



# **brilliant** tips for first time travellers

by

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# the art of haggling

Shopping around the world is fun and in some areas you will find that haggling and bargaining for a price is part of the local culture and is therefore the norm. In fact in many areas, the prices are set artificially high for tourists so that you have to haggle, and will be expected to do so. If you don't, you'll find yourself unnecessarily ripped off. Making sure you have a good haggling technique is very much an advantage, and is a skill that is not only fun to try out, but will improve with practice!

## Top tips to bag a bargain...

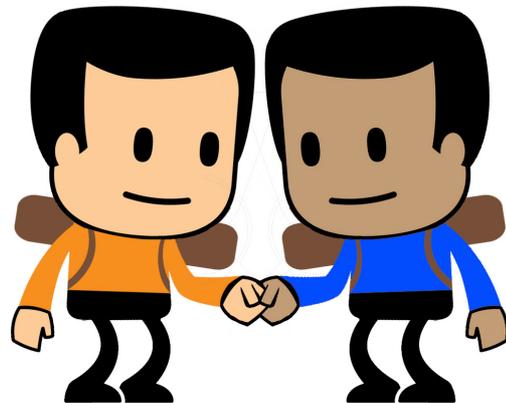
1. Before you start bargaining, make sure haggling is a local custom in the country you are visiting.
2. Recognise that haggling is not appropriate at all times, especially in places where prices are fixed such as in supermarkets, restaurants and on public transport.
3. Don't try to negotiate the price of an item you have no intention of buying, as it's not fair on the seller.
4. If a street trader tries to get you to look at a stall in which you have no interest, politely say no thank you and walk on. Don't feel bad or guilty. If you pretend you are interested, you could easily end up being hassled into buying something you don't want.
5. Have a rough idea about how much you are prepared to pay for the item and don't let the bargaining rise much above this figure.
6. Be realistic, reasonable and fair. Don't be greedy and don't take advantage. Try to be an ethical shopper!
7. Let the seller make the first offer. The original offer will normally be an optimistically inflated one, so don't immediately accept it. Instead, offer around half of their first offer. This offer/ counter-offer conversation should then go back and forth until you both eventually agree on a figure, and before you make each counter offer, you should take your time and look as though you are really considering whether it's worth it or not. Try to look less enthusiastic each time a higher price is offered to you.
8. Remember, not all attempts at bargaining will be successful. Be prepared to lose sometimes.
9. Always look disinterested when browsing. The seller will be watching your every move and will judge your level of interest before offering you a price. Any show of interest will usually raise the price.
10. Avoid picking up anything for a long period of time. Ask the price of two or three items so that it's not apparent which one you are really keen on.
11. Shop owners usually enjoy haggling with tourists, so don't get angry or aggressive. If you are friendly and relaxed then you're more likely to get a good deal.
12. The stall owner may look offended with your counter offer but don't worry, it's all part of the game. Don't feel guilty if they start telling you a heart-rending story about how they have ten starving kids at home; this is all part of the act. Listen politely and counter offer with a slightly higher price than your original offer.
13. You should get a better price if you buy multiple items. For example, if you are looking to get a t-shirt, you can usually get a better unit price if you buy a few.

14. It's a good idea to take a friend with you. Not only can they keep an eye on you in case you get carried away but they can help play the good cop/bad cop act. You can look interested whilst your friend looks totally bored and tries to drag you away. The stall owner usually reacts by quickly offering a lower price so they clinch the deal.
15. If the seller doesn't offer a price you are satisfied with, then move on and shop around. Sometimes just walking away is enough for them to call you back and offer you a better price.
16. Do not flash your cash before paying for an item. If the stall owner sees that you have lots of cash, they may assume you are a rich tourist and mark the price up. Only show your cash when you pay the agreed amount.
17. Have fun! Bargaining in markets is a part of everyday travel life in many places around the world.

## making friends

One of my favourite things about travelling is meeting new people and making new friends.

I met most of my travelling friends in hostels. These are great places to meet people as they provide you with plenty of opportunities to talk to other travellers. You can strike up a conversation with someone in your dorm, the communal kitchen, hostel bar or while checking your emails. My number one rule is to smile and be friendly. Do this and most people will be happy chatting with you - you never know, you might make a friend for life or at the very least someone to have a beer with!



It's easy to start conversations, and most people ask the same sort of questions:

- What's your name?
- Where are you from?
- When did you get here?
- Have you been to any countries before here?
- Where are you planning on travelling to next?
- How long have you been travelling for?

From these initial questions, you can easily extend the conversation to other topics that you have in common, so you'll quickly gain tips and advice. For example, someone might say they have just come from Thailand, which just happens to be your next destination. You could then say 'Well, I'm going there next, could you recommend a good hostel in Bangkok?' Hopefully, they'll give you a few recommendations; followed no doubt by stories of their mad nights out and how you'll just *have* to visit a certain bar or place!

But it's not all about picking up tips and recommendations. You may find you've discovered someone to go to the beach or share a few beers with, or, if you are heading in the same direction, you may decide to go together to share the travel costs. Remember anything can happen; they may for example suggest hooking up with a mate of theirs in Sydney who they think you'd get along with and could show you around the city - networking opportunities are endless and are part of what makes travel so exciting.

## Other ways to make friends overseas:

- **Book a day tour.** It could be a city tour, or a trip to a local attraction. Whatever it is, you will immediately be with a group of travellers for a whole day, and chances are you'll end up going to dinner with them or meeting up again for some independent travel.
- Some hostels have **notice boards** for those wanting to take part in group activities. These could be anything from guided walking tours around the town, to pub-crawls at night. If you want to meet people, then it's worth putting your name down and joining a group.
- **Stay in dorm accommodation at hostels.** There are usually 4+ beds in each room. These are often not the biggest of rooms so you are almost always guaranteed to meet someone! When you wake up, you'll say hello and then probably end up having breakfast or chilling out by the beach with your roomies!
- Travellers normally wear t-shirts, especially ones that they get free. These **T-shirts can provide you with an excellent starting point for a conversation.** For example if they are wearing a t-shirt that shows they've done a bungee jump, sky dive or a dive course, you could ask them about their experience if you fancy doing something similar yourself in the future. Most travellers love talking and sharing stories, and will, generally speaking, be only too happy to chat to you.
- If you find yourself cooking in a hostel, you could comment on your neighbour's food. If you compliment them, they may even invite you to have some!
- **There are so many ways to start a conversation.** The key is to keep it simple, smile, and have fun, and by the end of your trip, you'll have added many new friends on Facebook! I am certain you will have invitations to stay with people both in the UK and around the world. You never know, you may even meet the love of your life! My best friend met her husband on a tour in Australia, has been married for four years and now has two kids!

There's nothing for it at some point during your trip you are going to have to see a man about a dog and spend a penny. Whatever you want to call it, unless you're planning on staying in nice hotels, you may at some stage find yourself having to use some very strange looking toilets with varying standards of cleanliness and hygiene, or may have no toilet at all and get right back to nature!

After you've been travelling for a while, you'll inevitably start to collect toilet tales and begin to share your less-than-private experiences with your fellow travellers. Bizarre as this may sound, even if your toiletry habits weren't a talking point before, once you start exploring the world and its water closets, you'll find 'regularity' as common a topic as the weather.

Squat toilets and peeing in the Bush can be a little difficult, especially if you haven't employed these methods before, so I would like to share a few of my toilet tricks with you.

# toilet tricks

## Squat Toilets

If you plan to travel to Africa, Asia and some parts of Latin America, you are highly likely to encounter a squat toilet. This is essentially a hole in the ground, and as the name suggests, you use it by squatting rather than sitting. If you haven't encountered one before, it can be a tricky process to start with as it requires a bit of effort, a good balancing technique and a good straight aim to keep your clothes and shoes away from the line of fire. However with a bit of practice, I promise you will soon be a master of this art! (Though it may not be a skill you can add to your CV when you get home).

There are some positive aspects to using a squat toilet, and though they may sound horrible, they can be considerably more hygienic than sharing a seat in a public toilet - and believe me there will be times when you'll be grateful that squatting is the norm. They also have the added benefit of toning up those thigh muscles!

Squat toilets are usually made of a porcelain plate that surrounds a bowl, or have a slightly raised pedestal a few inches from the ground, normally with a ribbed footrest either side of the toilet for you to rest your feet on. Squat toilets have their own cubicle, just like public toilets in the UK, so it doesn't matter if you look silly trying to get to grips with this novel way of answering nature's call.

Most squat toilets are fine to use and it does get easier with experience. These following tried and tested tricks may help you on your way

- 1.** The golden rule is to carry your own supply of tissues or toilet roll at all times. The chances are you won't find toilet paper available in these kinds of toilets. You should have your tissue ready before you squat otherwise you could find yourself in a difficult position, struggling to get into your pockets and running the risk of ruining your delicate balancing act. You should not put any tissue down a squat toilet as it can block the plumbing system. Use the bin provided instead.
- 2.** Place your feet on the footrests and keep your feet flat on the ground, as this will improve your balance and stability.
- 3.** If you are wearing a skirt secure the end of it into the waistband, but if trousers are more your forte, pull them down, but make sure they stay above your feet. The floor is usually wet where people have either used water to clean themselves or missed the target. You could always remove your clothes to be on the safe side or until you have got the hang of it! Don't lose the contents of your pockets, as it won't be fun retrieving them!
- 4.** It doesn't really matter which direction you face when squatting as long as you fire in the right place, but most people tend to squat facing the door.
- 5.** Now comes the controversial part. To rinse or to wipe If you have tissues, then I would recommend using them. If you don't have any tissues then you have three options. Firstly you could drip dry. Not ideal. The second option is to use the sprayer. This is normally a nozzle attached to a hose, which you point and fire by pushing down a lever. The final option is to clean with some water. In traditional squat toilets there is normally a bucket of clean water situated by the toilet. You can scoop this water out with your right hand and cleanse with your left. Remember to rinse your left hand. This is why in some countries people don't eat

or shake hands with their left hand. Personally, I have never used this method; I prefer good old-fashioned toilet paper!

6. Some squat toilets have a conventional western flush, so simply flush as you would at home. Otherwise, use the clean water next to you and pour some down the toilet. One of my tips for an effective flushing technique is to use more water, not less. The faster and stronger the flow (drop the water from a height), the more easily the waste goes down. The last jug of water should be poured along the side of the toilet bowl so it cleans the whole bowl and gets rid of the final remnants.
7. Wash your hands. If there isn't any soap available, use some antibacterial gel.
8. Finally, my last toilet trick is to always have a torch handy, ideally a head torch. Some toilets don't have a light. When I was in Fiji, the electricity on the island went off at 11pm so I had to do everything in the dark. When it came to brushing our teeth, all the travellers would help each other out by taking it in turns to shine the torch. It was a fun experience, however going to the toilet was a little more difficult unless you didn't mind an audience. Personally, I like to do these things in private but I wasn't prepared to pee in the dark in case I had any nasty company like snakes, spiders etc, so I would simply hold a torch between my teeth and do my best. Looking back, a head torch would have been a much more practical accessory and is now always on my kit list.

## Answering nature's call in the wild

There may be occasions when you have no alternative but get back to nature, and it's an unfortunate reality of travelling, especially when you are backpacking. Normally this is a rather straightforward exercise, however, when going to the toilet outdoors on your travels, there are other matters to consider - most notably the things going on around you.

I remember one night in Kruger National Park in South Africa. It was dark but our guide gave us permission to jump off of our jeep so we could spend a penny. I was half way through my business when the guide suddenly shouted 'Be calm, but get yourself back to the jeep now. There is a hyena stalking you,' Well as you can imagine, I quickly stumbled back to the truck with trousers around my knees and a severely increased heart rate. So do take care when peeing in the bush and, where possible, have a friend standing nearby or even better - a guide with a gun!

And as a word of advice - take notice of what the locals say. One time I was camping on Fraser Island in Australia. There were no toilets at the campsite so we were told to go to the toilet in pairs so we could protect ourselves from the wild dingoes that inhabit the island. One morning at 6am, I woke up needing to go and as everyone in my tent was still asleep I decided to break the toilet rule and go by myself. Finding a suitable bush by a sand dune to hide behind, just as I was about to go, I heard something, and looking up saw there were a pack of dingoes standing watching me. At first I froze. Then, resisting the urge to say 'nice doggies', I slowly stood up and ran like mad back to my tent. As it turned out, I was fine and they didn't follow me but I learnt my lesson and did not break the toilet rule again!

I have to admit though, there are some advantages to going in the wild. During my Mount Kilimanjaro climb the only option was a makeshift long-drop. It was disgusting - imagine a hole in a wooden floor with obviously no water and no flush system, with people's messy business all over. The smell alone made me gag. From then on, whenever I needed the toilet, I hid by a tree or went behind a suitably sized boulder. It was cleaner, less smelly and I could enjoy the stunning sight of the snowy peaks while doing my business.

I have lots more outdoor toilet stories but I'm gradually getting better at it, so hopefully through my trial and error you will avoid some of the common pitfalls:

- Remember to go to the toilet before you go out, as this will limit the number of times you will need to bare all.
- Always carry tissue or toilet paper with you otherwise you may have to find some soft leaves.
- Before you get desperate, start considering where would be a good place to go. Trees and rocks are great to hide behind. Make sure you are not too close to any pathways. Look around you and check that you are sufficiently hidden. Remember to look up as well. I once got very embarrassed when ten porters on Kilimanjaro started laughing and pointing at me - I had failed to look at the pathway on the hill above me, which they thought was very amusing.
- Avoid peeing in tall grass so you reduce the risk of nasty creatures like ticks, ants, snakes or spiders biting your butt, or worse!
- Don't go to the toilet near a water source like a stream or river.
- If you need to do a number two, you should try and dig a small hole to do it in and then kick the mud back into the hole. Experienced outdoor toilet goers will also place a rock or stone over the covered hole to warn others that they shouldn't dig there or they will get a nasty surprise.
- Don't be a litterbug. If you use tissue, put it in a plastic bag until you can dispose of it in a bin. As a last resort you could burn the paper; just make sure the fire is out before you bury it. If you have to use leaves then you should try to bury them afterwards.
- If you have to go at night, take a friend with you. Not only will they keep you company, they can also keep an eye out for unwanted guests.
- Take some antibacterial gel with you so you can wash your hands afterwards.

## showers made simple

Communal bathrooms are - well - an experience. Standards vary between destinations and throughout the world. I have stayed in hostels where the bathrooms are as nice as in some good hotels, but equally I have shared my shower with rats, cockroaches and filthy, gooey floors.

The most important item you'll need for your trip to the bathroom is a good pair of flip-flops. Some bathrooms are pretty disgusting and you have no idea who has been using that shower and what nasty things you may stand on. Keep your flip flops on whilst you are in the shower to protect your feet from any dirt and germs.

Shower cubicles don't usually have a great deal of space in which to put your things. If you are lucky you may find a shelf or at the very least a hook on the door. A hanging toiletries bag is essential as it allows you to avoid placing your shower accessories on dirty floors. I also put my clean, dry clothes into a plastic bag so they don't get soaked while I'm showering.

Depending on where you are in the world, avoid having a shower first thing in the morning. The reality of taking a shower at this time is long queues, dirty showers and a sudden, and often quite shocking, loss of hot water. There are better times of the day to take a shower, like after the cleaners have finished. Not only are the showers super-clean, but there should be plenty of hot and high-pressure water, plus you'll be more likely to be able to take your time.

Remember to have lots of toilet paper with you. Trust me, many places don't provide it.

Some bathrooms, especially at campsites, don't have mirrors, so remember to pack a small pocket mirror. This is useful for the ladies who fancy wearing a bit of makeup and for guys when they need to shave. It will make life a lot easier.

Don't forget to take a travel towel with you. They fold up really small, dry quickly and are super absorbent. Don't take a normal towel with you because it will take up too much room in your bag, take ages to dry, and if you pack a wet one into your bag you'll find all your other clothes will pick up the same horrible damp and musty smell.

As some countries do not benefit from the same infrastructure as we do back home, you may not have hot water or even a shower at all, bringing me on nicely to the bucket shower

## The Bucket Shower

Bucket showers are an interesting and novel way to clean yourself. You are likely to come across one if you plan to travel around South East Asia or Africa and they come in all shapes and sizes. The most basic version is simply a bucket or similar container, while the more technical ones actually hang above your head and have a pipe attached with a tap. It's easy to fool yourself into thinking that it is a normal shower for about 20 seconds, while the water lasts. If you are lucky you will have warm water but from my experience most of them are cold - though this can be refreshing, especially if you are travelling in hot, humid areas.

It was in Fiji that I experienced my first bucket shower. We were allowed one bucket of water a day to clean ourselves. It was different - cold, but refreshing. As each day passed, I quickly became an expert in the art of bucket showering. Cold showers can make you shudder and scream but there are things you can do to make it more bearable.

The most important thing to ensure is that you shower before it gets dark. By doing this you can sit out in the sun and dry off without getting too cold. Secondly, have your shower gel and shampoo ready so you don't have to waddle around naked and soaking wet trying to find your stuff. If you only have cold water you can get yourself accustomed to the temperature by cupping some water in your hand (or with a ladle if there is one) and sprinkling it onto your skin. Then throw more water all over yourself until you are sufficiently wet enough to lather up, wash yourself and simply rinse off. I leave my hair until the end so I don't have a cold and wet head for too long. A good tip for those with long hair - when washing your hair in cold water, bend over and pour the water over your head so the cold water doesn't needlessly go over the rest of your body. This will make for a much more pleasant showering experience!

My favourite bucket shower was in Koh Chang in Thailand. The shower area was in the middle of a rainforest surrounded by a six-foot wooden fence and there was no roof, just glorious tall trees hanging over me. The weather was hot and humid so to stand naked and pour rainwater over me was quite an exhilarating experience. I could lather up listening to the tropical birds and feel at one with nature. Lovely!

## hostel etiquette

If you are travelling on a budget then it's likely you will spend a lot of time in hostels. Hostels are an affordable and fun place to stay and they provide many opportunities to form spontaneous friendships that can last a lifetime.

To get the most from your hostel experience it's important you show your fellow backpackers respect and treat others how you would want to be treated. Hostels are very different to hotels, the main difference being that this is a communal experience. You are sharing dorms, bathroom facilities, kitchen and TV rooms with a bunch of strangers, so don't be a selfish traveller. Maintain a good sense of humour, be friendly and polite and you and your fellow travellers will have a great experience.

I've stayed in lots of hostels during my travels and met some great travellers but, unfortunately, I've also had to bunk with some rather selfish and irritating people. From my hostel experiences I've learnt the unwritten rules of hostel etiquette. I know what really annoys me and I know what can get on other people's nerves. Most of it is common sense and manners, but you will soon realise that some people lack both. You may think these rules are very simple and obvious, and I agree, however it's amazing how many people don't follow them. Abide by these rules, and you will be considered the greatest roommate that ever lived! (Well... you won't be unnecessarily hated!)

1. If you come in late, don't switch the light on. You can buy a nifty mini torch key ring or you can simply use the glow from your mobile phone or iPod. I normally try and keep a torch easily accessible by the side of my bed in case I need to go to the toilet in the middle of the night.
2. If someone in your dorm is asleep, try and keep the noise to a minimum.
3. Be quiet when you return home from a night out. Your fellow roommates may not want to hear you crashing around or discussing your drunken antics. Just because you are drunk and want to have a singing contest or a pillow fight it does not mean everyone else does.
4. Don't whisper to your friends while others are sleeping. You may think you are being polite and talking quietly but it's still disruptive and most of the time people can hear what you are saying.
5. Don't keep pressing your snooze alarm. Set the alarm for the time you need to get up and then get out of bed.
6. Just because you got an early night and want to get up at 6am, it doesn't mean that others do. When you get up, be quiet or hang out somewhere else.
7. Pack some earplugs. It's impossible to have a totally quiet room when you're sharing with others, and I guarantee that at some stage you will have to share a room with a snorer.
8. Don't steal or borrow items from your fellow travellers. Travellers should look out for each other and there has to be an element of trust. Don't let the side down and don't pick up anything that isn't yours.
9. Try not to fart and burp whilst in your dorm; it's not funny. If you feel the urge to do so, go to the toilet or at the very least warn people first and then apologise afterwards.
10. Don't be a crinkly plastic bag rustler. This is someone who packs their things in multiple plastic bags creating unnecessary noise each time they access or pack their things. There always seems to be one in every room. This really annoys me and I know it irritates most travellers. There is nothing more annoying than lying in bed listening to someone rustle a plastic bag for what seems like an eternity. If you have to pack your things in plastic bags, don't unpack or pack late at night or early in the morning otherwise you will make yourself very unpopular.

11. If you are leaving early try to pack as much as you can the night before. The sound of opening and closing zips and rustling bags is very annoying.
12. Don't leave your belongings everywhere. You don't have to be ultra tidy but do try and keep to your part of the room and definitely don't put your stuff on other people's beds.
13. Keep your dirty clothes in a separate bag. No one wants to see your dirty pants lying on the floor first thing in the morning or, for that matter, at any time of the day.
14. Do not have sex in the dorm room. If you are feeling amorous and want to get it on with someone, it's best to get a private room. I've had to try and sleep to the sound of drunken couples getting it on in a noisy wobbly bunk. It's both uncomfortable and embarrassing. If you do it you not only run the risk of your fellow roommates giving you a round of applause when you finish, but you will be talked about and probably complained about for a long time afterwards.
15. Don't steal food from the communal kitchen cupboards and fridge.
16. Dispose of your own rubbish in dorm rooms and clean up after yourself in the kitchen.
17. Do take a shower every day. No one likes to share a room with a smelly traveller.
18. Don't spend ages in the shower, especially if there is a queue of people waiting.
19. Do flush the toilet when you have finished doing your business.
20. Don't spend hours on the free unlimited Internet especially if other people are waiting to use it.
21. Ask others before you change the channel in the TV common room.

## washing your clothes

'How do I wash my clothes?' This is a question people feel stupid asking but it's surprising how many times I've been asked it. It stands to reason that if you are planning on constantly being on the move then you may worry about how you will possibly find time to do your laundry. Don't worry as there are some easy options, such as hand washing them yourself, using the laundry facilities in hostels, using laundrettes or paying a local service to clean them. To start with, I would recommend that you only take clothes with you that are easy to wash. Leave any dry clean only items at home. Take clothes that can be left to dry and, preferably, garments that will dry quickly.

### Hand wash

You should have access to a sink and a tap at most of the places you stay, even if you have to use the sink in the bathroom. An essential piece of kit for washing your clothes is a universal sink plug. It's amazing how many hostels and campsites don't have any plugs. A universal sink plug can also be used in the bathroom when you need to fill a sink to wash your face or have a shave.

Simply fill the sink with water and put your clothes in. You can use special travel wash, however I have been known to use soap, shower gel or shampoo - they all do the trick. Wash your clothes, rinse them in fresh water and then wring them out.

Sometimes there will be a dry room at your accommodation where you can hang wet clothes or there may be a washing line provided. You can also buy a pegless clothesline that you simply hang up in the sunshine using the attached suckers. Failing that, you can hang your clothes over a balcony, on a chair or by a window. In good weather, your clothes should dry overnight.

Just remember to keep an eye on your things. Not all travellers are honest travellers. I once had a nice bikini and some jeans stolen from a laundry room. Very annoying!

## Hostel laundry facilities

Some hostels have good laundry facilities normally consisting of a few washing machines and dryers. These are usually operated by using coins or by purchasing tokens from the reception, where you can usually buy individual sachets of washing powder.

Next you simply load your dirty laundry into the machine and off you go. When it's done, put your wet stuff into the dryer or hang it up in the sunshine.

If someone else's wash has finished in the dryer and they are not there, don't be afraid to empty it and replace it with your clothes, just simply put their stuff neatly on a table or surface. Obviously don't just chuck it on the floor.

## Laundrettes

Some of the more developed countries have laundrettes like we have in the UK. The same principles apply as using one here. Take your clothes, have some change in coins, buy some washing power and hey presto mission accomplished!

## Pay someone else to do it

Sometimes it's easier just to pay someone to do your laundry for you, especially in the more rural and poor areas. Usually the staff at your accommodation can do it for you or will put you in touch with someone who can. It's normally cheap plus you are doing your bit to support the local economy.

It's most common to pay for your laundry by weight or per item. Don't be surprised if your lovely clean clothes are returned to you with little bits of coloured cotton sewn into each item. Some laundry services do this as a means of identifying whose clothes belong to whom so that your clothes don't get mixed up with someone else's and they can easily be taken out. It's normally a different colour for each customer but amazingly mine was always purple, wherever I went!

**keep in touch and keep  
your parents worry-free**



I am 35 years old but my parents still worry about me when I go travelling. I guess parents will always see us as their babies. I don't think I really appreciated how much parents worry until I started working for a gap year provider. I used to get many calls from parents who were really concerned because they had not heard from their children. Some of them would call the emergency contact phone and say something like Kelly should have landed in Sydney at 5:45pm and it's now 6pm and I haven't heard from her. Other times it would be John is not the best at staying in touch, but I haven't heard from him in three months. Do you know where he is? I would then do my best to explain that Kelly is most likely still in the baggage area waiting for her luggage, and advise them to give her a little more time, whereas John is probably having so much fun that he has lost track of time!

## Set expectations

I am not a parent myself but I now understand that there are simple things we can do to help keep our parents calm and worry free. Below, I've listed some of the things I discussed with my parents before I went away and ideas that I shared with travellers whose trips I helped plan.

Tell your parents that you will call them as soon as you can when you arrive in a new country. Don't give them a definite time and tell them not to expect a call from you the moment you are expected to touch down from your flight. Hold ups can and do happen. For example, your flight may be delayed or it could take a while for you to collect your bags and clear immigration and customs. The arrival area may be manic and you'll probably feel like jumping straight into a cab and getting to your accommodation. Because of this, I normally agreed to call my parents once I had reached my accommodation and also left them with the phone number of the place where I was staying on my first night.

If you know you are going to be travelling in an area that doesn't have phone or Internet access, remember to tell them. That way they won't expect a call from you and they won't freak out each time they try to call your mobile and receive an automated message telling them your mobile is out of service. Try to give them an estimated date when you will be able to contact them again.

## How often to call

Depending on your situation, destination and relationship with your parents, it's a good idea to agree how often you will try to call them. My parents expected a call from me roughly every fortnight. Sometimes the call would only be a minute long, but would be enough time for me to tell them I was well, safe and having a good time.

Apparently, parents like to hear your voice and emails are just not the same! However, emails can be a great means of keeping in contact with other family and friends. Most hostels and towns have Internet facilities, often open 24/7 especially in hostel accommodation. Even you just type a few lines to say you are okay and having a good time, emails are always appreciated. My mum even kept all the emails that I sent to her whilst travelling and presented me with a folder containing all them when I got home. It was so lovely to read through them - a bit like reading a journal - and it reminded me of all the amazing things I experienced.

Skype is obviously a good way to stay in touch, with most Internet cafés and hostels around the world now having computers with headsets, microphones and webcams so you can see and hear your family and friends back home.



I have noticed that more and more travellers are choosing to take their own laptops and notebooks with them on their travels. Many hotels, hostels, bars and cafés in the major cities around the world have Wi-Fi available and in many cases, this is free of charge. If you do decide to take your own laptop or notebook, remember to check that it is covered in your travel insurance policy.

Avoid causing your parents unnecessary worry. For example, if something out of the ordinary happens to you but you are absolutely fine, then consider if your parents really need to know about it and if you do want to tell them, consider whether it might be better to wait until you get home so that they don't start panicking about your safety. I've got so many examples of occasions when I wanted to tell my parents what had happened to me but decided against it, like the time I rode my moped into a tree in the Cook Islands, or when I got lost in the dark hiking in an Australian National Park, or saw a python go into my hut in Thailand.

Travel blogs are a great way of keeping your family and friends informed of your whereabouts, so long as you don't mind them reading the content of your blog. Blogs are good because you can say where you've been and what you've been up to without having to send lots of separate emails. Everything is in one place for everyone you care about to read, and it's a quick and cheap way to stay in touch. You'll soon find your travel tales will be of great interest to everyone back home and will no doubt make your friends insanely jealous!

Lastly, of course, there's good old Facebook - an easy and quick way to keep people informed of where you are and what you are up to. Plus, it's a great way to share your travel photos!