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Timely Tech Travel Tips

Skills and Professional Development



Many of us travel year-round on business. But in the United States, where I happen to be located, we are just entering the summer vacation season. Therefore, I thought I'd provide some travel tips having to do with technology.

Gear

No matter what kind of travel you are doing, a general rule is to pack as lightly as you can while still meeting your travel needs, and this goes for your tech gear too.

If you are traveling for work, many of you have probably become accustomed to bringing your work laptop. But most work laptops are typically quite heavy and bulky, so you might be better off substituting a tablet or even just relying on your smartphone to meet your needs. These days almost all tablets or smartphones can easily be linked to Bluetooth keyboards and there are many available keyboards that are foldable, very thin, and light (e.g., the Microsoft Universal Foldable Keyboard or the Zagg Pocket Keyboard), so carrying them is easy. I have taken a number of business trips where I managed to type long form memos or reports on my smartphone using one of these keyboards.

Of course, if you are lucky enough to have a good ultralight (like a MacBook Air or Dell XPS 13) or a pro-grade tablet or PC hybrid (iPad or a MS Surface) that have a companion smart keyboard available, using these will be even better.

Accessories

A good travel PC or tablet and a smartphone is just the bare minimum of what you will probably want to bring. Here are some useful accessories to consider:

- I tend to bring a number of devices that I want to charge overnight, so I always bring a USB hub, which is simply an adapter that plugs into an electrical outlet and has between 3-10 USB ports. I have an Anker PowerPort 5; it delivers 49 W/8 A of power and provides five ports, so I can charge up to five devices at once. It cost a little over US\$20.
- It also helps to bring the right type of power cords, and enough of them, to plug in and charge whatever devices you bring. Since I use the same setup at home to charge my devices, I just unplug the hub and pack the whole setup into my travel backpack.
- Speaking of travel backpacks, most of the newer ones have special compartments for carrying your electronics gear. I use a Tom Bihn bag that has an especially roomy front-top pocket. It holds all my accessories, has plenty of room for a laptop, iPad or both, and fits easily under an airplane seat. (By the way, I tuck it under “face down”, which leaves more room on either side for my feet.)
- Battery packs have become compact and inexpensive. I carry a 16000 mAh portable battery that can fully recharge an iPad and iPhone and also serves as a flashlight. I think I bought it for around US\$25.
- Most hotel rooms have dreadful WiFi because so many customers are vying for the same bandwidth. However, a lot of those hotels also offer hard-wire Ethernet connections for the same price or less. So, you may want to bring your own travel router which plugs into an Ethernet cable and creates your own private wifi network — much faster and more reliable, too. HooToo and others make some very good inexpensive ones (less than US\$15).
- For international travel, I strongly recommend bringing a good universal travel adapter and converter. Make sure that whatever you buy is both an adapter (so it has the right plugs to fit the sockets) and a converter, so it can transform 220-240v to 110-120v. Make sure it is reliable, or you may risk frying your devices. I use one by Conair that cost about US\$20, but there are many good ones by various brands.
- Cellular service is still very expensive when you travel overseas. Most smartphones these days will allow you to swap out your SIM card for ones you can buy in your destination country for far, far less.

These are just some basics. I also sometimes bring an Apple TV or ChromeCast for hotel entertainment purposes, a good compact SLR or other specialized digital camera for when you want especially good photos (although the smartphones these days are pretty good), and other odds and ends I could talk about in a future post if readers are interested. In the meantime, safe travels and

happy trails!

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