

HELPFUL REMINDERS FOR INTERNATIONAL TRAVEL

There is one rule for international travel, everything else is just a helpful tip to make the “one rule” more achievable. More fun!

The one rule: Make friends with the unexpected!

The following tips have been learned through our own experiences, friends, and other resources. We are sure that you know some things that we don't. Please email us and we can add those tips to the list or share at the January 5, 2027 meeting.

TRAINS, PLANES AND AUTOMOBILES

- Always build in extra time with travel. If able, arrive a day earlier than expected. Expect delays! Don't worry... it's all a part of your pilgrimage.
- Make sure your passport is up to date - VALID at least the 6 months following your trip. People have been refused entry on a flight due to expiration dates 6 months or less.
- Carry anything you need immediately, on your first days of travel, and/or on the plane with you (i.e., medications, hiking shoes, possibly a change of clothes, etc).
- When booking travel, remember that the European bus and rail systems are fantastic. Yet, you may not be able to book until you are 1-3 months out from your travels.
- When booking flights, double check the airline's baggage policies. More and more, airlines are charging extra for checking bags and some carriers are charging for carrying-on bags. Sometimes a cheaper flight ends up being much more expensive due to extra baggage fees.
- Review all travel and lodging reservations (outside of the pilgrimage) one month in advance - making sure all confirmations are lining up and still in order. (Recently, we found that we had booked two hotels in the same city for eight nights and forgot to cancel one. YIKES! Another time, we found we had not reserved a hotel when we got there. YIKES & YIKES) True, these discoveries invite us to notice “God is in all things.” But you may prefer less costly/ stressful ways to enjoy being with God.:-) Note: be especially careful with flights, hotels, and events booked on miles and third party sites
- Keep a copy of your itinerary and confirmation numbers in two locations (i.e. phone and paper).
- If your flight transfers in the United Kingdom, remember that they are no longer part of the EU. In both GB and your EU port of entry you will have to go through customs, security, and recheck your bags again. Allow for extra time.
This is true for your return trip as well, first GB, then the States.
- If possible, arrive in Italy a day or two early to get oriented and adjust to the time allowing extra time. Some people breeze through this, but for others, it takes a couple of days to adjust.

CASH/CREDIT CARDS/ATMs

- HEADS UP: smaller villages in Italy can be more cash-oriented or entirely cash. Carry Euro denominations of 5€, 10€, or 20€ notes (Start by bringing 50€ - 100€ and you can always stop at an ATM if needed later).
- YOU WILL WANT a stash of smaller denominations for drinks and incidentals in the event merchants will not take cc's for small purchases.
- YOU WILL NEED small denominations (2€ - 4€) for local tourist taxes payable at hotels. Larger cities, such as Florence, may range as high as 8€
- YOU WILL WANT small denominations, anywhere from 1€-10€ for restaurant service. There is not a tipping culture. That said, you may want to show gratitude by rounding up the change or leaving a euro or two. For servers, it is not about the amount but about the recognition. 5€ or 10€ is reserved for rare service that is well above/exceptional/memorable service.
- Most payments in Italy are done by debit or credit card. This is the standard payment method used for basically all stores and shops. Visa and Mastercard are your best options. Visa is the most accepted type of bank card in Italy.
- Dollars v. Euros: when using your Visa, you may be asked if you want to pay by Euros or US dollars, always choose Euros. The same is true for ATMs
- Check with your bank or AAA to inquire about rates for obtaining Euros. You will not need much cash. Often, it is best to withdraw cash from an ATM while in Europe (remember: select Euros), It is, however, can be helpful to have a bit of cash on you until you can withdraw cash.
- Transaction Fees: You may want to look into your bank and credit cards to understand their fee structure on purchases (if any) and ATM usage. Some banks waive fees for ATM transactions on affiliate banks. While others will charge fees on both ends.

Security

- One should be alert in the same way one would be at home in the States. NOTE: It is much more difficult to piece things back together overseas.
- As in the States, pickpocketing or petty theft is a thing. Just be aware, not afraid.
- As in the States, be aware of your surroundings and your cash, cards, etc. Similarly, if traveling on buses and trains, be aware and wise.
- Do not leave your valuables unattended.
- In large cities, it is recommended that you use a money belt, etc. to store your cash, cards and passport.

NOTE: Keep a photocopy of your passport and any cards you are bringing with you. You will want to ask another person on the trip to hold your copies. Additionally, leave a copy with your emergency contact person (or another trusted person).

PHONES & COMMUNICATIONS

We strongly recommend that you prayerfully consider what type of relationship you want to have with your devices while traveling. There is no right or wrong answer. Some will want to stay in touch with people at home. Others will not want to be distracted by work, apps, etc. Others, like one dear friend of ours, will purchase a brand new iPhone for the trip and lose it on day two of a month-long pilgrimage. All is gift! And this pilgrim received the gift of letting go...

- KNOW YOUR PLAN and plan accordingly, to avoid unnecessary, unwanted fees.
- Many cafes, hotels, etc. provide wifi, however, you'll want to have coverage for when you are walking.
- GPS is valuable on the trail. It is, generally, always running in the background without fees. But, according to your coverage it may or may not interact with whatever mapping service you want to rely on. (Dan prefers to rely on waymarkers. I mean, it worked for centuries before I-phones. What could possibly go wrong?)
- WhatsApp is vital when traveling. Many travel companies, restaurants, hotels, etc. utilize WhatsApp for communication. It's also a great way to stay in contact with new friends from all over the world. **As a group, we will communicate via a WhatsApp group chat, as will our company in Italy.**

Language:

- Download the Google Translate app version to your phone that is accessible offline.
- If you want to practice your Italian, you may want to download the Babbel or Duolingo free app which will help you learn a new language. Note: You may encounter different dialects, but, in general, you will have better recognition of words and phrases.
- In smaller villages, they will most likely only speak Italian, but between using the Google Translator App and pointing (with a touch of basic Italian), you will experience the adventure as more than doable! (Ask Dan and I about Spain!)
 - **Tuscan** — the area around La Verna (our starting point) is historically Tuscan. Modern Tuscan speech is very close to standard Italian, so it's generally easy for Italian speakers from elsewhere to understand.
 - **Umbrian varieties** — as you move toward Assisi, you'll hear regional Umbrian speech. Again, it is essentially Italian with regional pronunciation and vocabulary rather than something you'll need to learn.
 - **Local accents** can become stronger in small villages among older residents.
 - One interesting point: **Tuscan was hugely influential in the development of modern standard Italian**, largely because of the prestige of writers such as Dante, Petrarch, and Boccaccio.
 - In general, you will hear variations of Italian along the way. **You don't need to worry about a language barrier on the La Verna–Assisi route.** Learning a few basic Italian phrases will be much more useful than trying to learn the local dialects.