

Travel

companion

A private guide to flights, jet lag, hotels, and staying metabolically intact wherever you land.



The Framework

Travel is where routines quietly fall apart. Not from one bad decision, but from a dozen small ones made without a plan, at an hour when your judgment is already worn down.

This guide isn't about eating perfectly on the road. The food side of that is already covered in detail in **Dining Without Damage**. This is about everything around the food: the sleep debt, the dehydration, the six hours in a metal tube, the jet lag that quietly wrecks your appetite and your judgment for three days after you land.

Most of what damages people on a trip isn't the destination. It's the transit. Get the transit right and the rest of the trip takes care of itself.

Read the section for whatever you're about to do next: the night before a flight, the morning you land, the first night in a new hotel.

Six Non-Negotiables

Everything in this guide reduces to six habits. Apply these on every trip regardless of destination, airline, or time zone.

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- 01 PROTECT THE SLEEP WINDOW FIRST**
Before you plan meetings, sightseeing, or dinners, protect when and how you'll sleep. Everything else can move around that. Sleep can't.
 - 02 MOVE EVERY TWO HOURS IN TRANSIT**
On a flight, a train, or a long drive, get up and move on a fixed schedule rather than waiting until your legs remind you.
 - 03 WATER BEFORE COFFEE, ALWAYS**
The first drink after you wake up on travel days is water, not the coffee or the airport espresso. Caffeine works better on a hydrated system anyway.
 - 04 ARRIVAL DAY IS NOT A TEST DAY**
Don't judge your weight, your energy, or your willpower on the day you land. Your body is mid-adjustment. Give it 48 hours before you draw any conclusions.
 - 05 PACK INSURANCE, NOT HOPE**
A small kit (electrolytes, magnesium, melatonin, a protein source) removes the moment where a bad airport or a closed kitchen gets to make the decision for you.
 - 06 LET THE ITINERARY BEND, NOT YOUR BASELINE**
Move a workout, skip a sightseeing stop, shift a meal time. The one thing that doesn't flex is the handful of habits that keep you functional.
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Flights

Cabin air runs at roughly 10 to 20% humidity, drier than most deserts, which is why your mouth feels like sandpaper by hour three. The bigger physical risk on a long flight isn't dehydration though. It's sitting still.

● DO THIS

Book an **aisle seat** on anything over three hours, specifically so getting up doesn't require negotiating with a stranger.

Stand and move every one to two hours. A short walk to the galley and back, plus a set of calf raises while you wait, is enough.

Wear compression socks on flights over five hours. The evidence for reduced clot risk here is genuinely strong, not just travel folklore.

Sip water steadily, roughly 200 to 250ml per waking hour, rather than one large bottle before landing.

● WATCH FOR

Sitting completely still for a long-haul sector. Flights over four hours carry a meaningfully higher clot risk, and it climbs further past eight hours.

Treating thirst as the only signal that matters. Dry cabin air dries out your mouth and nose directly, which isn't the same thing as your body running low on fluid.

Skipping movement because the seatbelt sign is usually off. "Usually off" isn't a plan.

HIDDEN TRAP

The dramatic version of flight dehydration isn't well supported. Real measured fluid loss from cabin air over an eight hour flight is modest, on the order of 150ml by some clinical measurements, with no measurable change in blood concentration. The dry mouth and headache most people blame on "dehydration" are more often the dry air itself, plus hours of immobility. Hydrate for comfort and circulation. Don't panic-drink a litre right before landing.

PRE-FLIGHT KIT

Electrolyte sachets, compression socks for anything over five hours, a protein source that survives security (jerky, a hard-boiled egg, a cheese pack), and a refillable bottle to fill after security rather than relying on the tiny cup service.

Jet Lag

Jet lag is not tiredness. It's your internal clock and the sun disagreeing about what time it is, and the two disagreements are not equally hard to resolve.

● DO THIS

Take **0.5 to 5mg of melatonin at your destination's local bedtime**, starting the night you arrive, for three to five nights.

For long eastward trips of six or more time zones, start a small evening dose two to three nights **before** you even leave.

Get outside light within an hour of waking at your destination. Morning light is the strongest signal you have for resetting the clock.

Shift your meals to local time immediately, even if you're not hungry. Meal timing is a secondary clock cue your body actually listens to.

● WATCH FOR

Dosing melatonin on your home time zone's clock instead of your destination's. It only works relative to where you are now.

Over-treating westward travel. Crossing fewer than five zones westward, most people adjust in two to three days without any supplement at all.

Bright screens at the wrong hour. Scrolling in bed at 2am local time is telling your brain it's daytime, right when you need the opposite signal.

HIDDEN TRAP

Eastward travel is measurably harder than westward, and it's not in your head. Your body finds it far easier to delay its clock (stay up later, which is what westward travel asks of you) than to advance it (fall asleep earlier, what eastward travel demands). Budget an extra day or two of patience specifically for eastward trips.

QUICK REFERENCE

Eastward, 6+ zones: start melatonin two to three nights before departure, continue at destination bedtime on arrival.

Eastward, under 6 zones: start melatonin the night you arrive, at destination bedtime.

Westward, 5+ zones: small melatonin dose in the destination's local morning.

Westward, under 5 zones: light exposure and meal timing are usually enough on their own.

Hotels

The food side of hotel stays, breakfast buffets, room service, minibars, is covered in full in Dining Without Damage. This is about the rest of the room: sleep, movement, and the small requests almost nobody makes.

● DO THIS

Request a high floor, away from the elevator and ice machine, when you book or check in. Most hotels will accommodate this if asked.

Black out the room properly. Travel blackout clips or simply hanging a dark garment over a stubborn gap in the curtains works better than most people expect.

Do a 60-second minibar audit on arrival. Move anything you don't want at 11pm out of easy reach, into a drawer or the closet.

Ask which floor or room type is quietest if noise matters to you. Front desk staff usually know exactly which rooms to avoid.

● WATCH FOR

Accepting whatever room you're assigned without a single request. Hotels adjust far more often than guests assume.

Loud HVAC units. A cycling air conditioning unit can fragment sleep more than the mattress ever will.

Skipping movement because there's no gym. A bodyweight circuit in a hotel room takes fifteen minutes and needs no equipment.

HIDDEN TRAP

Most people troubleshoot a bad hotel night by blaming the bed. More often it's the noise floor: a cycling AC unit, a hallway, an ice machine two doors down. A phone-based white noise track or a small travel fan solves more sleep problems than a pillow menu does.

SAY THIS — ON CHECK-IN

“Could I get a room away from the elevator and ice machine, on a higher floor if one's available? I'd also love to know if there's a gym or fitness area on-site.”

Supplements

Travel supplementation has exactly three jobs: help the clock reset, replace what transit strips out, and keep the gut stable somewhere new. Nothing more complicated than that.

● WORTH PACKING

Melatonin, 0.5 to 5mg, for circadian resets on multi-zone trips.

Magnesium glycinate, for sleep quality and the constipation that transit and dehydration commonly cause.

Electrolyte sachets (sodium, potassium, magnesium), especially for long-haul flights or hot destinations.

A probiotic or *saccharomyces boulardii*, started a few days before travel, to buffer against new-water and new-food gut disruption.

● BE CAREFUL WITH

Prescription sleep aids as a first option. They're a legitimate tool for genuine cases, but they're a bigger lever than most travel sleep problems need.

Mixing melatonin with alcohol. The combination sedates oddly and blunts melatonin's actual circadian effect.

High-dose magnesium on travel days. More isn't better here specifically, since the most common side effect is loose stools, which is the last thing you want mid-transit.

HIDDEN TRAP

Most "travel wellness" blends bury their one genuinely useful ingredient, usually melatonin, at a fraction of an effective dose inside a proprietary blend label. Check the actual milligram amount on melatonin and magnesium specifically. A pretty label with "sleep support" written on it is not the same as an effective dose.

Hydration

Hydration on the road is mostly about circulation and electrolyte balance, not the dehydration panic the airport water shops are selling you.

● DO THIS

Drink 200 to 250ml per waking hour in flight, spread out rather than front or back-loaded.

Add electrolytes, not just plain water, on any flight over four hours or in hot climates.

Hydrate well the day before a long travel day, not just during it.

● WATCH FOR

Large volumes of plain water with no electrolytes, which can leave you feeling worse, not better, on a long sector.

Coffee or alcohol as your main fluid intake for the day. Neither substitutes for water.

HIDDEN TRAP

Measured fluid loss on a long flight is smaller than the popular "flying dehydrates you" story suggests, so chugging water right before landing does little for how you'll feel and mostly just means a queue for the bathroom. Steady sipping across the whole flight beats volume at any single moment.

Eating Out, On The Road

The full breakdown for every cuisine, airport, hotel, and room service menu lives in Dining Without Damage. Here's the version to skim while you're standing at the gate.

● QUICK DEFAULTS

Airports: boiled eggs, jerky, cheese boxes, plain nuts, sashimi-only orders.

Hotels: request eggs or protein at breakfast ahead of arrival, even if it's not on the buffet.

Room service: ask for any sandwich or burger as a plate, no bread, side salad instead of fries.

● QUICK AVOIDS

Grab-and-go sandwiches, wraps, and bagels at the terminal.

Buffet pastry stations and the "healthy" grain bowl that reads lighter than it is.

Smoothies and bottled juices marketed as the healthy option.

For ordering scripts, hidden carb traps, and cuisine-by-cuisine detail, see Dining Without Damage in full.

Alcohol In Transit

The old idea that altitude gets you drunker faster isn't well supported. What the newest research actually shows is more useful, and more concerning, than that.

● DO THIS

If you drink in flight, **match every drink with a full glass of water.**

Keep it to one drink on an overnight long-haul sector if sleep matters to you the next day.

Drink earlier in the flight, well ahead of when you actually plan to sleep, rather than as a sleep aid.

● WATCH FOR

Using alcohol as a sleep aid in flight. It does the opposite of what you're using it for at cruising altitude specifically.

Multiple drinks on an overnight flight, especially for older travelers or anyone with an existing heart or lung condition.

HIDDEN TRAP

A 2024 sleep study measured this directly: alcohol combined with the lower cabin oxygen levels found at cruising altitude dropped blood oxygen and raised heart rate for hours, and cut deep sleep to roughly 46 minutes, compared with 84 minutes after alcohol alone at ground level and 67 minutes with neither. The "glass of wine helps me sleep on the plane" habit is measurably working against the one thing a long flight actually requires: real recovery sleep.

Sleep On The Road

Everything else in this guide is really in service of one thing. Getting real sleep in an unfamiliar bed, on an unfamiliar clock, without the routine that normally makes it automatic.

● DO THIS

For short trips (under four days), **keep your home sleep and wake times** as closely as the schedule allows, rather than fully adapting.

Control the **first night's environment** above everything else: dark, cool, quiet. It sets the tone for the rest of the trip.

Travel with a **simple sleep kit**: eye mask, earplugs or a white noise app, and whatever magnesium or melatonin you've decided to use.

Get **outside light within an hour of waking** at your destination every day, not just the first.

● WATCH FOR

Long naps on arrival day. Twenty to thirty minutes helps. Two or three hours resets the wrong clock and makes that first night harder.

Screens in bed at the wrong local hour. The light itself is a signal, and at 2am local time it's the wrong one.

HIDDEN TRAP

A short nap is a tool. A long one is a second time zone change you didn't plan for. If you have to nap on arrival day, set an alarm for thirty minutes and get back into daylight immediately after.

QUICK REFERENCE

The One-Page Recap

Everything above, condensed. Read this in the taxi to the airport if you don't have time for anything else.

CATEGORY	DEFAULT TO	WATCH FOR
Flights	Aisle seat, move hourly, compression socks 5hrs+, steady water	Sitting still, treating thirst as the only signal
Jet Lag	Melatonin at destination bedtime, morning light, shift meals	Dosing on home time, over-treating short westward trips
Hotels	Request quiet floor, blackout the room, minibar audit	Accepting the first room offered, loud HVAC
Supplements	Melatonin, magnesium glycinate, electrolytes, probiotic	High-dose magnesium on travel days, melatonin plus alcohol
Hydration	200-250ml/hour with electrolytes, hydrate the day before	Plain water only, coffee or alcohol as your fluid source
Eating Out	Protein-forward defaults, see Dining Without Damage	Grab-and-go carbs, "healthy" grain bowls
Alcohol	One drink max overnight, water 1:1, drink early not late	Alcohol as a sleep aid in flight, multiple drinks overnight
Sleep	Control first night's environment, short naps only, morning light	Long arrival-day naps, screens at the wrong local hour

Figures referenced throughout this guide are drawn from published aviation health and sleep research, and are typical ranges rather than guarantees for any individual case.



Safe travels. Come back the same person
who left.

Questions about a specific trip or itinerary between sessions, reach out
directly, we'll plan around it together.

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