easiest and most affordable cloud-based back-up programs. If you're working on the go, then you probably have a



lot of important data on your computer and lugging around an external back-up drive is kind of a hassle. Crash Plan eliminates the need for it.

- \* [Rescue Time](#) – When you only have a few precious minutes each day to do your most important work between WiFi connections, it's good to make sure you're actually getting work done. Rescue Time is a web-based app to help you make sure you don't waste those few minutes.
- \* [Outright](#) – This is an app that you can use to manage your business accounting. It's not robust enough to run a million dollar operation, but if you run a small operation like me, it's perfectly capable.

Also keep in mind that if you're jumping around from country to country, you'll want to make sure you **contact any banks where you have accounts you'll need access to while you're away** or they'll get frozen the second you try to make a purchase abroad. This is important whether or not you run a business.

**Reminder:** If you deal with PayPal a lot, you'll want to be sure you're very specific with them about where you'll be and when. There are many reports of people having their accounts locked just by signing on in a foreign country.

## BON VOYAGE

Finally, I want to say that I'm not some guru or travel ninja. I'm just a guy that likes to go on big adventures from time to time and I thought there might be others out there like me. If you're really into traveling, here's a list of other great writers and travelers that you'll probably be interested in checking out:

- \* Gary Leff – [View from the Wing](#)
- \* Rick Ingersoll – [Frugal Travel Guy](#)
- \* Chris Guillebeau – [Art of Non-Conformity](#)
- \* Matt Kepnes – [Nomadic Matt's Travel Site](#)
- \* Gary Arndt – [Everything Everywhere](#)
- \* Christine Gilbert – [Almost Fearless](#)
- \* Lea & Jon Woodward – [Location Independent](#)
- \* Sean Ogle – [Location 180](#)
- \* Jenny Leonard – [Where is Jenny?](#)
- \* Cody McKibben – [Thrilling Heroics](#)
- \* Tynan – [Life Outside the Box](#)
- \* Adam Baker – [Man vs. Debt](#)
- \* Karol Gajda – [Ridiculously Extraordinary](#)
- \* Ashley Ambirge – [The Middle Finger Project](#)

Whatever your ambitions are, make sure you take them seriously and follow through. If you get overwhelmed, remember that you don't need to know *everything* to have a successful adventure. In fact, if you did, it wouldn't be much of an adventure at all.

Spend a few minutes every day plotting your course and, before long, you'll be off on your own magical mystery tour.

Maybe I'll see you on a bus somewhere.

Happy wandering,



**P.S.** Whether you want to wander to the most remote corners of the earth or just see a few foreign cities you'd always heard nice things about, I hope you found something useful here for your travels. If you did, I'd really appreciate it if you'd **share this guide**. Here are a couple easy ways to do that:

- \* [Tweet it](#) on Twitter
- \* [Share it](#) on Facebook
- \* Email it to a friend
- \* Write a blog post about it

Also, if you want more free resources like this, **sign up for [free updates](#)** from *Advanced Riskology*.