



TRAVEL TIPS *from Sechrist Travel*

TRAVELING AS AN ENSEMBLE

Experiences are always enriched when you can share them with others. Many strong and lasting friendships have been forged between people who meet and travel together on an ensemble tour.

Being a part of an ensemble requires **consideration, compromise, and tolerance**. All of us love to do different things. In order for everyone in the ensemble to enjoy his or her favorite aspect of travel, tolerance and consideration is asked of everyone.

To be a good traveler, you must be genuinely interested in different peoples, customs, and ways of life. You must accept the limitations imposed by air travel, foreign governments, and each country's own cultural idiosyncrasies.

Try to be pleasantly surprised by the differences in peoples and customs and be willing to accept things as they are and not as you might wish.

Two other factors are important when traveling with an ensemble – **punctuality and flexibility**. Don't keep your ensemble waiting. Arrive a few minutes before the scheduled time. Delays may mean that we miss an important activity. Flexibility shows that you are willing to "go with the flow."

While ensembles contain many people who have traveled extensively, it is important for all to remember that ensemble travel is different from family or individual travel. Please get permission from your director before "striking out on your own."

Passports and Visas

When traveling outside the U.S., you must have a passport valid for at least six months beyond the return date.

The Internet, as well as Federal, State, County Court buildings, and some branches of the U.S. Post Office are resources for application and renewal forms.

KEEP YOUR PASSPORT WITH YOU AT ALL TIMES, when traveling from city to city or country to country, OR STORE IN HOTEL SAFE when you are in residency for a night or more – **NEVER** pack it in your suitcase. You will need it at check-in for international flights and sometimes at hotel reception desks.

It is always good to **carry a photocopy of the data page** of your passport, along with a spare photograph. If you lose your passport, these can be used as proof of identity and speed the process of obtaining a replacement. Keep these duplicates in a place separate from your passport. It's a good idea for your group leader to have copies on file, as well.

A **visa** is a permit from a foreign government for you to enter their country. **ALL NON-U.S. CITIZENS in your ensemble are required to obtain a visa for international travel**. It is issued as a separate card or stamped entry in your passport by that country's Embassy or Consulate in the U.S. Visas can take several weeks to obtain. Most countries do not require a visa for American citizens. You must already have a passport before you can obtain a visa.

Health and Safety Matters

For most countries, the government does not require immunizations, but you should consult your personal physician, local health department, or The Center for Disease Control in Atlanta, GA, who may recommend preventative measures. The best thing you can do to protect yourself from illness overseas is to make sure you start your trip healthy.

Be sure to take along sufficient amounts of any medications you normally use. Prescription drugs must be in the container with the doctor's prescription on it.

As for safety, be wise and **never go anywhere by yourself**. The "buddy system" is a tried and true method. You also have more fun with a friend than by yourself!

Be sure to check with your health insurance company to see if you are covered overseas and what the process is if you find yourself in an emergency situation. Most of the time, you must pay for your medical expenses in full overseas and then are reimbursed once you have returned to the states. Keep all receipts to assure a full reimbursement.

Luggage

For ease of travel, **you may bring only one full size checked suitcase and one carry-on bag** that will fit in the overhead bin or under the seat. Avoid hanging garment bags. *The best kind of checked baggage has strong wheels!*

REMEMBER – You may have to carry your luggage up/down stairs. If you can't lift it, no one else will!

We suggest that your carry-on luggage include sleepwear, a change of clothing, toiletries, all prescription medications, and your passport.

Current checked baggage allowances: Weight: No more than 50 lbs. Size: Length+width+height should total no more than 62 inches.

Leave room in your luggage for souvenirs you are sure to bring home, or bring along an extra collapsible tote.

When traveling to and from North America, the Transportation Safety Administration recommends you do not lock your checked baggage, unless you have a special lock that only security personnel can access. The TSA may need to open your luggage to complete their security check.

Make sure you have tagged your luggage properly and also placed your contact details *inside* your luggage.

Electricity

Most European countries and the South Pacific use 220-voltage.

You can buy voltage converters and adapter plugs at most travel and luggage stores, or Radio Shack.

Country, Voltage, & Plug Type:

Voltage: 220; Plug Type #2 or B - This plug has 2 round prongs and is used in most of continental Europe

Phoning Home

The most convenient way to call the U.S. from Europe is to use your long distance carrier calling card. Contact your long distance carrier before departure from the U.S. to learn the access code for the countries you will visit.

If you are an AT&T customer, here is the procedure to call the U.S. (you can also use your credit card if you are not an AT&T subscriber):

1. Dial the AT&T Direct Access Number of the country you're in
2. At voice prompt: Dial area code + number
3. At tone, enter your AT&T Calling Card number or credit card number

AT&T Direct Access Numbers:

AUSTRIA: 0800-200-288

FRANCE: 0-800-99-0111

LATVIA: 8000-2288

CZECH REPUBLIC: 00-800-222-55288

GERMANY: 0-800-225-5288

NORW NORWAY: 800-190-11

ESTONIA: 800-12001

HUNGARY: 06-800-011-11

SPAIN: 900-99-0011

FINLAND: 0-800-11-0015

ITALY: 800-172-444

SWEDEN: 020-799-111

For example, a call to the city of **New York (MANHATTAN)** from **Italy** would be dialed as:

800-172-444 + 212 + Local Number

Wait for a prompt then enter your AT&T Corporate Calling Card Number and 4-digit PIN or Credit Card information

Smart Tips:

NEVER dial directly from your hotel room without knowing the charges.

You may want to take pre-addressed labels to attach to postcards. Airmail stamps can be purchased in the hotels and can usually be mailed at the hotel's front desk.

Money Matters

Familiarize yourself with the currency of the country you're visiting so you won't be at a complete loss when you arrive. The **EURO** is a common currency in most of continental Europe. Prices are typically quoted with the abbreviation **EUR** or the symbol **€**.

International travelers can choose from several different currency options:

1. **Credit Cards and ATM Cards:** One advantage of credit card purchases is that they are exchanged at the interbank rate, which is usually more favorable. It is best to use credit cards for large purchases. A disadvantage of credit card purchases is that if a dispute arises over charges on your card, you do not have much protection overseas. With credit cards and ATM cards, keep the following in mind:
 - a. If your ATM is linked to Cirrus or Plus systems, you can use your ATM card to obtain cash while traveling. Your bank should be able to give you a listing of all ATMs available on your network; and
 - b. Notify your bank that you will be using your card out of the country; ask that they document it in the system or your account may be placed on hold or blocked for security purposes.
2. **Traveler's Checks (not recommended by Sechrist Travel):** The only advantage of using traveler's checks is that they are replaceable if lost or stolen.

Check www.xe.com for current exchange rates.

ATM's, Traveler's Checks & Cash

We suggest that you use your credit card at ATM's to get local currency.

Use ATMs rather than travelers checks: You will get your cash cheaper and faster using an ATM. Just keep in mind that while ATMs give the best possible rates, they do come with transaction fees. Minimize fees by making fewer and larger withdrawals. Store the cash safely in your money belt.

Throughout Europe, cash machines (ATMs) are the standard way for travelers to get local currency. European ATMs work like your hometown machine and always have English-language instructions. Using your debit card with an ATM takes dollars directly from your bank account at home and gives you that country's cash. You'll pay fees, but you'll still get a better rate than you would for exchanging traveler's checks.

Ideally, use your debit card to take money out of ATMs. You can use a credit card, but you'll typically pay more in fees.

BEFORE YOU TRAVEL: Confirm with your bank or credit-card company that your card will work in Europe and alert them that you'll be making withdrawals while traveling — otherwise, they might freeze your card if it detects unusual spending patterns. Some banks automatically block US debit card use in certain countries (including the United Kingdom) to protect against fraud.

ATM transactions, using bank-issued debit cards, come with various fees. Your bank may levy a flat \$2–5 transaction fee each time you use an ATM, and/or may charge a percentage for the currency conversion (1–3 percent); the ATM you use might charge its own fee, too. If your bank charges a flat fee, make fewer visits to the ATM and withdraw larger amounts. (Some major US banks partner with "corresponding" European bank chains, meaning that you can use those ATMs with no fees at all — ask your bank.) Other fees may apply; for all the details, see [The Sleaze of Fees](#), below. These additional expenses can pile up. Quiz your bank to figure out exactly what you'll pay for each withdrawal.

If you use a credit card (rather than a debit card) for ATM transactions, it's technically a "cash advance" rather than a "withdrawal" — and subject to an additional cash-advance fee. The moment you pull cash out of the ATM with a credit card, you're immediately bumped into the high-interest category with your new credit-card debt. If you want to use your credit card for ATM transactions without incurring this interest expense, you may be able to prepay the account — check with your bank.

Since some European keypads have only numbers, you'll need to know your personal identification number (PIN) by number rather than by letter — derive the numbers from your hometown bank's keypad. A PIN with more than four digits may not be accepted. Plan on being able to withdraw money only from your checking account. You might be able to dip into your savings account or transfer funds between accounts, but don't count on it.

BRING TWO (2) DIFFERENT DEBIT/CREDIT CARDS - this provides a backup if one is demagnetized or eaten by a machine. Make sure the validity period of your card won't expire before your trip ends.

It can be helpful to set up online access to your bank accounts. Most banks have secure websites that allow you to check balances, make payments and transfer funds; if you check your account periodically while in Europe, you can also see the exact exchange rate you're getting, and whether the bank is levying any extra unexpected fees.

Ask your bank how much you can withdraw per 24 hours, but be aware that many foreign ATMs have their own limits. If the ATM won't let you withdraw your daily maximum, you'll have to make several smaller withdrawals (and incur extra fees) to get the amount you want. Request a big amount on the small chance you'll get it. If you're lucky and the machine complies, you'll save on fees. If you're denied, try again, requesting a smaller amount. Few ATM receipts list the exchange rate, and some machines don't dispense receipts at all.

In some countries (especially in Eastern Europe), an ATM may give you high-denomination bills, which can be difficult to break. My strategy: Request an odd amount of money from the ATM (such as 2,800 Czech koruna instead of 3,000). If the machine insists on giving you big bills, go immediately to a bank to break them.

If you're looking for an ATM, ask for a *Bankomat* just about everywhere in continental Europe, a *retrait* or *distributeur (de billets)* in France, or a cashpoint in the UK. Many European banks have their ATMs in a small entry lobby, which protects users from snoopers and bad weather. When the bank is closed, the door to this lobby may be locked. In this case, look for a credit-card-size slot next to the door. Simply insert or swipe your debit or credit card in this slot, and the door should automatically open.

Stay away from commercial ATMs that aren't run by banks. These companies, such as Travelex Money Machine, like to stack their machines next to bank ATMs in the hope that travelers will be too confused to notice the difference. The commercial ATMs charge outrageous extra fees — often double the cost of a bank ATM. **Transaction Fees add up!**

Tips for Using ATM's

- *Make sure your credit card is compatible.* Does your bank's ATM card have a Plus, Cirrus, VISA, MasterCard or EuroCard logo?
- *Have the right kind of PIN.* Your PIN should be numeric, not alphanumeric, e.g., "1245," not "ab12."
- *Carry a backup credit card.* If you lose your ATM card or a machine can't read it, your VISA or MasterCard will be a lifesaver. You'll also find a credit card handy if your expenses are higher than planned.
- Credit Union cards DO NOT, as a rule, work in ATM's overseas.
- Be sure to notify your bank and credit card company that you will be traveling abroad so they will not be alarmed by the international access to your account. Leave all unnecessary cards at home.
- American Express offers a TravelFunds card, which can be used just like a credit card, but has a pre-set limit. It can be used at ATM's, as well. It is good for those who want to stay on a pre-determined budget.

Tipping Practices

Your tour price includes all tips, taxes and service charges at the hotels and group restaurants listed in your itinerary. When paying for independent meals in European restaurants, determine if the tip has already been included on the bill. If not, 10%-15% is a reasonable amount for a tip. Often in France and Germany it is expected that you will round the bill to an even amount in addition to the service charge. **For example, if your bill is €7.43 it is customary to pay €8 TOTAL.**

It is a good idea to check your bill for accuracy before you pay. Sometimes waiters are known to add extra amounts on the bill to make more money! If you are unsure about anything, ask.

How to give a tip varies. Discreet is a good rule – don't make a big deal of it. You can leave it on the table or, especially in Italy, give it to the waiter personally.

It is customary to tip the local professional sightseeing guides €1 per participant upon completion of the tour. It is also customary to tip the coach driver and Tour Director €2.50-€3.50 per day per participant at the end of the tour. These individuals work very hard to ensure that your tour runs as smoothly as possible.

Because the currency looks and feels different than U.S. currency, make sure you are giving what you intend to give. Don't ever feel as though you are rushed when paying. A second look doesn't take very long!

Don't over-tip: Only Americans tip 15 to 20 percent in Europe, even tipping when it is already included or not expected. Ask locals (who are customers rather than employees of a restaurant) for advice. Generally, 5 to 10 percent is typical if service is not included.

VAT TAX:

In Europe, a local value-added tax (VAT) is included in most retail prices. If you spend more than a certain amount of money in one store, you are entitled to a refund of the V.A.T. which can range from 9% to 20% of the retail price. You can apply for this refund when you leave the country (or European Union).

When you shop at stores displaying a tax-free-shopping-for-tourists sign and you spend more than the required minimum, obtain the Value Added Tax voucher from the sales representative. Your passport will be required.

The V.A.T. refund will take place at your final departure from the European Union or non-EU country. For example, you must apply for the refund at the airport where you board your transatlantic flight. Alternatively, if you make purchases in Switzerland or another non-EU country, your tax free voucher must be stamped by a customs official when leaving that country. In both cases you must be able to present the purchased goods, the receipts and the V.A.T. voucher to the customs official for verification. Cash refunds can often be made immediately at the airport, or you can receive your money via charge card credit or check.

Reminders for Directors

- Assign a luggage crew beforehand to load and unload coaches. Some **Coach Drivers** and **Tour Directors are not allowed to load/unload luggage**. This will expedite check-in/check-out and on-time departures.
- Assign one or more of your chaperones to take roll before each departure. Devise an efficient way of taking attendance, i.e., chaperone groups, numbers, etc.
- **Remind participants that they must be able to carry their own luggage.**
- Advise chaperones of their responsibilities and your expectations of them before the trip by giving guidelines to follow.
- They are to help you, not hinder you.
- Make copies of all the passports and keep with you.
- Be an example for your students – be on time, be flexible, and be helpful.
- Bring a pitch pipe!

A Word About Etiquette

You can change the perception in other countries that Americans can be loud, entitled, and arrogant. Remember that you are a guest of the countries, hotels, restaurants, and churches we visit. Enjoy being a positive ambassador of your school, state, and country.

Loud and unruly behavior is simply not appropriate or acceptable. We have zero tolerance for room damage or theft. Any items removed from rooms will be given an inflated surcharge and billed to your ensemble.

Musical Preparation

Your rehearsals and concerts are the centerpiece of your tour. To that end, please make every effort to arrive at your destination fully prepared for musical excellence.

For singers, be smart about your physical and vocal health. Minimize loud talking and get a decent amount of quality sleep. **Drink lots of fluids!** We want you to maximize your travel experience, but be mindful that you are sharing this experience with others (especially on the coach and in your rooms!). Be courteous and thoughtful.

Sechrist Travel Representatives (Managers and Escorts)

Sechrist Travel Tour Manager and Tour Escort will accompany your group during the land portion of your trip. The Tour Manager and Tour Escort serve as an intermediary between suppliers such as hotels, concert venues, coach companies, restaurants, etc. and the group. Typical duties include checking into hotels, reconfirming all scheduled appointments, and handling the financial details associated with the tour. The Tour Manager and Tour Escort will try to resolve all problems that affect the group as a whole. **While being familiar with the countries you are visiting, it is not the function of the escort to be a tour guide.**

Travel and hotel stays in foreign countries may not be as efficient as you are used to. Know that your Sechrist Travel Tour Manager and Tour Escort will take care of you and your arrangements.

Packing & Preparation Tips

While packing your luggage, itemize your bags' contents and their worth. This will help in case your luggage is lost or stolen.

It is also a good idea to use Ziploc bags for toiletries and other items that may spill.

What you pack depends more on the season than on any particular dress code. **Casual, comfortable clothing and comfortable shoes are essential.**

Plan layered outfits to accommodate temperature changes, i.e., cool mornings and evenings and warm days. Jeans are acceptable for sightseeing and informal dining. Some churches require long pants and covered shoulders.

Couples should split suitcases in two and pack clothes for both in each. If a suitcase is delayed en route, no one is left without clothes. Always put documents, medications, traveler's checks, keys, reading material, and other valuables in your carry-on bag.

Pack travel size facial tissues. They have many uses, including restroom situations where toilet paper may not be available. Moist towelettes or baby wipes are also useful. Don't forget shampoo, soap, and other toiletries in travel sizes.

TRAVEL TIP: Take half as many clothes as you think you'll need. You must be able to lift what you bring.

Be prepared for considerable walking during your tour. Negotiating uneven cobblestone streets, climbing hills for "the view" and touring old castles with no elevators can take a serious toll on the legs and feet. Bring good walking shoes and wear loose, comfortable clothing.

Begin now (**yes, NOW**) to acclimate yourself to walking more. Climb the stairs in your dorm, school, or work. Make a definite plan to walk more every day. Preparation now will help your overseas trip be more enjoyable and not tiring. You want to be your healthiest to take full advantage of everything your tour has to offer.

PACKING TIPS

The bottom line when traveling: pack only what you need! Keep in mind you'll be toting your own luggage on and off the bus or at the airport, and to and from your hotel. So bring what you need for each day of the trip. On the day of departure, once your luggage is stowed under the motor coach, you will not have access to items until hotel check-in. Therefore, pack any valuables (camera, money, medicine, etc.) and/or a change of clothes in a carry-on bag that you need prior to departure for your first day. Also, on the final day of the trip, you will not be able to access your luggage until you arrive at home as it will be stowed under the motor coach. Pack your valuables, change of clothes, etc. in your carry-on bag as well.

Be prepared for weather extremes, such as rain or wind with cooler than expected temperatures. Check www.accuweather.com to set up a weather advisory that can be sent directly to your email or as an app on your cell phone, and to find out average temperature highs and lows at your destination.

Plan to dress comfortably during the days. It makes sense to bring informal outfits including jeans, shorts, slacks and comfortable walking shoes. All clothing must be clean, neat and modest. Students, your teacher/sponsor may require you to adhere to your school dress code as well. If your group is going to the theater or planning a fine dining experience, include one dressy outfit.

To sort it all out, see our suggested packing list on the next page.

SUGGESTED PACKING LIST

There is typically a dress code in churches and museums. Bare shoulders must be covered, not heads. Skirts and dresses must be below the knee. We recommend that women carry large scarves or "sarongs" to wrap around their waist and/or shoulders for entrance into sights and venues. These can easily be stored in bags and carried.

Clothing:

1. Comfortable walking shoes and one pair of nicer shoes
2. Shirts (short- and long-sleeved)
3. Socks
4. Underwear
5. Shorts/pants/jeans
6. Pajamas
7. Bathing suit (if applicable)
8. Dressier outfit (reserved for a theater night, special night out, fine dining, etc.)
9. Raincoat, poncho or umbrella
10. Sweater and/or jacket (if applicable)
11. Trip tee-shirt or polo (if applicable)
12. Laundry bag with plastic liner
13. Keep in mind that some religious sites and churches require that shirts cover the shoulders and arms, and do not allow shorts, short skirts or flip-flops.
14. Winter-wear (for winter tours): insulated winter coat, scarf, insulated gloves/mittens, stocking hat, insulated socks, thermal long underwear, and sweaters. Please dress in layers!

PERFORMERS:

1. Folder, music, instruments, travel music stands (as applicable)
2. Concert Attire and accessories (ties, shoes, stole/robe, dark socks, etc.)

Personal Items:

1. Soap
2. Deodorant
3. Shampoo/conditioner
4. Toothbrush/toothpaste
5. Hairbrush/comb
6. Sunscreen
7. Spare set of contact lenses/glasses (if applicable)
8. Medication (if needed)

Special Note: Remember, when flying with carry-on luggage, any liquids including shampoo, conditioner, liquid soap, sunscreen, etc. as well as toothpaste can't be larger than 3 oz. and needs to be placed in one-quart Ziploc bags.

Other:

1. Spending money & ATM card (if needed)
2. Pouch for storing money and passport under clothing (if applicable)
3. Cell phone and necessary charging cords, plugs, and plug adaptors
4. iPod/MP3, etc.
5. Travel sized umbrella
6. Pillow/blanket
7. Notebook/pencil
8. Watch/Travel Alarm Clock
9. Book
10. Copy of the tour itinerary
11. List of important phone numbers, addresses, etc.
12. Passport (if applicable)
13. Copy of prescriptions (Customs officials in both the U.S. and Canada may want to verify that a container's contents match the label. Therefore, all medication should be carried in its original container.)

It must be noted that trip participants will assume full responsibility for any valuables brought along on the trip. Unless there is a room safe, we suggest that you do not leave any valuables, medications, etc. in your hotel room while touring. We further suggest that you do not leave any valuables on the motor coach, even when the motor coach is locked.

Carry-on Bag:

Here's a short list of items students, parents and teachers might need on the first and last days of their trip. As a reminder, each person should have a carry-on bag with them on the motor coach or flight (in case the checked luggage is delayed).

1. Money
2. Passport (if applicable)
3. Airline ticket (if applicable)
4. Toothbrush/toothpaste (remember, if flying, toothpaste needs to go in a one-quart Ziploc bag and can't be larger than 3 oz.)
5. Hairbrush
6. Contact lens/glasses (to sleep comfortably on the bus or plane)
7. A change of clothes
8. Medication
9. Any valuables (camera, iPod, book, etc.)
10. Pillow (for travel on motor coaches only)
11. Winter-wear (for winter tours): insulated winter coat, scarf, insulated gloves/mittens, stocking hat, insulated socks, thermal long underwear, and sweaters. For use upon arrival.