

TRAVEL

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Packing the right gadgets to go

Travel can be a real headache for technophiles. But with a little forethought, you can have your vacation and bring (some of) your gizmos too

BY FARHAD MANJOO
NY TIMES NEWS SERVICE, NEW YORK

Traveling used to be easier back when you didn't have to worry about all your doodads. Now, before any trip, I seem to have to pack an electronic bazaar into my luggage just to avoid forgetting anything important. After lots of trips with gadgets in tow — and after consulting many friends and followers on Twitter — I've compiled my favorite tips for traveling with technology.

Whether you're going abroad or staying in country this season, here are some of the best ways to get the most out of all your gadgets.

Pack lightly — but not too lightly. Depending on your trip, it's always a good idea to take along a few extra cables, adapters and other accessories. For foreign travel, a power adapter — to charge your camera, phone, e-reader and other gadgets — is a must. I recommend a universal adapter, which will work on plugs in many different countries, and which are available at online retailers like Amazon for less than US\$5.

For most electronics, an adapter is all you'll need; for other appliances like hairdryers, shavers, and curling irons, you might also need a transformer. I recommend WalkaboutTravelGear.com, which has a range of these devices. Do you plan to do a lot of driving in rental cars? Take your music player, a male-to-male audio cable and a car charger for tunes on the go. Or consider a cord to connect your laptop to a TV to let you watch DVDs in your hotel room — the perfect way to end a long day of exploring the Hindu Kush.

MAKING LOCAL CALLS ABROAD

If you've got an old cell phone lying around — and who doesn't? — it might be your ticket to cheap local calls in foreign lands. Before you leave, make sure your phone is "unlocked" so it can work on other networks.

Then, when you land, visit a local mobile phone shop and buy a SIM card, which should cost you about US\$20. When you pop the card into your old phone, you'll get a local number. Now your calls around town will be a bargain.

STAYING IN TOUCH WITH HOME

Don't call home with that local SIM; the long-distance rates might be sky high. A better trick is to use Skype, the Internet phone system. Skype requires a laptop or smart phone and an Internet connection, which you can get at a hotel or cafe. With Skype, you'll often be able to call home for just a few cents a minute. If you set up call forwarding on your Skype account, people at home can call a local number to ring you anywhere in the world, letting them pay nothing for the call.

AVOID BUYING HOTEL WI-FI

Internet access is invaluable whether traveling for business or pleasure. The only trouble is the cost; some hotels want to charge you as much for a night as you would pay for a month of Internet service back home. That's why it's wise to take Wi-Fi prices into account before you book your trip. In the US, many low- and midrange hotels offer Wi-Fi free, while expensive chains ask US\$10 or US\$20 a night for service. For international travel, consult HotelChatter's invaluable guide to which hotels around the world offer free or cheap Internet.

TIPS FOR SMART PHONE OWNERS

If you've got an iPhone or some other Internet-capable device, you might want to take it along for overseas trips, as it makes a nice way to access the Internet on the go. Remember to go into the phone's settings panel and turn off "long-distance roaming"; this will prevent the phone from racking up huge data fees on foreign networks. Your phone will still be able to access the Internet through Wi-Fi. Some iPhone apps that are particularly handy overseas: Yelp, for reviews of restaurants and attractions; Skype, for calling home; and TripIt, a terrific online service that keeps all your itinerary details in order. TripIt's Web site is great even if you don't have an iPhone.

Spring for an iPad. I've found Apple's tablet computer to be a fantastic travel machine. It's small, lightweight and best of all, the US Transportation Security Administration doesn't require you to take it out of your bag during airport screening. (Most of the time; a TSA agent at Kennedy Airport in New York did ask me to remove my iPad during a recent trip).

The iPad is better for leisure travel than business; it's the perfect way to read books and watch movies on the go. But if you plan to write the great American novel while visiting Parisian cafes, take along a small Bluetooth keyboard (Apple makes a nice one) to connect to your iPad; even with the

keyboard, the iPad setup is easier to carry in a satchel or large purse than most notebooks.

"GEOTAG" YOUR PICTURES

That old photo of your grandfather posing with an elephant — was that snapped in Rhodesia or at Ringling Brothers? Digital pictures offer a way to solve this sort of geographic confusion. Their files can be embedded with location information that will remember, forever, where you took your picture.

Some newer cameras and smart phones insert these geotags automatically, but if you've got an old camera, consider buying a geotagging memory card like the Eye-Fi Explore. The card has a Wi-Fi chip built in. Not only does the chip determine your geographical location, it can also upload your pictures to the Internet automatically.

Want "real" photos? Some people still can't get over the idea of having their pictures inside memory cards. Sure, you can print those photos when you get back home, but if you miss instant prints, check out the Polaroid PoGo mobile printer. The device sells for US\$40 but requires special paper that costs about US\$0.30 a page. If you're traveling with children, instant pictures can make for an entertaining on-the-go scrapbook project.

E-READERS ON THE BEACH

If you plan to spend your vacation with a shelf of classics, you ought to go digital; with

a Kindle, Nook, iPad or other flat reader, there's no practical limit to the number of books you can enjoy, and you don't have to worry about weight. The only problem: How do you protect these delicate devices in the sand and surf? You could consider buying a waterproof sleeve for your reader; TrendyDigital makes one that sells for US\$20. Or go on the cheap — encase your reader in a snug zipper sandwich bag. These are usually transparent enough to read through, but sturdy enough to protect your device from the weather.

NOISE-CANCELING HEADPHONES

Headphones that electronically eliminate ambient noise have been around for at least a decade. But they're now so cheap — you can get the Sony MDR-NC7 for less than US\$40 — that they're no longer solely the domain of frequent travelers.

Noise-canceling headphones are a must if you plan to watch movies or listen to music on planes, trains and other loud means of locomotion; without them, you'll have to turn up the volume to a high level, which isn't good for your hearing. Consider a pair even if you don't care to listen to songs, as these headphones turn an otherwise cacophonous plane ride into something resembling a vacation.



Laptop computers may be more useful for business-related tasks, but devices like e-readers and the iPad, left and center, are easier to carry on trips.

PHOTOS: BLOOMBERG AND REUTERS

[FESTIVAL]

What's red and white and chill all over?

Whether you're a Canadian or not, Canada D'eh offers everyone the chance to kick back, relax and sip on some cold Canadian brew in true Canuck style



BoPoMoFo add the blues to Canada D'eh's red and white.

PHOTO COURTESY OF BOPOMOFO

BY ALITA RICKARDS
CONTRIBUTING REPORTER

The diverse range of folks at last year's annual Canada D'eh party brought the country's multi-cultural ethnic to life with people from not only Taiwan and Canada, but South Africa, Jamaica, South Korea, the US and other nations attending the family-friendly outdoor barbeque. "Likely about 35 percent are Canadian or have lived in Canada. It is really open to everyone," said organizer and Canadian Society board member Kevin Dempsey. He estimates there are about 50,000 Canadians living in Taiwan but says "nobody knows for sure."

About 3,200 Canucks and friends attended last year's party at Shalun Beach (沙崙) in Tamsui, organizers say, and they expect as many will head back today to a popular venue in the countryside near Baishawan (白沙灣) where the festival was held two years ago.

Dempsey thinks this venue is just more fun than last year's. "Most of the Canada D'eh's have been here. We moved it back because it is a better atmosphere and easier to manage," he said.

It's beers, beef, bands and beach with a range of sports for adults and activities for children.

The meat-heavy menu has hot dogs, hamburgers, whole roast pigs and, new this year, barbecue Canadian roast beef. Beer, wine, and non-alcoholic drinks will be available as well. All transactions are made with coupons; the door charge garners a few and more can be purchased, which is best done sooner than later because long lines tend to form for coupons as the day goes on. One coupon will get you a non-alcoholic beverage or fries, two snags a beer, wine or most food items, and it takes four to get a Guinness. Unused coupons will not be refunded.

Activities include beach volleyball and soccer, a hockey shoot-out and tug-o-war.

There will be face-painting, and though every year they say it's "for kids," many adults sport Canadian flags on their faces and appendages. Day-trippers are advised to bring sunscreen and wear a hat — even when it's pouring in Taipei, the weather can be dramatically different outside the city.

Those more inclined to sprawl on plastic chairs under awnings drinking beer will appreciate the arrival of DJs Dominik T and Rick Kraft who will play from 4pm, with other entertainment from 6pm. An Aboriginal Dance troupe

FESTIVAL NOTES

WHAT: Canada D'eh 2010
WHEN: Today from 2pm to midnight
ADMISSION: NT\$600 per adult, NT\$700 for adult plus child, children less than 6 years old or 90cm tall get in free
GETTING THERE: If traveling by public transportation, take the MRT to Hongshulin MRT Station (紅樹林捷運站) on the Red Line. Free shuttle buses will run from the Hongshulin MRT Station at regular intervals. The 22km ride takes about 40 minutes. If traveling by car, take the Coastal Highway (Provincial Highway 2) past Tamsui (淡水) (keep right and don't turn off at Tamsui) until you reach the 22km marker. Turn right into the parking lot
AFTER-PARTY: The last 10 buses departing the Canada D'eh fest after 11pm will go directly to Luxy, 5F, 201, Zhongxiao E Rd Sec 4, Taipei City (台北市忠孝東路四段201號5樓). Canada D'eh guests get in for half price
ON THE NET: www.canadiansociety.org

will be followed by the raffle draw and then BoPoMoFo (ボポモフォ) blues band. Other acts include I/O Band, ABS (All Blues and Soul) and Wailin' Soul.

"It's a great event, always lots of fun," said BoPoMoFo frontman Douglas Charles Rapier, whose band has played at three prior Canada D'eh's.

"We've got a reputation for a great fireworks show," he added, "but this year it has been dramatically expanded and will be our biggest ever."

A word of warning: Bands are scheduled until 11:50pm, but the last shuttle buses to Hongshulin MRT Station (紅樹林捷運站), the last station on the Red Line before Danshui (Tamsui) MRT Station (淡水捷運站), leave at 11pm. The last 10 buses go straight to Luxy, where Canada D'eh guests can get in for half price. Canada D'eh itself doesn't end until midnight, which is when the last train leaves Danshui MRT Station. That puts the only duh in the D'eh.