EXPLORE TRAVELER
Informational Blog

TRAVEL TIPS THAT COULD SAVE YOUR LIFE

Preparation, awareness & practical travel safety

2026 PRACTICAL EDITION

JOHN J. GENTRY, SR.

Picture the day before you go

Ideas from our travel archive, with a practical prompt beside each scene. Use the original worksheets and chapters to turn inspiration into a plan.

SINGAPORE

Make arrival less rushed

Write down your first destination, how you will reach it and an offline contact. Keep the plan easy to find.

LAKE DANAO, LEYTE, PHILIPPINES

Plan the return as well as the outing

Before an activity, note the meeting point, return arrangements and the questions you still need to ask the provider.

Open the practical safety guide

Research entry and visa details

1 **Choose one priority**

2 **Check the details**

3 **Save an offline note**

MY NEXT STEP

ExploreTraveler photo and video archive. Scenes document past visits.

About this edition

This is a new, condensed and substantially updated practical edition based on John J. Gentry Sr.'s 2015 book *Travel Tips That Could Save Your Life*. It follows the original nine-chapter structure: travel gear, preparation, travel in transit, hygiene, food and water, arrival, personal safety, technology, and first aid. The original book's experiences are historical. This edition replaces selected outdated or overly broad recommendations with current planning principles and official reference links; it is not a verbatim republication of the 110-page original.

The book offers general information, not individualized medical, legal, security, or travel-insurance advice. Destination requirements, health risks, transport rules, and local conditions change. Consult official authorities and qualified professionals for your own circumstances. The original 2015 edition should not be used as current medical or security guidance.

Companion resources: https://exploretraveler.com/ebook-downloads/ and https://exploretraveler.com/travel-route-planner/.

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Chapter 1 | Travel gear: reliable and simple

Choose equipment for your actual itinerary

John's original book began with gear, and the principle still holds: good equipment should reduce problems, not create new ones. Choose luggage you can manage on stairs, uneven ground, public transport, and during a delay. A large backpack may be convenient for some travelers but difficult for others; carry-on size and weight limits vary by airline and ticket. Check the current rules for every carrier on your route before packing.

Put essentials where you can reach them: identification, medication, glasses, a change of clothing, chargers, and important contact information. Protect valuables from rain and accidental loss. A smaller day bag can be more useful than carrying your full luggage everywhere. Label bags without publicly displaying your home address or sensitive personal details.

Build a reliable power kit

Carry charging cables that fit your devices, a reputable power bank, and a suitable plug adapter. Voltage converters are different from plug adapters; check your device's input rating before using it abroad. Lithium-battery and power-bank rules are specific to carriers and aviation authorities, so verify where batteries may be packed and whether capacity limits apply. Never assume an older packing list reflects the rules for today's flight.

If a phone is your camera, map, ticket wallet, translator, and emergency contact, a backup power plan matters. Save essential information offline as well. A power bank is useful only if you can legally transport it, charge it, and connect it to your device.

Water equipment is not automatically purification

A bottle with a filter may remove some particles or organisms, but not every filter removes bacteria and viruses. The CDC explains that treatment methods differ, and some contaminants require boiling, chemical treatment, or other suitable processes. Check the product's specific claims and the local water risk; do not assume a filter alone makes unknown water safe. Factory-sealed bottled water is often a practical option where tap-water safety is uncertain.

Pack test: Can I carry my bag comfortably? Are power rules verified? Do I have offline contact information? Is my water plan suitable for this destination?

Chapter 2 | Preparation: know before you go

Check entry rules for your own passport

Do not assume a rule that applied to a friend, a different nationality, or a previous trip applies to you. Verify passport validity, visa or electronic authorization requirements, entry and exit rules, transit rules, and any documentation for children with the destination government's official sources. U.S. travelers can start with the State Department's country information and current travel advisory. Some destinations require passport validity beyond the intended stay; requirements vary.

Save copies of travel documents in secure digital storage and a separate physical location. Keep the originals protected. Make sure trusted contacts can reach you if plans change. Never upload passport scans or payment-card information to an unfamiliar booking form or unsolicited message.

Prepare for health needs early

The CDC recommends arranging a pretravel visit with a healthcare professional or travel-health specialist at least four to six weeks before departure when possible. Discuss your destinations, activities, existing conditions, routine and destination-specific vaccinations, prescriptions, and access to care. The right preparation depends on the individual traveler; this book does not prescribe medication or vaccine schedules.

Ask whether your medications are permitted at your destination, how they should be labeled and stored, and whether you need a prescription or doctor's letter. Carry adequate legitimate supplies, including a delay allowance when appropriate. Never assume a medicine that is available without a prescription in one country is safe, genuine, or legal in another.

Learn the context before you arrive

Read about local history, everyday etiquette, religious and cultural expectations, dress, photography rules, and basic greetings. John's original emphasis on learning words such as "thank you," "yes," and "no" remains useful. Learn how to ask for help, state an allergy, and identify your accommodation address. Do not assume everyone speaks English or that one language represents an entire country.

For U.S. travelers, the Smart Traveler Enrollment Program (STEP) can provide embassy or consulate updates. Keep the enrollment and contact information current if you use it. Review travel insurance, medical coverage abroad, and evacuation needs before departure.

Preparation record: Passport/visa checked with: _____. Health appointment or advice: _____. Local emergency number: _____. Trusted contact: _____.

Chapter 3 | While en route: manage the journey

Make connections realistic

Build time for check-in, security, immigration, baggage, terminal changes, and unexpected delays. Separate tickets and tight connections can increase risk because one operator may not protect a missed onward journey. Verify the airline's actual baggage and check-in deadlines, not just the departure time. Save the booking reference and an alternate way to contact the carrier.

If you are transferring by road or ferry, check the departure point and operating schedule. A short map distance may hide traffic, boarding procedures, weather disruptions, or a long walk. For an important connection, plan a backup instead of assuming every leg will run perfectly.

Rest, hydrate and move safely

Travel can disrupt sleep and routines. Drink safe water regularly, eat appropriately, and take breaks. On long journeys, move or stretch when safe and follow medical advice if you have a higher risk of blood clots or other conditions. Seat belts should be used when instructed or available. Do not follow generic advice about the "safest seat" on an aircraft as though it guarantees a better outcome; follow crew instructions and know the nearest exits.

A quiet arrival day can be more valuable than squeezing in another attraction. Consider jet lag, local time, medication schedules, and the need for rest. Keep the first day flexible if you are arriving after a long flight.

Keep important information accessible

Store your accommodation address, transport confirmation, emergency contacts, and a simple itinerary offline. Carry a separate backup of key phone numbers in case your device fails. Be careful about discussing room numbers, account details, or travel plans where strangers can overhear them. Use reputable transportation and verify pickup instructions before accepting a ride.

Transit check: Flight or train deadlines: _____. Connection buffer: _____. Backup route: _____. Arrival contact and address: _____.

Chapter 4 | Hygiene: small habits, large benefits

Make handwashing routine

The original book emphasized hygiene while traveling. Washing hands with soap and safe water before eating and after using the toilet remains a useful basic practice. When soap and water are not available, CDC advises using an alcohol-based hand sanitizer containing at least 60% alcohol. Sanitizer is not a substitute for all situations, particularly when hands are visibly dirty.

Carry tissues or toilet paper when appropriate, and understand that restroom facilities differ across destinations. A squat toilet or unfamiliar fixture is not inherently unsafe; take your time and use it as intended. If you have mobility limitations, research accessible restrooms in advance rather than assuming they will be available everywhere.

Water can look clean and still be unsafe

The appearance of water does not prove it is safe to drink. Contaminated water can carry bacteria, viruses, and parasites. Check official destination guidance, use a safe water source, and treat water appropriately when needed. CDC notes that boiling, filtration, and chemical disinfection have different strengths and limitations; follow current guidance and the product instructions. Do not assume that long-term residents' drinking habits establish water safety for a visitor.

Use safe water for brushing teeth, preparing food, washing produce, and making ice when local water safety is uncertain. Be cautious with water activities in places affected by sewage, runoff, or other contamination. Avoid swimming with open wounds in questionable water and seek medical care if a wound becomes infected.

Personal hygiene and intimate health

Travel safety includes privacy, consent, and sexual health. Know local laws and cultural expectations, use appropriate protection, and seek qualified medical advice for prevention and testing when needed. Avoid isolated or unsafe situations, but do not confuse cultural differences with danger. Respect people, their boundaries, and the privacy of others.

If you develop a concerning illness or infection while traveling, seek qualified care rather than using an old packing list as a treatment plan. A common over-the-counter product at home may have different names, ingredients, or rules abroad.

Hygiene check: Safe drinking-water source: _____. Handwashing supplies: _____. Accessible facilities or special needs: _____.

Chapter 5 | Food and water: enjoy carefully

Food is part of the journey

John and Karen's food stories are an important part of ExploreTraveler. Trying local dishes can deepen your understanding of culture and history. Enjoy the experience while asking practical questions about ingredients, allergies, food preparation, and safe drinking water. An inviting market or a popular restaurant is not a guarantee of food safety, and the absence of familiar signage does not prove a place is unsafe.

CDC recommends choosing food that is fully cooked and served hot, using caution with raw produce and seafood, and drinking beverages from safe sources in destinations where foodborne illness is a concern. Buffets and food left at room temperature can present risks. If you have a serious allergy, communicate it clearly and recognize that shared cooking equipment may cause cross-contact.

Be curious without ignoring warning signs

Street food can be memorable, but consider whether the food is prepared fresh, held at safe temperatures, and served with clean utensils. Ask about seafood, eggs, nuts, soy, wheat, and pork or animal fats when relevant to your health or dietary needs. Do not infer ingredients solely from the name of a dish. ExploreTraveler's Penang Food Passport includes space for those questions.

Avoid relying on a restaurant review or video to establish current hours, ingredients, prices, or sanitation. The most useful travel story identifies what the author experienced and when, while leaving room for the vendor and conditions to change.

Know when illness needs medical attention

Traveler's diarrhea and other foodborne illnesses can disrupt a trip. Safe hydration matters, but severe symptoms, blood in stool, high fever, dehydration, persistent vomiting, or illness in a vulnerable traveler require prompt professional advice. Do not self-prescribe antibiotics from a market or use a blanket vitamin rule. A travel-health clinician can advise whether any medications are appropriate for your particular itinerary and health history.

Alcohol can affect judgment, hydration, and medication safety. Drink responsibly, keep track of your beverages, and seek help if you feel unexpectedly unwell. Do not accept drinks you cannot verify or assume that any drink is safe because it is commonly consumed locally.

Food notes: Dish and ingredients checked: _____. Safe drinking-water plan: _____. Allergy wording in local language: _____.

Chapter 6 | Upon arrival: get oriented

Start with an arrival plan

The first hour in a new place can be disorienting. Before departure, confirm the airport or station, official pickup point, accommodation address, expected transfer method, and what to do if your flight is late. Save the information offline. If you use a ride service, verify the vehicle and driver details in the app before entering. Avoid unlicensed or unsolicited transport offers when reliable alternatives exist.

Give yourself time to understand the neighborhood, identify a pharmacy or medical facility if needed, and locate a practical grocery or meal option. An arrival day with fewer commitments makes room for transport delays and rest.

Money, payments and exchange rates

The original 2015 book discussed airport currency exchange and cash. In 2026, payment methods and exchange rates vary widely. An airport kiosk is not automatically the best rate, and an ATM is not automatically safe or inexpensive. Compare provider fees, currency conversion choices, withdrawal limits, and card charges. Use reputable machines and keep a second payment option separate from your primary wallet.

Be cautious of unsolicited currency exchange, card skimming, or offers that require handing over sensitive information. Check whether the local merchant charges in its own currency or offers a conversion at checkout; understand the costs before accepting. Carry enough appropriate cash for immediate needs without exposing large amounts unnecessarily.

Learn your local route

Use a map to understand your accommodation, transport stations, medical resources, and the places you want to visit. Check local transit operating hours and fares with current official sources. A map pin can be wrong, moved, or imprecise, especially for market stalls and temporary venues. Confirm the exact place before traveling across a city.

Plan sightseeing around realistic travel times, accessibility, weather, and rest. Do not assume a destination article documents a completed trip or current opening hours unless the author explicitly says so. Use ExploreTraveler's route and budget planners to organize your own verified information.

Arrival plan: Official pickup location: _____. Accommodation contact: _____. Backup payment method: _____. First-day essentials: _____.

Chapter 7 | Personal safety: awareness over bravado

Replace "urban camouflage" with practical awareness

The 2015 original used the phrase "urban camouflage" for blending in while traveling. This revised edition emphasizes respectful, practical awareness instead of tactical posturing or trying to appear intimidating. Learn local customs, dress appropriately for the setting, avoid unnecessarily displaying valuables, and be mindful of your surroundings. Do not assume that looking like a local will prevent crime or that a particular gesture is safe everywhere.

Travel advisories and local conditions change. Review current official guidance for your destination and route. Be especially cautious of unsolicited offers, pressure to make immediate payments, or requests for documents and account information. If a situation feels unsafe, prioritize leaving and finding a staffed public location or qualified help rather than confronting someone.

Make a communication plan

Save local emergency numbers, your accommodation contact, the nearest appropriate medical service, and your embassy or consulate details when relevant. Share a general itinerary and check-in plan with someone you trust. Avoid publishing real-time details about an empty home or your precise accommodation location to a broad audience. Keep a second method of communication if your primary phone or service fails.

If you lose your passport, contact local authorities when appropriate and your embassy or consulate for replacement guidance. Keep copies of documents separately from originals. If a card or phone is stolen, know how to freeze access and protect accounts promptly.

Choose transport and activities deliberately

Use licensed or reputable transport where possible and wear seat belts or appropriate safety equipment. Research activity providers, guides, permits, and emergency procedures for diving, hiking, boats, or other adventures. Follow posted restrictions and local conservation rules. No travel guide can guarantee that a particular route, venue, or activity will be safe at a future date.

When traveling with others, agree on meeting points and what to do if separated. For solo travel, keep a trusted contact informed without making yourself feel obligated to share every movement publicly.

Personal safety plan: Local emergency number: _____. Trusted contact: _____. Lost-phone recovery method: _____. Safe meeting point: _____.

Chapter 8 | High-tech travel: useful backups

Plan connectivity before arrival

The original book anticipated the importance of mobile maps and translation tools. Modern travelers may use an eSIM, roaming, local SIM, hotel Wi-Fi, or a mixture. Check device compatibility, coverage, activation requirements, and pricing before buying a plan. Some services require a working internet connection to activate. Do not assume your phone will work abroad without checking your carrier and destination.

Download offline maps and language resources where available. Test them in airplane mode before departure. Save addresses in the local language as well as English when practical. A navigation app may suggest a route that is unsuitable for pedestrians, private vehicles, or changing local conditions; use judgment and official information.

Protect your accounts and devices

Use strong unique passwords, multifactor authentication, and a screen lock. Check whether you can access recovery codes if your phone is lost. Avoid sensitive account transactions on unknown shared devices or untrusted networks. Public charging stations and unknown cables may pose privacy or security risks; using your own charger and a reputable power source reduces dependence on unfamiliar equipment.

Keep essential travel information in more than one secure place. Do not store an unprotected folder of passport images, financial documents, and account passwords together. Know how to remotely lock or locate your device, but do not depend on that feature as your only recovery plan.

Use digital tools without outsourcing judgment

AI assistants, translation apps, maps, and price-comparison websites can save time. They can also be outdated, inaccurate, or based on incomplete data. Verify visas, entry rules, medical advice, reservations, and exact business locations with primary sources. A confident answer is not evidence that a provider has confirmed availability or that a route is safe.

ExploreTraveler's interactive budget and route planners work with information you enter. They are not live-price or booking systems. Use them to organize decisions and keep your own records rather than treating a calculation as a promise of future costs.

Technology backup: Offline maps tested: _____. Account recovery plan: _____. Phone and charger compatibility: _____. Offline document access: _____.

Chapter 9 | Travel first aid: prepare with professionals

A kit is not a treatment plan

The 2015 book discussed medicines, antibiotics, and first-aid supplies. Some of that advice is now too broad to use safely. This edition does not recommend obtaining antibiotics without a qualified clinician's guidance, using antibiotics with a blanket vitamin supplement rule, or carrying medical procedures or supplies you are not trained and authorized to use. Discuss your health, itinerary, medications, allergies, and emergency-care access with a healthcare professional before travel.

A basic kit may include adhesive bandages, appropriate dressings, antiseptic supplies, and any clinician-recommended items suited to your activities. Check expiry dates and how supplies should be stored. Consider first-aid training, especially before remote travel, but recognize the limits of your skills and equipment.

Medicines and legal requirements

Carry prescribed medicines in accordance with your clinician's instructions and the destination's laws. Some medications are restricted or require documentation abroad. Keep appropriate labels and a list of generic medication names when possible. Be cautious about counterfeit medicines and unfamiliar products. Ask your clinician how to manage time-zone changes or storage requirements for essential treatments.

For traveler's diarrhea, prevention, safe hydration, and symptom recognition are important. Treatment depends on severity and the person affected. Seek urgent care for severe dehydration, bloody diarrhea, high fever, severe abdominal pain, persistent vomiting, or other concerning symptoms. Never use a general ebook as a substitute for medical assessment.

Know how to obtain help

Before traveling, identify how you would reach local emergency services, an appropriate clinic, and your insurer's assistance line. Review whether your coverage includes overseas care and medical evacuation. In an emergency, seek qualified local help first; do not assume a home-country emergency number works abroad.

If you feel ill after returning, tell a healthcare professional where you traveled and what exposures you may have had. Keep a record of relevant symptoms and dates. This can help clinicians evaluate travel-related illnesses.

Health readiness: Travel-health consultation: _____. Prescriptions and legal documentation: _____. Emergency clinic/insurance contact: _____.

Appendix A | Before-departure checklist

Four to six weeks ahead, when possible

- Check the official travel advisory and destination-specific entry rules.
- Review passport validity, visa or transit documentation and required forms.
- Arrange a travel-health appointment if recommended for your itinerary.
- Review medical coverage, evacuation needs and cancellation protection.
- Verify medication legality, labels, quantities and storage requirements.
- Choose appropriate luggage, clothing and safety equipment.

One week ahead

- Reconfirm transport, lodging, arrival transfers and contact details.
- Check weather, local alerts, venue access and activity rules.
- Download offline maps, tickets and important addresses.
- Test phone connectivity, translation tools, chargers and adapters.
- Save secure copies of essential documents and recovery contacts.
- Arrange a trusted contact's check-in plan if appropriate.

Day of travel

- Check airline or carrier notices and departure deadlines.
- Keep medication and essential documents accessible.
- Bring safe drinking water when allowed and appropriate snacks.
- Carry a practical backup payment method and emergency funds.
- Allow time for transfers, security and unexpected delays.
- Respect local laws, people and cultural expectations.

Appendix B | Emergency and medical reference card

Keep a paper or offline version of this card in a secure place. Do not include full passport numbers, payment-card details, account passwords, or other unnecessary sensitive information.

- Traveler name and emergency contact: _____
- Destination and accommodation address: _____
- Local emergency number: _____
- Embassy or consulate contact, if relevant: _____
- Travel insurer assistance number and policy reference: _____
- Medical facility / clinic researched: _____
- Important allergies and medications (share only as needed): _____
- Primary phone and backup communication: _____
- Meeting point if separated: _____
- Date information was checked: _____

If you need urgent medical or police assistance, contact the appropriate local service. Embassy and consular services may help with documentation or referrals but do not replace emergency responders or insurers.

Appendix C | Official sources and editorial record

The sources below were reviewed for the 2026 editorial update. They are general starting points, not substitutes for destination-specific rules or professional care.

- U.S. State Department international travel planning: https://travel.state.gov/en/international-travel/planning.html
- U.S. State Department travel advisories: https://travel.state.gov/en/international-travel/travel-advisories.html
- CDC before you travel: https://wwwnc.cdc.gov/travel/page/before-travel/
- CDC safer food and drink: https://wwwnc.cdc.gov/travel/page/food-water-safety
- CDC avoiding contaminated water: https://wwwnc.cdc.gov/travel/page/water-disinfection
- CDC getting health care during travel: https://wwwnc.cdc.gov/travel/page/health-care-during-travel
- CDC travel health by destination: https://wwwnc.cdc.gov/travel/destinations/list
- ExploreTraveler free downloads: https://exploretraveler.com/ebook-downloads/
- ExploreTraveler route planner: https://exploretraveler.com/travel-route-planner/
- ExploreTraveler destination resource center: https://exploretraveler.com/travel-resource-center/
- ExploreTraveler optional travel updates: https://exploretraveler.com/travel-updates/

Editorial record: This is an abridged and rewritten 2026 practical edition adapted from *Travel Tips That Could Save Your Life* by John J. Gentry Sr. (2015), not a verbatim or fully annotated reprint of the original 110-page manuscript. It retains the original nine-chapter topics while updating selected advice and adding new worksheets. Historical anecdotes were not independently reverified or represented as new trips. © 2026 ExploreTraveler / GenTek Holdings LLC. Free promotional distribution for personal planning and intact sharing with attribution. Other rights reserved.