Khanjan's traveling tips:

Here are a few travel tips that you may find useful:

The cheapest way to get money abroad is by using your Debit / ATM card at ATMs. Only Mastercard and Visa are accepted internationally (Maestro and Cirrus are not). However, Mastercard does not work (atleast till last Summer) in Uganda and no international ATM cards work in Rwanda.

Credit cards are accepted at few places and generally with an extra charge upto 5%. Traveler checks (TCs) incur a heavy commission. TCs are helpful only as a fourth ba ckup after cash, ATM cards and Credit Cards. You can get TCs on your name (for free from your bank) and carry them with you and deposit them back in your account after the trip.

There are certain default values set for the maximum amount that can be withdrawn from your account (about $300 per transaction and $1500 per day). Your bank (or whoever issued the debit card) can change these values for you. I generally set a limit of $250 per transaction AND $250 per day.

Also, I block off my savings account so only my checking account is accessible. I go online and transfer money from savings to checking when i want to withdraw money. This way, even if i lose my debit card, i lose only whats in my checking account. (This is from experience - i was once conned off my debit card AND pin number by crooks posing as cops in Prague and ended up losing $1004.)

Also, i take all my debit / credit numbers, encode them and save them in my email account alongwith the numbers to call to cancel them. Incase i lose my card(s), i can get online (fairly easy around the world) and get the numbers to cancel my cards. I share this information with my family as well.

Scan your passport (and visas) and keep the soft copy in your email account - just in case you lose it. Get multiple photocopies of your passport and keep them in your bags. Keep your passport under lock and key in a safe place and travel locally with your passport photocopy.

travel as lightly as possible - i travel with one 30-35 lbs large backpack and a daypack (which is actually pretty big because i have a big camera). I have seen people travel with a single daypack and half of that is taken up by their camera equipment! Avoid bags with a high deadweight because you have to carry them most places in East Africa.

Carry essential medicines (including Imodium and tylenol) and toilet paper in your daypack. The toilet paper in Tanzania is generally pretty rough - carry your favorite brand with you if you want :) Having a daypack with a slot for a water bottle is also a good idea bcos you will be carrying water with you all the time.

Carry spare batteries for your cameras (and other accessories). Alkaline batteries are not easily available. If you are planning on going on a safari, make sure you carry a LOT of spare batteries.

**Aaron's traveling tips:**

(Aaron generally disagrees with khanjan...so these might directly conflict with khanjan's tips. Jokes apart, these are very good travel tips.)

Bags

o When getting a pack…go to an outfitter that has experience and try on a few bags WITH WEIGHT in them to see how they feel when fully strapped. Don’t settle for one that isn’t comfortable or sturdy because of a lower price.

o I took 4 bags last year—a large backpack (Gregory Boltoro 70), a daypack that doubled as carry-on and was packable (REI Cruise UL), a small duffle for souvenirs and carry-on (old Sports Illustrated bag that! I found at Goodwill about the size of a purse), and a secondary bag (old full-size suitcase that I didn’t plan on carrying with me while backpacking, had somebody else bring it back).

Clothing

o Take as little cotton as possible. It takes a long time to dry and is pretty hard to clean as well.

o Don’t automatically assume that you need to go get high end backpacking gear. I found some great deals on some of the athletic wear at wal-mart. It was cheap and lightweight. Also, check your closet for old clothes as well!

o Practice doing your laundry in a sink. Why not? It also gives you an idea how long your clothes will take to dry.

o The easiest way I found to do laundry was to wear/take my clothes in to the shower with me and wash them as I took them off. It’s a little weird at first, but it wor ks pretty well, keeps you from having to do “laundry”, and stuff is dry and ready to go after a few hours.

Packing

o I was very strict when packing my bags. I packed stuff where it needed to be. If I needed it backpacking, it went in my backpack. If I didn’t need it backpacking, it went in the secondary bag.

o Pack your bag with what you expect to be in it, weigh it, and then start walking around with it on. If your bag weighs more than 40 pounds…it’s probably too heavy (and might not pass airline restrictions). Walk around like this for a good bit to see how it feels and if you could carry it for a long time/distance if necessary. If it feels light…don’t add anything else, unless it’s imperative. If it feels heavy…consider making cuts to packing list. Look at heaviest items first.

o Coordinate with travel buddy. Don’ t take multiples of items that you only need one of.

o For liquids, like soaps/shampoos and stuff. I would make 2 bottles for almost all of them. One bottle for my backpack, and one goes in my secondary bag for the 3-week project work (stationary). Get the small 2-3oz. squeeze bottles and fill them up from large containers that you buy at the store.

o For snacks/food…I packed all of it in my secondary bag, except for what I took in carry-on. If there were things that I planned on taking afterwards, I squeezed them in.

Miscellaneous

o Get street maps (you can print them on google maps), phone numbers of hostels, US Embassies, banks, credit cards, etc. and print them out before you go.

o Teach you parents how to use Skype & e-mail if they don’t know already. Skype is a Voice-Over-IP (telephone over the internet) service. Calls from Skype-to-Skype are FREE and calls made to cell or land lines are pretty inexpensive. They have their rates listed online. Also consider…if you have a cell phone using a local carrier, incoming calls and text messages are free—they don’t count against your credits. Also, e-mail is usually the easiest way to stay in contact due to time difference. Internet cafes are relatively accessible throughout the world.

o Scan and e-mail yourself and emergency contact copies of your passport, vaccination card. Encode your bank account info and credit card numbers if you send that too.

Electrical Items

o Check first to see that every device that has an electrical plug on it can handle up to 240V on the input. Most will say 100-240V or something close. If one or more do max of like 130V…yo u either need to leave them home, or use a voltage converter! (much h eavier). If all of your devices say 240V…all you need it a plug converter. Kenya uses the same plugs as Great Britain, which they look like this http://www.amazon.com/Adapter-Plug-Great-Britain-Polarized/dp/B000BMC5OQ. But, you can still use the round “Europlug?” I believe. You just need to have somebody show you how to unlock the outlet. It’s quite simple, just insert a pen Into the hole going up and down to unlock it