



INTERNATIONAL TRAVEL 101

By Ray Collins
Photographs by Ray Collins

I know I'm not the first person to want to plan a big trip to distract me from a big birthday...so off we went to Lisbon, Portugal and Barcelona, Spain. This is my fourth trip to Europe—and as you're about to read, I'm still soaking up the similarities and differences:

*We flew direct from Miami—and in hindsight I have to say, it was easier to maneuver our way around Europe though international customs and flight connections than to find the long-term parking lot in Miami. They don't want you to find it. Tampa's airport is superior in that department.

*Even if you spend three times more to sit in first class, that doesn't prevent the people behind you from having a crying baby. I also found out those reclining seats are less like beds and more like MRI machines. Claustrophobic.

*I've done it before, but it is still surreal to fly overseas, arrive at--what your body thinks is--Midnight and then start to see the sun come up and the day begins.

*Surreal to fly half way around the world, use the same Uber app on your phone—and the driver is playing "Hotel California" by the Eagles. Didn't I leave this music behind?

*We were fortunate the hotel in Lisbon had one room available to let us get a few hours sleep before we began our sight-seeing. My first tip is to buy an outlet converter for your phone charger, flattening iron, etc. Around \$30.

I knew my body-clock was still adjusting when I went to the bathroom overnight—thinking it was around 3am—and it was actually 9am!

*Speaking of bathrooms, public restrooms are different in Europe: It's not unusual for the men's and ladies rooms to share the same sink and mirrors.

*Some of the people who spoke English as a second language had British accents. It made sense when you realize the United Kingdom is a lot closer than North America.

*Your credit card is never out of your hand. Wait-staff pulls out those portable gadgets and you swipe from your seat. (You're starting to see more of that in this country, but not as much.)

*Tipping is not a standard custom in Europe—however, it is creeping in: Some of the 'gadgets' ask if you want to add a tip—but the denominations aren't as high.

*Hate to say it, but Europeans are better dressers than Americans. Fewer baseball hats, etc. You also see more 'man bags and even high-end fanny packs.

In conclusion—there's only one thing as good as going away...and that's coming home.

Ray Collins is a travel writer with over a hundred published articles. www.raycollinsmedia.com/articles. He's also an award-winning Realtor, elected official and media consultant.



