

THE INVALUABLE ART OF MAKING LISTS – By Stephanie Jackson

A light-hearted look at one of the tasks that every traveller should undertake before departing on a journey of adventure.

Text as published in On The Road magazine, Australia

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Wouldn't it be great if all you had to do once you'd decided to go on a holiday was to toss a few clothes into a bag, pull the door of the house shut behind you, and drive off into the great outdoors? Unfortunately, it's never that easy – unless you plan to stay at a resort where everything you'll need is provided by someone who's at your beck and call day and night.



If you're planning a more do-it-yourself style of holiday or heading to some of Australia's off-the-beaten-track locations, thorough preparation is essential if a relaxing adventure, rather than one freckled with turmoil, is on the agenda. And good preparation begins with a list - or preferably a whole ream of lists.

If you're a genius with an infallible memory rivalling that of a computer and can retain a mental record of everything you will need to make your holiday a trouble free one, I envy you. But if you're one of the ordinary folk like me whose brain occasionally goes AWOL or who suffers from fragmented concentration when the excitement of a new adventure is on the emotional horizon, compiling a few lists is the only way to guarantee that everything will go smoothly.

I'm happy to boast that I'm an expert in the art of making lists, and my unwavering dedication to this essential pre-holiday task has guaranteed that nothing has ever been left behind, no job that needed to be attended to before my departure has ever been overlooked, and I've always set off knowing that my tattered lists will guarantee a trouble-free holiday.



But I have to be honest; my method is not infallible. I once left home without any tent poles, a fact I only became aware of as the boat that had brought me to a deserted island vanished over the horizon. 'Tent and poles' had been clearly written on my basic-stuff-to-take list, but all I had read in my excitement as I prepared for a new adventure was the first word.

My otherwise unblemished record as a well organised camper is due entirely to lists, to the fact that I put everything down in black and white, and meticulously tick each item off as it has been either done or packed into the camper van. And to get you started on the invaluable art of list making, I'll give you a few hints on how it's done.

The task of compiling lists should start well before your departure, so you can continually add items as they come to mind. First, you'll need the must-arrange-before-hitting-the-road list that can include such essential tasks as organising a forwarding address for your mail, or arranging for someone to collect it and to clear junk mail from your mailbox. If gardening is your passion, you'll need to arrange for someone to water your plants, and to mow the grass regularly too.

Add a reminder to this list to have your phone calls diverted to your mobile phone or to a message bank. But whatever you do, don't leave a message on your answering machine saying, "Hi. I'm away on holidays, and won't be back for several weeks. Don't leave a message because I won't be back to answer it". Do that, and there's a good chance that the worst message you'll receive will be one from the police advising you that the villains who accepted your invitation to visit an unoccupied house have been and gone with all your treasures.

An insurance policy guarantees that if your property has been stolen or damaged by the hand of either man or God, someone other than you will cough up the money to rectify the situation. Some insurance companies, however, require notification and payment of an



additional premium if a house is to be unoccupied for more than 60 days.

A reminder to contact your insurer to verify this and to make arrangements to pay a premium that may fall due while you are away should head the dreaded bills-to-be-paid list. Like it or not, it's a list that's essential. If your bills are routinely paid by direct debit, you've got nothing to worry about. But if mortgage and other loan repayments, or accounts for electricity, council and water rates, phone bills,

vehicle registration, and other essential services fall due during your absence, add them to the list to ensure that you either pay them in advance or arrange a way of making payments while you are on the road. Ignore this vital list, and you could find the bailiff hovering on your doorstep when you return from your travels.

Another important list is the basic-stuff-to-take list. Any items of food, clothing, crockery, or cooking utensils that you may forget to pack can be usually purchased along the way, unless of course you're heading into remote areas of the outback. But it is often only at the precise moment when you need something that you realise you haven't got it.

If you have a caravan or campervan that has a full compliment of household equipment, then your basic-stuff-to-take list may be relatively short. But it should still include a list of the food you'll need for at least the first few days of your trip, a first aid kit, maps, camera, and a few basic tools to allow you to do simple jobs such as tightening the screws on the hinges of a rattling cupboard door, or fixing a leaking hose connection.

Adding specific items of clothing to the list may seem unnecessary, but will you remember to take what you will need for each of the varied climatic conditions you might encounter? If you don't want to find yourself in the wet tropics without a raincoat, unable to enjoy a winter dip in the hot water of an artesian spa bath because you forgot your bathers, or shivering with cold as night descends over the desert, you'll need to put careful thought into what to add to your basic-stuff-to-take list.

Next, there's the life's-mundane-yet-essential-stuff list that should include items such as washing powder, toilet paper, dishwashing liquid, clothes pegs, sun block lotion, toothpaste, matches or a cigarette lighter for lighting a campfire, and a torch.

Add to this list any medications you will need and prescriptions for an additional supply of drugs if required, and that's another list well under way.

If your dog will be sharing your holiday, you'll need the stuff-for-Fido list too. Heading this list should be a reminder to check that places in which you intend to stay will be happy to see both you and your pet. Failure to do this brings the grim possibility that you will roll into a town late in the day only to find that Fido is not welcome at any of the region's caravan parks or camping grounds.

The stuff-for-Fido list can be a long one, particularly if you want your pet to enjoy all the comforts of home. Basket, bedding, lead, food, toys, brush, flea spray, and food and water bowls are just some of the items you'll need to add to this list. Any medication that your pet requires, and a supply of heartworm tablets if you intend to visit areas where this often fatal parasitic disease is prevalent, are vital components of the stuff-for-Fido list too. And don't forget to add your pet's current vaccination certificate to the list, as this will be required if, for some unexpected reason, your pet needs to spend some time in boarding kennels.

A must-see-places list is critical if you want to cram the maximum amount of pleasure into every day. If you do a little research into what each region you intend to visit has to offer, you'll be able to make a beeline for the best spots without wasting precious holiday time finding out where they are.

The anyone-who's-important list is the one made up of contact details of friends and family members who expect to be notified whenever you go on holiday, and who will want to be kept informed of your whereabouts at all times.

This is a list reserved for good mates, so don't include anyone for whom you usually have very little time, the people whose good manners and courtesy usually prevent you from ignoring even though you find them tedious, boring, or a downright pain in the posterior. If they later complain that you failed to keep in touch during your odyssey you can politely explain that you forgot to add their address or phone number to your list. "So sorry Aunt Mabel", you can mumble with insincerity.

It's easy when you are busy planning an adventure to forget about your vehicle or caravan, but that's where another list comes in handy. The stuff-to-be-done-to-the-van list is the one that will remind you to fill up the water tanks, check that the gas bottle is full, that the tyres are inflated to the appropriate pressure, that any house batteries are fully charged, and that maps are in their allotted place.

Now you're almost ready to leave, but there's one final list you'll need before you walk out of the door. It's the things-to-be-done-at-the-last-moment list – and it's made up of reminders about numerous small but important tasks. Empty any household rubbish bins; remove food from the fridge; hand a neighbour or trusted friend a spare set of keys for use in an emergency. Put away garden hoses, ladders, bicycles, and other easily moveable items that are usually left outdoors; move indoor plants outside where they can be watered; switch off electrical appliances; and turn off the power if you will be away for a substantial length of time.

Now, with everything on every tattered list neatly ticked off, you can toss a few clothes into a bag, pull the door of the house shut behind you, and drive off into the great outdoors with confidence that your preparations will be rewarded with a good time. And those words "We forgot to bring...", words that once triggered debate, even arguments over who was to blame for leaving an essential item behind, will never again need to be uttered.