

Currency Tips

While each traveler has unique needs, it's generally a good idea to carry some foreign currency cash. However, to limit your dependency on any one form of funds, a better, safer approach is to use a portfolio of payment products to cover your travel expenses. Those products include credit/debit cards, travelers checks and some US and foreign currency cash. Here are some guidelines on using those products — as well as safety and other travel finance concerns — for business and vacation travelers.

Cash

Take at least \$100 to \$300 worth of currency for the first country you plan to visit, so when you arrive you can pay for a taxi, tips and grab a quick meal, especially if you're on your way to a business meeting. When you're jet-lagged, the last thing you need is to stand in a long line and pay high commissions at an airport exchange window. Some countries also have exit fees and many of them require cash payment, so remember to keep some for your departure. Ask for some currency in small denominations, the equivalent of \$1 to \$10; cab drivers and food vendors might not accept large bills.

There are several ways to obtain this cash. Most banks — including all Country Club Bank locations — can buy and sell foreign currency with a few days' notice. The Plaza financial center has foreign currency on hand for customers who need same-day exchange service. Our other financial centers can take customer orders for foreign currency and have them available within one day.

Credit/Debit Cards

Paying with these cards allows you to minimize cash needs. Also, you'll normally get a favorable conversion rate because card issuers use a single exchange rate — usually close to wholesale — to process transactions. Keep in mind that while you may get a more favorable exchange rate when using a credit card, many credit card service providers charge an additional percentage fee of one to three percent. A three percent fee may make a difference on large ticket items.

If you plan to make cash advances with the cards, contact the issuer to ascertain if your Personal Identification Number (PIN) is in the proper format for the countries you are visiting. Four-digit numeric PINs are standard in most countries. If you have an alphabetic PIN, change it into numbers before leaving home. The exchange rate for credit card purchases is set on the day the purchase is processed, not the day the purchase is made. Finally, to minimize risk of theft or loss, take only the credit cards you will need during your trip.

Travelers Checks

These checks are insured and can be replaced if they're lost or stolen. How much should you bring? It depends on where you're going. Major cities have extensive networks of ATMs where cash can easily be obtained. In less-developed countries, you may need to rely more heavily on travelers checks and cash.

To protect against fluctuations in exchange rates, purchase travelers checks denominated in the country's currency. These are available in a number of major currencies and can be spent just like cash in the country you are visiting. This allows you to avoid exchange line hassles and save valuable travel time since the checks are already denominated in local currency. Your bank may need a few days' notice to fill the order, so it's wise to plan ahead.

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Travelers Checks Cont'd

For the best rate when exchanging travelers checks in U.S. dollars, cash the checks at a bank rather than a hotel, airport or train station. Also, many banks or exchange houses charge a fee for each U.S. dollar travelers check converted, so it can be to your advantage to use checks in high denominations. Be sure to write down the amount and payee of each check. You'll need that information if the checks are lost or stolen. One of the most valuable features of travelers checks is that they can easily be replaced if lost or stolen so they remain a highly secure way to handle your travel expenses.

ATMs

Today, ATMs circle the globe, making it much easier for travelers to obtain cash. The MasterCard/Cirrus network and the Visa/Plus Network each have approximately 530,000 ATMs worldwide, and major networks have Internet sites that list ATM locations by region. Both networks have machines in more than 100 countries. Cash at foreign ATMs is dispensed in the local currency and debited from your account in dollars.

Some international ATMs are available only during normal business hours, which vary from country to country. Also, most international ATMs do not permit transactions involving multiple accounts, so your transaction will be routed to your primary account. Be sure to test ATM cards before leaving the country and make sure you have a four-digit PIN for your card. Many ATMs outside the U.S. do not have letters on the keypad or the letters appear in a different order.

Also, find out what kind of fees your bank charges for using ATMs outside the country. They usually range from \$2 to \$5 per transaction — to reduce transaction charges, make larger withdrawals.

Safety

Before you leave home, make a list of account numbers of credit cards you plan to take, numbers of travelers checks and international telephone numbers for reporting cards and checks lost or stolen. Keep a copy of the list with you, and give one to a traveling companion and to someone at home whom you can call in case of trouble.

Keep cards in a safe place, where they won't bend or scratch. Never write a PIN on the card or on a piece of paper in your wallet or purse. Divide your money and travelers checks with a companion, if possible. That way, if yours are lost or stolen, your companion still has access to cash. When using ATMs, use the same caution you would when you're at home. Store your passport, airline tickets, extra travelers checks and other must-haves in a secure place, and carry only the cash you need for each day's outing.

Heading Home

Once you return, you can exchange leftover paper currency. However, use up foreign coins because U.S. banks won't buy them. Keep your exchange receipts until you get home — some countries require visitors to produce an exchange receipt if they wish to convert local currency when they depart the country.



Where roots run deep, relationships grow strong.