

# On the Road Again

October 2016

## Mayfield's Laws of Travel

- Never pass up the chance to sit down or go to the bathroom.
  - Winston Churchill
- Never pass up the chance to charge your phone or other important devices.
  - Anonymous
- Tablets and (especially) smartphones are small, easy to steal, and easy to fence. Always keep a close eye on your electronics while traveling.

## Cellphone usage abroad

- You already may have discovered that cell, text, and data rates abroad can be outrageous.
  - Depending on the carrier and your location, international voice rates may range from 50¢ to \$5 per minute.
  - Text messages may cost 10¢ to 50¢.
  - Data rates may have a surcharge of about 2¢ per kilobyte. That's \$20 per megabyte, when a typical phone photo is larger than a megabyte!
- Check with your carrier about their policies.
- Some simple solutions:
  - Put your phone into *airplane mode*. This generally turns off cellular (voice and data), Wi-Fi, Bluetooth, GPS, and location services.
  - If you find a location with free Wi-Fi (say, your hotel or a café), you can turn on just the Wi-Fi if you are in airplane mode. However, be aware that Wi-Fi standards that apply in the USA may not apply at your destination.
  - If these do not work, communicate via short text messages. This probably will be a solution of low cost.

- Airplane mode also helps prevent “hidden” or unexpected charges:
  - Updating apps on your phone.
  - Incoming calls (from the time the phone starts ringing).
  - Incoming texts.
  - Apps that automatically send data. (For example, when I take a photo on my phone, the photo is uploaded to my Google+ account automatically.)
- Other Possible solutions:
  - Check out *Skype calling*, which takes place over Wi-Fi.
  - It is very inexpensive, and you can call landlines or cellphones.
  - If you want to receive calls via Skype, you can subscribe a Skype number for \$18/3mo or \$60/12mo. This could meet your needs for the duration of your travel.
  - Also take a look at *Google Voice*, which is a free service.
  - You will receive a new, separate telephone number, and then you can roll calls made to this number to as many other phones as you like.
    - For example, if someone calls my Google Voice number, I can have it ring my cell phone and my home landline.
  - Some apps exist to use only Wi-Fi for Google Voice.
- *Viber* is an app that lets you send free text messages, photos, voice and video messages, and make calls to other Viber users.
  - It is available for Mac, PC, Windows phone, iPhone, and Android Phone.
  - It operates over Wi-Fi.
- Other possible solutions:
  - Check with your carrier to see if you can purchase a temporary, international plan that can be added to your existing plan.
  - Purchase a prepaid, disposable SIM card and install it in your phone in place of your regular SIM card. When you return to the USA, just swap the SIM cards again.
  - Purchase a separate phone for international travel; for example, [Mobal's \\$29 international cellphone](#).

- In addition to the costs associated with operating your cell phone abroad, there is the possibility that your phone will be lost or stolen, even when traveling domestically.
  - “*Find my phone*” programs or websites exist for all of the “big three” phone operating systems (Apple iOS, Android, and Windows). Google “find my phone” along with the manufacturer name and phone model to learn more.
  - If you purchased phone insurance, learn whether lost/stolen phones are covered and what process you need to undertake to replace the phone.

## Tablets

- If your tablet has cellular data capabilities, use the same procedures one uses for cell phones.
- Most tablets are Wi-Fi only. Again, hotels and cafés are excellent choices for free Wi-Fi.
  - And, Wi-Fi calling apps will work with your tablet, not just your phone.

## Laptops

- Apple Macbook computers have a “*locate my computer*” feature.
- Products are available for Windows-based laptops that provide the same service.

## Hotel Wi-Fi

- If you like to use Wi-Fi from your hotel room:
  - Check to see if there is an additional cost for the use of Wi-Fi. If so, this can add \$10-\$15 to your daily expenses!
  - If hotel Wi-Fi in your room is *really* important to you, check the signal strength of the Wi-Fi right after you arrive. If it is insufficient, talk to the manager about moving to a room that is closer to their signal router or booster.
  - Some hotels provide free Wi-Fi, but charge for faster Wi-Fi.

## Public Wi-Fi security

- Good travel practices to follow:
  - Make sure your *anti-virus*, *anti-spyware*, and *firewall* software are up-to-date!
  - When you connect to a new network in Windows, it may ask you whether to treat the network as a home (least protective), work, or public connection (most protective). When in doubt, choose “public”.
  - When using the Web on your computer to shop, check your bank account, looking at your credit card balance, etc. while connected to a public network, make sure you see *the browser’s “locked” icon* or check to see that the URL (i.e., Web address) from which you are purchasing begins with “*https:*” (http secured) rather than just “*http:*”.
  - Avoid entering personal and private information such as your SSN, credit card numbers, and passwords on a public computer. Unscrupulous people may have installed “*key logging*” software on these computers to capture such info and email it to them.

## Helpful travel apps

- The names and capabilities of these apps may differ depending on the smartphone or tablet you are using.
  - *PackPoint* packing list builder – build a customized packing list; takes weather at destination into account.
  - *Uber* – Arrive in any of 100+ cities and order a car; Uber shows you a photo and the name of your driver, gives you an estimate for the time your ride will arrive, and shows you where the car is on a map. Payment is by credit card using Uber, and both driver and rider can rate each other. (Note: European Uber is for luxury rides rather than taxi rides.)
  - *SleepSounds HQ* and *Ambience* – Provide a library of urban and natural background sounds to help you get to sleep or drown out noise while working. It includes such sounds as: ocean, insects, rain/storms, fireplace, public places, and household.
  - Google Maps – Helps you find your location, other locations, and provides turn-by-turn (or walking) directions.

- *Maps.Me* has mapped out much of the globe's roads, public transportation, and points of interest, plus it works offline for the times when you don't have service. (Just remember to download the maps you need ahead of time for offline usage.)
- *Hotel Tonight* – Book a last-minute hotel stay. The app guarantees the best rates possible and offers 24/7 real-person customer support via phone or email.
- *Yelp, AroundMe, and TripAdvisor*– Uses your current location to inform you of nearby restaurants, banks, medical facilities, and so forth. Restaurants provide ratings by other users.
- *XE Currency* and similar products helps you shop abroad by quickly calculating prices in the currency of your choice.
- *Postagram* – Take a picture on your mobile device, upload the picture, compose a message to go along with it, and this service will print and send a physical postcard via the US Mail to the recipient of your choice.
- *Skype and Google Hangouts* – You can use these to call your friends and family for free, as long as free Internet is available. Audio significantly less bandwidth than video, and both of these apps support an audio-only mode.
- *Smart Traveler* helps you keep up-to-date with current travel alerts and warnings from the U.S. Department of State. It also provides lots of other useful information, including important local laws, information on medical services, and safety and security advice.
- If your travel agency or airline provides a *text-message-based “status” service*, sign up for it. That way, you can learn before heading to the airport whether or not your flight is on time or canceled.
- *Google Translate* – translate words and phrases, both typed and spoken, among more than 80 languages.
- *Yandax.Translate* is similar to Google Translate, but works offline as well. (Just download the language you need while connected.) There is a per-character cost; pricing starts at \$15/1M characters for low usage, down to \$6/500M characters for power users.

## Electrical adapters/converters

- What good does it do to take your mobile devices with you if you can't recharge them?
- When traveling abroad, make sure to take an appropriate electrical outlet adapter/converter.
  - Sometimes, the plug shape is different.
  - Sometimes, the voltage is different.
- Some hotel rooms or cruise ship cabins may have only one outlet.
  - Take with you a two- or three-way plug adapter so you can plug in multiple devices simultaneously.
- Before you purchase an adapter, be aware that you may already have the correct adapters.
- For example, I traveled to China where the power is 220V AC.
  - I borrowed an adapter from the hotel that adapted only the shape of the outlets to the standard found in the US.
  - Upon reading the info on my Android charger and MacBook Pro power brick, I discovered that they worked with the voltages available in China.

## Entertainment on the Go

- Load up your device of choice with entertaining material.
  - If you have a *public library card in Oklahoma*, you can sign up to download eBooks and audio books before you leave. (Audio books help pass the time quickly on long drives.)
  - You can “*rip*” your CDs and DVDs to provide music and video to enjoy while on your trip.
  - With an app such as *PocketCast*, you can download several podcast episodes for later enjoyment.
- Consider purchasing a pair of *Bluetooth earphones* so you can listen to your audio stash while navigating the airport or other busy venues, without the tangle hassle of wires.

## Television

- Mobile devices and laptops provide access to online video services such as Netflix, Hulu Plus, and Amazon.
  - Make sure to use Wi-Fi rather than a cellular connection if your cell plan has a data cap.
  - The ability to watch video and its quality is affected significantly by the quality/speed of the Internet connection that you have available and the number of other video watchers on the network.
- There is a plethora of devices that will let you watch video from most of the paid subscription services on a hotel TV, and they also let you stream video stored on your smartphone or tablet to the TV.
  - *Google Chromecast*
  - *Amazon Fire Stick*
  - *Roku Stick*
  - *Apple TV*
- They plug into an HD connection on a TV, and then you can navigate through programs using a remote, tablet, smartphone, or laptop.

## Other tips & tricks

- When traveling, scan your important travel documents and upload them to a *cloud account*.
  - That way, they will be accessible to you should something happen to the paper copies.
- If possible, back up your photos on a daily basis as your trip unfolds.
  - If you have your laptop with you, you could back up the photos there.
  - If Internet access is available, back up photos to a cloud account.
- For years, people have been able to purchase travel books for their specific destinations. Now, consider purchasing *travel-specific apps*, instead.
- Today's passports – and some credit cards – contain embedded *RFID* (Radio-Frequency ID) chips.
  - High tech thieves can “*skim*” (i.e., electronically read from a few feet away) the information stored on those RFID chips.
  - If you are concerned about this, you can purchase *RFID blocking passport wallets*, such as those available on Amazon and elsewhere.

- If you are carrying private information on a laptop or mobile device, encrypt the information using *BitLocker*, *VeraCrypt*, or a similar product.
  - This way, if your device is lost or stolen, your data cannot be accessed easily.