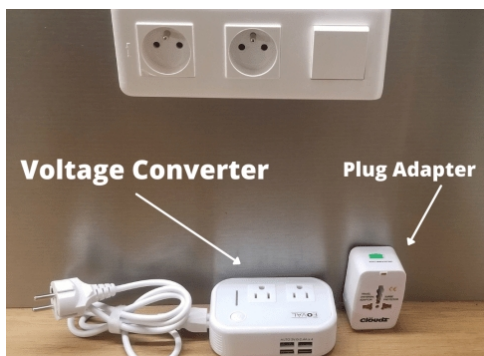


Tech Tools for Travel (updated August 2026)

Whether you are taking a short trip close to home or an extended international tour, technology tools can make travel smoother, safer, and more personal by removing common frustrations with planning your trip, navigating in unknown destinations, communicating in unfamiliar languages, and optimizing your time and money.

Power

- **Adapters vs. converters:** An international power adapter changes the physical shape of your plug to fit a foreign wall outlet, while a voltage converter changes the electrical voltage itself. You will almost certainly need an adapter to fit the plugs in the countries you are visiting, but you probably will not need a converter. If you are charging your device using a USB cord rather than plugging it into an outlet, you do not need to worry about dual voltage.
- **Dual voltage vs. single voltage:** Check your device for voltage information. This information can be found on the power adapter/charger, on the device itself, in the user manual, or on the manufacturer's website.
 - o **Dual-Voltage** When you see "INPUT: 100-240V, 50/60Hz" on a device, that means it works anywhere in the world. You just need the right plug adapter. This includes smartphones, laptops, tablets, cameras, e-readers and travel CPAPs.
 - o **Single-Voltage** (110–120V only): If your device only works on US voltage, plugging it straight into a foreign 220–240V outlet will ruin it instantly. You need a voltage converter, or better yet, leave the single-voltage item at home. Common single-voltage devices are older or high-wattage heating devices such as hair dryers, curling irons, and hair straighteners. Most modern electric shavers and CPAP machines are dual voltage.



- **Plug types:** There are currently 15 types of electrical plugs used around the world, designated by letters A through O. Each plug type has specific characteristics including pin configuration, grounding capability, and amperage ratings. Universal adapters are convenient for frequent travelers visiting multiple countries.

Look for a universal adapter that covers Types A, B, C, G, and I, which handles most destinations. Ensure it's from a reputable brand with proper safety certifications. Avoid cheap adapters for high-power devices, they may overheat. For extended stays, consider buying a quality country-specific adapter instead. For more details on plug types, visit <https://plugtypes.com/>.



International adapter



Adapter with different plug types



Long charging cable

- **Power strips and/or long USB cables:**

- o **Single-Outlet Solution:** Hotel rooms often have only one visible wall outlet, usually hidden behind a nightstand or desk. A power strip and/or a long cable provides easier access.
- o **Shared Power:** Airports, cafes, and train stations have scarce outlets. Plugging in a power strip lets you share electricity with other travelers and make friends.
- o **Fewer Adapters Needed:** You only need one or two plug adapters, and you can plug multiple domestic devices directly into the strip (provided they are dual voltage).
- o **Cruise Ship Friendly:** Cruise lines ban surge protectors because they pose a fire hazard with ship wiring, but non-surging basic extension strips are usually allowed.

- **USB-A or USB-C Connectors:** USB-A is a traditional one-way connector, while USB-C is a modern, oval, reversible connector that delivers much faster speeds and higher power.
- **Portable power banks/chargers:** These are essential to ensure you have adequate power when you are on the go. For faster charging, look for USB-C Power delivery and higher wattage ratings. Many modern options include built-in USB-C or Lightning cables alongside standard USB-A and USB-C slots.

Most lithium power banks under 27,000mAh are airline-approved for carry-on luggage, but you should always check specific carrier policies.

- There are several types of portable power banks:
 - o **Mini / Pocket Power Banks:** Small, lightweight batteries designed to slide easily into a pocket or purse for emergency phone charges.
 - o **Standard / Daily Use Power Banks:** Mid-size power options that can recharge a smartphone multiple times and often feature fast-charging ports.
 - o **Laptop / High-Capacity Power Banks:** Large battery packs equipped with high wattage output capable of charging tablets and laptops.
 - o **Magnetic / Wireless Power Banks:** Wireless chargers that snap directly onto compatible phones using magnetic alignment
 - o **Solar Power Banks:** Chargers equipped with small built-in solar panels to trickle-charge the internal battery using sunlight during outdoor trips.



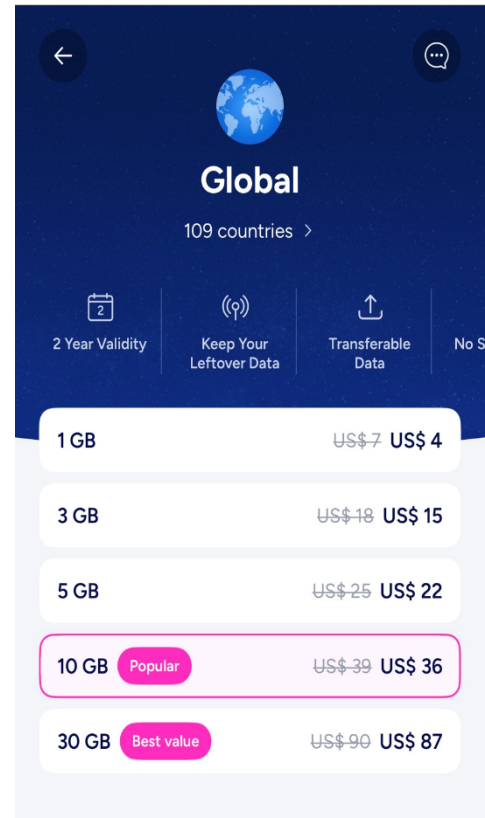
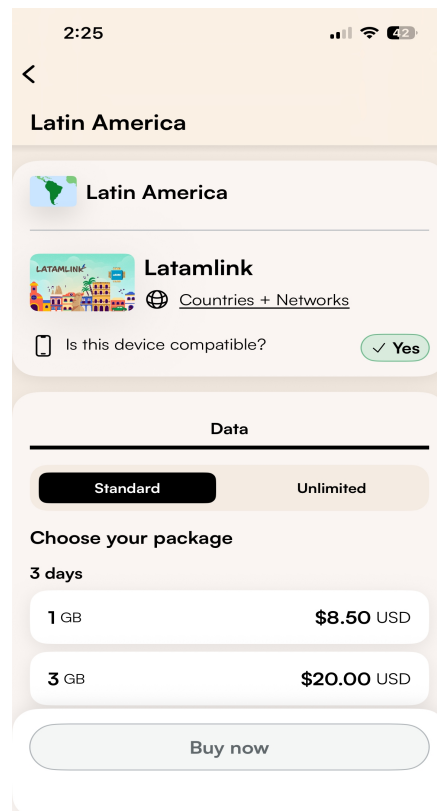
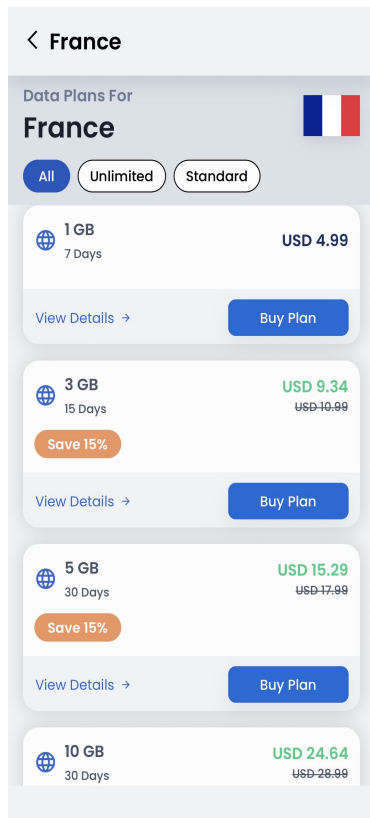
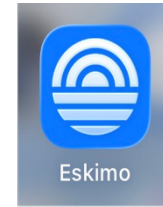
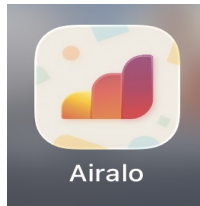
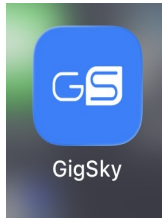
Staying Connected

While unplugging during a trip can be tempting, keeping open lines of communication with family and friends often makes traveling smoother and far less stressful. With a bit of strategic planning, you can stay in touch without letting your screen distract from the adventure.

- **Cellular Data & International Plans:** Constant connectivity is necessary for real-time navigation and emergencies. Check to see if your current carrier offers daily or monthly international travel passes and find out the cost of data and phone calls. Many carriers offer WiFi calling options:
 - o **AT&T:** <https://www.att.com/support/article/wireless/KM1063258/> or <https://www.att.com/support/article/wireless/KM1401809/>
 - o **Verizon:** <https://www.verizon.com/support/wifi-calling-faqs/>
 - o **Google Fi:** <https://fi.google.com/about/international-rates>
 - o **T-Mobile:** <https://www.t-mobile.com/support/coverage/wi-fi-calling-from-t-mobile>

- **SIM Cards or eSIM cards:** If your phone is unlocked and paid off, buying a SIM card to connect with local cellular networks upon arrival or activating an eSIM before you leave is often a significantly cheaper alternative. You can purchase a plan for a set period or for a certain amount of data. Many companies offer data only plans and some offer both data and a voice number (this would be a different number than the one you normally use).

Some examples of eSIM options and costs (GigSky, Airalo, and Eskimo):



- **Smart Wi-Fi Usage:** If you only need periodic access, rely on Wi-Fi networks available at hotels, cafes, and public hubs. Keep your phone in Airplane Mode with Wi-Fi enabled to prevent hidden background roaming fees.

Avoid logging into bank accounts or sensitive services over unsecured public Wi-Fi without a trusted Virtual Private Network (VPN). Read more about VPNs.

- **Cross-Platform Messaging Apps:** Set up internet-based messaging services like WhatsApp, Signal, or Telegram before departing. These tools allow you to send texts, share high-resolution photos, and make voice or video calls over Wi-Fi without international SMS charges. Make sure your contacts download your preferred app prior to your trip.

Security Tools

- **RFID blocking purse, wallet, or envelopes:** These items use metallic or electromagnetic shielding materials to disrupt radio waves between wireless scanners and the microchips inside your contactless credit cards or passports.
- **Theft-Resistant Bags:** These bags and neck straps use specialized design features like slash-proof wire mesh, lockable zippers, and cut-resistant straps to stop pickpockets and grab-and-go thieves.
- **Theft-Resistant phone neck strap:** Prevent theft or loss by keeping your phone strapped to you.
- **Money belt or hidden pouch:** Keep your most important travel documents and emergency cash completely safe from pickpockets. Many travelers use these just for transit days or deep storage, relying on front pockets and hotels safes for daily sightseeing. Just be sure to carry only the cash you need for the day and keep different amounts in different pockets.
- **USB Data Blocker:** An inexpensive, portable tool that lets you safely charge your phone or laptop from public USB ports while preventing any data transfer or malware infection. Alternatively, use power banks or electrical outlets to charge your devices when in public facilities.
- **A Virtual Private Network (VPN):** A VPN encrypts your internet traffic and hides your real location, making it a vital tool for staying secure and accessing home services while traveling.
 - **Public Wi-Fi Security:** Airports, hotels, and cafes use open networks that hackers can easily monitor; a VPN scrambles your data so it cannot be read.
 - **Access Home Content:** Connecting to a server in your home country lets you log into your usual banking, streaming, and local web services without geographic blocks. [\[1\]](#)
 - **Bypass Censorship:** Some countries block popular apps and news sites; a VPN helps you safely route around local government restrictions.
 - **Better Deals:** Changing your virtual location can sometimes show different pricing when searching for flights or rental cars.
- **Portable Router:** Frequent travelers may consider purchasing a portable router, which provides the following benefits:
 - **One-Time Login:** You go through a hotel or airport login page (captive portal) just once on the router, and all your other devices connect automatically.
 - **Bypass Device Limits:** It counts as a single device on the network, letting you connect your phone, laptop, tablet, and TV without paying extra per device.
 - **Network-Wide VPN:** You can install a VPN (Virtual Private Network) directly on the router to encrypt traffic for every connected device at once—even smart TVs or gaming consoles that don't support VPN apps.
 - **Better Security:** It blocks other users on public Wi-Fi from seeing or accessing your devices.
 - **Wired-to-Wireless Conversion:** You can plug a hotel room's Ethernet cable into the router to broadcast a fast, private Wi-Fi signal.



USB Data Blocker



Portable Router

Miscellaneous Tech Tools

- **Digital Luggage Scale:** Airlines charge high fees—sometimes \$50 to \$200 per bag—if your luggage goes over the weight limit. Weighing bags before going to the airport avoids these surprise charges.
- **Headphones/Earbuds:** Over-ear headphones generally provide better overall noise cancellation than earbuds because their large ear cups create a stronger physical seal and house more powerful noise-canceling chips. However, many travelers use earbuds because they are more compact and easier to pack. If you use wireless earbuds, be sure to purchase safety straps for them to avoid losing them under your airplane seat. Many planes now have Bluetooth capability to connect your wireless earbuds, but in case they do not, pack an adapter that plugs into an airplane's standard headphone jack if you want to use your wireless headphones or earbuds for in-flight entertainment.
- **Luggage trackers:** Follow your bags and make finding lost bags easier by tucking a luggage tracker in your bags and backpacks.

Additional Useful Travel Apps

When it comes to travel, you will likely find that “there’s an app for that.” A plethora of smart phone apps can ease navigating, conversing, or researching information when traveling. Many apps offer a free version as well as a paid option with upgraded features.

UC Retirees Travel’s worldwide tours are expertly planned and led, so the use of apps is not necessary while on our tours, but apps can facilitate communication and logistics, particularly during free time while on tour. Some apps that UC retirees have used while traveling include:

Communication:

- **Duolingo or Babble:** Learn some basic vocabulary before traveling. Babble uses more traditional training modules and Duolingo uses a fun, gamified approach.
- **Google Translate:** Translate spoken conversations or use your smart phone camera to translate written text on restaurant menus, street signs, etc.

Transportation:

- **Airline apps:** Download the app for all your airline(s) to check in for flights, check in your bags, store boarding passes, and get notifications of schedule or gate changes. If your flights are booked on multiple airlines via code share, download the apps for all the airlines and log in before leaving home using the record locator number for that airline.
- **Flight Tracker:** Track real-time flight status and see the live map flight track of any commercial flight.
- **Maps (Google, Apple, Etc.):** Search for directions using different transportation methods, download maps to access offline, and create your own “saved lists” of attractions, restaurants, and more.
- **Local transportation apps:** Use local transportation apps at your destination to plan routes, buy tickets, or get real-time updates.
- **City Mapper:** Very useful for getting from point A to Point B using public transit, walking, cycling, and ride-hailing services in major global cities. It provides real-time transit schedules, fare costs, platform guidance, and multi-modal routing.
- **GPSmyCity:** Offers pre-planned walking tours, audio guides, and localized travel articles to explore landmarks and hidden gems at your own pace.

- **AllTrails:** Find the best hiking, biking and running trails, including details on s length, starting location, and quality. This app works in urban as well as rural areas.
- **Rome2Rio:** Find the speediest route to your destination with step-by-step directions and instructions for public transportation.
- **Uber, Lyft, Grab, or Country-Specific Ride Apps:** Book a ride with these convenient rideshare and transportation apps.
- **Waze:** Get community-based information while on the road about traffic, hazards, and fastest routes.

Trusted Traveler:

- **TSA Pre-Check:** A paid program that provides expedited security screening in US airports to let you move through airport security faster without removing certain items, such as shoes, belts, light jackets and without removing items from your bag such as your laptop or 3-1-1 liquids.
<https://www.tsa.gov/precheck>
- **CLEAR:** A paid private identity-verification service that lets travelers use biometrics like eye or facial scans to bypass the standard ID check line at participating airport security checkpoints. CLEAR is available at more than 60 U.S. airports as well as select sports stadiums and entertainment venues (where stadium entry is free via the app). <https://www.clearme.com/>
- **Mobile Passport:** A free app that helps you clear customs more quickly. Can be used in conjunction with TSA Pre-Check and groups of up to 12 people can be processed together.
<https://www.cbp.gov/travel/us-citizens/mobile-passport-control>
- **Global Entry:** A paid program that includes TSA Pre-Check and expedited Customs processing; requires an application and interview; best for frequent international travelers.
<https://www.cbp.gov/travel/trusted-traveler-programs/global-entry>

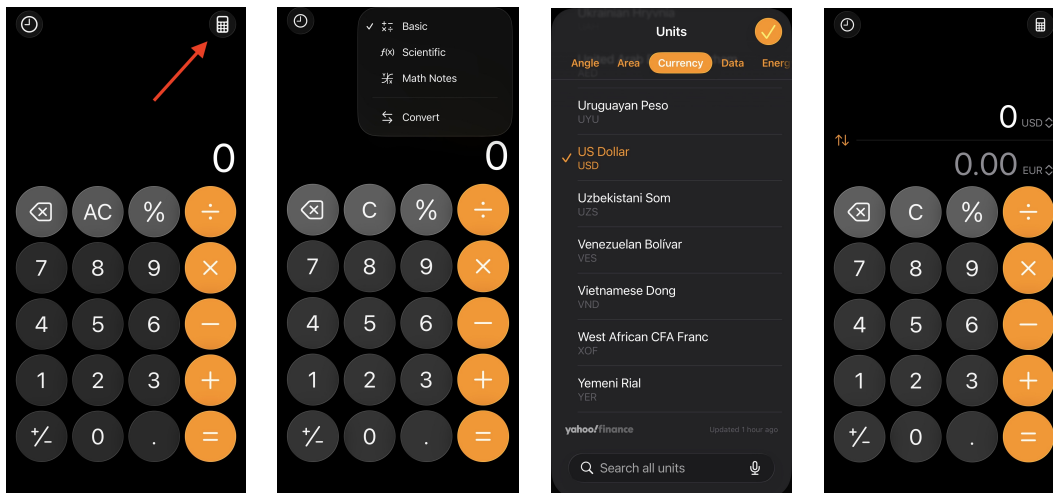
Other:

- **Hotel apps:** Download the apps for your hotels to allow you to do things such as skip front desk lines, use your phone as a room key, and manage room service or requests directly.
- **Travel insurance app:** If your insurance has an app, download it to receive real-time alerts about your destination and have offline access to your policy, 24/7 emergency assistance, and fast claim filing.
- **Clock:** Using the World Clock feature on your phone's default clock app, add the cities you will visit to easily check the time difference back home.
- **Calm or BetterSleep or YouTube recordings:** Play guided meditation or a variety of sounds such as white noise or rainfall to help relax and sleep on the plane or in noisy hotels.
- **Photo Sharing Apps:** Use WhatsApp, Google Photos or iCloud to share photos with family and friends. Make sure you ask them to download WhatsApp before departing home. Google Photos and iCloud albums can be set up any time and shared with a link that doesn't require a login or download.
- **Video apps and Podcasts:** Netflix, Amazon, etc. Download content for offline access.
- **Trip Advisor:** Search for accommodations, restaurants and attractions to see reviews and ratings.
- **Get Your Guide or Viator:** Find tours, excursions, skip-the-line tickets, private guides and more.

- **Reading apps:**

- o **Kindle:** A free software program by Amazon that lets you read e-books, magazines, comics, and graphic novels on your smartphone, tablet, or computer.
- o **Libby:** A free reading app that allows you to borrow eBooks, digital audiobooks, and magazines from your public library using a valid library card
- o **Hoopla:** A free digital media service that lets you borrow e-books, audiobooks, comics, movies, TV shows, music, and magazines using a local public library card. Unlike other library apps like Libby, items on Hoopla are available instantly with no holds or lines. Libraries often place limits on the number of items you can borrow.
- o **Chirp:** A la carte audiobook retailer that offers daily deals and heavily discounted titles without requiring a monthly subscription or credit system.
- o **Audible:** A digital platform created by Amazon that lets you buy, download, and listen to audiobooks, podcasts, and original audio programs

- **PackPoint:** Create a customized packing list based on your destination, length of stay, and activities and share your list with fellow travelers. You can also create packing lists using Notes, Google Docs or Sheets, OneNote, etc. Or print the [UC Retirees Travel suggested packing list](#).
- **XE Currency Converter or All Currency Converter:** Calculate currency exchange rates.
- **iPhone Converter:** For iPhone users, the calculator has a built-in currency converter. Open the calculator, tap on the calculator icon in the upper right corner tap the “convert” button, and choose the currencies you want to convert between. You can also use this app to convert things such as length, weight, and temperature.



- **Food Finding apps:**

- o **Happy Cow:** A global dining guide and community platform that helps users find vegan, vegetarian, and plant-friendly food options.
- o **Yelp:** A mobile guide that helps users find, review, and connect with local restaurants as well as shops and service providers.
- o **Maps apps:** Find nearby restaurants, read reviews, check menus, and get directions.

Do you have a favorite tech tool or app? Email us at UCRetireesTravel@gmail.com. We may add it to the list.