

**Ep #144: First-Time International Travel Made Easy:  
Top Destinations and Practical Tips**



**Full Episode Transcript**

**With Your Hosts**

**Alex Payne, Jess Field, and Pam Lorg**

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## **Ep #144: First-Time International Travel Made Easy: Top Destinations and Practical Tips**

Alex: Traveling out of the country can feel a little overwhelming at times, especially that first international trip. Here are some tips to make it a little easier, plus some destinations that are perfect for that first international trip.

Welcome to Points Talk with the Travel Mom Squad. We are three moms who've discovered how to leverage credit card welcome offers to get hundreds of thousands of dollars of travel expenses for nearly free. We've used credit card points and miles to take vacations to places like Hawaii, Paris, Greece, Maldives, Japan, and so much more. And the best part? We each still have 800 plus credit scores. Imagine being able to take the vacation of your dreams for nearly free. It's totally possible, and we're here to show you how.

Alex: Hey, I'm Alex.

Pam: And I'm Pam, Alex's mom.

Jess: And I'm Jess. Let's talk points. So we get a lot of questions about traveling internationally, from where to visit, about currency, language barriers, getting around, and more. Today, we're sharing some practical tips for traveling internationally, including some of our top recommendations for where to visit on your first international trip to ease you into international travel. So Pam is going to start us off with countries that we recommend visiting first for first-time international travelers.

Pam: Okay, so the UK is a great suggestion and one place that people want to go over and over again. It's great to go to London, Ireland, Scotland. I'm going to talk a little bit about London. It was actually my very first trip to Europe. Actually, I would say I hadn't really, I guess I did travel internationally before this. I had gone as a foreign exchange student to Colombia, and then I had gone to Mexico a couple times.

But other than that, that's all I'd gone. So I hadn't really gone internationally before, and I went with my parents when I had two kids. Alex was too little to go that time, who were college age, and we went, and I'll tell you that first trip to Europe, that trip to London, I was blown away, and it ignited the travel bug that never went away. And from then on, travel was my passion. And then

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interestingly enough, one of the daughters that went with us to London went back and did a study abroad program, met her husband, and has lived there for 19 years. So London has become my home away from home. I know it so well now. And little did I know on that first trip, as my first foreign country that I stepped into, that it would become someplace I would go back to again and again.

Alex: Your first foreign country in Europe.

Pam: First foreign country in Europe. Yes. One of the great things about going to the UK, London, Ireland, Scotland, is that you don't have a language barrier. Everybody speaks English. They may have a little bit of an accent and that may make it a little bit tougher, but not really. It's great.

I love London because they have such an amazing public transportation system. I don't use the buses a lot, but I use the tube all the time. It's very easy to get used to. And then again, because everybody's speaking English, it's really easy to ask for directions if you get lost, but it's really easy. It's easy to just tap your credit card in and out. There was a day you couldn't do that when I first started traveling. We had to get these little things called Oyster cards, but now it's just so easy.

So much to do and see there. You can, definitely, I think that if you're going to see London, you probably need about 3 days to see it to see all the sights, although I did take my sister and we did it in 2 days, but one day was massively booked. It was just run, run, run. I love to see the sights. There's just so much history, so many old buildings.

I also love, love London for the plays. I love a good Broadway musical like no other, and you can even watch them cheaper in London than you can in New York City. So that's always something that's high on my to-do list. In fact, I'm going back there next week to see my daughter in London, my husband and I, and we are going to see a play there. We're going to see a new play called Operation Mincemeat. So I just, it's just amazing.

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It's really not bad on points and miles to get there. The coming back is a little more expensive because London Heathrow charges a really high surcharge. So you just have to know that going in. If you're flying over and back on economy, it's not going to hit you so hard. Business class, it definitely does. I don't know. I find I'm okay paying \$500 if I'm laying flat in business class, and that's all I'm paying. So it's okay with me. I deal with that. Not only is there a ton of different options for flights, every airline just about flies over there, you know.

There's also so many hotel options. I have lately flown Virgin Atlantic a lot. In fact, I'm flying over there from Boston again. I got that flight for 29,000 miles in business class. That has been harder to find. It has been more expensive, and unfortunately, Virgin Atlantic did increase their surcharges. I'm paying very little on this one. I think I'm like under \$20, but they have increased those surcharges. So just know, but it's a great way to get over there. But I've flown over there on United, I had a Delta Flash sale that I flew over on Delta, I've done AA, I've done British Airways. So there's just tons of options.

And once you get over to London, so many hotels that you can stay in. And of course, lots of Hyatt options. There are Marriott, there are IHG, and there's some amazing hotels there that you can use those points too, and Hilton. But I love, of course, to stay in a Hyatt hotel and get my Globalist breakfast and all the perks that come with it. I've been upgraded to suites quite often when I'm in London. Some of my favorite hotels are the Park Hyatt, of course, brand new hotel. It is a work of art. It's more expensive. I think it's like 40,000 to stay there. Then there's multiple Hyatt Regencies. I haven't been to the Blackfriars yet, but I think you went there, did you Jess?

Jess: I did not, but Megan did. And I feel like in our Facebook group, that is definitely one of the most popular recommendations for family stays in London, the Hyatt Regency Blackfriars. And now the Standard also has hotel,s or are under Hyatt, and I know the Standard London has standard, it's confusing because the name is The Standard, but then I'm talking about standard rooms, has standard rooms that can sleep four. And so I don't know personally anyone who has stayed there yet on Hyatt points, but it's definitely worth looking into.

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Pam: Definitely. I love the Hyatt Regency Churchill. It's about 30,000 a night, but I love it. I think it's a beautiful hotel. And I love it because every time I've been there, they've given me a suite upgrade. So that doesn't hurt at all. And then another really great hotel in a fantastic location, cute, cute, cute, is the Great Scotland Yard, and it runs about 25,000 a night.

So I absolutely love to go to London. I go there all the time. My daughter is moving out of London, and so unfortunately, I probably won't be able to go as much. She's probably going to move to the States or somewhere else. So I'm going to really enjoy the next this next year trying to make a couple trips there.

The other thing that I love is you can tack on another easy trip when you go to London. And that's you can I've taken the channel to over to Paris, and I've done that two or three times. So that's really a great way to see another amazing city, and even then flying out of Paris is usually probably a little cheaper than flying out of London Heathrow. So that's just a great thing. But yeah, all in all for first-timers, if you want to go to Europe, how do you go to Europe and not go to London? Make it part of your trip.

Alex: You know, one thing I wanted to say real quick is when we've gone to London, one thing that works really well too is flying Delta but booking it through Virgin Atlantic. I've seen flights for as low as 15,000 points in economy. The taxes and fees are higher, like \$200, but 15,000 points and \$200 for a direct flight from Salt Lake to London is pretty darn great. So that's another option for people who are okay flying economy and like flying Delta to check out flights on Virgin Atlantic.

Jess: Well, as you're saying economy, I think economy on Virgin Atlantic is like 6,000 to 9,000 each way. It's just so cheap. Again, the surcharges could be a little bit more. I haven't checked them out.

Alex: Usually, that's, oh, if you fly from the East Coast, but I've even seen the 9,000 from LAX. So that's just that's really literally crazy that you can get those flights. And then you get a transfer bonus, get a transfer bonus, and it's insane.

Alex: Yeah, seriously.



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Pam: Okay, Jess, let's move on to other parts of the UK.

Jess: All right. Well, Ireland, we included Ireland because geographically, it's so close even though it's not technically part of the UK, but Scotland is, and Scotland and London were actually my family of six's first international trip together on points and miles. Ted and I had been to Europe before, but this was back in 2017. This was like I had just racked up all those points and miles, and I was finally cashing them in for this family trip.

So we went to Scotland and London. Amazing time. Same thing, English speaking, easy flight from the United States, especially if you're on the East Coast, but we are in Houston, and it still wasn't bad. And so easy flight from the US. If you go to a major city like Dublin or Edinburgh, you do not need a car. In fact, I would not recommend a car in those cities. Public transportation is really easy to use. If you are going to a smaller town, then you likely will want to have a rental car or you can take the train. We did that when we went to Ireland. We took the train from Dublin to Galway, and so that was an option for us.

I will say they might not be the best first international destinations if you're planning to drive because they drive on the left, and the roads, a lot of the roads are really narrow and they freak me out. And so that's always a, Ted, you're driving this portion of the trip when that happens. But in Ireland, there is the Hyatt Centric Dublin. I have not stayed there, but Pam stayed there and she really liked it.

Pam: Yeah, it's nice and really nice, very centrally located. We walked everywhere in Dublin from there.

Jess: And then we just stayed at Glenlo Abbey using Hilton points. It is now an SLH, well, it is an SLH property, which means it is under Hilton now. Amazing property, like a huge estate, kind of very traditional Ireland feel for that one. And so that's an option there.

In Scotland, Pam and I have both stayed at the Kimpton Charlotte Square on IHG points and absolutely love it. I stayed there with my family of four. We did have to get two rooms because room occupancy is pretty strict in Europe in

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general. But I thought the location was great. The hotel was so cute, and the rooms were a decent size for a city in the UK. So.

Pam: I love that hotel. I think it is I'm obsessed with it. I think it's so, so cute. I think every part of that hotel is cute. Again, the rooms are a little tiny here, but I also I stayed at another hotel, which is a hotel brand that probably most of you have never heard of, and that's a Voco. And I stated that in Scotland because we had rented an Airbnb when we came back to Edinburgh, and I wasn't getting any sleep. I thought I, a great way to just I got to go to a hotel by myself. I can't share a bed. So, a great way to get points and miles for a good night's sleep, and I was really impressed. It was really cute. Yeah, cute hotel. I would definitely suggest it to someone to check that out, too.

Jess: All right, now we're going to move south of the border. Alex is going to talk about Mexico. So go ahead, Alex.

Alex: Yes, Mexico. Okay, so this was my family's, my kids' first international trip was to Mexico. And I think a lot of times when you think of Mexico, you're thinking, oh, Cancun or Cabo, which are great options. Like, that's where we went, we went to Cancun, we had a great time.

In these more touristy areas, most of the people, you know, at the hotels and everything, there's a lot of English speakers. So you don't run into, you know, as much confusion there. I mean, and a lot of us in the US, I mean, not myself, but a lot of people in the US, we can get by with our Spanish. So it's a fun place to go. My son was going to the next year be taking Spanish in school. So it was kind of fun to go somewhere where you know little bits and you can kind of practice your Spanish a little bit. When we go, Jess is always the one that's speaking the Spanish for us. But you took a lot of years of Spanish, Mom, and you lived in Colombia like you said. So Pam's Spanish is pretty good, too. Mine, not so much, but it's kind of fun to be able to go and understand little bits of it and try to speak it.

And the people in Mexico are super friendly. Every time we go to a resort there, they're so nice, amazing. They accept the US dollar there. So you don't have to worry about getting your currency exchanged or anything like that, which we'll

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talk about later on in the episode. Not too far from flights from the US. So you're not going to have to worry about jet lag depending on where you're coming from. That can be, we talked about that in a past episode, but jet lag can be pretty rough sometimes if you're going to Europe, especially as a first-timer. This is a nice option to not worry about that.

Lots of hotels on points, lots of flights on points. Our favorites for my family. My kids love the Hyatt Ziva Cancun. They're obsessed. It's one of their favorite places they've been. They are asking to go back for adults only. We love the Secrets Impression Moche. We're not traditionally all-inclusive people, but all of us are, yes, we would go back to Secret Impression Moche any day of the week. So nice.

Jess: I'll go tomorrow. Do y'all want to go tomorrow? I'll go tomorrow.

Alex: Yeah, seriously. Also though too, if you're like, okay, well, that's not really my vibe. I don't want the Cancun scene. It's just more busy. Granted when we go, we haven't really even left the resorts, but if you're like, I want a more of a cultural experience because you're not really getting a cultural experience if you're just sitting at the resort. If you're looking for more of a cultural experience, Jess went to San Miguel de Allende, loved that. I mean, do you want to like mention that for a second, Jess, like just kind of your thoughts about that? Because I think that's a great option for people who are looking for something else.

Jess: Yeah, so we it was just Ted and I, but it was very family-friendly. Like, I would not hesitate to bring kids there. Tons of parks. It's a lot of walking around, and the climate is very temperate, and so it's not super hot there, but it was great. We stayed at Numu Boutique Hotel. I have a review of that hotel on the blog if you want to check it out. It is part of the Unbound Collection with Hyatt. So we were able to redeem Hyatt points. So super cute option if you want a little bit more, like Alex said of great food and more of a cultural experience.

I'm also dying to go to Mexico City. I have never been there, but I really, really, really want to go there. They have an Andaz there that I want to check out. And so that is high on my list.

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Alex: That maybe should be one of our Travel Mom Squad retreats.

Pam: I think it should be.

Alex: We haven't done enough, like we've done Mexico together, but it's always been the more the beachy areas.

Jess: So I think Travel Mom Squad, we need to start getting more into Central and South America and other parts of Mexico. Speaking of Central America, Pam is up with our next destination.

Pam: Okay, and that's Costa Rica. And that is one destination that I think so many people have it on their list to go to. I know my sister does. She's driving me crazy about wanting me to go back with her. But the thing is, I've been going every year. I mean, I think I've gone five times, so I've been going so much. So I'm like, I'd really like to go somewhere else sometimes.

Alex: Maybe try to get her to go to Belize because I've heard great things about Belize, too.

Pam: Oh yeah, yeah, she's really stuck on Costa Rica. So, but listen, and I'm willing to go back because everybody that goes there loves it. It's a great mix of beach and adventure, so whatever you're looking for, you can find it. Done zip lining there, we've done repelling, white water rafting, snorkeling, you can find all of it. Tropical lush jungles like you can't believe, especially if you're going into the La Fortuna area. It just knocks your socks off. Monkeys all the time. Alex's boys were so entranced with the monkeys all over at breakfast, trying to steal food. It's just a great place to go as a family. It's a great place to go as couples. I've gone with a friend. It's just a great location, period.

Alex: I feel like, I feel like it can work for any travel style. If you're like, I just want to go relax at a nice resort, you can do that. If you're like, I want to go on hikes and I want to go white water rafting, whatever your travel style is, I think you can find what you're looking for in Costa Rica for anybody.

Pam: Yeah, it really is amazing. There are two main airports. There's the one in San Jose and then there's the one in Liberia. I've gone to both, I've stayed near

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both of them. We usually go to Liberia. That's where we're usually heading. And I usually, I love it because it's a direct flight from Denver, and I usually fly it on United. But you can get there on Southwest, you can get there on just about every domestic airline there is. It's not far, you don't have the jet lag problem that you have when you go to other international places.

Lots of great hotels that you can use points and miles on. A little harder for points and miles in some of the areas. I know that sometimes people end up doing an Airbnb. One of my favorite places is Tamarindo. It's this old hippie surf beach town. We love it. I've stayed there twice, going to stay near there again soon. And when we go there, we usually just do an Airbnb, although there is a Marriott, a JW Marriott that is fairly close to there. I've also done the Marriott in San Jose. It's a really nice hotel. I think it's called the Hacienda Marriott.

And then of course, we all are obsessed with the Andaz Papagayo. And that is a place that I've been to twice. Jess, I think has been there three times. Alex just went there this year and it is a major, you know, everybody loves it that has ever listened to us and taken our advice to go there. So Costa Rica definitely easy, great place for your first trip internationally.

Jess: Well, I was just to say, I also think Costa Rica is one of the best uses of a companion pass if you have the Southwest companion pass. We have, I mean, coming from Houston, getting to Costa Rica is half the time, maybe a third of the time it takes us to get to Hawaii. I prefer Hawaii. I wish I was closer to Hawaii, but I still love Costa Rica. It's a 3-hour flight from Houston. And so it's really easy. But if you have a Southwest companion pass, Costa Rica is one of the best ways to use that because getting a free international flight for just the taxes and fees is pretty huge. So, and Pam, we also need to check out the new Waldorf Astoria in Costa Rica.

Alex: Pam? Why not me?

Jess: Well, no, you too. But Pam is just... I'm Pam Jr., and we like bougie things.

Alex: Yeah, yeah yeah.

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Pam: We can't pass up bougie.

Jess: We actually had someone DMing us that they were there and were obsessed and they were sending pictures, and I was like, oh my gosh, I need to I my list is getting too long of all the places that I want to go.

Alex: I actually had that booked for when we went for spring break, but I couldn't, like we couldn't find availability in another room for my mom, and then I don't think it ended up being open yet anyway, and I was like, all right, we'll go back another time.

Pam: Well, maybe I can take my sister there.

Jess: Yeah, you should.

Alex: Yeah. That's a great idea.

Pam: Yeah.

Jess: All right. So next, I am going to talk about Iceland, which is one that I just went to with my family this past summer, but I actually when we were putting this list together, I was like, Iceland would actually be really easy for someone's first international trip. I absolutely loved Iceland. My entire family loved it. It is unlike the UK and Ireland, it is very easy to drive in Iceland. I did not do it, but because Ella was like, I want to drive, and I said, sure, go ahead. I'm not going to stop you. But the roads are nice, they're wide, they drive on the right-hand side. And so I feel like you need to rent a car in Iceland, but it is a really easy, it's an expensive place, but it is a really easy place to drive yourself around.

We stayed at the Canopy Hilton Reykjavik City Center on Hilton points, great location, clean, modern. I will say the toughest part of going to Iceland is the jet lag because okay, for a pro, the flight is short. For a con, the flight is short because if you're when you're crossing that many time zones, it's like you don't have, I think we flew from Chicago to Reykjavik, and it was 6 hours gate to gate.

So with you, when you're factoring in, by the time you get in the air and fall asleep, and then by the time they're turning the lights on and coming through to

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clean up the cabin, you're getting 4, 4 and a half hours of sleep, assuming you sleep the entire time. So I feel like it is rough from a jet lag perspective, but it's also, if you're it's a 6-hour flight. It's a 6-hour flight, and you're in a place, you feel like you're on a completely different planet. And so that part is really cool.

Everyone that we encountered spoke English, and everywhere, and I mean everywhere, takes credit cards. I will say American Express was difficult, but if you've got a Visa or a Mastercard, which I'm assuming everyone who's listening to this episode has at least one Visa or Mastercard, you are golden. They everywhere, they we went to this horse farm, and they had horse food that you could buy for the equivalent of a dollar, and they had a QR code to pay with a credit card. And so that's really I always find, and Pam's going to talk about that a little bit, I always find getting the local currency to be a little bit of a pain because yeah, you can go to an ATM, but then they charge all these fees and it's, and so being able to just use your credit card everywhere was a huge perk of Iceland.

Alex: Well, and we don't like using cash anyway.

Jess: I know. I'm like, why I'm not earning points. I'm paying all these fees. Yeah, so

Jess: All right, Alex, what's what's our next and final destination?

Jess: All right, well, this is not an exhaustive list. There are plenty more destinations, countries that would be fantastic to visit as a first-time traveler internationally. These are just some of the ones we've done and recommend. So next, my second country for my kids after Mexico was the Netherlands.

So we went to Amsterdam, and it was fantastic. Such a really easy country to navigate and visit. The people there are so incredibly friendly. They have really good public transportation as well. We didn't have any issues with it. We'll talk a little bit more in the episode more about public transportation where we'll give some more tips about how to navigate in different countries, but it's a really great system there.

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We stayed at the Hyatt Regency, which was great for families. We booked two rooms for my family of six. The rooms sleep three. So we had a king bed in one room, and then the other room was two twins. So not big. If you have bigger kids, it might not be ideal, but for our family, my three of my, I might even stuck all four of them in that twin room. I don't really remember, but it worked out to have six of us in these two rooms. So if you have a family and you have young, smaller kids, that could be a really great option because a lot of times, you're finding rooms that just sleep two.

Lots of flight options. I also think that Amsterdam is another great jumping-off point to visit another country. Really, anywhere in Europe. Once you get to Europe, every the countries are just so much smaller there that you can see a lot of places in a shorter amount of time. I also think a lot of people just think, oh, I'm going to Europe. I need to be there for at least 2 weeks. I'm not of that mindset or even 10 days. It's great if you can. But when you have kids and they have you're going with a school schedule or work schedule, it's not always feasible. So I think any amount of time you can get is better than zero amount of time.

So that's another thing. I don't stress like, I really want to go to Europe, but I don't have 10 days. That's fine. We went for a week, and it was fantastic, and we had a great time. I've even gone for 5 days, and it was great. I think my mom and I went one time, and we did 4 nights in Europe. So like, you know, a night flying over, 4 nights in Europe, but we flew business class, which helps.

Pam: And first on the way home, back.

Alex: And first on the way back. But, you know, just don't stress about this is only worth it if I can do 10 days. It's not true at all. I'd rather have 2 days in Europe than 0 days in Europe. So that's kind of my take on it. But yeah, Amsterdam's a great place for anybody wanting to dip their toes into Europe.

Okay. Next, we're going to share some just general international travel tips. The first one is going to be from my mom. She's going to talk about local currency, and I specifically chose her to talk about local currency because the joke among the three of us is, everybody knows I'm not bringing cash. Like when I travel with

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Mitch, he's in charge of getting the cash. Like it's fine. But when I'm, I think it's just because I know, oh, I'm going with my mom. I'm still her little girl. She'll take care of me, even though I'm 37.

Jess: Well, and now I have also adopted that mindset. And so it's it's funny because every time we go on a trip together, I'm like, okay, that is one thing I don't have to worry about is getting local currency.

Pam: Yeah, it is funny. And now I have to kind of remember, oh, you got to get a little bit more because you are paying the tips for

Alex: We do Venmo her. I will say we don't, we don't make her pay for us.

Pam: Yes. So do you need cash? As far as Pam says yes. Do you need a lot of cash? No. What I usually do is I do go at the airport and I get my cash. You can get sometimes at a bank. It's a real pain to do that. I don't ever do that. I just take I have a debit card. It's a Charles Schwab.

Alex: You mean like from your bank ahead of time? Like in the United States, you'd go to your bank?

Pam: Yes, some people will do that. So I have a Charles Schwab debit card that I bought, that I got specifically because it reimburses me for all ATM fees. So I just keep it around with me. So if I'm somewhere where I need some cash, and I don't carry a lot of cash around with me usually anyway. But you do need some local cash sometimes in these foreign countries.

I would say primarily for me, it's for tipping. That's primarily, but there are I have been places where they go, yeah, we don't accept a credit card. You know, sometimes they'll accept Venmo or something else. I mean, it's rare. Basically, that's why I don't get much. I will usually get maybe \$100 in whatever currency it is. And then I'll just buy some stuff if there's stuff left, or I'll put it on my whatever I have left, I'll put it towards my hotel bill for food or whatever I've spent, and then finish paying it with a credit card.

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So I'm always getting there, going to, first thing I do is go to the ATM in the airport, get my money with my Charles Schwab card, and that's just kind of what I always do. I'm the one that's always expected to do that.

Another thing is, and I think Jess touched on it, is the Amex sometimes doesn't work. I'm finding it works a lot more than it has in the past. If I'm trying to meet a minimum spend on an Amex card, I bring it, but I always bring a backup credit card, either a Visa or a Mastercard, also. Now, what I bring most of the time on all of my international trips is I bring my Venture X card, so that I can get 2x on everything. Easy peasy. I don't have to think about it. So that's pretty much what I use on most of my trips. It's also really easy when I go back in and I'm trying to see how much I spent. It's all on one card, and I can kind of figure it out. So my take is, you do need a little bit of local currency, but you don't need much.

Jess: All right. I'm going to cover language barriers, which we touched on a little bit. A lot of the countries we mentioned, I think almost all of them, speak no problem, no issues speaking English there. I feel like we are very fortunate to know English because a lot of other places kind of cater to us in that way.

I do try to learn a handful of basic phrases before I go on a trip to a country that also speaks another language. We didn't mention Japan, but you know, for Japan, I learned hello, goodbye, thank you, good morning, good afternoon, good evening. I try to learn that kind of stuff before I go, just to greet, you know, even if that's all I can say, and it's funny because I will say something and then they'll reply to me in the language, and I'm like, oh no, that's all I know. Like that's that's literally all I know.

Alex: That happened to us, to me when we were in Spain. I said like gracias or something when he dropped us off, and then he started talking to me. I'm like, oh, no, I don't really know Spanish.

Jess: But I just feel like that little gesture goes a long way to show that you care and that you are trying your best to speak their language. Also, I am grateful that I live in a time of the internet and smartphones and Google Maps and Google Translate because those all come in huge, but especially Google Translate. There's they even have it's called Google Lens as part, I think it's part of the

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same app, but you can basically hold your phone up to a menu or anything, and it will translate the words directly for you on the screen. And so I, especially menus going when I go out to eat and the menu is in a different language, I find that incredibly helpful. So I definitely recommend downloading Google Translate and Google Lens to your phone before traveling to another country that does not speak English.

Pam: You know, I wanted to add that usually I've never had trouble, especially in hospitality world where everybody knows English. The one country that I felt like was the hardest was Japan. And especially with taxi drivers, I mean, they didn't have a clue, and Google Translate really helped a lot in that case. So definitely, most of the time, I don't think a language barrier is huge, but definitely in Japan, it was a little rough sometimes.

Jess: Well, it's funny because Alex mentioned when we were putting this together, she was like, should I add Japan? And I was like, I don't know, I feel like it's not super first-time friendly because of the language. Like, the transportation is great, but there is there's definitely the language barrier, and a lot of the signs are in Japanese. And so it's, it can be overwhelming when you first arrive to try to get around. So for that reason, it's off, but I will say it is an amazing country and I recommend it.

Alex: All right. I'm going to talk about getting around. This, for myself tends to stress me out the most when I'm going somewhere new is like, how am I going to get to the hotel? And then how are we going to get around? And it can worry me a little bit. And I want to just preface this, too, like we travel internationally often. All three of us sometimes get overwhelmed and a little bit of nerves before certain trips. So don't if you feel that way about traveling internationally like, oh, I don't know if I'm ready for that. I like staying domestic because it's comfortable and I know it, and I'm too nervous to do that. We've been there and we still feel like that sometimes. So it's totally normal. You just power through and it gets a little easier the more you do it. All right.

But so as far as getting around, what I like to do is I like to plan ahead. So while I'm home, I will, for example, when we went to Amsterdam, I was like, okay, how

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am I going to get from the airport to the hotel? You know, one option you can always do is you can book transportation with the hotel. That's the most convenient and the easiest, but it's also a lot more expensive. You're paying a high premium for the convenience for that. So I didn't want to pay that much because a lot of times, too, it'll be per person. So if you have six people, you're looking, it might be more expensive. Not all the time per person, but a lot of times it is.

So what I will do is I will think, okay, let me see if they have Uber in this place. So I'll go to my Uber app. I'll put in like the airport and the hotel and see if it works. If it works, I will then, you know, scroll through, get an idea of like, okay, there's six of us. Do these options seat six? Do they have cars that seat six or more people? Because not every place you go is going to have cars that will fit your family.

I forget where Megan had just went. Maybe it was Croatia or Greece. I can't remember. She talked about it on one of the podcast episodes, but they were like, they just kind of crammed their family of five. The taxi driver was like, no, I can do it. And she was like, that was a scary drive. So I like to know ahead of time what I'm getting myself into.

So we know, okay, we're going to have to split up and get two taxis or, nope. In the case of Amsterdam, they had big vans that seat six or more people. So that was really nice. Then I knew, okay, that's going to work. I've got that covered. I don't need to worry when we get to the airport. I follow the signs to rideshare pickup. I get on it and we're fine. So that to me kind of alleviates a lot of the worries is finding out ahead of time how we're going to get from the airport to the hotel. You can use a car service. I know Mom, you've done this a lot. Like, what's your kind of experience with booking through like a third party?

Pam: Yeah, and mainly I've done that if I'm trying to get somewhere by myself. I just feel safer. I like to have someone there waiting for me with my name. And I've kind of done the research. I've read the reviews. I picked, you know, a really reliable, trustworthy car service. And that when I'm traveling alone or even sometimes even with two people, like my sister and I traveling from Milan to

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Lake Como, we would we found a car service that picked us up. And so that I just feel like is a safer way for a woman to travel, especially if she's by herself, if there's two.

If there's three, I'm just I'm the airport taxi person. I'm the Uber, the Grab, whatever, person. But yes, if it's and if it's my husband's there, then I'm, you know, I'm not concerned. But yeah, I think what you're saying Alex, is the thing that is really important to me is to do that research, know how I'm getting from point A to point B, and have that all set. That's probably the thing that stresses me out the most. And so when I know I have that done, I can calm down.

Alex: Well, and I know a lot of times, too, you can take public transportation. For example, if you're going into London, it's really easy to just take the what am I blanking on what it is? The Heathrow Express. Like you go, you get your ticket, it's it's simple. Like that's what I would recommend.

Jess: No, take the Elizabeth line.

Alex: Well, you... There are cheaper options like the Elizabeth line, but for myself, I'm like, this is just I know how to do it and I've done it and it's easier. You know, like I don't have to... like with Amsterdam, I know people who have taken the public transportation from the airport into the city, and it's way cheaper and it's easy apparently, but I'm like, I'm landing with six, there's six of us. We're landing after a red eye flight, we're going to be tired. I don't want to have to I don't know if I'll have the mental capacity with the jet lag to figure out, okay, this is how we do it. I've never done that there before. I'm not willing myself to save the money to figure out transportation, public transportation in a new place from the airport.

I will do it once we get to our destination. Like once we're at the hotel and everything, but from the airport, I'm like, we're tired. We just want to get there. We want to be done with our travel day. I, that's not something I like to do, but it's doable and it's the cheapest option. Mom, when you do a car service, do you ever book via Viator? Is that what you do sometimes or...?



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Pam: I have done that before. Yeah, I've just done it on Viator, you know, several times.

Alex: Yeah, I think the key thing like you said though, is to read reviews because there have been situations where like maybe the ride doesn't show up. I know that's happened you before one time, they the people tried to tell my mom and I like, oh, we had to wait for you outside the airport for a bit. So you owe us more money, but they didn't tell us that till we were almost to the hotel. And so sometimes like some shady things can happen. So I definitely recommend reading reviews. So you're getting, you know, a good reputable company because I do think on Viator sometimes you can find some like, random things that maybe aren't as vetted, maybe.

Okay, and then as far as once you get to your destination, or I mean, I look into this ahead of time too, because the more I plan, the less anxiety I feel. So look up transportation for once you're in the city. Download any apps that might make it easier.

One app that we like is Citymapper. This is something you can use in like, I think it's almost like every city. There's so many, you can even use it in New York City. Like, even domestically, it's super helpful. It'll tell you like, you know, you put in where you're going, where you are and where you're going, it'll tell you the best way to get there. It even accounts for if you wanted to walk there, you know, different things. It's super helpful app. There also are apps that are specific to that city.

So in Amsterdam, they have a GVP app. I found this extremely helpful. It works similarly, where you can put, okay, we're at Hyatt Regency, and we need to get to the Anne Frank house. And it will map out the best way to get there. It'll tell me like, okay, this is what time, like you need to take this train to this station, and then you're going to hop on this bus number. And it was it was really seamless. We followed the instructions, and it worked perfectly. You can purchase your tickets on the app. You know, you can see all the different routes available.

So I highly recommend finding out that information ahead of time and just doing that research, like, do I need tickets ahead of time? Am I able to tap in and tap

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out with a credit card? Or do the kids actually need tickets? Sometimes when you go places, there'll be a discount for kids under a certain age, or even they might be free to a certain age. So that's important to know that information as well.

One thing we bought like, I think it was like a two-day ticket in Amsterdam, and our tickets expired. We had one tram ride, like we got on our bus from the Anne Frank house or the tram, and then we needed to take like the underground to our to our last stop. And we were, I think we were scanning in for our last ride, and our tickets stopped working. We missed it by minutes. And so I was like, oh man, we got to get on. Like the ticket booth was we probably could have gone to a ticket booth and bought our tickets there. But instead, I was like, okay, how many credit cards do I have? I have debit cards between me and Mitch, we had, I think six cards on us because that's one thing to know if you're wanting to tap in and tap out with a credit card, you can't tap in and out for all six people, or you can't tap out with multiple people with the same card. So everybody will need their own card.

So like when we went to London, my oldest, he's too old to ride for free. So I just gave him a credit card that he was in charge of holding, and he would tap in and tap out with his own card. So just something to keep in mind, you if you're planning, like if you're going to London and you have older kids and you're going to be tapping in and tapping out, you're all going to need your own way to tap in and out. You can't just use one credit card for everybody. So, do you guys have any other things? Did I miss anything with transportation or thoughts about that?

Jess: The only other thing I would say is if you're going somewhere and you might want to do ride sharing, see if there's a local app that's better than Uber or Lyft. Like some don't use Uber and Lyft, they use a different one. So maybe that's something you want to look into ahead of time and like download that app. We did that for Ireland. But I think you covered everything else.

Pam: Yeah, I think so too. So, you know, like Alex said, traveling internationally and feeling comfortable didn't happen overnight for any of us. I think we are all done it a lot. We feel pretty good now. In fact, I feel like my eyes pick things out,

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and I just automatically see, oh, there's a taxi thing before anybody that I'm with, you know. So you get more comfortable, it gets easier and easier. But we still have times when we even get a little bit stressed. And doing the research and being prepared really takes that down.

So if you found this episode helpful, please share it with your friends and family and ask them to join you on your next international trip.

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