

THE COMPLETE TRIP PLANNING GUIDE

THE SECRETS TO PLANNING

How to travel with
a small budget

LEARN TO VALUE TRAVEL

Get the best bang for
your travel buck

TRAVEL TIPS, TRICKS & HACKS

Make traveling much
easier for you



HI, I'M NICK

I'm here to help you get the most bang for your travel buck!

I was born in the Windy City of Chicago and I've been traveling the world since 2012. In my spare time, I enjoy photography and making inspirational travel films on [YouTube](#) for budget-minded travelers like me.

Follow along on my journey to see what I'm up to next on social media and my website, navigatornick.com.

I'll show you how to value travel!

Value traveling is getting the most bang for your travel buck.

-NAVIGATORNICK

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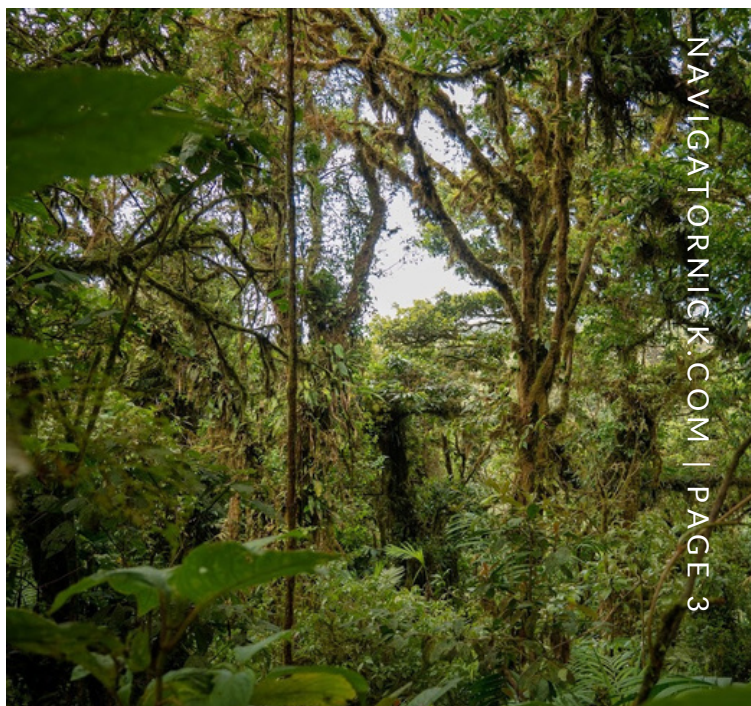
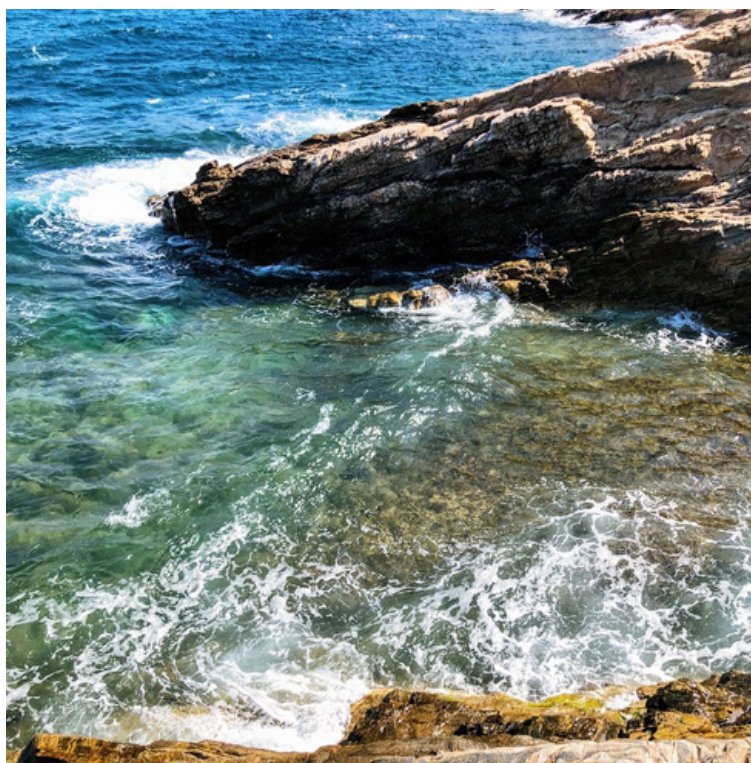
It's during this phase that you can picture what your dream getaway will look like.



WHERE TO GO?

Here are some questions to ask yourself.

- What time of year or month do I want to travel?
- How much time off do I have?
- Do I want to check out a new place or return somewhere I know and love?
- Do I have enough time and budget for international travel, including long flights and jet-lag recovery, or is a short road trip from home a better choice?
- Am I looking for beaches, hiking, biking, relaxation or adventure?
- What is my goal of the trip? Do I have a goal or do I want to just relax?
- Would I prefer to be surrounded by nature, spending time at the beach or immersed in urban culture?



1. CHOOSE YOUR DESTINATION

Start with your dream list of locations. Go old school, write them down or better yet get a dry erase board. First things first, decide on the time of year that you would like to travel because weather is always something to be aware of and could become a factor on your vacation outlook. It could even influence your plans. Another thing to consider is the cost of your destination during a specific time of year.

For example, going anywhere around Christmas or USA's spring break is going to be very expensive. And, the amount of time that you have off, will factor into how much time you have to travel. For example, unless you live close to Indonesia, you wouldn't want to travel to Bali for only a week. That's because you would spend so much time getting there,

you wouldn't have enough time to enjoy it before you had to head back home.

The time of year, the weather, climate and the cost of your trip surrounding those factors are the most important things to remember when planning your trip. Hawaii is an amazing value in April and September. Why? April and September are shoulder seasons for Hawaii. Actually, a lot of places are of great value during these months.

Traveler Tip: The shoulder season is a great way to save money!

Note, some destinations require you to bounce around, like Thailand. Other places, like Maui, have everything there is to do on one island. Keep this in the back of your mind during planning. Taking road trips and multi-destination getaways into account, be sure to allow enough time at each place. Plan on at least **two full days** at any major city hubs.



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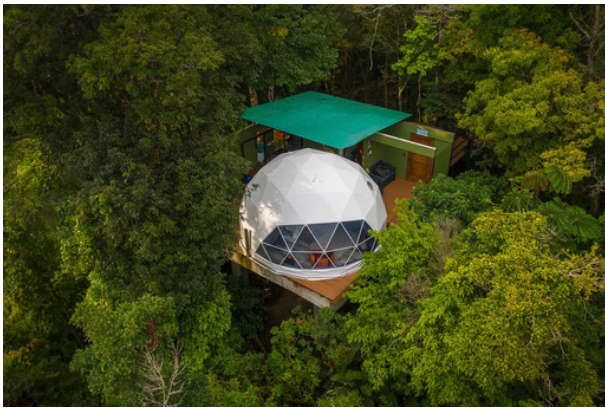
2. SETTING A BUDGET TO VALUE TRAVEL

Personally, I don't set a hard budget and here's why -I love traveling so much that I make it a priority in my life. But, I never go overboard with my spending because I've developed a system called "Value Traveling".

Value Traveling is getting the most bang for your travel buck.

For example, when I'm booking my accommodations -I absolutely love luxury Airbnbs, who doesn't? But I also know that when I travel, I won't be spending my entire week in the room. So, why spend all my money on a room, when I won't be in it?!

This is what I do.



[Chira Glamping Yurt, Monteverde, Costa Rica](#)

I book multiple hotels and/or AirBnbs, condos, etc., during my stay (depending on the length of my trip) in different areas of the city or country (depends on how small the country) at different price points. It's the best of both worlds!

I will stay in a Yurt on the side of a Costa Rican jungle for a couple of nights (read: expensive) and then I'll stay in a hostel with a private room for another few nights (cheap!). [Check out the Glamping Yurt here.](#)

When booking my accommodations, I will **never** sacrifice on clean sheets, but I will sacrifice on amenities to save some money.

In the end, you will notice that you will get **more value** for your money by splitting your time between accommodations – luxury and budget. This is one way to **Value Travel**.



[Kavalari Hotel, Santorini, Greece](#)

Another way to Value Travel is by **finding free things to do** in the destination of your choice. City tours, hiking, museums (on free days), parks, gardens, markets, festivals, concerts in the park, visiting scenic lookouts or religious monuments, and much more!

Each city has a plethora of free things to do, you just have to search them out in between your guided tours and/or day trips!

The last way to **Value Travel** is by travel hacking. Sign up for a [travel rewards credit card](#) to earn FREE flights or hotels during your stay!

To get an idea of how much your trip will cost, research prices for airfare, hotels, and activities before you make any nonrefundable purchases or reservations.

Continue onto the next page to learn more about value traveling...

Here are some tips for finding the lowest prices:

- **Consider using a travel credit card to earn points for your future trips.** The [Capital One Venture](#) card is a fantastic travel rewards credit card to start off with. If you're already a credit card user, try stepping up your game with the [Chase Sapphire Preferred](#) card.
- **Try multiple dates.** Flights are often cheaper in the shoulder- or off-season. Check prices for different dates within your travel window. A sale on airfare may help you afford a destination that's otherwise out of your reach.
- **Avoid holidays, festivals, and other large events.** Crowds can inflate hotel rates, overwhelm popular sights, and make it difficult—and costly—to get around.
- **Compare midweek to weekend prices.** Hotels in big cities tend to be more affordable on the weekends when the business travelers have gone home, while resorts in vacation destinations may be less expensive midweek.

Once you've estimated your trip's flight and accommodation cost, start considering the cost of transportation.

Public transportation or renting a car could eat into your overall budget. Make sure you have an efficient and reliable way to get around. If you're considering hopping from town to town, it's best to rent a car in most cases. For centrally located cities and small towns, plan to walk or use public transportation.

Next, get an idea of your food budget. I'm a foodie lover, so more likely than not, I'm finding new, fun, and interesting places to check out. Some people opt to save on their food budget and hit the local market or neighborhood grocery store. This can also be a really cool experience in itself.

Traveler Tip: You may find a really cheap and authentic souvenir at one of these local markets.



What's the point of traveling if you're not experiencing new things? Don't skimp on tour and excursion expenses. You will regret not taking that authentic tapas tour in Spain or sailing on the Mediterranean or horse back riding through the Costa Rican jungle.

Traveler Tip: It's a good idea to break up your excursions and line them up for at least every other day. Find free things (as mentioned on page 6) to do on non-tour days. This saves your budget and allows downtime throughout your stay. If your itinerary is jam-packed, that's not fun either.

3. RESEARCH AND BOOK FLIGHTS

It's important to check flight prices as soon as you decide where you're going.

Use Google Flights to search, compare and track flights.

Read More: [How to use Google Flights to find the Best Prices](#)

Track multiple flight options with just a click of a few buttons. A question I get often is, "when should I book?". There's not a science to booking the right flight, at the right time. However, there are patterns to be aware of. For example, flights May - August will always be higher, this is peak travel season.

USA Holidays will also be higher. Popular festival dates will be higher. Religious holidays will be higher. Shoulder season is the cheapest time to book (April, September, October). My favorite month to travel to Europe is September! Much of the summer crowds have gone away and the weather is still warm, but not too hot.

Generally, you should book international flights around 90+ days out. Domestic flights should be booked 45 - 60+ days out.



4. PLAN YOUR ACCOMMODATION

Once your flight is booked, it's best to start locking in accommodations.

Browse Hotels.com, AirBnb, HomeStay and other hotel, lodging, camping and resort locations. **Favorite, star, heart, or write down** your favorite places. Base your final decision on location, price, style, features and amenities, *in that order*.



If you're booking a cruise, **ask all the right questions before booking** with your travel agent, travel portal or company website.

- How big is the cruise ship?
- What does the cruise cost?
- How many passengers can it hold?
- Is the cruise line reputable?
- Does this specific cruise have good reviews? (Read them at CruiseCritic.com)

Before making any kind of payment, make sure you know the cancellation policy. And if you think you need it, purchase trip cancellation insurance. Most major travel credit cards include trip protection, such as the Capital One Venture card or the Chase Sapphire Preferred card.



Another reason to book using your Capital One or Chase card is collecting miles and points for future traveling. That's right, more benefits for you! Every time I travel, I'm already checking my new mileage chart for my next destination.

So, use those travel reward credit cards to get a jump start on your future travels. You may even get a round trip to Hawaii (or similar) for free by just using your sign-up bonus miles. I did!

The wildly gorgeous hotels, amazing infinity-pool-view villas, yurts on a seashore cliffside, glamping tents -will all book up far in advance. Generally, their prices don't swing and there will be no deals to be had. Expect to pay for what you get at these luxury and off the beaten path stays.

Reading reviews online of other travelers experiences should give you a good idea on the experience you can expect.

Last but not least, compare all of your favorites before making a final decision.

5. BOOK A RENTAL CAR, HIRE A DRIVER OR MAP PUBLIC TRANSPORTATION

I love the freedom of being able to come and go on my own time. The freedom to hit the open road to get away from the big city. The freedom to explore more than one place in a short amount of time.

Booking a rental car allows you to have flexibility. It also saves you time and it could save you cash.

Waiting around for public transportation is just not my thing. Guided group tours that make you wait for a packed bus full of tourists -nope, not for me!

However, if there are no other options, I digress. But otherwise, I'm renting my own car, scooter or moped to explore and make an adventure out of it.

When estimating your rental car costs, remember to add up tolls, fuel costs, parking fees, and charges for dropping off the vehicle in a different location, if applicable.

It's important to shop around for rental car deals. In some cases, it's possible to get a rental car for free with using points from your [CapitalOne](#) or [Chase Sapphire Preferred](#) credit card. It never hurts to sign up for the rental car programs that Enterprise, Hertz or Budget offer. Each company sends an email from time to time about current or upcoming specials. Every penny counts.

When choosing your rental car, make sure it has enough space for all passengers and all of your stuff. Consider price of the vehicle, model, and gas milage your top three priorities. If you know you're going to be in a muddy situation or crossing a stream or two (literally), camping or off-roading, make sure to get something with four wheel drive and height clearance.

Traveler Tip: Most rental vehicles outside the US are only offered in a manual transmission. Automatic transmissions are harder to find and book up much further in advanced, not to mention they are more expensive.

Before you rent a car, scooter or motorcycle in another country, you will need to apply and purchase an IDP. **An IDP is an International Driver's Permit.**

If you're outside your home country and you don't know the local laws, read up on a few of the important ones. You will feel more comfortable on the road.

Otherwise, sit back, relax and hire a private driver or use public transportation.

So, when does public transportation make sense? It makes sense when you're in a major city where parking is scarce. Usually the major cities will have some sort of fastpass card or bus/train pass. You pay for a card and get so many times to ride either the bus or the train for a smaller fee, rather than paying for individual rides. Europe is famous for it's great infrastructure and public transportation systems.



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RENTING A CAR

If you want to avoid being stuck with a tour group, or waiting around for public transportation, I highly suggest renting a car.

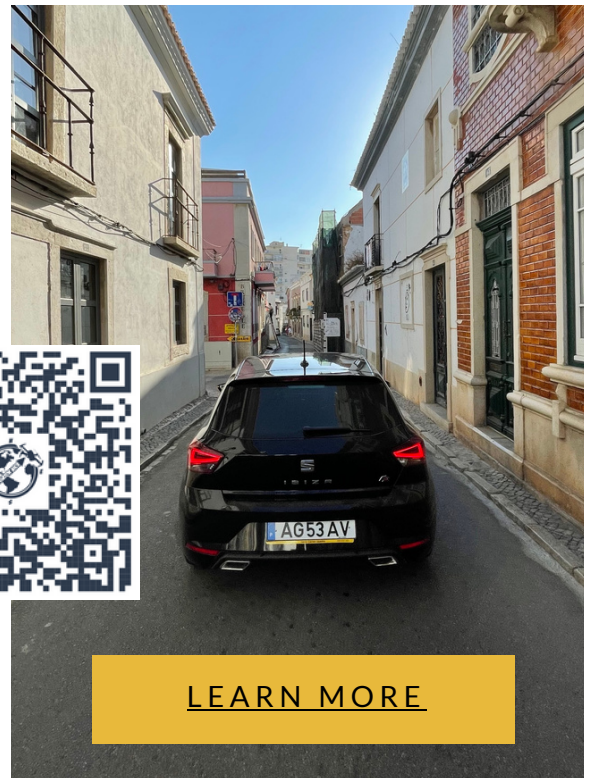
DiscoverCars.com offers no hidden costs, 24/7 support and 100% free cancellation.

You can compare major car brands like Hertz, Budget, AVIS, Enterprise, EuropeCar, Alamo, SIXT and many others.

Having your own ride to get around will let you explore different towns.

Pick up your car directly from the airport and off you go!

If you plan to rent a car in another country, it's recommended that you get an International Driving Permit in advance of your trip.



[LEARN MORE](#)

These are issued through agencies like AAA (US), CAA (Canada), the UK post office, and AAA Australia. Cost varies by country from about \$5 to \$25, and IDPs are valid for one year. EU/UK law requires foreign drivers to carry an IDP in addition to a driver's license.



World Travel Tech Awards - World's Best Car Rental Booking Website 2022



World Travel Tech Awards - World's Best Car Rental Booking App 2022



Magellan Awards Gold Winner 2022



Travel & Hospitality Awards 2021



FT 1000: Europe's Fastest Growing Companies - Top 300 Companies 2021



FT 1000: Europe's Fastest Growing Companies - Top 100 Companies 2020



Uzakrota Travel Awards - World's Leading Car Rental Website 2022

MY FAVORITE TRAVEL CREDIT CARDS FOR BEGINNERS



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7. BOOK EXCURSIONS & PLAN ADVENTURES

You could say this is the home stretch and the most fun part in the planning process.

It's during this phase that you can begin to paint a picture on what your dream getaway will look like on a day to day basis.

And, while there are a hundred ways to bake a cake, this is all up to you on what you want to experience.

When I have a destination in mind, it's usually because I have some must-do adventures that I want to tackle. This is why I chose my destination in the first place.

If you're looking for ideas, [GetYourGuide.com](https://www.getyourguide.com) can help you out. Another idea is to scour Instagram using the destination hashtag to see what other people are doing. Because, if you didn't photograph it and post it on Instagram, did it really happen?

When I'm traveling, I like to explore as much as possible so generally my days are full with adventure, with little down time.

This plan isn't for everybody though, so think about what activities excite you the most. It's not a terrible idea to dedicated down time either. Balance is key.

Leave space in your plans for power naps, unexpected discoveries, and spur-of-the-moment detours. From the moment I start planning a trip, I jot down all my ideas in Apple Notes, Google Drive, etc. This idea list is also my mobile itinerary. I always refer to it abroad and use it as a guide. I like to go further into detail in my trip notes by making subheadings for things like food, photo spots or a cultural experience.



8. GATHER DOCUMENTATION

At least six months before your departure, make sure your ID and other necessary documents are in order.

Driver's license: Most of the time, you can leave this at home. However, if you are renting a car, you will need to show it to your agency. Also, if you lose your passport, this is a good second form of identification.

Passport: Applying for or renewing a passport typically takes six to eight weeks, sometimes longer. However, you can pay an additional \$60 expedited service fee to get it renewed in two to three weeks, if desired. If you plan to travel outside the U.S., you need a passport. Make sure your passport will not expire for at least six months after your trip is scheduled to end. Some countries also require passports to have one to two blank pages for entry.

Visas: If you're traveling to another country, you may need to apply for a tourist visa. This could require paying a visit, or sending your passport, to a foreign embassy or consulate in the U.S. Application fees typically run from \$50 to \$200. Visit the U.S. Bureau of Consular Affairs to learn more.

TSA PreCheck and Global Entry: Travel Credit Reward Cards like the Chase Sapphire Preferred or Capital One card, give you up to a \$100 credit towards these programs.

Confused about the two programs? Here's the difference: **TSA Precheck** (\$85) puts you in a faster security line at U.S. airports.

Global Entry (\$100) includes TSA Precheck and adds expedited customs screening upon your return from international trips. These programs can help you zip through airport security lines.

Before you apply, give yourself a few weeks to fill out the online application and visit an enrollment center for fingerprinting and an ID check.

You must already have a valid U.S. passport to apply for Global Entry, and you must participate in an interview at a designated enrollment center. Once approved, your status lasts five years. Most interviews last about five minutes, it's very easy!



9. PACKING

Each adventure requires a different packing list. If you pack last minute, you can skip this section.

Traveler Tip: If you're a film nerd like me, don't forget your [DJI mini drone](#) or [GoPro](#) at home! Follow this link to my Amazon store to grab the latest [GoPro Hero 12 Black](#).



If you want to pack like a pro, I highly suggest to start thinking about it an advanced. This is for a few different reasons. The most important being that you don't want to forget anything, obviously.

Speaking of packing... you won't be able to miss [this luggage set](#) at the airport.



Packing Cubes vs. Rolling: Which is best?

A packing cube set, like [these on Amazon](#), can help you save almost as much space as folding. Plus, keep you significantly more organized. And this is why I love packing cubes. It makes my life so much easier on the road.

Traveler Tip: If you stick a travel size fabric softener spray bottle in a plastic ziplock bag in one of your shoes, you can use it at your destination to get out any wrinkles and keep your clothes smelling fresh.

The Secret Packing Cube Hack

Here is what I do. I roll my clothes and pack them in my packing cubes organize by clothing garment. So the basics like pants, shirts, bedtime outfits, etc. Fill in your shoes with items like socks and place them around the packing cubes, where the gaps are. Lastly, not everything needs a packing cube. You may want to lay thick sweaters or jackets flat.

This way, **you get the best of both worlds.** The cubes keep your garments organized and rolling technique allows you to fit more inside the cube. VIOLA!



LOST LUGGAGE...

Who ya gonna call? Ghostbusters?!

The airlines doesn't care about your lost bag, trust me! That's why I always, always, always keep an [Apple Airtag](#) in mine.

Don't have an iPhone, no problem, use [these](#) instead.

10. ENTERTAINMENT

It's a known fact that while you're traveling, you will experience some down time. Consider bringing some form of self-entertainment to keep you busy like a book, magazine, iPod or a tablet, or a combination of these things.

Download Netflix shows, books, podcasts, offline so you can watch them during downtime or on the airplane.

Traveler Tip: Not all flights have TV/DVD screens. Be ready to sync your device to the airport or plane Wi-Fi to gain more digital entertainment options.

THE ULTIMATE TRAVEL PACKING LIST

CLOTHES TO PACK

- UNDERWEAR
- SOCKS
- BRAS
- SLEEPWEAR
- T-SHIRTS
- DRESS SHIRTS
- CASUAL SHIRTS
- JEANS
- PANTS
- SHORTS
- DRESSES
- SKIRTS
- SWEATERS
- SWEATSHIRTS
- SUITS
- SWIMSUITS
- COVER-UPS
- COATS
- HATS
- GLOVES
- SCARVES
- PURSES
- UMBRELLA
- LEISURE SHOES
- HIKING BOOTS
- SNEAKERS
- SNOW BOOTS
- DRESS SHOES
- SANDALS
- BELTS
- TIES
- JEWELRY
- COLLAPSIBLE PACK

MISCELLANEOUS ITEMS

- CELL PHONE
- CELL PHONE CHARGER
- MEDICATIONS
- ELECTRONIC CHARGERS
- EMERGENCY CONTACTS
- COPY OF PASSPORT
- PLUG ADAPTER
- BEACH TOWELS
- SWIMMING GOGGLES & FINS

TOILETRIES TO PACK

- TOOTHBRUSH
- TOOTHPASTE
- DENTAL FLOSS
- SOAP
- DEODORANT
- SHAMPOO
- CONDITIONER
- HAIR BRUSH
- STYLING TOOLS
- FACIAL CLEANSER
- FACE LOTION
- SUNSCREEN
- MOISTURIZER
- CONTACT LENSES
- CONTACT SOLUTION
- SHAVING SUPPLIES
- MAKEUP
- MAKEUP REMOVER
- PERIOD PRODUCTS
- MEDICATION/BC
- NAIL FILE
- NAIL CLIPPERS
- TWEEZERS
- HAND SANITIZER
- BANDAGES
- FIRST-AID
- INSECT REPELLENT
- PAIN RELIEVERS
- VITAMINS

TECH & CAMERA GEAR

- CAMERA
- GOPRO
- DRONE
- TABLET/LAPTOP
- CAMERA CHARGERS
- BLUETOOTH SPEAKER

WHAT TO PACK IN YOUR CARRY-ON

- BOOKS/E-BOOKS
- HEADPHONES
- TRAVEL BLANKET
- TRAVEL PILLOW
- EYE MASK
- EARPLUGS
- TISSUES
- LIP BALM
- DISINFECTING WIPES
- GUM
- CHANGE OF CLOTHES
- SNACKS
- EMPTY WATER BOTTLE
- IN-FLIGHT MEDICATIONS
- VALUABLES
- CAMERA
- DRONE BATTERIES
- PASSPORT/VISA/ID
- CASH
- CREDIT/ATM CARDS
- INSURANCE CARDS
- ITINERARY
- MAPS/DIRECTIONS
- GLASSES
- SUNGLASSES
- HOUSE KEYS
- HAND SANITIZER

