

or stolen, you'll have a workable backup system. It's also a good idea to leave copies of these documents with a family member or friend.

If you'll be travelling in developing countries, pack a small flashlight. Power failures can be frequent. Consider carefully whether to accept food or drink from strangers. Understand that drugging is always a possibility.

Remember that, when you're flying, your body has to adapt to changes in cabin pressure, the air you're breathing and different time zones.

Travelling in comfortable, casual clothes that don't restrict body movement is a good idea. Also remember that your feet are bound to swell. Avoid travelling in pull-on boots; shoes with laces make the most sense.

Lip balm and moisturizer can help to combat the dryness of aircraft cabins.

If you use contraceptive pills, be sure to take them every 24 hours.

In any country you visit, avoid sightseeing in isolated places.

If you plan to rent a car, consider travelling with a cellular phone. If you do, make sure you have an emergency telephone number in case you experience a mechanical breakdown or find yourself in a dangerous situation. Never pick up hitchhikers. And never get out of your car if someone bumps into it; wait for the police to arrive.

Don't be misled by crossing time zones.

A good way to minimize jet lag is to drink a glass of water for every hour you're in the air.

Chewing gum will help relieve the pressure that builds up in your ears, especially during the plane's final descent.

Shoes are never worn in Muslim mosques and Buddhist temples. Travellers should pack a pair of heavy socks.

Choose your accommodation carefully. You may wish to consider small hotels, B&Bs or homestay exchanges. Their size generally allows for caring, personal attention. To avoid extra stress, travel early in the day, especially if you don't have reservations. This gives you time to find a place you like before it gets dark.

Whether the accommodation is a hotel, a B&B or a hostel, always ask to see the room before you take it. Is it clean enough? Does the door lock properly? Does it feel safe? Trust your intuition. Don't stay anywhere unless you feel entirely comfortable with both the accommodation and its location.

Never accept a room if the check-in clerk calls out your name or room number. Others within hearing distance may use this information to try to call you or gain access to your room.

You should avoid ground-floor rooms or any room that has easy access from outside, such as from a balcony or fire escape. Book a room that is close to an elevator and away from exits.

Stairwells allow troublemakers to hide and to come and go undetected.

Never open your door to anyone without taking the necessary precautions. Even if your visitor claims to be a member of the staff, you should check with the front desk to verify the person's need to enter your room.

Consider investing in a small, lightweight, portable smoke detector, as well as a deadbolt that can easily be installed on any inward-opening door. These items are perfect if you plan to stay in very simple accommodation.

"Women travel differently than men. Whether they choose a hot pink nail buff, a fake wedding ring or the proverbial baggy dress while trekking in Nepal, life on the road for women is simply a different trip."

*Debra Cummings,
columnist specializing
in women's issues*