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Travel Intel

What's the secret to smooth sailing on your honeymoon? Here are 10 tips from the pros.

Whether your honeymoon dreams include beachy downtime, a lively city getaway or an exotic adventure, you don't want any unexpected surprises or costs. We asked travel-industry experts for their top suggestions for seamless journeys. Here's the scoop on everything from passport details to snagging perks after you've arrived.

1 | PASSPORT & VISA RULES Before booking flights and hotels for a destination, find out whether the country requires a visa for U.S. citizens — and if it does, what the specific rules and costs are and how long the process might take. For example, visas for Brazil “can take a long time to get, must be obtained before arrival from

the consulate in your home region, and cannot be issued at the port of entry,” cautions Carolyn Fox of global tour company Country Walkers. China, Russia and India also have detailed application processes, while some spots in Europe, the Middle East and Africa (including South Africa) require any arriving visitor to have two blank pages side by side >>

by SANDRA RAMANI illustration by NATHALIE DION

in his or her passport for visas and stamps. Is your passport nearing its expiration date? Apply for a new one before you hit the road, just to be safe. Most countries consider your passport valid only "if it is good for at least three — and sometimes six — months beyond your date of travel," warns Fox. "Costa Rica, Morocco and Argentina, for example, all require six months' validity." On the U.S. State Department's website, the International Travel section lists entry requirements for each country. If you need a visa or expedited service, Fox recommends using a passport service like traveldocs.com or travisa.com to help ensure everything is done correctly.

2 | CHECK THE CALENDAR Before picking dates for your trip, check the calendar for your intended destination to see if any local holidays, festivals, or major sporting or cultural events are taking place at that time. "Special events during holidays can add fun to a trip, but can also mean that attractions, restaurants and museums might be busier than usual and reservations may be needed," says Robin Elliott, chief concierge for the Shangri-La Hotel, Toronto. Hotel and flight prices may also be higher, you may encounter changes to the public-transportation schedule, or you could find that some places are closed altogether. Some holidays to keep in mind: Canada Day in July and Canadian Thanksgiving in October; Mardi Gras and Carnival in February (varies depending on destination); monthly bank holidays in England; May 1 (Labor Day) in Italy and France; and Chinese New Year (late January/early February) in China, Singapore and Hong Kong. Also, many French and Italians take vacation in August and shutter their businesses for the month.

3 | PACKAGES VS. A LA CARTE The decision to go all-inclusive or pay for things as you go really comes



down to what type of honeymoon you want. "The peace of mind that comes with booking an all-inclusive is tempting," admits Kate Maxwell, editor-in-chief of Jetsetter.com — especially after you've

just dropped a lot of cash on a wedding. "But ask yourself if you really want all the extras included. If you plan to take the sunset cruise, enjoy a couples massage, embark on 13 hikes and go jungle biking, then purchase away — but if your goal is to read 20 books and never leave your beach chair, then forgo the package and just book the room." Another option is doing a meal package at a traditional resort. "Some wonderful hotels with award-winning chefs and restaurants offer full- or semi-board packages," says Maxwell — so if you have your heart set on a certain place, just ask.

The prepaid-package route is ideal for complicated itineraries with multiple transfers, like an African safari or a multistop trek through India or Asia. It's also great if you don't want to limit yourselves to group outings. For something more customized, work with a destination specialist to create a tour specific to your interests. Marcia and Elizabeth Gordon, the mother-daughter founders of Extraordinary Journeys, say custom-planned itineraries "can be surprisingly affordable, and you won't be stuck with people you may not care to spend your honeymoon with. Bespoke programs feature smaller properties not used on packaged tours, and you'll meet other interesting people along the way — but on your terms, not because you've been thrown on a bus together."

4 | GET PROTECTED "If your honeymoon is going to involve memory-making experiences like extreme sports or visits to secluded destinations, consider purchasing travel insurance that covers things such as emergency evacuations and medical expenses," Travelzoo's senior editor, Gabe Saglie, says. "Packages

can include custom travel insurance from the get-go, or you may have a window when you can tag on insurance after you've settled on your plans but before you take off." Travel agents can also suggest insurance options, and your credit-card company may offer coverage for overseas theft or fraud.

5 | HIDDEN COSTS Even if you've budgeted your trip down to the penny, be on the lookout for extra expenses. "Many vacation hotels now tack on resort fees, while time-share properties may add a cleaning fee," Jaime Freedman, group publisher for Travelzoo, says. "The best way to combat that is to ask in advance if there is a resort fee and find out what exactly it covers." Taxis may also be an unexpected expense. "In Barbados, the average round-trip cab ride seems to run at least \$50, even if it's only a 15-minute drive," says Freedman. Also keep an eye out for airport departure fees, which are common in the Caribbean and Latin America. "San José Airport in Costa Rica currently requires a payment of \$28 per person as an international departure tax prior to boarding," Fox says, "while Argentina asks visitors to pay \$131 upon entry." Both can be paid in cash or with a credit card, but it's always smart to have some extra money on hand.

6 | WEIGHTY MATTERS While many airlines allow each passenger traveling internationally to check at least one suitcase for free, you may encounter baggage restrictions once you get to your destination, note the experts at upscale travel operator Abercrombie & Kent. Trains to and from Machu Picchu, for example, allow only one bag (not to exceed 11 pounds) per traveler, while most small planes between African safari lodges limit you to one soft-side duffel. Economy-class flights within India and Kenya and discount carrier flights within Asia also impose weight restrictions. To avoid extra luggage fees, pack light — and opt to have any heavy souvenirs shipped home. Tip: To save on checked-baggage fees within the United States, sign up for airline frequent-flier miles (once you hit 25,000, some airlines waive the charge) >>

Tricks *of the* Trade

or open a credit card that rewards you with airline perks.

7 | STAY IN STYLE “You’re much more likely to be upgraded at a hotel than on a flight; hotels want you to come back, and if they have a better room that’s going to sit empty otherwise,

chances are they’ll put you in it,” Maxwell says. For the best upgrade chances, choose a new hotel (it’s more likely to want to give guests a good impression and garner positive word-of-mouth) and check in after the standard 3 p.m. time, when the front desk will have an idea of which rooms are still free. But remember that bigger isn’t always

better. “If you’re traveling to a major city with lots of street noise, request a room on a high floor,” she suggests. To snag other room deals, travel midweek, when vacation properties are usually less crowded. Also be sure to ask if there are any incentives — like complimentary spa treatments or a round of drinks — for booking multiple nights.



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8 | GO LOCAL “While newlyweds don’t want to spend their honeymoon as a threesome, a local guide can help bring insight to the trip,” Fox says. Even just hiring someone for an afternoon “can open doors to behind-the-scenes experiences, hidden-gem restaurants and cultural activities.” Fox suggests asking your concierge or a reputable tour operator to refer a guide. “After all,” she stresses, “the guide must understand the fine line of letting a couple be a couple!” Another way to feel like a local is by checking into a private home instead of a hotel. Sites like airbnb.com feature rental options including a private island in Fiji, a treehouse in Hawaii and a villa in Bali, often at prices below what you might expect.

9 | TIPS ON TIPPING Tipping rules vary greatly from country to country; to avoid any awkward situations, check on your destination before venturing out. Personal-finance site mintlife.com has a handy tipping chart that lists the various global percentages, as well as which industries to tip where. When in doubt, ask the front-desk staff for advice.

10 | SHARE THE JOY The one tip we heard the most: Tell everyone, from the airport staff to the concierge, that it’s your honeymoon. Travelzoo’s Freedman brought a copy of her marriage license on her honeymoon and scored business-class upgrades on a flight back from Turkey, while Shannon Califano, special-events manager at La Valencia Hotel in La Jolla, California, carried her bridal bouquet and snagged flight upgrades and VIP treatment on her cruise. You may also enjoy romantic touches like champagne and chocolates in the room or the best table at a restaurant — or at the very least, plenty of congratulations from strangers. ■