

The Ultimate Trip Planning Roadmap

by HaveitYourOwnWayHolidays

Phase 1: Drafting Your Dream Destination

6 (experienced) - 14 (novice) months ahead

Make your destination wish list. Ask yourself, "If you can only do this one trip, what are your 'must see' world sites?"

Wishlist created.

Phase 2: Budget-driven, schedule-smart travel planning

6 = 13 months ahead. Establish a firm budget and schedule to realistically define your destination options and the duration of your stay at each location.

What is your Budget total: \$ _____

Accommodation: 25 – 40% \$ _____

Flights: 20 – 30 % \$ _____

Food & Dinning: 10 – 25% \$ _____

Local Transportation: 10 – 20% \$ _____

Activities & Sightseeing: 10 – 15% \$ _____

Contingency Fund: 5 – 15% \$ _____

Travel Insurance: 5 – 15% \$ _____

Budget accomplished.

Phase 3: Map Your Journey: From Departure to Return

6 – 12 months ahead. Based on your holiday duration, outline a travel itinerary. Start with a major city directly accessible from your home airport, include your 'wish list' destinations with estimated stays, note connecting countries, and finish at the airport for your return flight.

Delete any destinations on the Safety Advisory page.

Are you OK with required inoculations? Check, remove or keep if you are aware.

Are any of your destinations high risk and may require a guide? Are they worth it?

Locate your arrival city. Label it on your map (digital or paper)

Locate your departure city. Label it.

Look for Wishlist 'hub' cities/towns in between, connecting these in a continuous path.

Download train maps for each country you are planning to cross through.

At each conjunction, confirm with Rome2Rio that it is possible to connect these two points, with either train, bus, flight or ferry.

Adjust 'hub' cities by comparing the train maps with possible connections.

Use the internet to estimate the number of days recommended to visit each city. Make a note for each 'hub' how many days you would like to stay.

- Look around your 'hub' cities for day trips (within one hour's transportation) and add 1 day for each to your estimated stay at the 'hub' city.
- Add 1 day to your holiday tally per transport connection to each hub city.
- Tally up your estimate.

Phase 4: Optimal Timing: Weather, Cost & Crowds.

6 - 12 months ahead

Plan the ideal trip by researching the shoulder season to balance comfortable weather, lower costs, and smaller crowds, while verifying flight availability before finalizing bookings.

Make a decision: your trip will start in which season, and in a specific month.

April – May (Shoulder season, spring)

June – August (Peak season, summer holidays)

September – October (Shoulder season, fall)

November – March (Off Season – Winter)

*Ensure that any seasonal activities and tourist sites are available during your selection.

Which month and year do you intend to travel: M: _____ Y: 20_____

Now, take your estimated travel days and plot them onto a calendar. As you finalize your schedule, consider these key adjustments:

1. **Avoid Sunday travel:** Transportation options are often reduced. While booking is possible, it is better to avoid it.
2. **Avoid Friday afternoons:** Expect high-volume traffic from locals and tourists. If you must travel on a Friday afternoon, absolutely book in advance and reserve seats if possible.
3. **Monitor European strikes:** Transportation strikes in Europe frequently occur on Saturdays. Be aware of potential disruptions if booking on these days.
4. **Mark local festivals:** Identify local festivals and mark them on your calendar. These events often bring heavy crowds, making transport difficult.

Essentially, we are adjusting the 'hub' city stays—adding or removing a day—to avoid scheduling travel days on Friday afternoons or Sundays.

With adjustments complete, you now have your travel dates—remember to check if you need to fly out the day before—and a confirmed return date. You should also know the duration of your stay at each hub town and the exact dates for booking transportation between them.

Flight date: _____

Return date: _____

Phase 5: Accommodation & Transportation

5.5 - 11 months ahead

Secure your accommodations by balancing budget with availability, prioritizing options with flexible or free cancellation for peace of mind. Carefully document the check-in and check-out dates for each stay. Note that your check-out date, transportation date, and the check-in date for your next accommodation will all overlap.

List is complete with Check-in and Check-out dates and confirmed check-out and check-in dates overlap.

Next, decide between an Airbnb and a hotel by comparing options for your specific dates. Analyze reviews, verify the location, check the total fees, and confirm amenities like WiFi and security. Although this requires research, the effort will pay off. Personally, I prefer staying near the town's 'hub' to step out for coffee and stroll through the historic center. However, I have friends that prefer quieter, off-centre locations, even if it means an hour's commute. Select your preferred accommodation now but prioritize options with free cancellation. I often find better deals or options through continued research later and cancel and rebook.

All accommodations booked... Pro tip: Double-check those overlapping check-in/out dates! I learned this the hard way, and let's just say begging Airbnb to change my booking dates was not on my bucket list.

Transportation Connections: Confirm the exact train, bus, ferry, or flight you will book. Consider key factors: what time are you willing to wake up? Account for prep time—I always allow 1.5 hours, especially with only one bathroom! Next, calculate your travel time from accommodation to the station, dock, or airport. If using public transport, I map it out, take screen captures, and rely on Google Maps' estimates; otherwise, factor in taxi or Uber time. Combining your prep and commute times ensures a confident, well-scheduled booking. Have your travel apps ready (Trainline, Trenitalia, Italo, SNCF Connect, Omio, etc.)

All transportation connections to 'hub' cities (hotel/Airbnb) rentals confirmed and noted, ready to be booked.

Phase 6: Flight, Insurance and Passports

5 - 10 months ahead

Time to book your flight, purchase your insurance, confirm your passport, and check for Entry Requirements.

Flights booked.

Comprehensive **travel insurance** purchased.

Passport is valid and extends at least 6 months past our trip dates. Apply if outdated.

Confirmed if **any specialized travel visas** are required for your journey. Apply for Visa entries.

Are any **vaccinations required?** Arrange for the necessary inoculations.

Phase 7: Attractions and Transportation

3 - 9 months ahead

Research top attractions and book along with trains, short-haul flights, buses and ferries.

- Short-haul flights** booked (if necessary).
- All transportation connections** to 'hub' cities (hotel/Airbnb) rentals confirmed, booked, printed (if possible) and uploaded to my phone apps.
- Book major activities/tours** and special restaurants.
- Get your vaccines.**
- Arranged accommodation** for pets, plants, mail, house-sitting, hold mail, putting out your garbage cans.

Phase 8: The Final Countdown

1 - 2 months ahead

- Notify bank(s)** all the cards you intend to take on the holiday.
- Digitize important documents.** Passports, driver's licence, credit cards, etc. Email yourself and have a copy on your phone.
- Send a copy** of your digitized documents to a trusted friend.
- Where possible, **print paper copies** of activity entrance tickets, boarding passes, booking confirmations, organize and place in a folder in your carry-on luggage.
- Organize your medication.** Literally count your pills! Make sure you will not run out, talk to your doctor about adding correcting a short fall.

2 - 3 Weeks ahead

- Purchase local currency.** If you are using a Wise card, load and convert.
- Monitor government travel advisories.**
- Check your destination local news.** Any potential strikes or dangerous weather forecasts.
- Download offline maps/apps**
- Start tentative packing.** Adjust as the days go by.
- Connect with hotel/AirB&B** about estimated arrival times.
- Confirm Reservations:** Double check times and dates, confirm all flights, accommodations, transportation, and tour bookings.
- Plan airport Transit:** Book airport parking or schedule a taxi/ride-share service.
- Secure Valuables:** Store important documents and sentimental items in a safe deposit box or hidden location.

1 – 2 Days ahead

- Clean/Secure Your Home:** trash, freezer, set light timers, run your dishwasher.
- Take **pets and plants** to their arranged caregivers.
- Luggage.** Final check!
- Check the news...** you may need last minute changes.
- Confirm** paperwork, passports, medication are in carry-on luggage.
- Prepare Electronics:** Charge all cameras, laptops, iPads, and power banks. Place all digital cables and chargers in your carry-on luggage.

24 Hours Before / Day of Departure

- Check-in & Digital Boarding Pass:** Check in for your flight and download your digital boarding pass to your phone.
- Clear the Fridge:** Eat or discard perishable food items. Empty all garbage cans in the house.
- Unplug and Secure:** Unplug non-essential electronics (toasters, TVs) and lock all windows and doors.
- Set the Thermostat:** Adjust the thermostat to save energy, but not so low/high that it risks frozen pipes or mold.

Have a Great trip... and do me a favor.... Check that your stove is turned off BEFORE you leave.

Just saying.

