

Traveling Roths

Documenting the travels of the Roth Family: Zoe, Tristan, Jennifer, and Dave, of North Carolina, USA

Blog post from Thursday, April 15, 2010

Available at: <http://travelingroths.com/> , reprinted with permission.

Travel Tips for Twelve-Year-Olds



The daughter of a friend of mine is going on a two-week trip to England and France this summer through a program called People to People,

People to People Ambassador Programs offers extraordinary, life-changing educational travel opportunities for students, athletes, educators, and professionals. With nearly 50 years of experience, more than 400,000 alumni, and destinations on seven continents, People to People is the world's most recognized and respected educational travel provider.

She asked me if I had any travel advice for her. I gave it a lot of thought, and wrote down what I could think of that would be useful to a 12-year-old. Not wanting to waste all that effort, I've posted it here as well.

International Travel at your age is tremendous, worthwhile experience that you'll probably cherish your entire life. You can't even begin to imagine the benefits you'll reap from this trip, and hopefully the many that will follow. You've made an excellent choice to take advantage of this opportunity, and becoming a comfortable traveler now will really help you later on too. You're on a guided tour, so you're not going to have to worry about transportation, translation, fees, most meals, lodging, etc. But there are still some things that can make a big difference during your trip.

Packing

You're going to over-pack. I'm sure your tour leaders will have provided a suggested packing list, and I suspect that there's too much stuff on it. They'd rather that you were over-prepared than overburdened with having to haul way too much gear around. But keep in mind that you will be responsible for packing, unpacking, carrying, stowing, retrieving, loading, unloading, dragging, and carrying this luggage around for the duration of your trip, and the more you bring, the more miserable the whole process of dealing with your stuff will be. For a fun exercise, I suggest packing up everything you're planning on taking on your trip, then get someone to take you and your luggage to the mall for the day. Make sure you're the only one who handles your luggage the whole time. Load it in the car, unload it at the mall, drag it around into stores, restrooms, restaurants, movies. . . . If after the end of the day you haven't completely rethought your packing strategy, then you're probably OK.



I suggest that for a two week trip to Europe in the summer, you can get by with one carry-on sized bag and a small backpack. Actually, I suggest you can get by with this strategy for pretty much any trip. Personally, I prefer a bag that does not have built-in wheels and a handle because they take up too much of the bag's available space. The MEI Voyageur is probably the ideal bag for this: <http://www.meivoyageur.com/> Once you have the bag, you should learn how to pack it. The best site I know of on the topic is One Bag <http://www.onebag.com/>



Food

You're not going to Europe to eat American food. Avoid it at all costs. It's only two weeks. Besides, the food is better in Europe anyway. Most of your meals are probably included in the tour, but if you have any on your own, you can eat a lot cheaper at a grocery store than a restaurant. When you're eating in somebody's home (which you should do every chance you get) try everything. Even if you think you don't like something, at least try it.



Buying Stuff

Don't buy anything in Europe that you can buy at home if you don't really need it right then: it costs more and you'll have to lug it around for the rest of your trip.

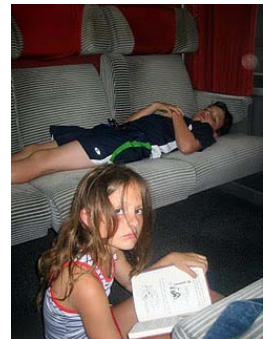
Don't get travelers checks. They're so last-century. Also, don't exchange money at a currency exchange place. You'll get ripped off on either the fees or the rate. Instead, get an ATM card and let your bank know where and when you're going so that they don't shut down your card thinking it's stolen. Get used to translating prices in your head, or make a little cheat sheet before you go. If you look at a price and think that \$1 = £1 = €1, you'll be in for a rude awakening when you run out of money a lot faster than you thought you would. (\$1 = £ 0.65 (65 pence) = €0.74 right now, or £1 = \$1.54 and €1 = \$1.36).

Memories

Get a camera and learn how to use it. A camera that takes AA batteries is a lot more convenient than having to bring a battery charger with you because you can buy spare AA batteries everywhere. Camera memory is also super cheap, so get more than you think you'll need. Take way more pictures than you think you should. . . every chance you get. You'll never wish you had taken fewer pictures. If you like to write, a journal is a great thing to have. In my opinion, the Moleskine journals are the best. You can get them at Barnes & Noble, Borders, and Amazon.

Advice from My Kids

I asked Tristan and Zoe what advice they would have for other kids traveling, and they recommended bringing plenty of entertainment - books, magazines, music, etc. When traveling with a group, you're going to have a lot of hurry up and wait time, so make sure you have something to entertain yourself with. Oh, and if you have the chance to use a clean, convenient bathroom, do it, even if you don't really need to. You never know when you'll find the next one.



Language

England is easy since you already speak English, but bear in mind that they call some things by different names than we do. French: As part of a tour, you're probably not going to need to be able to speak any French, but that doesn't mean that you shouldn't. You should at least learn a few common French phrases (yes, no, please, thank you, I would like. . . , where is the bathroom, etc.) Most French people you would encounter probably speak English, but they really, really appreciate your attempts to speak their language in their country.

Adapters/Converters

If you have to take anything that plugs in, you'll need an adapter and/or a converter because power outlets are different shapes in England and France and different voltages too. You'll probably only need an adapter since most electronics (iPod chargers, battery chargers, hair dryers) can run on either voltage automatically. Get one adapter that has the British and European plugs on it. If you use a dual voltage hair dryer, make absolutely sure that you switch the voltage over to 220V before you plug it in over there. It'll blow up if you don't.

General

Rick Steves, who travels for a living, has a huge amount of great advice:

http://www.ricksteves.com/plan/tips/tips_menu.htm

Try to blend in with the locals - do what they do, eat what they eat. Try not to be loud (Americans are really loud). Be adventurous. Be outgoing. Make new friends. Don't stress. Have fun!



-Dave

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