



As experienced travel writers, tho we plan and research, we're always still at the mercy of airlines, hotels, cruise ships and other providers. And need we mention Mother Nature? Here are some helpful tips, based on years of wandering the world.

Fly Light: Especially with ever-increasing baggage fees, get the largest approved carry-on and fit everything inside. And/or for stuff you can stash on your body, wear coats with many inside and outside pockets. Checking baggage costs money and valuable travel time, while increasing the possibility of loss. Consider Fedex or UPS to ship bulky items in advance.

Plan Ahead: On the day before you travel, be aware of potential problems in weather, illness, accidents, labor strikes, political issues and other possible glitches on the way to and at your destination. Always have at least one what-if plan ready to apply. **Prepare Your smartphone:** It should contain all your medical, family, travel and other contact info. Know your program and what it allows. If you'll be traveling out of the country and/or visiting foreign ports, check international coverage and rates.

Be Loyal: To gain the most points or miles, it's best to stick with the same airlines. Many hotels, airlines and car rentals are combined to offer free miles, so frequent bookings with the same company can earn the most benefits for future travel.

Be A Tipper: You may be surprised what a \$5 or \$10 bill, slipped discreetly to a desk clerk, baggage handler and other service people can accomplish. Cash, especially in the currency of the country you're visiting can be bargaining chips to get better service and/or lower prices.

Know Airline Info Shortcuts: When at the airport facing canceled flights or other problems, sometimes the best solution is to find a quiet corner. Then immediately get on the smartphone to the airline HQ, instead of waiting in long lines for an overworked desk agent to get to you.