GoalTodo

How to plan an international trip: a new country in 16 weeks

Visit a new country

16 weeks · Mon, Nov 30 → Sun, Mar 21

Week by week

Tick a box each time you do a session.

Nov 30–Dec 6
Week 1

Make a shortlist

Pick the country

- [ ] Write down three countries you'd love to see, and what draws you to each
  20 min
- [ ] Read your government's travel advice for each one: safety, entry requirements, local laws and health
  1 hr
- [ ] Note a rough cost for each: getting there and back, a night's stay, and a day's food and local transport
  45 min

Done when: You have three countries written down, each with its travel advice level and a rough daily cost

Sticking point: Can't narrow it down? For a first trip, look for a shorter journey, simple entry rules and travel advice that asks for normal caution. You can go further next time.

Dec 7–13
Week 2

Choose, and check you can get in

Pick the country

- [ ] Choose one country, your rough dates and how long you'll stay
  30 min
- [ ] Check its entry rules on your government's country page and on the destination's own official government site: visa or entry permit, and how long your passport must be valid
  45 min
- [ ] Check your passport's expiry date: aim for at least six months after the day you come home, which covers most countries' rules. For Europe's Schengen area, it must also have been issued less than 10 years before you arrive
  5 min
- [ ] Look up the country's health page for recommended vaccines and malaria tablets
  20 min
- [ ] Write a rough budget for the whole trip, then divide it by the months until you go
  45 min

Done when: Your country and rough dates are chosen, you know its entry rules, and you have a total for the trip and a monthly amount to save

Sticking point: If your passport runs out within six months of your return, or is too old for your destination's rules, switch to the I don't have a passport yet level. That level gives renewing the same weeks as applying for a first passport. If you need a visa, note how long it takes now.

Dec 14–20
Week 3

Book the time off and start saving

Book the time off

- [ ] Ask for the time off at work, for your dates plus a day either side if you can
  15 min
- [ ] Add a trip line to your budget and move this month's amount into savings on payday
  30 min
- [ ] Book a travel health appointment with your doctor, practice nurse, pharmacist or a travel clinic, ideally 12 weeks and at least 6 weeks before you leave
  10 min

Done when: Your time off is approved in writing, your first trip saving has moved, and your health appointment is booked

Sticking point: Dates not approved yet? Don't pay for anything you can't get back until they are.

Dec 21–27
Week 4

Watch the prices

Easier week

- [ ] Look up travel there and back and a few places to stay for your dates. Note the prices and the cancellation terms
  30 min
- [ ] Check your trip savings against your plan
  10 min

Done when: You have two or three options for the journey and for a place to stay, with prices and cancellation terms

Dec 28–Jan 3
Week 5

Your travel health appointment

Travel health

- [ ] Go to your travel health appointment. Take your dates, every country you'll visit or pass through, what you'll do, where you'll stay, your medicines and any vaccine records
  30 to 60 min
- [ ] Put any further doses or follow-up appointments in your calendar
  5 min

Done when: You've had the appointment, and any vaccines or tablets you need are started or booked

Sticking point: Even if you think you need nothing, go. Some countries ask for proof of vaccination at the border, and some vaccines need more than one dose, weeks apart.

Jan 4–10
Week 6

Book the journey and the insurance

Book the trip

- [ ] Book your travel there and back. Check the names match your passport exactly
  1 to 2 hrs
- [ ] Buy travel insurance the same week. Read the exclusions before you pay
  1 hr

Done when: Your journey there and back is booked, and your travel insurance policy is in your inbox

Sticking point: Before you buy insurance, check it covers the whole trip, every country on your route, hospital treatment, getting you home on medical grounds, any medical conditions you have and anything you plan to do.

Jan 11–17
Week 7

Book where you'll stay, and any visa

Book the trip

- [ ] Book where you'll stay, at least for your first nights
  1 hr
- [ ] Apply for your visa or entry permit if you need one, on the destination's official government site
  1 hr
- [ ] Write down your first night's address and how you'll get there from where you arrive
  15 min

Done when: Your first nights are booked, and any visa or entry permit is applied for, or you've checked you don't need one

Sticking point: Use the official site your government's travel advice links to for visas and entry permits, and save the confirmation with your documents.

Jan 18–24
Week 8

Check your savings

Easier week

- [ ] Compare what you've saved with your plan. If prices came in higher, raise the monthly amount now
  20 min
- [ ] Read your insurance policy wording once, start to finish, and note the 24-hour assistance number
  30 min

Done when: Your savings are on track, or you've changed the monthly amount so they will be

Jan 25–31
Week 9

Learn the basics

Easier week

- [ ] Read the local laws and customs section of the travel advice for your country
  30 min
- [ ] Learn a few words: hello, please, thank you, sorry, and the numbers one to ten
  10 min

Done when: You can say hello, please and thank you, and you know two local laws or customs that differ from home

Feb 1–7
Week 10

Sketch your days

Easier week

- [ ] List what you most want to see and do, and group it by area
  45 min
- [ ] Give each day one main thing, and leave at least one day free
  30 min

Done when: You have a rough plan for each day, with one day left free

Feb 8–14
Week 11

Sort out money abroad

Get ready

- [ ] Contact your bank: tell it your dates and countries, and ask what it charges for card payments and cash withdrawals abroad
  20 min
- [ ] Choose two ways to pay, such as a debit card and a credit card, to keep in different places when you travel
  10 min
- [ ] Work out a daily spending amount from what's left in your trip budget
  20 min

Done when: Your bank knows your dates, you know the fees on each card, and you have two ways to pay and a daily amount

Sticking point: Ask about fees on every card you might use, not just one, so you know which to use for what.

Feb 15–21
Week 12

Last savings check

Easier week

- [ ] Check your trip savings are where they need to be, and move any last amount
  20 min
- [ ] Confirm each booking: dates, names and what's included
  20 min

Done when: Your trip savings are complete and every booking is confirmed

Feb 22–28
Week 13

Copies and emergency numbers

Get ready

- [ ] Make copies of your passport, visa, insurance policy and bookings: one set to carry apart from the originals, and one to leave with someone at home
  30 min
- [ ] Write down your emergency numbers: the local emergency number, your insurer's 24-hour assistance line, your bank's lost-card line, and your country's embassy or consulate at your destination
  20 min
- [ ] Send your plans and where you're staying to someone at home
  10 min

Done when: Copies are made and shared, and your emergency numbers are written down and saved in your phone

Mar 1–7
Week 14

Phone, plugs and medicines

Get ready

- [ ] Check what your phone will cost to use abroad and choose a plan before you go
  20 min
- [ ] Check the plug type at your destination and get an adapter
  10 min
- [ ] Order repeat prescriptions so you have enough for the trip and for delays, and check the rules on taking your medicines into the country
  20 min

Done when: Your phone, plugs and medicines are sorted for the whole trip

Sticking point: Keep medicines in their original pharmacy packets, with copies of your prescriptions, in your hand luggage.

Mar 8–14
Week 15

The week before

Get ready

- [ ] Read your destination's travel advice again, and sign up for alerts: STEP if you're from the US, GOV.UK email alerts if you're from the UK, Smartraveller updates if you're from Australia
  20 min
- [ ] Pack from a list. Passport, documents, medicines and a change of clothes go in your hand luggage
  1 hr
- [ ] Get a little local currency for when you arrive
  15 min

Done when: You're signed up for alerts, your bag is packed, and you know exactly where your passport is

Mar 15–21
Week 16

Go

Go

- [ ] Check in for your journey and read the travel advice one last time
  15 min
- [ ] Go. Passport, insurance details, two ways to pay. Enjoy your first day somewhere new

Done when: You've arrived in a country you've never been to before

How the plan works

The plan follows the four steps on your goal board: pick the country, book the time off, book the trip, then go. Enter the day you leave on the plan page and the weeks count back from it, so the last week is the week you go.

The first weeks are decisions: a shortlist, then one country, rough dates and a budget, then your time off agreed and your saving started. Then the bookings: a travel health appointment, the journey and the insurance in the same week, then where you'll stay and any visa. The rest is getting ready: money, copies of your documents, emergency numbers, phone and medicines, and the week before.

Most weeks take one to three hours. The easier weeks (watching prices, savings checks, learning the basics, sketching your days) are the ones a shorter plan leaves out. It never leaves out the passport, the health appointment, the bookings or the last weeks.

A few things have lead times, and the plan is built around them:

- Travel health. TravelHealthPro, the UK's national travel health service, advises an appointment ideally at least four to six weeks before you travel. Australia's healthdirect says at least 6 weeks, and preferably 12. The full plan puts yours about 11 weeks before you leave, and the shortest plan at least 6.
- Your passport. Book no travel until it's in your hands.
- Insurance. Buy it as soon as you've booked the journey: the plan puts both in the same week.

This plan is general guidance, not legal, medical or financial advice. It never tells you which company to travel, stay or insure with.

Which level to pick

- I have a valid passport: and it's valid for at least six months after the day you come home. 16 weeks, or 11 at the shortest.
- I don't have a passport yet: you've never had one, it has expired, or it runs out within six months of your return, so renewing counts. 18 weeks, or 14 at the shortest. You apply in week 2 and book the journey about seven weeks later, once the passport has arrived.

How long a passport takes depends on where you live and the time of year. In the UK, HM Passport Office says you'll usually get it within 3 weeks. In the US, a first passport is applied for in person at a passport acceptance facility, often a library or post office. The State Department says routine processing takes 4 to 6 weeks, plus up to 2 weeks for your application to reach it and 2 more for the passport to reach you, so allow about 10 weeks, or pay for expedited service. Times change through the year: check the current ones at travel.state.gov (https://travel.state.gov/content/travel/en/passports.html) before you choose your date. In Australia, check passports.gov.au (https://www.passports.gov.au/). In Canada, check the passport pages on canada.ca (https://www.canada.ca/en/immigration-refugees-citizenship/services/canadian-passports.html).

The plan allows about seven weeks between applying and booking (six in the shortest plan). That fits the UK's usual 3 weeks, but not US routine service. If the current wait where you live is longer, pay for a faster service, or choose a later date and apply for your passport now, before the plan's weeks begin.

The 12-month timeline

The plan's weeks cover the last four months or so. If your trip is further off, here's what to do when, counted back from the day you leave. The plan page starts your weeks at the right time.

- 12 months before: pick a region, or a few countries you'd love to see. Check your passport's expiry date. Add a trip line to your budget and start saving every month.
- 9 months before: read the official travel advice for your shortlist, including the entry rules. If you'll need a visa, find out how long it takes.
- 6 months before: choose the country and rough dates. Apply for or renew your passport if you don't have one, or if yours runs out within six months of your return. If your workplace books holidays early, ask for the time off now.
- 4 months before (4 and a half if you need a passport): start this plan.
- About 3 months before: your travel health appointment, then the journey and the insurance, booked the same week.
- 2 months before: where you'll stay, and any visa or entry permit.
- 1 month before: tell your bank, check your card fees and choose two ways to pay.
- 2 to 3 weeks before: copies of your documents, emergency numbers, phone, plugs and medicines.
- The week before: read the travel advice again, sign up for alerts, and pack.
- The day: go.

Starting to save 12 months out means each month's amount is about a third of what it would be with 4 months to go.

Before you start

- Pregnant, or living with a health condition? TravelHealthPro advises an earlier appointment with your GP, specialist or midwife, even if you won't need vaccines. Book it as soon as you've chosen the country.
- Tell your insurer about any medical conditions, including ones still being investigated. GOV.UK's travel insurance guidance warns that leaving one out may invalidate your policy.
- Check the official advice before you fall for a country. If your government advises against travel to a place, your insurance may not cover you there.
- Pay for the trip from savings, not debt. If you'd need to borrow, or you're behind on bills, start with the Keep a budget plan. Keep your trip money apart from any emergency fund, so the trip never empties your safety net; the Build an emergency fund plan helps you build one. If you pay for bookings by credit card, pay the bill in full when it comes.

Picking the country

Start with your own government's travel advice. Each country page covers safety, entry requirements, local laws and health:

- US: the State Department's travel advisories (https://travel.state.gov/content/travel/en/traveladvisories/traveladvisories.html), from level 1 (exercise normal precautions) to level 4 (do not travel)
- UK: the FCDO's foreign travel advice (https://www.gov.uk/foreign-travel-advice) on GOV.UK
- Australia: Smartraveller (https://www.smartraveller.gov.au/)
- Canada: travel advice and advisories (https://travel.gc.ca/travelling/advisories)

Then check the entry rules twice: on your government's page and on the destination's own official government site. Look for whether you need a visa or an online entry permit (such as the US ESTA or the UK

ETA, which most visitors without a visa need), how long your passport must be valid, and any vaccination certificate. Rules change, so check again before you book and the week before you go.

For a first trip, easy beats far. A shorter journey, simple entry rules, somewhere you know someone, or a language you've started (the Learn a language plan pairs well with this one) all make a first trip abroad simpler.

Budgeting and saving for the trip

Write the whole trip down, not just the journey and the room:

- travel there and back, and to and from the airport or station
- where you'll stay
- food, local transport and things to do, per day
- travel insurance
- passport, visa or entry permit fees
- travel vaccines and medicines: some aren't free, so ask the cost when you book the appointment
- phone and data abroad
- a buffer for the unexpected

Save every month. Divide the total by the months until you go, and make it a line in your budget. Move it on payday along with your other savings, the same way the Keep a budget plan works, and check it in the savings weeks. If prices come in higher than your rough budget, raise the monthly amount straight away rather than at the end.

Money abroad

- Tell your bank your dates and countries, so it doesn't freeze your cards when they're used abroad.
- Ask about fees for every card you might use: for paying in shops and for taking out cash.
- Carry two ways to pay, such as a debit card and a credit card, and keep them in different places, so one lost bag or blocked card doesn't leave you stuck.
- Have a little local currency for when you arrive.
- Save your bank's lost-card number in your phone and on paper, with your other emergency numbers.

Travel insurance: what to look for

Buy it as soon as you've booked the journey. Before you pay, check it covers:

- the whole length of your trip
- every country you'll visit, including any you only pass through
- treatment in hospital, emergency transport, and getting you home on medical grounds
- any medical conditions you have, declared in full
- everything you plan to do: some sports and activities need extra cover
- a 24-hour assistance line

Read the exclusions. GOV.UK lists common ones: events after drinking too much or taking drugs, places the government advises against travelling to, riding mopeds or quad bikes, and adventure sports.

Travelling from the UK to the EU or Switzerland? A GHIC gives you state healthcare there, but it isn't a replacement for travel insurance.

Take your policy number and the insurer's emergency number with you, and share them with someone at home and anyone you're travelling with.

Travel health

▪ At the appointment, the clinician will ask about your health, your medicines, every country you'll visit or pass through, when and for how long, what you'll do, where you'll stay, and your previous vaccines. Take that list with you.

▪ Some countries require proof of vaccination before they let you in. If you get a vaccination certificate, keep it with your passport.

▪ Medicines travel in their original pharmacy packets, with copies of your prescriptions and enough for delays. Check the rules on taking them into your destination.

▪ On a long journey, drink plenty and move your legs often to lower the risk of blood clots.

▪ After you're home, if you get a fever or feel seriously unwell, get medical help quickly and say where you've been.

Country health pages: TravelHealthPro (https://travelhealthpro.org.uk/countries) (UK), and healthdirect's travel vaccinations page (https://www.healthdirect.gov.au/travel-vaccinations) (Australia).

Documents and emergencies

▪ Copies of everything: passport, visa, insurance and bookings. Carry one set apart from the originals and leave one with someone at home.

▪ Emergency numbers: the local emergency number, your insurer's 24-hour line, your bank's lost-card line, and your country's embassy or consulate at your destination.

▪ Sign up for alerts. US citizens can enrol in STEP, the State Department's free Smart Traveler Enrollment Program: you get alerts for your destination, and the embassy can reach you in an emergency. From the UK, sign up for GOV.UK email alerts for your country's travel advice. From Australia, subscribe to Smartraveller updates.

▪ Someone at home should know where you're staying and when you're due back.

Common mistakes

▪ Booking before the passport arrives, or without checking how long it must be valid.

▪ Leaving the health appointment too late. If you're short of time, go anyway: TravelHealthPro says a last-minute appointment is still worth it.

▪ Buying insurance late, or without reading it. GOV.UK advises buying it as soon as possible after booking your trip.

▪ Leaving out the extra costs: visas, vaccines, insurance, phone and getting to the airport add up.

▪ A name on the booking that doesn't match the passport. Check every letter.

▪ Packing every day full. Leave a free day, for rest and for the things you find when you're there.

The week you go

▪ Read the travel advice one last time for any change to the entry rules or safety.

▪ Hand luggage: passport, copies, insurance details, medicines, two ways to pay, chargers and a change of clothes.

▪ Know your first steps: how you'll get from where you arrive to your first night's address.

▪ Then go. Take the first day slowly, and say hello in the local language.

When you're back, the Try 12 new things plan keeps the habit of new experiences going, and the Sleep under the stars plan is a different kind of adventure.

If you fall behind

Missed 1 week: Do this week's tasks and last week's together. If you missed a booking week, do the booking first: the passport, the health appointment and the insurance can't wait.

Missed 2 weeks: Check the three things with lead times: your passport, a health appointment at least 6 weeks before you leave, and any visa. Do those first. Leave out the easier weeks you missed.

Missed 3 weeks: Enter your departure date on the plan page again. If it says tight, the plan leaves out the easier weeks for you. If nothing is booked yet and it says not safe, choose a later date.

Missed 4 or more weeks: Already booked and short of time? Do only the core weeks: passport, health appointment, insurance, money, copies and the week before. If the health appointment window has passed, still go: a last-minute appointment is worth having.

Sources

HM Passport Office (GOV.UK)
`https://www.gov.uk/government/organisations/hm-passport-office/about-our-services`
“You’ll usually get your passport within 3 weeks.”

HM Passport Office (GOV.UK)
`https://www.gov.uk/government/organisations/hm-passport-office/about-our-services`
“Do not book travel until you have a valid passport - your new passport will not have the same number as your old one.”

USAGov
`https://www.usa.gov/apply-adult-passport`
“You must apply in person at a passport acceptance facility for a new passport.”

USAGov
`https://www.usa.gov/apply-adult-passport`
“The time it takes for each varies throughout the year, and there may be additional fees.”

USAGov
`https://www.usa.gov/travel-advisory`
“Before planning your trip outside the U.S., you can find out if there are any travel advisories in your destination country.”

USAGov
`https://www.usa.gov/travel-advisory`
“The Smart Traveler Enrollment Program (STEP) is a free service from the U.S. Department of State.”

USAGov
`https://www.usa.gov/travel-advisory`
“When you enroll and register for a trip, you will receive emails with news, alerts, and travel advisories about the location.”

Foreign, Commonwealth & Development Office (GOV.UK)
`https://www.gov.uk/guidance/foreign-travel-insurance`
“You should buy your travel insurance as soon as possible after booking your trip.”

Foreign, Commonwealth & Development Office (GOV.UK)
`https://www.gov.uk/guidance/foreign-travel-insurance`
“Read the small print and familiarise yourself with any exclusion clauses for the policy.”

Foreign, Commonwealth & Development Office (GOV.UK)
`https://www.gov.uk/guidance/foreign-travel-insurance`
“When you travel, make sure you take your insurance policy details with you, including the policy number and your insurer’s emergency assistance telephone number.”

TravelHealthPro (National Travel Health Network and Centre)
`https://travelhealthpro.org.uk/factsheets/general-travel-advice`
“If you need vaccines or malaria tablets, make an appointment with your GP surgery, pharmacist or travel clinic as soon as possible, ideally at least four to six weeks before travel.”

TravelHealthPro (National Travel Health Network and Centre)
`https://travelhealthpro.org.uk/factsheets/general-travel-advice`
“A last-minute appointment is still valuable even if you are travelling at very short notice.”

TravelHealthPro (National Travel Health Network and Centre)
`https://travelhealthpro.org.uk/factsheets/general-travel-advice`
“Always travel with medicines in their original pharmacy packets, along with copies of prescriptions.”

healthdirect Australia
`https://www.healthdirect.gov.au/travel-vaccinations`
“You should see your doctor at least 6 weeks (and preferably 12 weeks) before you leave Australia.”

healthdirect Australia
`https://www.healthdirect.gov.au/travel-vaccinations`
“Some countries require proof of vaccination against certain diseases before you can visit.”

Hamilton College
`https://www.hamilton.edu/academics/offcampusstudy/before-you-leave/predeparture-checklist`
“If you already have a passport, make sure it is valid for at least six months beyond the date of return.”

Hamilton College
`https://www.hamilton.edu/academics/offcampusstudy/before-you-leave/predeparture-checklist`
“Inform your bank that you will be studying abroad and traveling so that they do not put a security freeze on your ATM, debit, or credit cards.”

Hamilton College
`https://www.hamilton.edu/academics/offcampusstudy/before-you-leave/predeparture-checklist`
“Also, make sure to find out about any international transaction fees that they may charge.”

University of Arkansas Study Abroad
`https://studyabroad.uark.edu/explore/preparing-for-travel-text-only.php`
“It’s never too early to start saving for your trip.”

University of Arkansas Study Abroad
`https://studyabroad.uark.edu/explore/preparing-for-travel-text-only.php`
“You’ll want to check on this early enough, so you have plenty of time to go through the process before your planned departure date.”

University of Arkansas Study Abroad
`https://studyabroad.uark.edu/explore/preparing-for-travel-text-only.php`
“Make copies of all your important documents (passport, Visa, credit cards) make sure you have copies with you and leave a few with your emergency contacts back home.”

U.S. Department of State
`https://travel.state.gov/en/passports/apply/help/processing-time.html`
“Routine processing takes 4-6 weeks.”

U.S. Department of State
`https://travel.state.gov/en/passports/apply/help/processing-time.html`
“It may take up to 2 weeks for your application to get to us. Add another 2 weeks for you to get your new passport after we mail it.”

U.S. Department of State
`https://travel.state.gov/en/passports/apply/help/processing-time.html`
“Expedited processing takes 2-3 weeks.”

FCDO (GOV.UK)
`https://www.gov.uk/foreign-travel-advice/france/entry-requirements`
“have a ‘date of issue’ less than 10 years before the date you arrive”

Home Office (GOV.UK)
`https://www.gov.uk/guidance/apply-for-an-electronic-travel-authorisation-eta`
“Most visitors need an ETA or a visa.”

U.S. Customs and Border Protection
`https://www.cbp.gov/travel/international-visitors/esta`
“To travel under the VWP, travelers must have an e-Passport and submit an ESTA application that includes biographic information and responses to VWP eligibility questions.”

This plan online	`https://goaltodo.com/visit-a-new-country`
Reach it with others on Welang	`https://welang.com/goals/visit-a-new-country`
Reach it on your own in HourLife	`https://www.hourlife.com`

This plan is a guide, not medical advice. See a doctor before starting if you have a health condition, are pregnant, or haven't exercised in a long time.