Sweet Dreams Are Made of This—Walking In Portugal
by Nancy Bestor

If the idea of walking from one charming seaside town to the next on the Algarve Coast in Southern Portugal sounds like a dream, I’m here to tell you it is just that. Cue the music. Picture windswept cliffs with the Atlantic Ocean churning below, small trails—or tracks as they call them in Portugal—with few other people, beautiful blue sky, warm sunshine, and delightfully quiet beaches, and you’ll get an idea of our recent trip to this captivating country on the southwestern tip of continental Europe. Add in the fact that every afternoon, at the end of our long day’s walk, we’d arrive in a small seaside village and before doing anything else, have a cold Super Bock beer, and later, after a short siesta, eat a delicious seafood dinner, and you’ll understand why I just wasn’t ready to wake up.

Our week-long walking tour in Portugal was everything we hoped it would be and more. Most days brought entirely different experiences of southern Portugal, whether it was luxury homes on the coast outside of Lagos, where we began our trek; walks through small inland villages, with cobblestone streets and friendly Portuguese villagers bidding us “bon dia;” or rugged and remote cliffs outside Sagres, with extremely steep drops to the ocean below, and nary a soul in sight.

We averaged about 9 miles a day over the five days, not too hard by any means, but with as much as 2100 feet in elevation gained on any given day, not too easy either. Some days we had short scrambles up steep and rocky slopes, where I had to grab onto rocks to pull myself up. Other

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You Can Teach an Old Dog New Tricks
by Robert Bestor

My Grandmother, the esteemed Lois Bestor, was born in 1917. She grew up on a farm in Nehawka, Nebraska without running water, electricity, or central heating. Yet from these humble beginnings she lived to enjoy the advent of television, see a man walk on the moon, and own a telephone that she could pop into her purse. And in the 1990s, she used her very own Apple desktop computer to write a 383-page history of her family, going all the way back to Ireland in the 1840s.

I was born in 1963 and am certain that the younger generations in my family will be amazed that I grew up with no cable TV, no computer, no internet, and, as of yet, no iPhone 8! But just as my Grandmother learned to use the latest newfangled techno

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Little Things To Make Your Travels Easier
by Robert Bestor

Sometimes it’s the little things that make the biggest difference. The holiday travel season is fast approaching with the spring season right on its tail. Here is some of our favorite gear for the traveler who’s making a wish list for their upcoming adventures. Some of them are small, yet far more useful than their size belies. Others are big, but have small, ingeniously designed features that make all the difference. Check ‘em out.

Briggs & Riley Transcend Luggage
Yes, luggage is big. But with Briggs & Riley’s newest version of their practically legendary Transcend line, it’s the little things (and a few big ones too!) that make it the best value in high-quality luggage today. The Transcend story begins with their clever new variable expansion system, which allows for customizable capacity and ensures that you’ll always have the perfect sized bag for any trip. It moves on to wonderful little touches like

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days we walked across beautiful sandy beaches. At times the track was very narrow, and closed in by bushes and brush, with lots of roots and rocks along the ground. We had to be careful, because it was easy to admire the view and not look where we were stepping, and thus trip over a root and take a tumble, slightly bruising your hand and wrist in the process. But I’m erasing that bit from my dream.

Our tour was self-guided, so we went at our own pace. We were outfitted with a GPS unit, with each day’s track pre-programmed, so once we figured out how to work it, we knew exactly where to go and how long we had to walk before arriving in our next charming beach town. We ambled through stone pine groves—the type of pine tree that produces pine nuts, not the pine trees we are familiar with in the Northwest. We walked by fishermen dropping their lines off high cliffs and into the deep, blue ocean waters below. We spied lighthouses, dolphins, cliffs and into the deep, blue ocean waters. We saw way more than we would have ever seen in a tour bus, a car, or from a plane, because we were tired of walking each night. And when you’ve been walking 9 or 10 miles a day for five days in a row, comfortable beds and hot showers are more important than hotels with lots of charm. The hotels were also all central in the towns that we walked to, which was important for getting to restaurants and bars without a car, and also because we were tired of walking each night.

Three other couples—one each from the US, Germany and Sweden—were on the same tour, and we often saw them at the hotel buffet breakfast, or walking around town during the evenings, as the villages were quite small. But we rarely saw them on the track, as everyone began each day when they were ready, and walked at their own pace. It was fun to check in each morning or evening though, and get their take on the completed hike and sights along the way.

Bob and I have done a fair amount of walking and hiking in our lives, but we were definitely tired by the end of our adventure. My feet tingled and my legs groaned. But I wouldn’t trade our experience in Southern Portugal for any other form of travel. We saw way more than we would have ever seen in a tour bus, a car, or even on a bike. Yes, it’s slow travel, but after returning from Europe, I’d argue that more things in life should be done at a leisurely pace. I’m trying to slow down and enjoy the ride, or, as the case may be, the walk.

Notes:

• We booked our tour through Mac’s Adventures out of Glasgow, Scotland - macadventure.com. The cost for the two of us was $2500. Mac’s Adventures was just the booking agent however.

The company providing the services in Portugal was Portugal Nature Trails - portugalnaturetrails.com. We were very happy with both.

• The self-guided tour included six nights hotel, six breakfasts, luggage transfer from town to town, our three hour transfers to and from Lisbon, and a couple of transfers during the week as well. In addition to the GPS, we were also well equipped with a Portuguese cell phone, in case of emergencies, and a map marked with sights and restaurants along our route.

• The pre-booked hotels were nice, usually good sized European hotels. They were not the type of hotels we would have chosen on our own, as we typically prefer smaller independent hotels, but the beds were comfortable, the showers were hot, and they all had wifi. And when you’ve been walking 9 or 10 miles a day for five days in a row, comfortable beds and hot showers are more important than hotels with lots of charm. The hotels were also all central in the towns that we walked to, which was important for getting to restaurants and bars without a car, and also because we were tired of walking each night.

• Breakfasts were always full buffets, with yogurt and granola, cold cuts and cheese, bread, fruit, coffee and juice. Most had hot offerings like eggs and bacon as well. It was a perfect start for a 10-mile day.

• Bob and I wore tennis shoes/light hiking shoes, and carried one small backpack between us, filled with two water bottles, snacks, sunscreen, our map, and phone. It was warm, even hot at times, so we didn’t need jackets, or fortunately, rain gear.
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devices, I too try to use them to make my everyday life, and my travels, easier. It’s just that sometimes, with me, there is a little kicking and screaming involved.

So, while I am in no way an early adopter, I am a grateful user of all the gadgets I can handle, particularly when Nancy and I are on the road. And despite my relative reluctance, it even excites me once in a while—particularly when a simple addition that immensely improves on existing technology suddenly appears, seemingly out of nowhere.

Just last month, while using Google Maps to get our bearings and locate our Uber pick-up location in Madrid, we suddenly noticed that the blue dot indicating our current location now included a “beam” that indicated the direction that our phone was pointing. For us it was a revelation. No more dialing up a route, loading a map, and then walking 20 feet before re-checking the phone to see if you are going in the right direction. Huzzah.

But here’s the frustrating part—that was the last night of our trip. We had been using Google Maps in the exact same manner for two weeks and had not noticed the directional beam until that moment. It was literally the last time we used the app on the trip. And now, just like that, it’s gone again. Before writing this story, I fired up Nancy’s phone to check it out, and our beloved Google Maps beam seems to have disappeared just as mysteriously as it arrived in the first place. No worries though, I’ll call the kids and they’ll tell me how to activate it.

Frustrations with TSA and cramped airline seats are a larger talking point than the truly amazing fact that modern jet travel can deliver you pretty much anywhere on planet earth within a day. Similarly, frustrations with technology, which for me are usually user error anyway, seem to get more ink than the amazing advances it has made for both our everyday lives and for our travels.

On our recent visit to Lisbon, Nancy and I were out and about, wandering somewhat aimlessly, when we decided that it was time for dinner. Nancy whipped out her phone and logged on to TripAdvisor. We checked the reviews for several nearby restaurants, chose one, loaded the map and directions, and within minutes, were comfortably seated with drinks and hors d’oeuvres on the way.*

Let’s say you are having friends over for dinner, everyone’s having a good time, perhaps some beverages are involved, and someone expresses an interest in Mexico City (or New Orleans, or wherever). Let’s say someone else agrees. By the end of the evening you could have the air, hotel, rental car and more, for your entire traveling party, booked and/or reserved. No more waiting until Monday morning to call a travel agent, where you’d probably leave a message and hope they get back to you when it’s a convenient time, so that you can get the info and then relay it to your friends who have likely already forgotten about the exciting plans you all cooked up in the wee hours of the morning. That’s the way we used to do it kids!

But there are things that I do miss about pre-internet travels. In 1990, I spent a month in Italy with just a general idea of where I wanted to go and what I wanted to see. Although it was the height of summer, my only advance planning was to purchase a rail pass prior to departure. So to beat the summer crowds and find a hotel room, I actually had to learn a little Italian. Upon arriving, I’d hit the first pay phone I could find and, using the listings in my Let’s Go guidebook, start calling hotels and pensions.

I would ask, “Vorrei una camera per due?” (Do you have a room for two?). “Quanto costa?” (How much does it cost?). Then I had to understand the response, which, with one dollar being equal to about 1700 lire at the time, was always a mouthful like “Quarantaquattromila” (Forty-four thousand). “Grazie. Il mio nome è Robert. Sarò lì in pochi minuti” (Thanks. My name is Robert. I’ll be there in a few minutes) would be my reply.

Because of these and other necessary interactions, I know and have retained far more Italian from my travels of nearly three decades ago than I have of Portuguese, despite spending two weeks in Portugal last month. But while I miss this, and little things like innkeepers meeting arriving trains in an old-school attempt to fill their vacancies, in the end I’ll trade convenience, efficiency, and safety for the romanticized memories of my travel past.

On our recent walking trip on the Algarve coast, our tour company provided us with a hand-held GPS device with the 45-mile trail preloaded on it. So, all alone in the wilds of Portugal, all we had to do was follow the blue line on the screen. Truly, that’s all we had to do.

In fact, the more I babble on here, the more I realize that I probably need to change my luddite ways. I think I’ll look into that fancy phone I mentioned earlier and, what the heck, bring on the driverless cars!

*One caveat to this example: when doing this abroad, read your reviews, load your map and then turn off your data! Your map and its GPS locator will still work just fine, but you won’t be needlessly burning through expensive data.

We buy a basic worldwide data plan before we go abroad. This gives us unlimited texting, as well as limited data.

“If adventures will not befall a young lady in her own village, she must seek them abroad.”
— JANE AUSTEN
Speed Through Pockets that help you zip through airport security by giving you the perfect place to put things like wallets, keys, watches, rings, and more into your bag and not into a bin. And, of course, Briggs’ Outsider Handle System which, along with a full front pocket (see photo below) that perfectly houses a fully packed Eagle Creek Medium Pack-It Folder, makes their bags the easiest and most efficient to pack by far. Finally, last but not least, Briggs still puts their “Simple As That” guarantee on every single bag they sell, meaning that if your Briggs & Riley bag is ever broken or damaged, they’ll repair it free of charge. That’s no little guarantee! Briggs & Riley Transcend offers a full range, all the way from their Rolling Cabin Bag ($299) to accessory bags, and from their Two-Wheeled Tall Carry-on ($399) to their 29” Large Expandable Spinner ($529).

Nalgene Bottles
Nalgene Travel Bottles might just fit the bill better than anything else in our shop. They are both among the smallest things we offer, while at the same time being among the most reliable as well. They do not leak. Got it? No matter if it’s soap, lotion, contact lens solution, gels, creams, olive oil, vinegar or anything you might use them for, just leave a little room at the top and give it a touch of elbow grease when closing the cap and you’ll be assured of a leak proof trip. We have them in wide mouth bottles, narrow mouth bottles, and jars, all of which are available in TSA approved carry-on sizes (less than 3.4 ounces still!) and bigger sizes as well. Our Nalgene Travel Bottles start at $1.00 and range up to a whopping $3.50.

Scratch Maps
Scratch Maps offer an eye-catching, fun, and educational way to decorate dorm rooms, kids bedrooms, kitchens, dens, and I suppose just about any room in your house. And they are fun and easy to use with a host of options. Most Scratch Map owners scratch off the countries they’ve visited. But some choose to scratch the destinations on their bucket list, while others leave their Scratch Map unscathed in its gorgeously pristine original state. Depending on the map, hidden underneath the foil you’ll find bright colors, world facts, or maybe even a few words to learn in a foreign language. Each Scratch Map ($28.95-$37) is made in the United Kingdom from the highest quality materials, using the most advanced printing processes and is guaranteed to look great!

Charging Hubs
Our new Charging Hubs make it a snap to charge multiple electronics in just a single outlet. How often does your hotel room not have enough outlets to meet your charging needs? Or worse, has them, but hides them behind the bed? Well from now on, it’ll be easy to plug your smartphone, camera and laptop all at the same time into a single outlet. Each Charging Hub features a standard outlet-style plug and two handy USB ports. We have a USA version, and three different foreign plug versions for direct plug-in all over the world with no additional adaptors required! So take a Charging Hub (all styles $22) on your next family trip and you’ll be sure that everyone will be fully charged at all times. It’ll help keep everybody happy, and that’s key to any successful adventure.

Photon Microlight
Made in the USA (Oregon to be exact!) and packing a powerfully bright punch, the Photon Microlight ($14.95) is always on hand and ready to light your way. It’s always on hand because it is quite tiny and comes with a handy clip for attaching to your key ring, purse, briefcase or backpack. Anywhere really. The Microlight features both a squeeze button for short use and a traditional on-off switch for longer usage. It runs on two replaceable lithium disc batteries (included!) and weighs in at a mere 6.2 grams. Once attached, you can be sure it’ll come in handy the next time a screw rolls under the couch or you return home after...
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dark only to realize you forgot to turn on the porch light before you left. It happens to me all the time.

**Travelon Anti-Theft Crossbody Bag**

Security is no little thing. It offers peace of mind and increased confidence, particularly when traveling to unfamiliar places. Travelon’s Anti-Theft Classic Crossbody Bag ($49.95) looks a lot like any other stylish and well-designed shoulder bag, yet hidden in plain sight are a number of theft resistant features that are sure to repel even the craftiest pilferers. A slash-proof strap, slash-proof body panels, locking zippers and RFID blocking pockets all work together to keep your little things safe and secure.

**Radius Recycled Toiletry Item Cases**

Radius believes that the first step towards making an ecologically friendly product is simple: “If we make a quality product, you won’t need to throw it away as quickly.” So first and foremost, they’ve designed their recycled, BPA-free products to last. All their unbreakable, one-piece cases are made from 50% recycled #5 plastic and close with clever locking tabs that keep contents from spilling or leaking when you are on the road. We’re carrying three Radius cases right now, each perfectly designed for a bar of soap, a toothbrush or a razor (all are $3.99).

**SpiBelt**

Got a few little things to carry? The SpiBelt is ready for your smartphone, keys, credit cards, and more. A traditional fanny pack is always the same size no matter what you put in it, which often makes for a fit that’s too big and floppy for your needs. But the SpiBelt’s unique stretchy storage pocket starts small and expands to perfectly cradle just about anything you put in it. It also features a similarly stretchy and comfortable waist strap that moves with your body and makes the SpiBelt perfect for activities like walking, hiking, and working out. We like products that offer versatility, and the SpiBelt can be worn like a waist pack outside of clothes, but is also sleek enough to be worn under clothing for increased security. The SpiBelt is available in Original Size ($21.95) and in a Large Pocket version ($22.95), which is big enough to carry plus-sized smartphones.

**Baggallini RFID Currency Organizer**

It’s back! For unknown reasons, a few years ago Baggallini discontinued this Travel Essentials customer favorite. Well Baggallini fans, not only have they come to their senses and brought it back, but the RFID Currency & Passport Organizer ($24.95) truly is new and improved with more pockets and built-in RFID protection. Four separate currency pockets along with a main pocket that’s big enough for both a passport and a smartphone offer plenty of options for handy organization of cash, credit cards, travel documents and more. A handy wrist strap provides for easy and secure carry, but it’s also small and slender enough to fit into just about any purse, tote or backpack.

**Cocoon Minimalist Toiletry Kit**

How could we leave out a product with minimalist in its title? Truth is, we’d include it no matter what it was named. The Minimalist Kit from Cocoon boasts an impressive combination of features. The kit is compact but roomy, and its easy-to-clean, laminated TPU Oxford Nylon fabric is sleek and lightweight yet both rugged and waterproof! The Minimalist ($64.95) also includes four zippered pockets, each with YKK Aqua Guard Water Repellent Zippers and a removable liquids bag that is perfectly sized to meet TSA carry-on requirements.

“Always there has been an adventure just around the corner—and the world is still full of corners.”

— Roy Chapman Andrews
Staying up All Night (Kind of) in Madrid

by Nancy Bestor

I’ve never been a late bird. When it gets to (ahem) 9:30pm, I’m often meandering my way towards bed. This is not new to my getting-old-self either. When I was in elementary and middle school, classmates would talk about the tv shows they were watching after—gasp—8 or 8:30pm, and I’d pretend I had seen them too, but in reality, I was in bed and likely fast asleep by then. (I’m sure the other kids saw right through my fakery, particularly when I had no idea what new things cruise director Julie McCoy was doing on the Love Boat, but I digress.)

Thus it came as something of a shock to me, when Bob and I were walking around Madrid at 10pm on our first night in Spain recently, that there were droves of people of all ages out everywhere. The streets and plazas were never more crowded in our four days than they were on Friday and Saturday night, from 10pm until at least 1am, the latest that our old selves stayed out. Restaurants and bars were busier at 10 and 11 than they were at 7 and 8.

Madrid, although beautiful by day, comes alive at night. People spill out of bars, live music plays on street corners, couples and families stroll pedestrian only streets, and buildings, restaurants and storefronts are lit up with beautiful lights. Even though I’m not at my best late in the evening (my husband would probably tell you I’m not at my best in the morning either), I loved being out late, and living the life of a young and carefree Spaniard. I know what you’re thinking. I’m not young, carefree or a Spaniard, but this is my story. A girl can dream.

For our Madrid stay, we rented an airbnb (about $110 per night) in the very central and super hip Chueca neighborhood. We were only about a five-minute stroll from Puerta del Sol, the plaza which is thought by many to be the center of all of Spain. From there we walked everywhere, taking the subway only when we were hauling our luggage back to the train station. Madrid feels quite compact, and it seems that no matter where you are, the main sights are never more than a 30-minute walk away from each other. On our first day, we followed two walking tours from the book of my travel guru, Rick Steves, Snapshot Madrid. I love spending my first day in a new city on a walking tour, as it gives me a great overview, and I learn and see way more than I would ever see on my own.

Steves points out great architectural offices, and shares secret places that would be impossible to know about without an inside track. Here’s a great example. Madrid’s Church and Convent of Corpus Christi has a superbly secret shopping experience. Cloistered nuns sell baked goods from their convent, and Rick Steves told us just where to find it. After we pressed a bell beside a large, nondescript wooden door, a nun answered over the intercom, and I answered back “dulces” (pronouncing it DOOL-thays, just like Rick told me to). The nun buzzed us in, and we walked through a couple of dark, deserted hallways to a lazy Susan, with which the nuns can sell their baked goods without being seen. Once we arrived at the lazy Susan, it began to turn, and low and behold, a box of fresh baked cookies appeared, just like Rick promised. We took the cookies and put 9 euros in their place. The nun said “gracias,” and we thanked her right back, and then went on our merry way with our convent cookies. There is no exterior signage, nor any hint at all of the mysterious and authentic experience available inside. You’ve got to be a friend of Rick’s (or at least read his book), to get the details.

We spent a delightful Sunday afternoon with friends at the beautiful El Retiro Park in central Madrid. El Retiro boasts gorgeous gardens, a lake filled with rowboats, striking statues and fountains, and all kinds of activity, including a kid’s puppet show, bike riders, rollerskaters, dogs, and families, all enjoying the green, urban oasis. We ended our walk in the park with a long, boozy lunch at La Galería, a busy restaurant with so many windows looking out onto the surrounding park that it felt a bit like we were eating in a greenhouse.

Later that Sunday we took a quick peek at several noteworthy works by the likes of Francisco Goya, Salvador Dali and Pablo Picasso at the Reina Sofia, which is free late on Sunday afternoons. It’s much easier to justify a quick museum visit, to see just a handful of paintings, if you don’t have to pay admission.

Our favorite experiences in Madrid, of course, revolved around food and drink. In addition to our fun afternoon meal at La Galería, we followed more great advice from Rick Steves and hopped from one tapas bar to the next one evening on Calle Victoria and Calle de la Cruz, eating tasty treats and drinking sangria, beer, or wine, or sometimes all three, at several small and busy spots. Tapas in Madrid are quite inexpensive, and often when you order a drink, you get some tapas for free. Small

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“Would you like to sail the sea, like a pirate, wild and free? Cast your whole life upon the wind, well it’s your song, and it’s your dream.” —JOHN FOGERTY
How to Fly More Comfortably—Hints from Nancy

by Nancy Bestor

I have a love/hate relationship with flying. I love how quickly I can get halfway around the world. I try very hard to be grateful that I’m not living in the days when it took weeks, months or years to get across the United States. I also love the fact that once I’m on an airplane, there is really nothing I need to do. I can’t work (well I could work on a computer; but I like to pretend that I can’t), I can’t return phone calls or emails, and I can’t exercise, clean the house, cook a meal, or do any other nagging chores. I can contemplate them, but I can’t do them.

But the hate part of the relationship..... well, let’s face it, trying to get comfortable on an airplane is nearly impossible, particularly for those of us flying coach. The seats are narrow, there’s not much leg room and it’s way too easy to determine how recently the people sitting next to you showered. Thus I try to come prepared in an effort to make my flight as comfortable as I possibly can. Here are a few “Hints from Nancy” for getting comfortable on a plane. Please remember that I’m not Heloise, so if you stain your shirt with airplane food, I cannot help you.

For starters, when I’ve got a long flight ahead, I take a look at seatguru.com to find out where the good and bad seats are on an airplane. After inputting your airline, flight number and date, Seat Guru tells you what seats to avoid. Perhaps they’re near the bathroom, or there is a large entertainment box under the seat in front, or the seat doesn’t recline at all. I find this website incredibly helpful as this information is critical. Then, if Bob and I are flying together, we book an aisle and window seat in a row of three. He “protects” me by sitting in the aisle, and I sit by the window so I have somewhere to rest my head—isn’t marriage grand? Center seats are often the last to be booked, which means if the plane isn’t full, those seats are often the empty ones. If we’re lucky, we get an open seat between us, in case we’re fighting so we can spread out, if just a bit.

This goes without saying I’m sure, but for a long flight, I make sure to wear comfortable clothes. I’m not going to choose my skintight designer jeans for a 10-hour flight, and it’s sad, because I have so many skintight jeans to choose from. Instead it’s comfortable black pants for me. Black always looks dressy, even when what I am wearing is really not much more than glorified sweat pants. Then I pick shoes that are easy to get on and off, and I always wear socks. Socks because I usually take my shoes off and I don’t want my bare feet touching the potentially dirty airplane carpet (I know, who am I kidding with the “potentially dirty” right?). And easy on and off shoes because I want to be able to easily slip them on and off when I go to the restroom.

I bring a good sized scarf. I change from too hot to too cold very quickly in this stage of my life, and a large scarf doubles as a blanket. It’s much easier to regulate my body temperature with a scarf than it is to take a bulky sweater on and off in such a tight space. Bob’s clothing tip is that he always wears a shirt with a breast pocket for easy access to his iPhone for listening to music. I also wear compression socks on long flights, as my feet and legs have a tendency to swell up, and the socks keep them from turning into tremendous sausages.

A few days before any trip, I check to see if my airline offers free personal on board entertainment. On a recent flight from Denver to Medford, United offered just this, so I downloaded the United app to my phone, and watched a movie for free, albeit on a very small screen, but still, it passed the time. I also never travel without earplugs. I have them handy every time I fly, because it seems like just my luck that the man behind me talks across the aisle to his business partner for the entire flight about important leadership techniques that they need to pass on to their coworkers at their auto dealership (also on the flight from Denver to Medford, and Bob agrees that they were annoying). And there are times when no matter what a concerned parent does, a baby just might cry all the way from San Francisco to Vietnam—yes, this did happen. Earplugs help block it all out.

Bob and I always carry on, and although it drives him crazy, I like to be one of the first to board, because I’m always anxious that the flight will run out of room for our carry on if we board last. And because he loves me, he does what I ask at all times every once in a great while.

I keep some personal refreshment items handy too, because when I’m traveling for a really long time, a good teeth brushing in the airplane bathroom, or a refreshing body wipe for those places that are getting a little stinky, feels really great. And I’m sure my neighbors like it too.

Don’t get me wrong. When flying coach these tricks don’t give me a blissful, first class experience, but they certainly make a really long flight a bit more tolerable. And, for the record, 3% hydrogen peroxide dabbed on a stain with a cotton swab acts like a mild bleach, and should get out most stains on light colored clothing.

“Drink heavily with locals whenever possible.” — ANTHONY BOURDAIN
tapas plates range in price from 2 to 5 euros, and sometimes we ate just a single plate at one spot, before moving right along to the next bar. It was so fun to try different things, including spicy chorizo, gambas al ajillo (Spanish garlic shrimp), burrata with arugula and balsamic vinegar, stuffed mushrooms, manchego cheese, croquettes filled with squid ink, and more—much, much more.

Another excellent food experience was a visit to La Mallorquina, a confitería or sweet shop on the corner of Puerta del Sol. La Mallorquina was extremely crowded on this Saturday afternoon, but we bellied our way to the stand up bar and enjoyed two café con leches, as well as a cream-filled Napolitana, and a palmeras (palm pastry). The shop was bustling, and it was fun to watch the action while enjoying our afternoon treats.

Late one night (well after midnight—look at me now Mom!), we stopped for hot chocolate and churros, at Madrid's most famous shop, Chocolatería San Ginés. Open 24 hours a day, this institution is tucked down an alley, but even past midnight, there was a line to order. The hot chocolate is so thick it helps to use a spoon, and dipping the fresh churros into the thick, creamy brown elixir is heavenly.

And the drinks, oh the drinks. Bob and I learned about vermouth in Madrid from our dear friends Jenna and Sergio. Of course, we knew that vermouth existed, because Bob likes a tasty manhattan now and again. But we didn’t know that you can drink vermouth with a splash of soda over ice for a delicious afternoon refreshment. And sangria….can I talk about Spanish sangria for just a minute? Every liter pitcher of sangria that Bob and I shared was absolutely delicious. Absolutely. Delicious. My mouth is watering as I write this.

One evening we bar hopped with some young, twentysomething American and Spanish friends, taking part in Madrid’s fourth annual Coctelsaña, where more than 30 bars offer their own unique cocktail concoction for 5 euros each. After enjoying a beer and some tapas at El Tigre del Norte, just across the street from our AirBnB apartment, we stopped in two more places. At Café de Ruiz, we sampled a whiskey and grapefruit concoction, and lastly, Café Ajenjo served us a coffee liqueur with whiskey and cream.

It was fun to check out different bars that we certainly wouldn’t have found if not for our young Madrileños. After the first stop, at about 9:30pm, we tried to give our young friends an out. We noted that surely they had better things to do on a Saturday night than hang out with old folks like us. They insisted that it was no trouble at all, as the party they were going to that evening “didn’t start until the night.” Remember, this was at 9:30pm. When we said goodbye at 1am, they headed to the party. Damn, I’m old.

We did, however, learn to adjust our personal timetables. We ate breakfast most days around 10am and usually had a late lunch at around 2pm. After all our city walking, we’d come back to our apartment for a late afternoon siesta, and to fortify ourselves for our “late” evening. Then we’d head back out around 7 or 8, to stroll the streets and alleys, and end up somewhere for a drink, then a late dinner at 9 or 10. If only my primary school classmates could see me now.