

LESSONS LEARNED LIVING ABOARD

FROM PART 4: VOYAGING

By J A Rogers



MONEY

Travelers checks are a safe way to carry money aboard ship. In addition to banks, most hotels and shops in tourist areas will exchange them for local currency with no problems. Most shop keepers, especially in tourist areas are up to date on the latest currency exchange rates and can convert their prices and make change in other currencies. Keep most travelers checks in smaller denominations such as twenty and fifty dollars in order to avoid the problem of carrying too much cash at any one time. A few hundred dollars in cash is all that is usually necessary to have on board. Have some cash in small bills for tips or for situations where you don't have any local currency and you don't want to convert a larger amount.

Tourists are often encouraged to exchange sizeable amounts of money because of fees which are charged both coming and going. There is often more than one exchange rate as published by the banks. Better exchange rates are offered by street hawkers, but since this activity is often illegal and counterfeit currency is sometimes involved, it is not advisable to exchange money on the street. A better exchange rate than the banks offer may be available in hotels and reputable shops where you can make your transaction more discreetly.

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If you make a purchase in your home currency, change will almost always be given in the local currency. This will take care of most of the need for having any local currency. Only a small amount of local currency needs to be carried at any time for special situations. You must be careful not to wind up with too much of it when it comes time to check out of the country, since exchanging back means another fee, and sometimes is not possible at all. Some countries, particularly in Latin America, also devalue their currencies regularly which can result in your cruising kitty either gaining or losing value over night depending on how much of the local currency you are holding.

A personal checking account from the bank back home is not of much use in paying for things in foreign countries, but very handy when needing to pay bills or for something else via mail back home. If you know you are going to have a regular amount for a particular bill to pay by mail, you can also purchase money orders in that amount before leaving home and mail them at the appropriate times when you arrive in port. Credit cards can also be used for bill payment of course, and when it comes to shopping for specially needed items through catalogs, paying by credit card gets the item sent on its way much quicker. Credit cards are also of particular value when it comes to renting an automobile in a foreign country, just as they are at home. And they are a valuable resource for purchasing an unexpected airline ticket.

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Trading

Hard liquor is a very hot commodity to have aboard, not necessarily for consumption, but for trading. A bottle can get you just about anything you want in many places. It can even help with bribing local officials. Whiskey is one of the first things asked for by commercial fishermen. Then come cigarettes and other tobacco products and magazines, the raunchier the better. Fishermen and other seamen also value nautical charts of their local areas very highly, even photocopies.

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