



Slow travel guide

The “We wish we’d known that” travel guide

For curious travellers with a bit more mileage on the clock

Because adventure doesn’t stop at 55 — it just learns to pack smarter.

INTRODUCTION

So, you’ve decided to travel *now*. Excellent timing.

You know what you like. You know what you don’t. And you’re no longer interested in trips that require recovery holidays afterwards.

This guide is for travellers aged 55+ who want memorable trips without unnecessary stress, and who’d rather learn from *our* mistakes than make all of their own.

We’ve made a lot of mistakes over the course of the years. We’ve learned from them and if you want, you can learn from us. To leave room for your own mistakes, of course.



CHAPTER 1: The planning stage

Mistake number 1: assuming we'd figure it out when we got there.

Lots of times, you *do* figure it out when you get there: book the first flight and take it from there. Works lots of times.

Other times it doesn't: you end up in a city during a national holiday, the town shuts down, and dinner becomes a creative exercise involving crackers. Or you arrive tired from a flight and longing for a bed and all you can find is a shared bunk bed in a hostel. This is the type of adventure we no longer enjoy.

What works better:

- We check local holidays before we go so we know what to expect
- We book at least the first few nights
- We know where food is coming from on arrival day: checked the hotel has a restaurant, looked up the nearest food market.

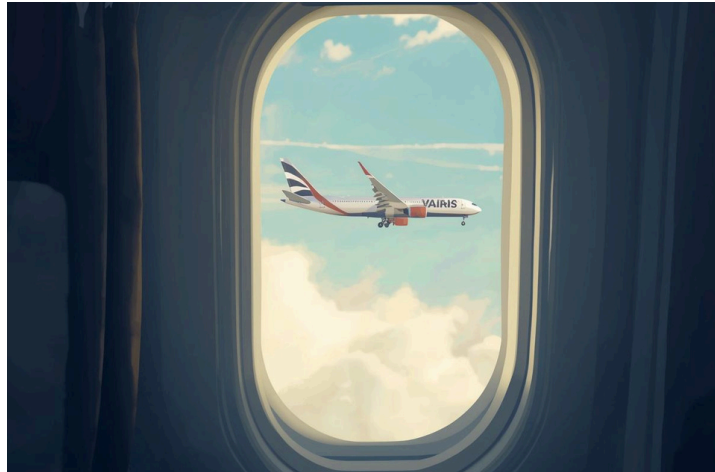
Being hungry is not a great way to meet a new country.

Mistake number 2: Packing for my fantasy self

Oh, the number of times I arrived at a foreign destination with my suitcases packed for who I thought I was going to be: the avid, superfit hiker (miraculously minus 15 kilograms), the party animal wearing a skimpy sun dress, the sophisticated city girl looking effortlessly elegant in linen. In reality, I was just me: a moderately enthusiastic hiker as long as there were breaks, someone who prefers to be asleep by 11, someone who crinkles linen just by looking at it. Most of my clothes stayed in the suitcases, I wore the same three outfits and just hauled the rest across multiple borders. Marc is much smarter and just packs the three outfits.

Smarter packing:

- Pack combinations, not just clothes. It's called a capsule wardrobe and it means you look good - and like you brought a lot of clothes - with just a few items.
- Comfortable shoes over style. Trust me, I'm an expert.
- If you don't wear it at home, you won't wear it while travelling.



CHAPTER 2: FLIGHTS – SURVIVING THE METAL TUBE

Mistake number 3: choosing the absolute cheapest seat every time

We don't fly business class (we're Dutch, from a stingy country if ever there was one)

We *do* like arriving upright and conversational. In the past I would just choose the cheapest seats available, invariably ending up in the back of the plane between five members of a football team drunk as skunks. Twelve hours with your knees around your ears while wrestling someone for the armrest is not a great start to a holiday.

What we now do:

- We bought a private jet. (Joking)
- We choose aisle seats where possible.
- If possible for that airline, I bid for a free chair next to me. It's not guaranteed but if you win the bid you'll have an empty chair between you.
- We pay a bit extra for legroom on longer flights if it's reasonable

Comfort is not indulgence. It's logistics.

Mistake number 4: underestimating layovers

A tight connection looks efficient on paper. It looks like a great way to shorten a trip, and a layover of an hour in Singapore, what can go wrong, right? Singapore's Changi Airport is huge, that's what can go wrong. As are most international airports. Running through the airport while cursing everyone in your way is not a fun way to start the next leg of the trip. By the way, talking about Singapore: that's an amazing airport. We had an eight-hour layover there at some point and we weren't bored for a minute.

Rule of thumb:

- Domestic layover: minimum 90 minutes
- International layover: 2–3 hours
- Add time for large airports and gate changes
- When booking your flight, some cheaper options have self-transfers. This means you have to pick up your bags, then check them in for the next flight yourself. This takes time, and it also means your luggage ending up at the final destination is now your responsibility, not the airline's. For me, the price difference isn't big enough for that.



CHAPTER 3: ACCOMMODATION – COMFORT IS NOT “BORING”

Mistake number 5: booking “charming” instead of practical

We still love *charming* hotels.

We’ve just learned to check exactly what’s so charming about them first. Because “charming” is often travel agency speak for no lift, narrow stairs, thin walls, drafty rooms and a shower designed for a professional contortionist. We still prefer the boutique hotels and the special stays, but we do check a few things before booking.

What we want to know:

- if it’s more than four floors, are there elevators?
- Can we just walk into the shower or do we need to climb into a bath tub first?
- What do the reviews say about the cleanliness of the rooms?
- Is there airconditioning, if we’re travelling to somewhere warmer, which is pretty much everywhere?
- Is it quiet at night?
- How are the beds?

Charm is wonderful. Knowing you’ll be able to sleep (and shower without slipping) is essential.

Mistake number 6: staying too far from everything

That bargain just outside the Péripherique in Paris? We spent the savings on Ubers because the neighbourhood was too seedy to walk around or to take public transport. And it's not only the money, it's the time too. We're now at an age where time is at a premium and money is less of an issue. So from now on, we do it differently.

What we do now:

- We stay central or, if that's really too expensive (I'm still Dutch) we book a hotel in a nice neighbourhood with public transport close by.
- We walk more and travel less

Time is the real luxury.



CHAPTER 4: ENERGY, HEALTH & PACING YOURSELF

Mistake number 7: overplanning every single day

There was a time where an average travel day consisted of a museum, a guided walk, a cooking class and a late dinner. At the end of the day, we remembered the museum. Vaguely. If it was really bad, I sometimes looked at photos later and remembered “Oh yes, that’s right, we did that too!” We didn’t enjoy things as much as we could have (and maybe should have) because we were always running from one activity to the next.

What we do now:

- We no longer plan our days completely full of activities: free afternoons after early mornings, a slower start before a busy afternoon etc.
- We stay in the airconditioning (or in the pool) and out of the sun if it’s very hot
- We have some days in the itinerary where nothing is planned or pre-booked so we can lounge by the pool if we want and still go places if we feel like it.

Memories need energy to stick.

Mistake number 8: forgetting we need more recovery time than we used to

Jet lag lingers longer than it used to — which surprises no one except us, every time. Also, after a full day of hiking or of walking through a city we need more time to rest our weary feet.

What helps:

- We don't plan too much for the first day after arrival
- We try to adjust our biological clocks faster by sticking to the new place's meal- and bedtimes. Daylight helps with that. Short naps do too, to make it through a day, but set the alarm.
- We drink plenty of water
- We take taxis and public transport without guilt
- We don't beat ourselves up over needing more time to adjust and recuperate

It's travelling, not training.



CHAPTER 5: MONEY, APPS & MODERN TRAVEL

Mistake number 9: we relied too much on one method of payment

Things that went wrong in this regard: we'd been told we could pay by card everywhere and take out cash at every ATM - only to find out a lot of places still expected cash and every other ATM was out of service. I forgot the pin code to the creditcard when trying to pay for something and had to spend quite a bit of time getting a new one. We put all our money in one place and then the backpack it was in was stolen.

What we do now:

- We carry three cards: Marc has his direct debit card, I have a credit card and we leave a third card in the hotel room locker.
- We keep an amount of local cash and we store this in two different places in case we get robbed
- We change the debit card's settings from "European Union only" to "Global" if we're leaving Europe.
- We inform the credit card company we'll be spending a lot more money than we usually do so they don't block the card
- We check the bank app for strange transactions every few days in case our card details are no longer secure.

Knowing you can always access your money is reassuring.

Mistake number 10: not setting up apps in advance

We're comfortable with technology. I've never met an app or computer program I couldn't figure out - but that's not how I want to spend my time while travelling. Having to download and install apps in the middle of a strange town because you can't find your hotel is no fun. Neither is having to spend hours in line to get a local SIM-card to get data. Or that we had no idea what it said on the menu in an Asian country and there were no pictures. Or that the local guide who claimed to speak English only knew about ten words - none of them very useful. So these days, we install apps before we even leave

Worth setting up:

- Airline apps for updates
- Google Maps with offline downloads, or any other offline map
- Translation apps for menus and signs and telling the guide you've decided you do not want to climb that last bit to the summit of the volcano.
- Notes app for reservations and addresses
- Airalo if your phone uses eSIM: it allows you to buy data for the countries you're travelling to in advance and all you have to do is switch it on on arrival.
- Like to keep track of where you are and what you do, and share it with the homefront? Have a look at Polarsteps. Tracks where you are, has destination guides and allows you to share your photos and adventures with others.



CHAPTER 6: FOOD, CULTURE & FEELING AT HOME

Mistake number 11: being too scared to eat the local food

Scared off by horror stories of Bali belly, Delhi belly or whatever else you call these nasty intestinal issues, we didn't dare try any of the local food. Until at one point we did try it, encouraged by a local guide. And lo and behold - not only did we survive, we found out that the local food was fresher, tastier and better than the things that were only eaten by overly cautious tourists

These days:

- We eat where locals eat
- We try something mildly adventurous every day. For me, mildly adventurous is opting for "somewhat spicy" in Thailand, not having a piece of crocodile or a tarantula on a skewer
- We still only drink bottled water and prefer cooked food and peeled fruit to "you don't know what that's been washed in" salads and fruit.

Mistake number 12: not learning at least the minimum of local words.

Fluency isn't required, but effort costs nothing. Nobody expects you to be fluent in Thai, Spanish or Mandarin when you're just visiting for a few days, but knowing the basic phrases is simply the respectful thing to do. Even as a Dutch person (and we know nobody speaks Dutch), I find it annoying if somebody just addresses me in English without even a perfunctory "Excuse me, do you speak English?" Also, learn some gestures to make (a polite little bow) and not to make. You can be incredibly offensive without even realising.

Learn at least:

- Hello
- Please
- Thank you
- Excuse me

It goes a long way — even with creative pronunciation. After this, people will generally switch to English if they can. Only in France will those few laboriously stammered words lead to a cascade of rapidly spoken French. Leaving you with no other options but to commit defeat and whisper "Je suis désolé, mais je n'ai pas compris cela"



CHAPTER 7: SOUVENIRS & WHAT COMES HOME

Mistake #13: buying things that were hard to carry

No matter how much you love those two-metre high wooden statues of giraffes or that scaled replica of the Taj Mahal, at some point you will have to take them home. Where after all your effort they will probably end up in the attic because your they don't go that well with your interior after all. This is a waste of time, money and muscle power.

What we choose now:

- Consumables. Do check if you can import them
- Lightweight art, like wall hangings and dream catchers
- Useful items: tea towels, mugs, keyrings, shawls
- Photos (always the best return)

If it's heavy, fragile, or awkward — think again

FINAL THOUGHTS:

Travelling at 55+ means knowing what matters to you, not what looks best on social media. Letting go of the things that no longer work for you. Accepting that you're no longer that twenty-something backpacker, but that you're nowhere near old enough to stop going on adventures. You don't need to rush, you don't need to prove anything (not even to yourself) and you can do whatever suits you best.

We've made the mistakes.

Now you don't have to.

Happy travels



One last thing

Thank you for reading — I hope you found this guide helpful.

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