

Computer Travel Tips

Must-Have Items

Virus Protection: Many people load their virus protection on their home computer, but forget to do so on their portable computer. A virus is a virus, no matter where you get it.

Setup and Boot Disks: Bring setup and boot disks, as well as any necessary registration numbers for re-installs and downloads. Boot disks, or startup disks, contain all of the system files necessary to get your computer up and running again if it encounters problems.

Software Components: Use the same software, even the same versions, at home and on your laptop. Comfortable work habits are already difficult to maintain while traveling; you don't need the added frustration of changing your routines for a different version, or worse, different brand of software, especially for high-volume tasks like word-processing and e-mail.

Important Note: Test any new software before you leave. Conflicts in your software or operating systems could arise, and the last place you'll want to deal with them is on the road.

Adaptor Plug Sets: If you are a frequent international traveler, it is wise to invest in a set of frequently used electrical adaptor plugs. There's nothing worse than being all booted up with no way to plug in.

List of Necessary Passwords: It's a double-edge sword. The more complicated the password, the harder it is for people to figure out -- and you to remember! If you tend to save passwords instead of re-typing them, you'll need to either to load them onto your computer or write them down somewhere safe, like an appointment book.

Contact Numbers for Technical Support: Bring phone numbers and bookmark Web sites for companies from which you may need technical support or downloads during your trip. As with passwords, it might be best to write these down in an appointment book or somewhere else that will always be with you, so you don't have to travel with countless slips of paper.

Tricks of the Trade

Perfect Packing: Load up your carry-on bag. Pack your phone cord and extra battery in your carry-on computer case. Airports, and even airplane seats, now have phone jacks and, in some cases, direct Internet connections on pay phones. To have access to a connection when the necessary connectors are in the cargo area of the plane can be a very frustrating experience.

Conserve Battery Power: Work, and/or recharge your battery, during layovers. If you use the Windows operating system, activate the 'suspend' mode before going to the airport. Your laptop will restart quickly and consume almost no battery power. Mac lovers should use the 'sleep' mode. Also, try turning off the 'autosave' feature on your Microsoft Office applications. This will allow your hard drive to power down without starting up again to do the 'autosave.'

Prevent Damage: *In your hotel room, there are tiny magnets in televisions, alarm clocks, hair dryers, and other common hotel appliances. These magnets can pose a threat to your laptop and its data. Do not leave floppy and zip disks on appliances for long periods of time -- leave them on the desk to avoid possible magnet problems.*

International Dial Tones: Configure your modem to ignore dial tones. Most U.S. modems are unable to recognize foreign dial tones and will fail to connect.

Check Ahead for Connector Requirements: Contact your hotel to find out what the connection specifics are so you can plan accordingly. Also, there's a great graphic of the required international adapters on the Magellans web site. When traveling in the U.S., ask when making your reservations if you can plug into their phone system with a modem. When booking a hotel room, ask about rooms equipped for business travelers. They often have dual telephone/modem lines, fax machines and printers, making your stay a convenient and simple one.

Maintain Documents: When you return, copy any important or changed files to your desktop computer. When you make small changes to documents on the road, you can easily use an older version when you return without noticing it. If you immediately copy all of the new or altered files back onto your desktop, and perhaps even delete the files from your portable after the transfer, you can eliminate confusion and version conflicts later on.

Prevent Theft

At the Airport: X-ray machines at airports pose no threat to your laptop, but the security checkpoint conveyer belt is a prime target for thieves who snag unattended equipment passing through machines. Ask a security guard to hand-check your laptop rather than putting it through the conveyer.

At the Hotel: If the idea of leaving your laptop unattended in your hotel room leaves you cold, hide it somewhere in your room, but take the removable disk drive with you when you leave. Without that vital piece of equipment, your computer will be worthless.

In Transit: To prevent theft, disguise your computer while traveling. Traditional computer cases are red flags for thieves. Try carrying your laptop in an unconventional bag that doesn't scream, "Valuable electronics in here!"

Laptop & Luggage Alarms: An essential investment when traveling with expensive equipment is a motion alarm. You attach the device to your luggage and the receiver stays with you. If someone attempts to steal your bag, an alarm will sound when your luggage reaches a set distance away from the receiver.