

## Vienna Trip – Travel Tips

By Jim Elliott

### **MONEY**

- If you bring cash, bring nothing larger than \$20 bills. In some countries, banks will not accept \$50 or \$100 bills for exchange to local currency. I bring some \$1 and 5's for tips/small purchases & \$20 for real spending or exchange cash.
- Bring a debit card for use in ATM to get local currency. ATM fees will apply. **DO NOT USE A CREDIT CARD TO GET CASH FROM AN ATM AS IT WILL BE CONSIDERED A LOAN WITH ALL ASSOCIATED FEES, HIGH INTEREST RATES, ETC.**
- You can get local currency at your bank before you leave. Your bank will generally charge a fee or not give you the best exchange rate.
- The best exchange rates are generally obtained by using your debit card at an ATM machine in country.
- Make sure your credit card has a “chip”. If it doesn't, ask your bank to get you a card with a chip. Cards without chips are almost useless in Europe (they are way ahead of us on this one).
- Generally you can charge most meals, larger purchases, hotels, etc. on your credit card (IF IT HAS A CHIP) and you get a good exchange rate (usually the rate for the exact day of the charge).
- Verify ahead of time with your credit card company what the exchange rate fees are. Most normal credit cards can be used in Europe, but you get charged ‘exchange fees’. If your card has exchange fees, get another ‘travel’ credit card that does not have exchange rate fees (BofA has a relatively good one and they overnight the card to you if you need it quickly). Exchange fees can add up, so be careful!

### **MONEY BELTS**

- I think they are a good idea. These days you want one with RFID (Radio-Frequency Identification). (**RFID**) is the use of radio waves to read and capture information stored on a tag attached to an object. A tag can be read from up to several feet away and does not need to be within direct line-of-sight of the reader to be tracked. Lots of places sell these online. Marilyn uses the one she got one

from AAA and likes it much better than one she got on Amazon (although they have more choices). She uses this as her only wallet when traveling.

- Most hotels have safes in the rooms, but I like to carry my passport & some money with me in my money belt. If the room has a safe, I use it for my electronics & valuables. Don't leave these type items lying about in your room when you are gone.

## **ELECTRICAL CONVERTERS**

- Europe is generally 220V. I believe Austria uses a Type F electrical plug, so make sure you have at least one simple/small adaptor. The hotels we will be staying in only have 220V and recommend bringing an adaptor.

## **CAR RENTALS**

- I have found Autoeurop and Europcar to have the best rates and I have had good luck with both.
- If you prepay you can generally save ~10%
- I have been told that you only need an international driver's license if you get stopped by the police. They can fine you if you don't have one. AAA sells them (\$20 license, \$5 photo).
- Be VERY careful about obeying the speed limits in Europe. They use a lot of cameras (which you never see) and you will get expensive tickets in the mail plus hefty fees from your rental car company. Someone I know (I won't mention her name) racked up enough tickets & fees to exceed the actual cost of renting the car! You will get these little surprises in the mail 2 or 3 months after you get home.
- The rental car companies like to sell insurance. Normally your credit card will automatically provide CDW insurance with NO deductible if you charge the rental on their card (at least the good "travel" cards do this). You should ask your credit card company to send you a letter BEFORE you leave that states that you have this coverage, otherwise the rental company might try to charge you extra for it if you can't prove you have it. I believe BofA calls it a "letter of coverage" or "letter of Eligibility." It's free.
- The rental car companies are generally required by law to provide you with liability and 3rd party insurance, so again, you should not have to purchase this as an extra.
- Your normal auto insurance is probably not good in Europe, but you should verify this with your own insurance company before you travel. However, if you have a

separate umbrella insurance policy it will usually cover 3rd party liability anywhere in the world. Again, verify this before you travel. If you do have an umbrella policy, ask the insurance company to provide you a letter of coverage. Keep this letter with you in case you have an accident. My umbrella covers anybody or anything we might cause damage to.

## **INTERNATIONAL DRIVER'S LICENSE (FROM THE AAA WEBSITE)**

- AAA is one of only two private entities in the U.S. authorized by the U.S. Department of State to issue an IDP.\*  
You will need to provide:
  - Download and fill out an application, and bring it to your nearest AAA branch office\*\*.
  - Two original passport pictures (also available at AAA branch offices\*\*).
  - A valid U.S. driver's license.
  - Pay \$20USD permit fee and you're ready to go!
- If you are not able to visit your nearest AAA branch office, your IDP can be obtained through the mail. Simply enclose the following and mail them to the AAA office nearest you (check locally for payment options):

You will need to provide:

- Your completed IDP application form
- Two original passport pictures each signed on the back
- \$20USD permit fee
- A photocopy of both sides of your driver's license
- If desired, include additional U.S. funds for expedited return mail service.  
See USPS.com, Fedex.com or UPS.com for rates.

## **INSURANCE**

- Medical and trip insurance – can be purchased ahead of time from the travel agent
- The travel agent can explain all the different types of travel insurance you can purchase. The simple medical insurance I believe is relatively cheap and probably a good idea.

- Check with your medical insurer here in the states about the coverage they provide when you travel. Our Aetna insurance is good most anywhere in the world, but you typically have to pay the bills in Europe and then ask for reimbursement when you get home. **CALL YOUR INSURANCE COMPANY AHEAD OF TIME SO YOU KNOW IF YOU ARE COVERED AND HOW IT WORKS WHEN TRAVELING.**

## **MEDICINES**

- Bring all your prescription meds with you in your carry-ons. Also bring a copy of the actual doctor prescriptions.
- Our medical insurance company recommended we get a complete 2<sup>nd</sup> set of all critical meds and pack one set and carry the other.
- You can talk to your doctor about what special meds you might need for the trip. A ‘travel’ consult with your doctor is generally not covered by Medicare, so you might ask the doctor about this when you are in the office for another reason.
- Keep prescription meds in their original containers
- Travel meds we generally bring:
  - Lorazepan (flight anxiety)
  - Ciprofloxacin or Zithromax (Upper respiratory; bacterial infection),
  - Loperamide or Pepto Bismo (Imodium)
  - Asthma meds
  - Pepcid AC (stomach acid, heartburn)
  - Celebrex or Aleve (pain or inflammation)

## **TRAVEL NOTIFICATIONS**

- Call (or do it online) your credit card & ATM card companies and put in “travel notifications” telling ahead of time where you will be traveling to. This is especially important if you are an ‘infrequent’ traveler. Credit card companies can/will put a lock on your card if they think it is being used fraudulently. Once it’s locked you are **SCREWED!** It can take days and lots of calls to get it unlocked. So call ahead of time and tell them the countries and, if possible, the cities you will be traveling to (including stopovers like Frankfurt airport), so they can expect to see charges from those areas.

- If you lose your credit cards or other important documents, have the numbers written down in your phone or tablet or somewhere only accessible to you. Make sure your phone and tablets are password protected!

## **PHONE NUMBERS**

- Put critical phone numbers in your password protected cell phone or tablet
  - Credit card number
  - Credit card company phone numbers if your card is lost or stole
  - Passport numbers
  - Doctors
  - Emergency contacts (friends/relatives)
  - Phone numbers of neighbors, pet sitters, etc. who are watching the home front for you while your away
  - Your bank account numbers & branch phone numbers in case you need to get money wired to you in an emergency
  - ICE ... in case of emergency. In the USA, all emergency responders are trained to look for “ICE” on your cell phone in and emergency.
  - Your cell phone carrier number
  - Travel insurance number
  - Airlines numbers for the airlines you are flying on (If a flight is delayed or cancelled you don't want to be the 100<sup>th</sup> person in line to talk with a Service Agent about rerouting you; you want to call the airlines directly so you get that last seat on the next plane out instead of the guy 50 places up in the line).

## **TELEPHONES AND GPS**

- Talk to your cell phone carrier before you leave and ask about how to use your phone in Europe and what the costs are. The service and costs vary considerably between carriers. When we were with Sprint, it was cheaper to buy a \$50 phone and prepaid phone card that worked in France than to try to use our Sprint phone.

- T-Mobile is an extremely good carrier for foreign travel. They offer free WiFi calling, free text, free data, and other perks. On my T-Mobile phone I can typically connect to the hotel internet and then call home for free. Because we have an unlimited T-Mobile data plan, I can use my GPS in most countries free. This is extremely handy for not only driving around, but also for walking around an unfamiliar city. You can find a great restaurant to walk to for dinner and be confident you can find your way back to the hotel after dark with the GPS; especially helpful after a few glasses of fine wine!
- Talk to your carrier before you leave. You will probably need to put your cell phone on certain settings to make sure you don't get charged outrageous fees for unsuspecting things. For example, my sister has Verizon and she had to turn off her texting and emails (even automatically downloading the local time) to avoid getting charged because some business wanted to send her a text or email advertisement. T-Mobile phones need to be setup for WiFi calling, otherwise you can incur some outrageous phone bills. So be careful and talk with your carrier ahead of time.

## **IMPORTANT PAPERS**

- Make copies of:
  - Passports
  - Travel itinerary
  - Medical insurance
  - Credit cards (you may want to expunge the CC number)
  - Prescriptions
  - Emergency contacts
- Keep one copy in your carry on, one in your luggage and give one to a travel partner if you have one.

## **TRAVEL MAPS AND BOOKS**

- If you belong to AAA, you can order maps & travel books online or call them and they will mail them to you for free.
- You can also go into the local AAA office and most of these maps & books are available for free
- The book stores have several selections. We particularly like Lonely Planet.

## **PASSPORTS**

- DON'T FORGET IT!
- Make sure ahead of time it is good for at least 6 months more than your expected return date
- Make sure you have enough blank pages (MUST be labeled "VISAS", not "Amendments and Endorsements") so there is one for every country you will travel to for their in/out stamps. In the Euro zone you generally only need one page, but if you go outside the European Union you generally need one page per country.
- Give a copy of your passport to your travel partner so if you lose your passport and your luggage, then your travel partner will still have a copy.

## **PACK LIGHT ... ACTUALLY VERY LIGHT**

AAA offers a class, "Travel Smart, Pack Light." Marilyn went to it a couple of years ago and found it very helpful. The next Bend classes are June 8 and 9. There are other classes offered sooner throughout Oregon.

- Comfortable walking shoes
- Umbrella
- Light weight rain jacket/wind breaker
- You may want to consider bringing a small amount of powdered laundry soap to wash clothes out in the room. I frequently just use the little bottles of shampoo provide by the hotel.
- Light weight drip dry clothes, wrinkle free, wash & wear. Avoid cotton that dries slowly.
- Hat, sunglasses, prescription glasses and/or contact lenses
- SMALL tube of 30 SPF sun block; 1 oz can go a long way
- Finish packing completely about 1 week ahead of time. Then 1 or 2 days later take about 1/3 of what you packed out and leave it at home! Less is usually better! NEVER bring a fully packed suitcase; leave room to pick up a few souvenirs/gifts along the way. I find a 2/3 full suitcase is about right.

- Cell phone can be your camera, GPS, WiFi, recorder, flash light, alarm. Don't forget the charger. Verify your charger will work on 220v/50Hz (most do). If not, you will need a small converter (Walmart should have these).
- Extra batteries for any electronics are generally a good idea, especially if your battery is a bit older and doesn't hold a charge well.
- Tablets are OK, but I don't recommend bringing a lap top unless you absolutely have to.
- I always bring a headlamp (it's the Boy Scout training)
- Lightweight/small binoculars (~\$10 at Walmart) are a nice luxury
- Toiletries – toothbrush, toothpaste (travel size), comb/hair brush, shaving items, deodorant, contact lens solution, etc. Most hotels provide shampoo & soap & many provide hair dryers.
- If you have to bring a hair dryer, get a small travel size one and make sure it runs on 220v/50Hz (most have a switch to go from 110v to 220v, just don't forget to use it!)
- Electrical adaptor plugs (220v plugs are different than our 110v plugs so you need a small adaptor ... again Walmart). I believe Austria uses a 'Type F' plug
- Small simple sewing kit
- I use rubber bands & always bring some extra's. I roll my clothes (except my nice shirts), put a rubber band around them and so they stay rolled small. I find they pack smaller that way.
- Airplane carryon: All critical meds, copies of critical paperwork (duplicates should be in your suitcase), valuables, money, phone, camera, tablet, electrical chargers, and basic toiletries and one change of clothes in case your luggage gets lost/delayed. I like to use a small backpack for my carryon.
- Ladies – leave your good/expensive jewelry at home
- Other optional:
  - Reading material/book or tablet
  - Travel journal/note pad and pens
  - Tour book/language translator or phrase book
  - Electrical transformer for any electrical unit you bring that isn't 220v compatible (shaver?)



## **LUGGAGE: SIZE, WEIGHT & LOCKS**

- Check with your airline and do not exceed their guidelines. The airlines are getting much stricter about this.
- I have seen passengers taken off flights by the police for arguing with flight attendants' about the size and weight of their luggage.
- Locks are a good idea, but **ONLY** use TSA approved locks. If isn't a TSA lock (one they have a key for) then they can cut or rip off the lock. I've seen it done! Walmart sells small TSA approved locks.
- Don't pack valuables (electronics, etc.) in your check baggage!

## **JET LAG**

- Start your trip well rested
- When you get on the plane, set your watch to the "landing" time zone. It helps considerably to mentally get in the new time zone ASAP into the trip.
- On the plane, drink lots of water and/or fruit juice. Avoid alcoholic and caffeine drinks. Try to only sleep (or nap) when appropriate for the "landing" time zone.
- Avoid heavy meals and fatty foods that might make it hard to sleep when appropriate for the landing time zone.

## **PICKPOCKETS (BE CAREFUL!)**

- I take 2 different credit cards. I keep one in my wallet and one in my carry on. If I lose one, I then have a backup.
- I always carry a wallet in my front pocket; it's harder to pickpocket that way
- Ladies ... use money belt, limit what's in your purse to what you could live without if it gets stolen