

Seven travel gurus share their secrets on how to wangle an upgrade, why black T-shirts are your best friend and who to avoid in London pubs (tip: they sound uncannily like you)

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COMMANDMENTS OF TRAVELLING

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WHETHER YOU KNOW where the taxi rank is at most of the world's major airports or are apprehensively planning your first overseas jaunt, there's always some useful advice to be gleaned from the real travel pros. Men like Lonely Planet founder Tony Wheeler and Peter Moore, globetrotting author of *No Shitting in the Toilet* (Transworld, \$25), have made it their business to locate the short cuts, minimise the unpleasant or inconvenient and maximise the pleasures of travel.

After tapping into their accumulated expertise, we identified 10 themes of interest to all travellers. You're hearing it from the mountaintop – follow these commandments and you'll never covet your neighbour's holiday villa in Tuscany again (well, maybe just a tad).

Thou Shalt Beat Jet Lag



Jet lag can be hell – wide-eyed at 3am, in a fug by 3pm. Symptoms vary from fatigue, dehydration and disorientation, to irrational thinking and swollen joints. It's not dissimilar to a hangover, minus the fun part. Some people swear by guzzling water, changing

their watches to destination time when stepping onto the plane or inhaling a number of jet-lag remedies.

Others simply agree you can't beat it. Moore believes in "accepting that the first few days after a long-haul flight are going to be a foggy haze. Just try not to step in front of a moving vehicle".

"Beating jet lag is simple – you just have to be disciplined," advises Grant Thatcher, founder of Luxe City Guides (luxecityguides.com). "Check your destination time and if it's night forgo the meal, in-flight entertainment and free drinks and



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get your head down. Never sleep during the day at your destination, no matter how dodgy you feel. Stay up at all costs and sleep when its bedtime."

How to reduce the lag: melatonin is the body's hormone that regulates sleep patterns and is therefore a prime ingredient in jet lag. It's available in tablet form, but be warned - it's all in the timing. Get the doses wrong and your jet lag could be worse. If in doubt, just take a walk in the sunshine when you land: sunlight has been shown to naturally increase melatonin production.

Top tip: jet lag comes from the body-clock change and dehydration that comes with flying. Water will help rehydrate, but too much will just flush out much-needed body salt. Try adding a dash of apple juice to water to help with rehydration or choose a remedy such as Flight Recovery (flightrecovery.com.au), which replaces lost salts.

Thou Shalt Always Angle For The Upgrade



It's easy to spot the economy-class passenger in the check-in line angling for an upgrade. It's all in the slacks; that's dress slacks, with loafers, a collared shirt and jacket.

Little does he know, no amount of Hugo Boss will help him. It doesn't matter

if you get to the airport early or late, smile sweetly, dress up, limp or shed a tear, there's a system to upgrading that's strictly adhered to by most airlines. Unless you know a cabin-crew member in first or business class who will sneak you up after take-off, join a frequent-flyer club and start working those points.

The official word from Cathay Pacific's David Bell is that "if economy is overbooked we'll upgrade to business. However, they almost exclusively go to frequent flyers, people who support the airline. We have all their records and if we need to upgrade, we select that way".

Thai Airways follows the same upgrade philosophy, although the inside tip from spokesperson Sue Marr is that upgrades, even for frequent flyers, are usually given to "singles or couples - and always adults without children". So leave the kids at home.

Peter Hession, Australia and New Zealand Regional Manager for The Mandarin Oriental Hotel Group (mandarinoriental.com), advises not to pre-order special meals because it reduces your chances of being upgraded, as you're already catered for in economy.

Or do as Thatcher does: pay up or shut up. "Travel in the class you can afford and quit thinking you should be upgraded. You want to travel business or first? Then earn some money."

How to get bumped to the front: join a frequent-flyer program. Cover all bases with a Star Alliance membership, made up of 16 airlines that all honour each other's frequent flyers. The One World Alliance does the same and includes Qantas, Cathay Pacific and American Airlines.

Top tip: assuming you can't escape cattle class, make the effort to learn about your plane. Check out the seating plan online and pre-request your seat number

so as to ensure the most leg room. There's nothing worse than arriving, finding the plane full and yourself squeezed in the middle.

Thou Shalt Spend Foreign Currency Like It's Someone Else's



Traveller's cheques are so 10 years ago. The advent of global banking means a simple ATM card and a credit card will get you from A to Z, providing you're not visiting the Sahara or Congo.

Pin your number into the local hole-in-the-wall

and watch the foreign currency slide out off the slot. Most countries accept the standard four-digit PIN number, but double-check with your bank before you go because six digits are sometimes required.

Conversion is for born-again; let an online currency calculator (gocurrency.com) do it for you and don't obsess about decimal points. You can waste precious time quibbling over a few bucks or running from bank to bank searching for the best rate when you could be strolling down the Champs Elysées.

How to keep your money in your pocket

Stick to a budget and don't carry hoards of cash. Plastic, both ATM and credit, will see you through.

Top tip: always let your credit-card company know when you are travelling. If they see a foreign debit on your card they may put a stop on your credit for security reasons, not realising it's you. Try explaining that to the maitre d when he returns your plastic.

Thou Shalt Cover Thy Butt



You're a mug if you don't take out travel insurance and not just to cover the cost of that Nikon Digital SLR you dropped in the river. Break your leg skiing, get hit by a truck on a dirt road in Africa, fall ill with fever in Asia and you could be up for big bucks.

"The cost of bringing someone home from Europe or America with a doctor is upwards of \$30,000 to \$50,000," explains Paul Quinn from Sure Save Travel Insurance. "And if you don't have travel insurance and you're admitted to hospital, all those costs are on you."

Since September 11, acts of terrorism aren't covered, but random shoot-outs are. Remember the bloke at LAX a few years ago who let loose with a machine gun? He had an issue with one of the airlines, people got shot and the airport shut down.

This wasn't declared an act of terrorism by the US or Australian governments, so if you'd been there and missed your flight, flying costs and accommodation would have been covered by your insurance.

It's your call: the Australian government has no obligation to assist you if you're hurt while abroad. So



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airlines worth flying

Skytrax surveys over 14 million passengers a year. The 2005 Airline Awards winners were:

Qantas: best airline Australasia and runner-up for airline of the year.

Cathay Pacific: airline of the year and best first-class service.

Malaysian Airlines: best economy class.

Emirates: best in-flight entertainment.

Thai Airways: best economy-class catering.

PHOTOGRAPHY (LEFT)



save yourself the worry and buy travel insurance when booking your flight. All travel agents in Australia are obliged to offer insurance, so if they don't bring it up, ask and sign on the dotted line.

Top Tip: if you're flying and have forgotten to insure, then there's a host of online travel-insurance brokers who will do it all for you the night before. It's called Last Minute Insurance; visit travelinsuranceaustralia.com.au for a quote.

Thou Shalt Refrain from Overpacking



Unless you have a Sherpa, chances are you'll be the one lugging your bags around foreign streets searching for cabs or using them as a mattress at the airport. Even if you like pumping weights at home, it makes sense to travel light.

Wheeler packs the lightest of all. His top five items to take overseas? "Money, money, money, money and a passport. What else do you need apart from your passport? Everything else you can buy along the way."

Australian travel photo-journalist Mike Gebicki's tip? Pack everything in zip-lock bags to separate dirty from clean. A pack of 100 resealable Poly Zip bags (380mm by 480mm) costs \$30 at Office Works.

How to lighten the load: packing is all about kilos. Lay out everything you plan to take then halve it. »

5 destinations made for loving

Looking for a romantic holiday? Get her heart beating in Hong Kong, above, or Bora Bora, below.

Bora Bora – there are not enough shades of blue to describe this magic lagoon. Give up and cosy up.

African safaris – wild beasts, drums, hot nights; if you can't find your rhythm here, try therapy.

Canada's Lake Louise in winter – baby, it's cold outside!

Ravello, Italy – the Amalfi Coast is just made for lovers.

Hong Kong by night – view the laser-light skyline from the Spoon restaurant for pure decadence.



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Then, just before you leave, take one more article of clothing out of your suitcase. You may be allowed 32kg of luggage from Sydney to London, but fly domestically within England and the allowance drops to 20kg. Work with the lower number.

Top tip: store phone numbers in your mobile's memory – as opposed to your SIM card – and purchase a prepaid SIM card at your destination. Then send a group text with your new number. You can also purchase a vRoam card before you go, which provides \$100 worth of calls in the country of your choice (vroom.com.au).

Thou Shalt Dress For The Occasion



If you're up the front of the plane, you'll no doubt be provided with hand-woven, alpaca-fleece pyjamas. But for those of us in coach, it's time to talk fabric. The last thing you need is itchy skin and chafed thighs mid-flight.

When flying long haul, you want fabric that moves and doesn't crease. Linen may be a natural-fibre fabric, but it creases big time and is a no-no if you want to arrive fresh. Silk is also natural, but depending on the type, may show sweat stains. Man-made fibres will serve you well – acetate doesn't shrink and acrylic is lightweight and soft against the skin, but avoid fabrics that need dry-cleaning because your hotel bill will triple.

Wheeler prefers to take "something I can throw away at the end of the trip. You're not seeing the same people every day, so nobody is going to notice you've only got two changes of clothes. And one of them is always being washed or dried". Colour? Seems black is the go for blokes on the go.

"I have a black suit for meetings and the jacket for casual," reveals Peter Hook, Communications General Manager for hotel group Accor Asia Pacific (accor.com).

"I have a lot of simple black cotton T-shirts you can wear for days if you need to and they still look okay," says Gebicki.

What to wear: choose man-made fibres that breathe and don't crease, in darker shades that don't show dirt. Sounds simple, but ask the shop assistant for help.

Top Tip: if you're an adventure traveller or camping for the first time, plan ahead. Paddy Pallin stores (paddypallin.com.au) are found in most Australian capital cities and stock hi-tech gear for high-adrenaline travel.

Thou Shalt Make Informed Choices



Travelling is risky, but so is train surfing (er, what was my point again?). Anyway, you can cower under your sheets and die of asphyxiation or choose to go abroad, keeping a few things in mind. No-one's going to accuse you of being a

5 things to never travel without . . .

An interest in where I'm going.

– Peter Hook

A sense of humour and good travel insurance.

– Peter Moore

The realisation that things are not going to go to plan.

– Tony Wheeler

Spare shoelaces and Australian sunscreen.

– Peter Hession

RM Williams boots.

– Grant Thatcher

scaredy-cat if you're aware of the dangers involved and making an informed choice. "They've probably put out a warning on travelling to Hamilton Island," reckons a sceptical Moore.

"Travel wherever you want," insists Thatcher. "You're more likely to fall down the stairs and break your neck, but nobody bothers to warn you about that."

However, if you're a bit more of a nervous Nigel, safetraveller.com.au offers good advice on how to prepare for your trip, information on airport screening, how to tell if you're under surveillance and what to do should you be kidnapped or arrested, plus seminars and e-brochures for those really keen to learn.

How to stay alert (not alarmed): you're not obliged to adhere to official travel warnings, but if you do want to know what's going on in the world, the Australian Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade's (DFAT) Web site (smartraveller.gov.au) lists warnings by country. DFAT also offers online registration for all Australians travelling overseas.

If that's all too Big Brother for your taste, then ensure you leave a detailed itinerary with contact details, a photocopy of your passport and travel insurance with your next of kin, just in case something happens.

Top tip: fire up your browser, establish an e-mail account (hotmail.com) and send it your itinerary, travel-insurance details, useful phone numbers and all other pertinent details before hitting the road. That way, if you lose vital information while on holiday, you have direct access to it from any cyber cafe.

5 unspoilt destinations

Sumba, Indonesia – surfers' secret spot, lost in time.

Tonga, South Pacific – nothing opens on Sundays; the locals are all in church.

Kangaroo Island, South Australia – two bitumen roads, the rest are dirt.

Hollyford Track, South Island, New Zealand – because it's not the Milford Track.

New York – the bigger it gets, the better it gets.



PHOTOGRAPHY UTILITY

Thou Shalt Recoil From The Ugly Tourist



There's nothing worse than witnessing cultural bad manners from fellow travellers. Other than alienating them with a moral sermon, often your best option is to distance yourself from the culprits.

As a travel writer, Gebicki's witnessed most

manifestations of cultural insensitivity, none more so than in Asia. "A lot of travellers in Asia think being white gives you special privileges. It's ugly to see. In Asia you are treated as an honoured guest and can feel like a king. It's easy to think you deserve that, but you don't, you're just a schmuck like everyone else. Don't forget that."

"When Poms, Aussies, Kiwis, Yanks or any other nationalities stick together it can be a horrid sight," observes Hook.

How to mind your Ps and Qs: to avoid offending, read up on the local customs and etiquette of your destination. In China it's considered rude not to try what is offered; in Indonesia you must take your shoes off before entering a house; in America "fanny" means bottom . . . you get the drift.

And why go overseas if you're just going to hang out with a bunch of your countrymen? Unless you're on a rugby supporters' tour, seek out the natives. Loud Aussies singing Cold Chisel classics in a London pub after too many lagers deserve all they get.

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sights to see before retiring your passport

Venice – it's the one essential. – Mike Gebicki

Jerusalem – spiritual home of religion.

– Harry Levin

Mayan ruins at Tikal in Guatemala.

– Peter Moore

If you're tired of London, you're tired of life. – Peter Hook

Santorini, Greek Isles.

– Peter Hession

Thou Shalt Take Thy Pills



You may think "it won't happen to me" or that you're not in a danger zone, but this author contracted Ross River Fever while staying at a five-star health retreat. Illnesses happen while travelling, but some can be prevented. Don't rely on your hosts to tell

you the health risks – they want your custom. If you've booked your flight, go directly to traveldoctor.com.au for up-to-the-minute information about required jabs and health alerts for all corners of the globe. It also lists the closest clinics for your pre-journey health check.

Extra pills: for \$20 at masta.edu.au you'll get a full travel and medical-advice health brief tailored specifically to your itinerary. The International Association for Medical Assistance for Travellers (IAMAT) makes competent care with multilingual doctors available in remote areas. Membership is free at cybermall.co.nz/NZ/IAMAT. Sign up and receive a list of IAMAT doctors with contact numbers around the world.

Top tip: attach a bright ribbon or fluorescent tag to your suitcase. This helps make your black suitcase stand out on the luggage carousel.

Thou Shalt Avoid The Trap



Before there was flight there was the Colosseum, Pantheon, Uluru and Pyramids. Thanks to Greyhound tours, they're now considered traps *de touriste*. Nonetheless, there are some sites you can't avoid – it would be rude to visit Paris and not say

hello to the Eiffel Tower. You know you're in a tourist trap when the streets are lined with souvenirs shops and postcards cost the same as a hardback *New York Times* best-seller. And while movies are big business for tourism, they're also a warning flag – Thailand's Chicken Island may have featured in a James Bond film many centuries ago, but it's not worth the boat ride to step onto a beach awash with hawkers.

Not everyone's so dismissive: Moore can still see the wood for the trees. "I went to the Blue Grotto in Capri recently and loved it. It was tacky and there were boatmen jostling to get my custom and a queue of boats a mile long waiting to go inside. But once you do get into the cave and you see the amazing blue of the water, you realise that tourist traps have become tourist traps for a reason. You just have to go along in the right frame of mind."

Don't get sucked in: pay your entrance fee, go on the Eye, climb the Tower, ride the tram and keep your hands in your pockets. If a taxi driver wants to take you to his mate's souvenir shop, don't go. If a tour says "silver factory" or "jade factory" or the like, cancel. It's a rort between the tour operator and the factory to persuade naïve tourists, usually Americans, to pay good money for junk.

Escape the hordes on Sumba Island, Indonesia.

