

“50+ Tips for the "R.V. Adventure Traveler"

1. Understand what adventure camping travel really is.

Adventure travel is an active, unique exploration of an exotic or remote destination with a small group of like-minded people, guided by full-time professional leaders. The typical object of your exploration is a beautiful landscape, unusual wildlife, or a intriguing foreign culture - often all three! You will be traveling by recreational vehicle, with side-trips by car, bus, plane, boat, jeep, dugout canoe, or foot and over many different types of terrain, and in all kinds of weather. Exceptional physical fitness usually isn't necessary; you can enjoy some adventure trips at a fitness level only a notch or two above that of a couch potato. But you'll almost certainly get sweaty, dusty, wet, and tired at times.

2. Don't panic at the idea of "camping".

Accommodations on Adventuretours trips range from "dry" camping to full-service hotel and hook-up camping with swimming pools and more! Camp location selection is done by our scouts well in advance, and based on touristic interest. Most "camps" will not have hook-ups, and sometimes when they do, maybe they won't work! That is a fact of life in Latin American countries. However, there will be water available, and regularly scheduled dump locations, which will present no problem for travelers with self-contained RV's- Many of the areas we visit, would be impossible to see and experience, if you did not camp ... some of the most beautiful and most cultural areas do not have five-star hotels and KOA's.

3. First; pick a destination.

The number of Adventuretours to choose from can be a bit bewildering. To narrow down the choices to a manageable number, decide early what part of the world you want to visit. If you're new at adventure travel and not quite sure where you want to go, pick a trip that has a track record of broad appeal over the years. Instead of, say, hang gliding with cannibals in Irian Jaya, stick to the classics: Panama Canal, Belize, Brazil, or maybe New Zealand.

4. Decide how much variety you want.

Look at the regularly scheduled tours included, also the "free" days and the options. Decide ahead, what you want to do with your free time ... maybe climb a mountain, or just bird-watching, hike in the jungle, or snooze on the beach. Read up on the areas you will be visiting and decide the optional things you want- to do.

5. Decide on your price range.

At a minimum, you'll probably spend about \$3500, for a two-month trip (fee based is for two persons). There are all price ranges of regularly scheduled tours, and there are custom- personalized tours for as little as one person, one unit, which can cost up to \$20,000 or more. Trip sharing is an idea to economize and share the experience.

6. Shop Around.

Compare itineraries, trip routing, tours, and costs for "extra cost" items, like visas fees and entrance fees. Also ask if the Tourleaders/staff is bilingual?

7. Compare cancellation policies.

Because of the more complicated logistics of planning Adventuretours, deposit/ cancellation policies are sometimes stringent. Is the initial deposit refundable? Are interim payments required? (On most adventure travel trips, the deposit is fully refundable up to 61 days before departure, with exception of a small processing fee). When is the full payment due? What re-funds, if any, apply if you cancel after that?

Pre-Trip Paperwork

8. Check Your Passport.

International convention says that passports must be valid for at least six months after the date of entry into a country and should contain a full blank page for the visa of each country to be visited.

9. Check Visa requirements.

Unlike many European nations, countries visited by our travelers often require that a visa be obtained prior to arrival. Many companies, including Adventuretours will be pleased to obtain the necessary visas for you free of charge, except for postage fees, if your passport is sent to them prior to the deadline date.

10. Make Photocopies of Important Documents.

Passports, Vehicle Title, Vehicle Registration, visas, credit cards, drivers licenses, and other critical documents should be photocopies, and the copies carried separately.

11. Read your pre-departure information carefully.

This form of travel usually requires more advance preparation than you may be accustomed to. Your trip organizer should send you a detailed pre-departure Infopak with advice on visas, special clothing, medication Information, local customs, and the like. It is not just fluff. Let it be your bible, and study it carefully.

12. Check to see if your health insurance policy covers illness or injury overseas.

If not, a short-term policy for the duration of the trip will provide peace of mind. (For Central, and South America, Sanborn's Insurance, 2009 S. 10th St., McAllen, Texas 78503 - Tel: (659) 686-0711 can provide this, as well as your vehicle insurance.

13. Consider Medical evacuation insurance.

An illness or accident in a remote area may require a very expensive helicopter evacuation. Your insurance may not cover this. For Mexico and Central America, there is a free Med-vac service available if you join the Sanborn's Travel Club (about \$25 a year), See above #12 - for address.

14. Check your vehicle insurance.

Most companies do not cover vehicles, outside of the U.S. and Canada. No company other than Mexican Insurance Companies will cover the Liability. For Insurance we advise you to contact Sanborn's (see # 12 above for address and phone).

15. Get in shape physically and mentally.

Prepare for the drive with any items you may require; sunglasses, sunshades or visor, back support cushion, travel mug. Try to limber-up before the trip, and think of the adventure ahead of you. If you plan to do hiking or other type exercise on the trip, do some of the walking before you leave, so your body has time to build up to the pace. Leave your tensions, telephones, and other business at home and enjoy yourself.

16. If you haven't had a dental checkup recently, get one before you leave.

A toothache caused by a cavity or a lost filling can turn into a painful ordeal when you are two days away from the nearest dentist.

17. Thoroughly break in your hiking or walking shoes.

Many first-time travelers buy new walking or hiking shoes for the trip. You must walk in them a minimum of 10 days, before departure. This should be enough to get over the initial break-in blisters and to ensure that they fit properly.

18. If you wear contact lenses, consider disposable.

Removing and replacing contact lenses every day can be a very annoying chore. Extended-wear lenses can be worn overnight, which cuts back on the hassle factor. Disposables are even better because you need not carry along cleaning or storage paraphernalia. Disposables have the additional advantage of being very inexpensive; it's no big deal if you lose one.

19. For advice on inoculations, consider phoning the Traveler's Hotline.

Travelers should have the latest scoop from the Center for Disease Control. You may call the CDC International Travelers Hotline (404-332-4559) for computerized briefing. You may also have the information faxed to you.

20. Take along medications.

Sufficient prescription medications should be taken with you to last the duration of the trip. Most common drugs can be purchased en-route, often at a lower price, and most often without a prescription.

The Right Stuff. - How and what to Pack

21. Plan to dress conservatively.

Traditional societies often have old-fashioned standards of dress; this is especially true for women. Inappropriate clothing may not only offend your hosts, but cause you embarrassment as well. Your guide will advise you about dress customs for your particular destination, but in general, men should always wear shirts and, usually, long pants. For women, it's ordinarily best to avoid shorts, tight fitting or revealing dresses, and sleeveless blouses. The beach areas are an exception to this rule.

22. Women should consider making their primary travel garment a long loose skirt.

Most experienced women travelers to developing countries and remote areas adhere to the local style of women's dress. It has been proven that this helps bring out the friendly feelings that local women already have for foreign visitors. A mid-calf, loose, comfortable skirt is the best way to identify yourself as a woman. Many of our tourists have found that, far from being inconvenient, a skirt is actually easier and more comfortable, even for hiking. In hot weather, a skirt is cooler than pants; In cold weather, you can wear long underwear underneath and stay just as warm.

Also keep in mind that you may be far from toilet facilities. If there are no bushes or rocks, nearby, it's easier to make a discreetly modest "pit stop" with the tent-like cover of a long skirt.

23. If you're going to the tropics, cotton is fine.

But avoid white. You'll find it impossible to keep white clothing clean. The British colonials had the right idea; Khaki color is light enough to reflect the sun, but dark enough not to show the dust and dirt.

24. Bring along small toys to help break the ice with the local kids--and adults.

An inflatable globe, for example, is entertaining and lets you point out where you live. Frisbee's, waffle balls, hacky sacks, magic tricks, finger puppets, and wind-up toys also enchant local kids. Avoid electronic doodads, like Gameboys, however, whose high-tech allure will mesmerize the kids. These toys are suppose to open up communication, not close it off. At the end of the trip you can give the toys to some needy child. School supplies such as crayons, pencils, rulers, coloring book and etc. are also excellent icebreaker to give and show to children.

25. Slip in some snapshots of your family, house, and hometown.

These are great icebreakers --- imagine the reaction of a Nicaraguan farmer upon seeing a Kansas field full of cows. A Polaroid camera allows you to present local with instant pictures of themselves, which invariable trigger delight. If you have an artistic bent, take along a small sketchpad or watercolor set. Musical instruments are also great!

26. Take along a generous supply of Ziploc plastic bags.

They are invaluable for storing all sorts of items, or maybe just keeping your passport protected against rain or dirt. For the compulsive organizer, the sorting possibilities are endless: Emergency pills - Imodium, Diamox, etc. --in one bag, daily vitamin pills in another. A bag for spare batteries (for camera, flashlight etc.). These see-through bags make it easy to locate items, so you don't always have to be rummaging, also for storing the different foreign currency.

27. Not for women only:

Take along skin moisturizer, even if you don't normally use it. Also sun block (SPF 15 or higher). High altitudes, or dry air and hot sun can combine to really dry out skin. A favorite skin cream is Lubriderm, which is very effective, fragrance-free, and modestly priced.

28. Take along a mini-tape recorder.

Audio memories --- children giggling, guides talking, the hubbub of a marketplace, the scream of a monkey--can be more fun than a photograph. The kids enjoy playback too!

29. Bring a pair of lightweight binoculars.

Even if you are not a bird-watcher, you'll get a whole new perspective on your trip. In addition to the obvious benefits for a tour or national park adventure, it's fun to watch a volcano erupt from a distant peak, or check out the rest of the group's progress as they come up behind you, or just people-watch from afar. A 9x25 model is a good compromise among magnification, light-gathering power, weight, and size.

30. If photography is a major goal of your trip, bring along a spare camera.

You simply can't count on being able to repair or replace a malfunctioning camera on an adventure trip. A good combination would be a high-quality SLR camera as your primary equipment and a small lightweight automatic point-and-shoot camera as a backup. But don't bring a huge assortment of camera bodies, lenses and tripods; you'll find all that equipment a burden to haul around and disruptive to

operate. In fact, you may find, to your surprise, that you end up preferring the small, unobtrusive point-to-shoot to the fancy SLR. Video cameras will capture your trip -- which you may re-live it again and again. Don't forget to bring along extra batteries!

Just Before you Go!

31. Hold off exchanging dollars for insider foreign currency.

The exchange rate is always better overseas than at U.S. banks, which take hefty commissions and don't like to trade in small amounts. For Mexican Pesos, wait until you arrive at the U.S. /Mexico Border, where you can exchange at the "Casa de Cambios" or exchange house - much better rate than the banks. Traveler's checks are safer than cash, but sometimes more difficult to exchange.

32. Budget for tips to your tour leader, guides, and attendants.

Like waiters and ski instructors, Adventuretour travel company field staff traditionally rely on tips for a portion of their income. The amount is strictly up to you, but if you feel the staff did a good job, 3 to 5 percent of your cost is a good ballpark figure. Keep in mind that what appears to be a trivial amount of money to you it can be a big help to a local staff member. On guided tours, your guide tips the local guides, if you want to give something additional, they appreciate surplus items of clothing, like T-shirts, and caps.

33. Get used to the idea that you may be out of touch with the rest of the world.

Everywhere you are going there will not always be telephones at all times. However, in recent years this situation has changed with the introduction of AT&T worldwide direct dial USA. Try not to come thinking of that big business deal, or other problems at home, you are on tour to forget about that! There are fax service and mail pick-ups.

Survival while on tour

34. Protect your valuables while touring.

First of all--Don't bring valuables with you (expensive jewelry, watches, and etc.) it has no place on an Adventuretours! In crowded, theft-prone areas like bus stops, city plazas, and special events keep your valuable documents and cash in a money belt or a neck pouch under your clothes. Keep some cash handy so you won't have to go rummaging into the pouch constantly. Keep cash in different parts of your vehicle, and list where it is.

35. If you don't know -- just ask!

Wherever you go, people are pleased if you inquire about how things should be done. You don't want to risk being inadvertently rude, so just ask! Whom to ask? Your tourleader is your primary etiquette source, but hotel desk staff, campground personnel, and the local tourism representative are also excellent local cultural experts.

36. Don't make phone calls through hotel or phone office switchboards.

Hotel/Phone office surcharges can be outrageous, up to double or triple the cost of the call. Instead, find out your long-distance company's international access codes for a direct linkup. Simply ask the hotel operator for a local outside- line and call your long distance company's international access code, Or find the public telephone office in the city you are in. Ask your tourleader for the access code.

37. Learn Tipping procedures.

On most side-trip or tours, your tourleader will take care of tips -- Don't short-circuit the system by giving individual tips; this can be disruptive. Of course, for a particular favor or service, you are free to tip individually for that.

What you came for - the TRIP itself

38. Be extravagantly friendly with your guides and the locals.

Don't let a language barrier stop you - Ask them to teach you a few words. Learn their names. Gesticulate wildly. Make visual jokes. Buy them drinks. The idea is to break down the cultural and hierarchical barriers and really get to know these people. If you succeed, you may find to your surprise that the highlight of your trip was not a mountain or an animal, but a person.

39. Keep a journal.

Snapshots are fine, but you'll find that a written record of your thoughts and feelings will bring a knowing smile years from now. Adventure travel, because it removes you so completely from normal everyday life, invariably stimulates contemplation and triggers unaccustomed musings. Should I quit my boring job? Does it really matter who wins the Super Bowl? Am I really ready to settle down? Write these thoughts down. Years from now, you'll be amazed at what went on in your head.

40. Maintain your normal hygiene routines.

Resist the temptation to play Neanderthal Man (or woman) in the jungle, your fellow Tourmembers will appreciate it, and you'll feel a lot better! Maybe you can't take a full shower or plug in your hair dryer or water pick. But you can brush your teeth daily, take sponge baths, and wash your hair regularly.

41. Drink, drink, drink.

Dehydration - which can make you more susceptible to fatigue, illness, and altitude ailments - is a common problem among travelers. It starts with extremely dry air like the desert of Texas to California. Tropical climates, exertion, and altitudes make matters worse. Drinking enough water is very important. So keep drinking water on hand at all times, and try to drink even when you are not thirsty. (By the time you feel thirsty, you're already well on the way to dehydration.) Check the color of your urine - it should be clear. If it's a bright yellow - you need to drink more water!

42. But don't drink the tap water

In most cases, tap water in the towns and cities of developing nations is not safe to drink. Sometimes the locals say "It's OK to drink", and they drink it out of the faucet, but you must remember, they do not know any other water - it will probably make you sick. To be on the safe side, drink and brush your teeth with pure water. The bottled water is generally good and if you want to be certain, see your tourleader in advance and he can advise you on a water filter. Use bleach to purify your water - see health advisory.

43. Food: Cook it, peel it, or forget it.

On adventure tours, you shouldn't have to worry about the restaurant food that is recommended by your staff. But local food, especially from street vendors and markets, is another story. Make sure that any meat or fish has been well cooked. Avoid lettuce and raw vegetables, which may have been washed with tap water. Eat only fruit that you peel yourself, and touch it as little as possible. Make sure that custard-type dessert have been properly refrigerated or are freshly made. Eat only street vendor-food that has been well cooked and is hot or that can be peeled.

44. Wash your hands frequently.

Even if your food is properly prepared, remember that the general environment in developing countries is not as sanitary. Wash your hands or use a disposable towelette before every meal and after going to the bathroom.

45. If you feel ill, inform your trip leader immediately.

If you think the problem is food-related, he or she will need to know right away. Certain kinds of more serious illness also require prompt attention. Don't try to tough it out, it's important that your tour leader be aware of any physical problems as soon as possible.

46. Get up early.

In the mountainous areas especially, get in the habit of rising before dawn to watch the sky lighten and the sun come up. People who have not experienced high-altitude mountain sunrises are invariably bowled over by this extraordinary visual feast. Dawn is also when local people start their day; you'll see kids on their way to school, shopkeepers opening up, farmers on their way to the marketplace, or maybe the local soldiers of a nearby army base, out running double-time.

47. Resist the urge to give out money, candy, pens and other trinkets to the local children (other than in some spots designated by your tour leaders).

It may seem tempting at first; the kids can be devilishly charming. But in the long run, it's a culturally destructive practice that creates a subservient "begging mentality" in an otherwise proud culture and perpetuates a shallow and stereotyped relationship between tourists and locals. One can already see the evidence of this in some areas of Mexico that have been previously traveled by "other" caravans.... groups of kids shouting, "pencil", often greet our tourists.

There are practical reasons to avoid this practice as well. Pencils create jealousy among children who don't have them. So play with the kids, talk to them, show them your stuff, do slight-of-hand magic tricks for them. Teach them a word or two in English. But don't give them things. There are some spots where we can do this in a controlled condition; Also there are certain areas where used clothing can be distributed to help the kids.

48. If you want to help the local people financially, contribute to Organizations.

The idea is to support the community at large, not particular individuals within it. On the local level, ask your tourleader about schools, hospitals, health clinics, orphanages, or cultural groups to whom you might contribute. (A gift of \$20, for example, to a rural health clinic in El Salvador can have a major impact.) Give a box of pencils to the local schoolmaster, not the individual children, so that he can hand them out in a way that won't stir up greed and resentment.

49. Don't take photos of locals without their permission.

They may be shy or have real fears about being photographed. Some Guatemalan Indians believe their soul will be taken. You can often earn their trust by showing them your camera, letting them look through the viewfinder, or even letting them snap a picture of you first- Keep in mind that the lack of a photo doesn't make the experience less real. Some say the opposite, in fact,

50. Take your photos during early morning and late afternoon.

Low, slanting sunlight brings out the shadows and details in all kinds of scenic shots. Professional photographers don't even think about shooting after 10 a. m. or before 4 p. m. They particularly like the light right around sunrise and sunset, which bathes the subject in a soft golden glow.

Home

51. Think carefully before buying antiques.

Counterfeits are common and very difficult for the average buyer to spot. Even if the antique is genuine, the seller might have obtained it illegally -- many countries have restrictions on the removal of cultural artifacts -- and you may have it confiscated at the border. In the past, unscrupulous art dealers, who sell them to foreigners, have looted many temples and archaeological sites. An unsuspecting antique buyer may unwittingly encourage this behavior by contributing to the profits of the looters.

52. Pool your tips for the tour leader and staff.

This encourages the staff to work for the good of everyone in the group, not just certain individuals. Traditionally, tips are given when you say good-bye. For example, a group will usually pass the hat for the Tailgunner on the last night of the trip and present it to him the next morning. Likewise for the Tourleader. Remember that tipping is an individual decision. It is entirely up to you how much to put in the hat.

53. Bring home as little local currency as possible.

You'll probably get stuck with it; U.S. Banks don't really like to deal in foreign currency, and they often have poor exchange rates and high minimum amounts.

54. Fill out your tour company's post trip questionnaire.

Be candid. Report the lows as well as the highs. Adventuretours/Pathfinders has learned that thoughtful comments from trip participants are the best form of quality control, and pays very close attention to feedback from its travelers.

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Check your home owners insurance policy for personal effects coverage's.

Original vehicle ownership papers required (if another owner, also need notarized statement authorizing use). License plates must be current - and valid through return to USA.

Each person must have a passport valid for at least 8 months from the start of this tour with at least 10 blank pages for immigration stamps. Bring 6 additional passport photographs for each person.

Take light weight casual clothes - possibly "wash & wear" - for the warmer lower level tropical areas. "Medium" weight clothes for the cool higher elevations with a light wrap for the evenings. Shorts (and bathing suits) on the beaches ONLY - NOT in the towns and cities.

Loud flashy clothes are not in keeping with many areas of Central America - best to dress "conservatively". Bring comfortable walking shoes - and an umbrella (or rainwear, just in case).

Temperatures vary with elevation - warm to hot at lower levels and pleasant to cool in the higher elevations.

Have vehicles completely serviced and inspected before departing from home.

Check all the tires and make sure all are in good condition. Spares should be mounted on rims You must bring an extra spare for unusual and/or half size tires.

Be sure that your axle jack is in working order and will lift your RV wheels - and, that your lug wrench fits. extra motor belts - maybe an extra fuel pump, fuel filter air filter, water pump, light bulbs, fuses. along certain important RV parts (i.e. RV water pump) and an extra complete set of keys.

Consider bringing fuel additives designed to eliminate "ping" for some of the mountain driving.

Bring along an adequate supply of your special medical prescriptions for the duration of the trip. And keep your prescription medicines in the original containers - it is a good idea to bring along a copy of the doctor's prescription.

Bring along any "special" US style foods or drinks that you just cannot "live without". Don't forget your cameras and plenty of film and/or tapes.

Bring an extra pair of reading glasses. Don't forget sun glasses, sun tan lotion and favorite bug repellent. You might want to bring a supply of paper products - plates, towels, RV toilet paper, etc.

Tipping for services just as in the US and Canada - usually 10% to 15% of your check.

Restaurants, for the most part, are of good quality and generally serve foods that you will recognize. Don't forget that we have a "bi-lingual" person along to assist with translations and to help you with the Spanish language.

Shopping is really "tops " and quite different especially in the villages and smaller towns. There will be time to shop for the many unusual items in native markets, in supermarkets, shops and stores all along the route.

Sightseeing has been planned to provide a real cross section of Central America.

And, last but not least, LEAVE YOUR VALUABLES AT HOME - or plan on storing them somewhere in your RV. You will not have occasion to wear the fancy necklaces, gold chains or rings of value. First of all, it is not the general custom to wear valuable or "flashy" jewelry Second, you do not want to encourage a street theft.

HELPFUL TRAVEL HINTS

MONEY

Bring small bills, as they are easier to use and exchange. Traveler's checks and credit cards are accepted in many places, but as at home, cash is always easier. Latin America is no different than the rest of the world regarding theft and pickpockets. We strongly recommend that you keep your passport and the bulk of your moneys in an under-the-clothing traveler's purse or belt. Keep a photocopy of your passport, credit card and traveler's check numbers in a separate location for safety.

Most Homeowners and Medical Policies do not cover you abroad, we strongly recommend that you purchase special travel coverage through a company such as Travelsafe. After registration we will send a brochure for travel insurance with your Trip Packet 60 days prior to departure.

Essentials

Wear your most comfortable walking shoes (canvas tennis shoes are great as they dry quickly). Bring a hat. Bring a swimsuit. Bring a flashlight. Bring sunscreen and sunglasses. Bring mosquito repellent. Keep your important toiletries, medicines, cameras, etc. with you in your carry-on bag during transfers for safety. Keep a photocopy of the first 2 pages of your passport in a separate location from your passport. A washcloth if desired. A small plastic bottle for water, to keep in your day pack, is handy. Most important - bring a good attitude and adventurous spirit.

Foreign Culture

Please remember that in Latin America waiting for things to happen is the norm. The point is to respect the culture and be ready to relax and wait more than normal. Bring a book or game.

Health

There is nothing more important to us than your general welfare, but when it comes to giving personal medical advise - we are not doctors. Unfortunately, you will get as many various opinions of what is needed medically, as the number of people you ask. Each person should make this decision personally and may wish to consult their doctor. The basic guidelines of

good hygiene and common traveling sense, needed for any away-from-home trip will help insure a healthier vacation. Medical treatment is available in Latin America. Talk to the guide before consuming anything of suspicion. Some good guidelines are: Drink only bottled or treated water (purified water is widely available). Avoid ice of a questionable origin. Beware of uncooked fruits and vegetables that may have been washed in untreated water. Meats and seafood should be well cooked. If you wish, bring Lomotil, antibiotics from your doctor and/or Pepto Bismol for symptomatic treatments. Avoid insect bites. Wash your hands frequently. Remember, this is supposed to be an adventure trip.

WEATHER

Warm to hot days and comfortable nights are typical. The usual weather pattern is a lot of sun with afternoon clouds and chance of showers. Be prepared for rain sometime during the trip. Rain in the tropics can be a great experience and well worth the inconvenience.

Clothing

Casual attire is the norm for this trip, If you want to dress up a little for dinners, that is fine too. Please adjust to your own tastes, and accept others for doing the same. We recommend traveling light. Light cottons easily wash and dry quickly. Laundry service is available at some camps.

Electricity

The voltage in Mexico and Central America is 110V, the same as the U.S. Some South American countries use both 110V and 220V. Others use exclusively 220V electric. In South America, many times, you will not be able to use shore power supplies.

Camera

Do not forget extra film and camera batteries so you can capture some of the incredible sights. A flash is recommended.