



6hrs

8hrs

# 48hrs

10hrs

12hrs



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**ADC**

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Afternoon Despatch & Courier

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# HAPPY HOLIDAY!

Whether you're taking a vacation next month or next year, you need to plan, book, budget and pack — all while ensuring that your trip is as memorable as it can be. So, **Rhea Dhanbhora & Dev Goswami** draw up a holiday planning guide to help ensure that the process is a breeze

## PLANNING YOUR ITINERARY

Don't go into a vacation blind, or you'll end up either doing so much that you experience too little, or doing nothing at all. Creating the perfect itinerary is the first step to planning a great vacation, so follow these tips to ensure that you have a seamless, fun-filled holiday.

- First things first, download an application or buy a book (if you're the paper and pen type) dedicated to your itinerary. Don't scribble notes on post-its or think that you will remember everything months later.
- Don't pack too much into your trip. Sure, you want to see and do everything, but what's the point if you spend your entire vacation running from pillar to post and miss out on experiencing things? Plan things realistically and accept that you will have to make compromises.
- Don't forget to account for travel time. Very often, you think of seeing five things in one day, but don't realise that the time you will take to travel from one place to the other will cut a huge chunk out of your schedule. Account for traffic, research how long it takes to reach and plan everything down to the T.
- Remember to research local holidays and timings. You don't want to have three things on your itinerary, only to be left with one because everything else was closed!
- If you're renting a car, think of parking spaces, walking time from the parking space to your destination and allow yourself a little breathing room in between.
- Don't forget to schedule in your meals! This may sound silly, but imagine spending the entire day trying to keep up with your tight schedule — if there's no meal time scheduled in, you will end up missing out on some great local food, not to mention your daily nutrients.
- Keep it flexible. You never know what you might experience while you're there and you may want to spend more or less time at a particular place than you thought you would.



>> Get an application that can help you put all your ideas in one place, so you can plan your vacation with ease

## ACCOMMODATION

Where to stay during your trip is important to consider if you don't have friends or relatives who reside in the country that you plan to visit. You can refer to applications for hotel details, prices and reviews (refer to our vacation planning applications to check which ones we like best) and call and confirm for current prices. Follow hotel blogs, social media accounts and read online reviews before you confirm a booking. Try to find out where friends, friends of friends, relatives, acquaintances and colleagues have stayed on their trips.



>> Websites and online reviews can help you pick the perfect hotel

## DRAWING UP A BUDGET

Don't look at your bank balance, subtract the amount you want to save and set the rest as a budget. Follow these tips instead:

- **Divide and rule:** Divide your holiday into travelling to the destination, inter-city travel, accommodation, entertainment, entry charges for attractions, food and shopping. Set a budget for each section, but read our next point first!
- **Estimate, then budget:** Don't go about setting arbitrary budgets for various sections. For example, you might have set a budget of ₹600 for entertainment, but does it cover the cost of film tickets as well as popcorn? Look online to draw up an estimate of how much it might actually cost. Then, use these mean prices or estimates to set realistic budgets.
- **Look to save money:** Planning a budget goes hand-in-hand with looking for ways to spend less. So, every time you research entry prices or transport costs, look for ways to save on them. For example, tourist attractions offer discounts if you book online for a large group. Several countries have pre-paid, inter-city transport cards that you can buy online at a cheaper price, especially if you book in advance. Also, instead of just buying foreign currency (more on that later), check the conversion rate trend over the past year to see whether you might be able to convert at a better rate in the near future.



## DON'T FORGET THESE

So, you've drawn up a great budget. But, did you include tips, laundry charges and emergency costs? Take a look at some things that you may not have accounted for:

- ATM fees that are often location specific.
- Roaming charges on your phone — for calling, texting and data.
- Departure taxes — for example, if you visit Bali, you have to pay a tax while flying out after your holiday.
- Tips at restaurants, in cabs and at hotels.
- Buying souvenirs.
- Snacks and food, over and above your daily meals.
- Medication — which is usually very expensive in foreign countries.
- Taxes — whether at restaurants, for accommodation charges or entry to tourist spots; the prices that you find out about will usually be exclusive of taxes.

## GETTING THE BEST FARE

Whether you're travelling within the country or to an international destination, you will spend a major chunk of your budget on airfare. However, there are various ways you can save money on air tickets. Here are a few tips:

- Travel during off-season:** This is a classic strategy that will help you get cheaper flight tickets. Mohit Gupta, chief business and marketing officer for MakeMyTrip, tells us that summer holidays and the Dussehra-Diwali-Christmas months are peak travel seasons in India. So, if you can, avoid planning a holiday during this period. Also check peak seasons and travel trends to your destination.
- Research:** This is one of the best ways to get a good deal. Instead of trusting your neighbourhood travel agent to get you the best fare, look for it yourself. Mohit tells us that their website (MakeMyTrip) has a calendar on its flight booking page with airfare — for the route that you want — for up to one year from your search date. Yatra.com, another travel website, has a similar calendar, where you can look at the airfare for an entire month on a particular route. Checking these calendars can help you decide on a date that offers you the lowest airfares.
- Be flexible:** Not just with your travel dates and accommodation, but also with where you want to land. Confused? Mohit has an excellent tip when it comes to saving on plane tickets. He tells us, "Change your city of arrival to the closest port of arrival that may be available at a cheaper price. For instance, if a ticket to Zurich is too expensive, you can opt to land in Venice and then travel to Zurich by rail or road. That way, you save on airfare and also get to experience a new place." Also remember that connecting flights, because of their longer travel time, are sometimes cheaper than direct flights.



## GETTING A VISA

While the process and documents required for visa applications change with the country you're visiting, there are certain things that you must remember. Find out about the visa procedure for the country you plan to visit, the moment you've decided on going there. Sometimes, it might take as long as a few months for you to get a visa. All consulates have websites with extremely simple instructions and requirements — so much so that you won't even need an agent. With tourist visas, most countries usually ask for residence and identity proof as well as proof of your ability to fund your entire trip. Make sure that you have a valid passport before you apply for a visa, or you will end up wasting a few days. Applying for a new passport or renewing an old one will usually take two-three weeks.



## FOREIGN CURRENCY

Foreign currency is one aspect that is usually overlooked. If you'd like to avoid unnecessary taxes and duties that will pop up when you use your normal debit/ credit card in a foreign country, remember that you can buy foreign exchange (forex) before you leave for your holiday. All banks — private as well as state owned — let you buy forex either in the form of cash (currency notes or travellers cheques) or a prepaid card — usually Visa or MasterCard — that you can use as a debit card to make payments as well as withdraw money through ATMs. While you can buy forex from any bank, buying it from the one where you already have an account will be a much simpler process.

## BEST VACATION PLANNING APPLICATIONS

Planning a vacation has never been easier, because there are applications that you can access on your smart phone, computer or tablet to make planning a breeze. Here are a few that we love:

- TripAdvisor:** One of the most popular vacation planning applications, TripAdvisor helps you get over accommodation woes with nifty tips, user reviews and city guides. The best part is that you can save what you search for and access it without an internet connection, making it easier to use if you haven't activated roaming. **Available on:** iOS and Android
- Gogobot:** We love Gogobot! It helps travellers access a range of destinations, pick from activities and build a sightseeing list without hassle. You can build an itinerary and access it wherever you are to keep track of it. **Available on:** iOS and Android
- Triplt:** Here's why people love Triplt. You can combine every confirmation you get, including tickets, rentals and reservations. You won't need to scour through emails or documents every time you need to check something and it gives you great hints and tips as well! **Available on:** iOS and Android
- Expedia:** Travellers love this because they offer deals to help you save money. From hotel discounts and last minute bookings to a range of reviews that will help you pick the best hotel, this is one application you need to download before you start planning your trip. **Available on:** iOS and Android
- Lonely Planet:** The book has been helping travellers for years and now there's an application that makes it even easier! You can access GPS locations and pick exactly what sites to visit when you're on vacation. **Available on:** iOS and Android
- City Guides:** The full name of this application is why we love it — City Guides, Offline Maps. It's a great way to explore, saving whatever you think

## CHECKING YOUR DOCUMENTS

We're going to explain visas to you, but before we do, here's what you need to check and double check before you even think of jet-setting across the world.

- Make sure that you have identification, even if you're just travelling around the state or to a domestic destination.
- Most countries require visas (read our box to find out how to get one), so make sure that you plan your trip at least two months in advance.
- Passports are mandatory! Check immediately whether yours is valid, even if you're not planning any immediate travel.
- Make sure that the identification you have is photo identification as most places ask for those now.
- Remember to get your travellers cheque, converted money and debit or credit cards (make sure they are international) in order before you travel.
- Apply for an international driver's licence if you're planning on renting a car.
- Carry immunisation documents if you are travelling to countries where you need to take shots before you enter. It's

more important when you're travelling to or from developed to developing/ underdeveloped countries.

- Several countries require at least a six month passport validity period from the date of return. Before you book, double check all the information — including dates, times, destination airport and total cost after additional charges.

## KEEP YOUR DOCUMENTS SAFE

Losing/ misplacing or forgetting your travel documents can ruin your entire vacation. To prevent this from happening, always make duplicates. Also, email yourself all your important documents, including airline tickets, passports, health certificates, your license and visas. Leave copies with someone who can help you out if you lose any documents. And make sure you get a proper travel pouch to keep them all safely. Don't leave passport holders on tables or stash them in your pockets. Always keep your money and your documents separately. If you do lose a document, contact the Indian embassy before you do anything else — the sooner you do it the less hassle it will be.



>> Carry prescription medication in their original cases

## TIPS TO CARRY MEDICATION

- A first aid kit is important. Whether you're carrying it with you (domestic travel) or putting it together when you reach your destination, make sure that you have bandages, adhesive tape, cotton balls, safety pins, creams for burns, cuts and scrapes and antibiotic creams to prevent allergy.
- When you're travelling within the country, don't forget to pack things such as antacids, anti-nausea medication, allergy medication, nasal sprays, antihistamines and basic cold and flu medication.
- You need to get prescriptions for any medication that you need to carry — even if you're carrying anti-malaria medicine to a country where contracting malaria is a risk. Make sure you carry enough because you're not going to be able to buy it without a prescription. Make copies of your prescriptions just in case.
- Make sure you know what medicines are banned in which countries. What is legal here might be banned in Europe — you need to be aware before you travel.
- Pack your prescription medication in your carry-on luggage, in their original packaging.



>> Pack light to avoid exceeding the weight limit when you're flying

## PACK LIGHT

Packing light is important not just to ensure you don't end up paying for excess baggage charges, but also so that lugging around your bags doesn't hamper your holiday. These tips will help:

- Go cordless:** Okay not completely, but remember that wires and chargers might not add much weight, they will be a hassle to sort through if you carry too many of them. So, try and get adapters for your gadgets that you can use with one, standard wire.
- Limit the bag:** Instead of limiting the items in your suitcase, limit the number of bags you carry. This ensures that once your bags are full, you'll either have to take out stuff to pack something that you need or avoid carrying anything extra at all. Either way, you win!
- Factor in the weight of clothes:** You might not realise it when you hold a shirt or a skirt in your hand, but once you've finished packing all your

clothes, you'll realise how much weight they carry. Remember that wool is heavier than materials such as cotton and linen and jeans are heavier than trousers. So, as long as the weather is suitable, carry light-weight clothes.

- Be stringent:** Think three or four times, if you have to, about whether you need something. You want to carry two-three books, but are you really going to read them? Do you really need all your makeup? Your first response might be yes, but if you really put your mind to it, you can weed out items that you won't need much over during your vacation.
- Disposables:** From toiletries to towels, you can get several items that you think you need, either free, or at a cheap price from your hotel or convenience stores at your destination. So, avoid carrying personal items that you know you can buy there and only focus on things that are necessary.