

TRAVEL

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THE ULTIMATE GUIDE TO VACATION PLANNING

TRAVEL CHECKLIST

ONE YEAR AHEAD

Start research, using websites, guidebooks, travel agents.
Create a budget. Figure out what you'll need per day for room, food and sightseeing.
Start saving. Open a savings account just for your vacation.
Consult a calendar of events to check whether there are places you want to be — or avoid.
If you're going abroad, consider taking a foreign language course. For ideas, go to latimes.com/language.

SIX MONTHS AHEAD

Check your passport. If you are traveling outside the U.S., make sure it is still valid. (Some countries require a passport that's valid for at least six months from date of travel.) Make sure you have enough pages; some countries require a certain number of blank pages for visas. Apply for a new passport (there's a new form that first-time applicants must use starting Tuesday) or renew it, if necessary. For information: www.travel.state.gov.
Buy hiking or walking shoes, so you have enough time to break them in.
Do you need shots? Check early with a doctor or a travel medicine specialist.
Contact foreign or domestic tourism offices (www.latimes.com/ultimateguide2011) to get information and maps.
Look at your camera equipment and consider what else you might need. Use every new piece of equipment at least twice before you travel.
Request time off from work.

THREE MONTHS AHEAD

Visit a travel agent to arrange your trip. Or use the Web to book tickets and hotel.
When you book your trip, consider buying travel insurance.
Apply for visas, if needed.
Sketch out a rough daily itinerary of what you'd like to see and do.
Start a file of important papers and communications (with copies of confirmation numbers) and keep it in a safe place. Or create an electronic file and scan in this info. If you're taking your smart phone, create an easy-to-access file with all this information.
Check with your phone provider to see what you'll need to make calls abroad.

ONE MONTH AHEAD

Set up an e-mail account accessible anywhere in the world.
Check with your bank to see whether your ATM card will work abroad and whether you will incur currency fees for withdrawing. Check with your credit card company too; make sure it knows you will be abroad and find out whether your card will work.
Make kennel reservations for Fluffy and Fido.
Finalize air, hotel and rental car reservations. If this is a driving trip, have a mechanic check your car.
Consider your wardrobe. Do you have appropriate clothing for your destination?
If traveling abroad, visit the U.S. State Department's website for travelers, www.travel.state.gov. Check out its advice for overseas travel and your destination. And register with its Smart Traveler Enrollment Program.
Make you have enough medication. Also check to see whether you are covered if you need healthcare away from home.

ONE WEEK AHEAD

Put a vacation stop on your newspaper, (800) LATIMES (528-4637) or myaccount.latimes.com/login.do.
Request a hold on mail delivery from the post office. You can do it online: <https://hold.mail.usps.com/holdmail/landing/Vista.do>
Give copies of your itineraries to two or three relatives or friends who can help if there's an emergency. Also give a copy to a neighbor in case there's an emergency at your house.
Verify hotel, car and airline reservations.
Make sure your trip documentation is in one folder in your carry-on. Include copies of confirmations, copies of passports, maps, telephone numbers and addresses and prescriptions for medications and eyeglasses. Or store it all on a thumb drive. Or both.
Print a copy of emergency contacts at home and put it in that same folder.
E-mail yourself scans of your important documents, such as your passport, to that e-mail

Gear up for the road

BY TERRY GARDNER >>> From roadside emergency beacons to cameras or devices that improve your snapshots, some gadgets are worthy road companions. Here are some that stood out last month at the Consumer Electronics Show in Las Vegas.

OnStar "Blue Button"

For rearview mirror, which offers navigation, emergency assistance and automatic crash response. Available for non-GM and older GM vehicles in spring 2011. OnStar service is activated when a customer subscribes. OnStar mirror is certified for 99% of the top 20 selling non-GM vehicles since 2001 (including many Hondas, Fords, Dodges, Chryslers and Toyotas).
Features: Stolen vehicle location assistance, emergency and roadside services, hands-free calling with Bluetooth connectivity and turn-by-turn navigation. (for \$9.99 a month)
Price: \$300 plus installation. Service plans will start at \$18.95 a month or \$300 a year
Info, availability: www.onstar.com, for non-GM and older GM vehicles in spring

or a photo-sharing site (such as Facebook) whenever the card is in Wi-Fi range. Compatible with PCs and Macs.
Price: \$100
Info, availability: www.eye.fi, now



Canon U.S.A.

Canon PowerShot A3300 IS

A digital camera
Features: 32 predefined shooting situations, such as portrait, action and low light. Also 720p high-def video
Price: \$180
Info, availability: www.usa.canon.com, early March

Pocket Xshot

A telescoping camera extender similar to a monopod
Features: Extends your reach up to 30 1/2 inches; works with all point-and-shoot digital cameras weighing less than 1 1/4 pounds
Price: \$25
Info, availability: www.xshotpix.com, now

Speakal Cool iPig

An iPhone/iPod dock and sound system
Features: Sensors adjust volume or change tunes with a wave of the hand
Price: \$150 (intro price)
Info, availability: www.speakal.com, now

Philips ChargeOn Battery Pack Kit

A backup battery
Features: Doubles battery capacity of many devices; includes charger, base, USB and wall charger
Price: \$80
Info, availability: www.usaphilips.com, now

Griffin Technology Woogie

A speaker and stuffed animal
Features: Speaker with a protective pouch for iPhone and iPod Touch
Price: \$20
Info, availability: www.griffintechnology.com, now

Breffo Spiderpodium

A gadget holder
Features: Podium, holster and grip has eight flexible, spider-like arms to stand gadgets up or suspend them from an airplane or car seat back
Price: \$20
Info, availability: www.breffo.com, now

Wilson Electronics MobilePro Cellular Signal Booster

A cellular and data reception booster
Features: Powered by a vehicle cigarette lighter, AC outlet or USB port. Requires no installation
Price: \$200
Info, availability: www.wilsonelectronics.com, now



Wilson Electronics

Loksak aLoksak

A waterproof gadget protector
Features: Various size plastic bags protect an array of electronic gadgets and valuables
Price: \$6.49-\$17.98 (for two or three sacks, depending on size)
Info, availability: www.loksak.com, now

Dexim iBlueK Bluetooth keyboard

A protective leather case and keyboard for iPad
Features: Almost full-size magnetic Bluetooth keyboard with as much as 90 hours of typing time
Price: \$99
Info, availability: www.dexim.net, now
travel@latimes.com



TERRY GARDNER

Etón TurboDyno Road Torq

A self-powered emergency beacon and roadside spotlight
Features: Crank-powered LED spotlight on a folding tripod with a flashing beacon
Price: About \$40
Info, availability: www.etoncorp.com, second quarter 2011

Eye-Fi Explore X2 Wireless Memory Card

A camera Wi-Fi memory card
Features: 8GB memory card wirelessly uploads photos and videos to a computer

Pros and cons of travel apps

BY TERRY GARDNER >>> With an app and a smart phone, you'll find it easy to plan your family vacation. You can book a flight, reserve a hotel room, find a mall, scout an adventure or rent a car while lounging at your favorite diner or waiting for that four-some to play through. The apps below work on Apple iPhones, iPod Touches and iPads; availability of BlackBerry and Android versions are also noted.

Alaska Airlines

Pros: Schedule flight notifications, generate boarding passes, select seats
Cons: Unable to book flights, track mileage or send push notifications
Cost: Free
Info: www.alaskaair.com/as/mobile/apps.asp; works with BlackBerry

Southwest Airlines

Pros: Book flights, reserve rental cars, track point status, receive Ding! Alerts
Cons: Unable to book Rapid Rewards flights
Cost: Free
Info: www.southwest.com/html/travel-extras/mobile.html; works with BlackBerry and Android

Point Inside

Pros: Maps and info for more than 100 airports and 750 shopping malls
Cons: Can't provide all maps at this time
Cost: Free
Info: pointinside.com; works with Android

Airbnb

Pros: Book unique lodgings through this free membership site; scroll through listings or search by destination.
Cons: Searches in the wrong place if it doesn't recognize a destination
Cost: Free
Info: www.airbnb.com/mobile/iphone;