

Extended Travel Trip Preparation Guide and Checklist

When leaving home for an extended period, there are a handful of important things to consider before you board your flight. Some things are obvious, others are less so, but with this list below you can easily get organized to leave your home stress-free, knowing everything that matters was accounted for. *Just make sure you turn off the coffee pot.*

Each item on the list below is something you'll likely want to make a pre-departure plan for, and this list is designed to inform you and help get you started. The resource also has two additional links included under each sub-category, for you to further your education and planning about any specific topic. We know some travelers want *ALL* the information and some just want to know what time and where their flight leaves from, so we designed this resource for everyone in between. You'll find valuable information below on the following trip preparation categories:

- **Mail Forwarding**
- **Store, Sell, Loan—Car, House, Boat**
- **International Driver's License**
- **Get a VPN**
- **Cell Phone Plan & Unlocking Your Phone**
- **Shipping Extra Luggage/Gear**

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- **Mail Forwarding and Virtual Mailboxes**

While you're away from the country for an extended period of time, it's important to make sure you make a plan for your mail. You can easily forward your mail via USPS for up to 12 months for free by visiting [their website](#) and filling out the appropriate forms.

Use your parents, a sibling, or a best friend, and when your trip is over all of your snail mail will be in one place waiting for you. Also, if something important comes you can have the individual helping you ship it forward to your address abroad, or simply open and photograph or scan the contents. If you're away for only 30 days or less, USPS also provides an option of simply "holding your mail," which is also very straightforward to set up [on their website](#).

Another new approach is hiring a "virtual mailbox" company, who will essentially open, scan, and email your physical mail to you—wherever you might be. Most of these services allow you to choose whether you'd like a particular parcel opened and scanned, forwarded to a different address, or simply shredded and recycled.

Top Two Outside Resources:

1. [USPS](#)
2. [Best Virtual Mailboxes Services for Travellers and Businesses](#)

- **Store, Sell, Loan—Car, House, Boat**

For the major things you own or rent—your house, car, motorcycle, etc.—make sure you have a plan to take care of these pieces of your life before hitting the road. What you do, how much preparation work you need to put in before you leave, will be based on several factors. Namely, how long your trip is, the weather where you live (will your pipes burst in the winter?), and what assets you need to be mindful of. For major physical things, you have three primary options:

1. **Store it**—There are garages where you can pay to store a car, motorcycle, scooter or bicycle. When storing a car or any toy with an engine, there are a few things you might want to do first, to make sure the engine turns over when you return to it. Check this [wiki-how](#) page for advice on storing a car long-term.
2. **Sell it**—This option will probably be the most appealing to those leaving the road for a long time. First, it'll help fund weeks of the trip. Second, it will make you feel lighter overall as you set off for foreign lands. Using eBay, Amazon, or craigslist are the most common options because of the huge audiences that check these sites. You can also simply photograph and post on your social media, in hopes of making a sale to someone you know.
3. **Loan it**—When it comes to a vehicle, it's fairly simple. Let a friend or family member use the vehicle in exchange for keeping it running. They'll put miles on it, but it won't rust into abandon while you're gone. With a house or apartment, this might look like letting a friend or acquaintance stay for free. If you have plants and animals you love, it might be the best, more peaceful option for you—and if you help house a friend for little to no rent, it's a win-win.

Top Two Outside Resources:

1. [Wiki-How for Long Term Car Storage](#)
2. [How to Rent Your Home and Go Travelling](#)

● International Drivers License

This only pertains to those who are looking to drive as they travel abroad. The good news is, most countries will rent a scooter or rental car to you with a valid United States Driver's License. If you're in Mexico, Italy or Thailand—you can rent wheels fairly easily. In some countries, like Indonesia—you can rent a scooter but *not* holding an international driver's license will make you susceptible to paying off the police if you're pulled over.

If you do want to get an International Driver's License you can visit the State Department's website for information on requirements for where you'll be traveling. If you are required to have the International Drivers Permit, it's as simple as [filling out an application](#), then visiting your [local AAA](#). You'll need \$20, your valid Driver's License, and two original passport photos (you can normally get these taken on-site for a small price as well). Once you jump through these hoops you'll have a new valid form of ID in over 150 countries, and you'll be driving your new rental car stress-free.

Top Two Outside Resources:

1. [How to Get An International Driver's License](#)
2. [AAA International Driver's License](#)

- **Get a VPN**

There are numerous VPN services out there, and using one for both security and access to certain things online (i.e. bypassing local censorship) is a must for travelers. A VPN provides a secure internet connection for users, through which they can send and receive data. This makes cyber-fraud or internet snooping more challenging for trolls and criminals.

Consumers can sign up for a VPN either for free or for a monthly or annual charge. Most VPN providers try to get you in the door with a “free trial” knowing that once you begin using their services it’s hard to go back. TunnelBear and ExpressVPN are two of the more popular providers and will cost around \$5-7 a month depending on how long you’re willing to commit. There are numerous resources online to vet the pros and cons of the myriad VPN offers out there. Check out [this resource](#) that lists *PureVPN* as the best for traveling.

Top Two Outside Resources:

1. [The Best VPN for 2021](#)
2. [Compare Top VPNs of 2021 With Tools and Chart](#)

- **Cell Phone Plan & Unlocking your phone**

In all likelihood, you’ll lose or break your phone at some point after you leave home for a long trip. If you have options, take a phone that feels “travel-ready.” Maybe it’s a backup phone, or maybe you buy a phone with a few years and more miles on it so you don’t have to worry about your new iPhone 11 while traveling.

Also, with any phone from the United States, you’ll likely have to unlock so it’s free from its original cell plan provider. Some providers will help you with this if you meet certain requirements, but if not—*there’s always a way*. Any “phone tech” worth that title can break a phone’s relationship with its original US cell phone plan provider. Once you’ve achieved this new found freedom for your phone, when you land in any airport in the world you can grab a SIM Card (get data only packages) and be connected to WhatsApp, Google Maps, Airbnb, Uber, and all the other most important travel information and apps on the internet.

If you don’t want to deal with getting new SIM cards in every country you visit, there are options like Google Fi, which works across borders in nearly every country on the planet, but is fairly expensive (around \$90-100 a month depending on usage).

Top Two Outside Resources:

1. [REI’s Tips for Using Your Cell Phone Internationally](#)
2. [How to Use Your Existing Phone Overseas](#)

- **Shipping Extra Luggage/Gear**

One final consideration in your trip preparation is the possibility of needing more things from home than fit in your luggage. In this situation, you can ship extra gear to your destination prior to embarking on your trip. This normally only applies to someone with a very specific interest or hobby that the travels are built around (i.e. Scuba diving, snowboarding, cycling), or otherwise might also apply to someone with very specific needs (dietary, sleeping, etc.). In that case, contact your first accommodation provider and let them know to keep an eye out for a package with your name on it.

For shipping, there are the standard international options of FedEx, DHL, UPS, and the United States Postal Service (USPS). Shop around for the best price and result as those will vary based on weight, time restraints, and final destination. For someone just hoping to travel and meet the world—I'd encourage you to keep your packing to one checked bag and one carry-on, and just remind yourself—*whatever you might decide you want when you get there, you can likely find it*. There are shoes, underwear, deodorant and adaptors everywhere in the world.

Top Two Outside Resources:

1. [Should You Ship Your Luggage Ahead to Your Destination?](#)
2. [How Can I Ship My Luggage Home Before I Fly Home?](#)