

How We Plan Our Trips

Our planning system, the complete packing checklist, the before-you-leave list, and an itinerary library from every trip.

Our planning system

1. One shared doc per trip - a day-by-day skeleton up top, a running 'places to go / things to eat' list below.
2. Anchor each day to one big thing and fill in around it. One anchor a day leaves room for the best detours.
3. Research the specifics that ruin a day: hours, timed-entry reservations, closures, real drive times, one breakfast + one dinner spot a day.
4. Build in buffer - plan about 70% of the time and let the rest happen.

Packing checklist

Clothing & shoes

- Underwear, socks, sleepwear
- Casual tops & bottoms, pants/jeans, shorts
- Athletic shirts & bottoms
- Sweaters, sweatshirts, a shawl/scarf
- Dresses / a nicer outfit for a night out
- Swimsuits & cover-ups, goggles
- Sneakers, sandals, one pair of dress shoes
- Cold-weather: hats, beanies, gloves
- Belts, sunglasses (with a case)

Toiletries & grooming

- Toothbrush, toothpaste, floss, mouthwash, tongue cleaner
- Shampoo, conditioner, body wash, deodorant, body spray/perfume
- Razor & shaving supplies, hair trimmer + charger
- Brush/comb, hair clips, styling tools, hair spray
- Face cleanser, moisturizer, makeup + remover, skincare
- Sunscreen, lotion, nail clippers & file, jewelry

Health & first-aid

- Medications & vitamins, pain relievers (pills + roll-on)
- First-aid kit, thermometer, aloe gel
- Eye drops, contacts + solution + backup glasses
- Insect repellent, hand sanitizer, tissues
- Braces / retainer supplies, hot packs

Carry-on & tech

- Passports / visa / IDs, printed tickets, cash
- Phones + chargers, laptop + charger, Fitbit chargers
- International power adapter, car charger, phone car mount
- Headphones, books / e-books, paper & pen
- Empty water bottle, snacks, gum/mints, lip balm
- Travel blanket, sleep mask, umbrella/poncho
- Big camera, luggage scale for the trip home

Before you leave: the door checklist

- Tell the bank - travel notice on the cards
- Cash - local currency for the first day
- House - garbage out, thermostat set, alarm armed, doors & windows locked
- Cars - lock the cars in the garage
- Adapters & chargers - pack last, on top
- Snacks & empty water bottles for travel day

Itinerary library (highlights)

Iceland - Ring Road, 10 days

Blue Lagoon off the plane, Reykjavik, Golden Circle (Thingvellir, Strokkur, Gullfoss), south-coast waterfalls (Seljalandsfoss, Skogafoss, Kvernufoss), Reynisfjara & Dyrholaey at Vik, Jokulsarlon glacier lagoon + Diamond Beach, Godafoss & Akureyri, Snaefellsnes & Kirkjufell.

Portugal - Lisbon, Sintra & the Algarve

Alfama, Tram 28 to Sao Jorge Castle, Santa Justa elevator; a full day in Sintra (Pena Palace, Quinta da Regaleira); Belem (Pasteis de Belem at 8am, Belem Tower, Jeronimos); Algarve beaches and Porto. Eat pastel de nata, caldo verde, piri-piri chicken, port.

Puerto Rico - San Juan, islands & El Yunque

Old San Juan (El Morro, Paseo de la Princesa, San Cristobal); ferry to Vieques for beaches + the bioluminescent bay kayak; Culebra's Flamenco Beach; a full day in El Yunque (La Coca Falls, Yokahu Tower, the 2.4-mi each-way trail - start early).

Oregon - Portland, the Gorge, Mt Hood & coast

Columbia River Gorge (Multnomah Falls, Vista House, Latourell Falls loop); Mt Hood & Mirror Lake; the coast (Cannon Beach, Haystack Rock, Ecola, the Peter Iredale wreck); Powell's, food carts, Voodoo; Silver Falls Trail of Ten Falls.

Texas - the big triangle

Dallas (Sixth Floor Museum, Dallas World Aquarium, Fort Worth Stockyards & Water Gardens); Houston (Waterwall, Space Center, Kemah) + Galveston; San Antonio (Alamo, River Walk, missions); Austin (State Capitol). Anchor one stop per city; don't over-schedule the drives.

Shawnee National Forest - hiking weekend

Pomona Natural Bridge + Little Grand Canyon; Garden of the Gods & Camel Rock, Rim Rock trail, Cave-in-Rock; waterfalls at Ferne Clyffe. Hoodoos, slot canyons and grottoes an easy drive from home.

Lake-house group trip

A shared sheet with a supply list (who brings what) and an expenses tab that splits per-adult at the end. Assign categories up front, keep receipts, settle on the last night. Book the boat and ferry early.

