

Ideas for Travel Journals...

As experienced travelers know, a well-kept Travel Journal is usually the best (and most favorite) souvenir. I have tried many different types of travel journals over the years, and the only regret I have is not keeping one every trip...no matter how short an adventure I had. Below are some ideas for travel journals, along with my opinions on each. As with everything, try many and choose the one you like the best. (Note to students: travel journals are different than field journals, though each might have elements of the other).

Characteristics of a successful, yet traditional, Travel Journal:

- Hard cover with strong binding that can lay open, “flat” on the table (good for sketching, easier to write)
- Small enough to carry with you at all times
- Large enough to hold a regular-sized (5 x 7 inch) postcard
- Acid-free paper (to preserve your writing for posterity)
- Storage capacity (ability to hold ticket stubs, post cards, small brochures, flyers, etc.)

Types of Travel Journals:

The *Notebook* Travel Journal:

This is a wire-bound or rip-out notebook, similar to the ones used by students around the world.

Positive: can be found just about anywhere, lightweight, can do in a pinch if you have nothing else available.

Negative: wear out fast, do not hold shape, have no storage capacity, weak binding, pages tear easily.

The *Journal* Travel Journal:

This refers to the Personal Journals found in bookstores. Some call them diaries, which are just smaller versions of the Personal Journal.

Positive: hard cover with a good binding that tends to last a long time, plenty of writing space.

Negative: could be too large to carry everywhere (“journal”-type) or too small to matter (“diary”-type), people are always curious about a “journal” and might want to peek at it, binding so tight difficult to hold open, difficult to quickly write down thoughts, no storage space.

The *Artist* Travel Journal:

These books come in all sizes, and usually have blank, un-lined pages.

Positive: good for drawing, can be hard or soft cover, come in different sizes.

Negative: usually very little storage capacity, usually bulky, thick paper, and thus less of it which might be less desirable for long excursions.

The *Post Card* Travel Journal:

The here idea is that every town or place you visit, you buy a postcard (or two or three...). On the postcard, you write down your experiences and impressions, pertinent information (date, weather, sites you saw, etc.), and anything else that might be important to you. Then you mail the postcard to yourself, back “home.” When you get home (or several weeks thereafter), you have a bunch of postcards that describe your trip, along with a stamp from that place. You can then put these in a book, old-fashioned photo album, or turn them into pdfs or images for electronic storage. Alternatively, you can keep the postcards for the entire trip, but that could take up unnecessary space and be cumbersome.

Positive: good pictures of places, nice souvenir, handy, unique.

Negative: can get lost in the mail, expensive if sending a lot (e.g., while a few postcards may only be a few Euros, to mail them from Europe to U.S. costs another few Euros *per card*), may take a while to assemble your journal.

The *Blog* Travel Journal:

Before leaving on your trip, set-up a blog site (or Facebook Page). Then, while you're traveling, use the ubiquitous Wi-Fi and your tablet/laptop/personal electronic device, to update your blog regularly. Folks can then follow what you're doing at their leisure. You can add pictures and even video along the way.

Facebook, Instagram, and Twitter also represent another fun way to share your trip. They allow you to upload photos and video with explanations and allow for interaction with others. With *Facebook*, you can even create folders for each country, place, and/or day and annotate them so any of your friends can see exactly what you've done and where you've been. Nowadays virtually every hotel or coffee shop has free wireless for your laptop, and (nearly) every personal electronic device has the capability of doing real-time updates/uploads to the web, including photos and video, from anywhere in the world. A very attractive option!

Obvious advantages: quick, fun, available in real-time.

Disadvantages: might be a few days between blog entries unless you're constantly online (and then perhaps missing a lot of things!), might still need a traditional journal to keep track of things and for sketches. Real-time updates from out of country can get expensive without free Wi-Fi or data.

The *Techno* Travel Journal:

This is an attractive, albeit somewhat expensive and potentially stressful way, to keep track of your travel experiences. Start with a digital camera, smartphone, or other personal electronic device that allows you to take still images and video. Add a laptop, iPad, or similar device. Take pictures/video along your trip, add captions, store your day's events in a word processor, download the images, and ultimately, when you get home, create a multimedia presentation for you and any family or friends.

Positive: very creative and unique, very nice looking, long-lasting.

Negative: can be expensive, perhaps a lot of time spent downloading/recharging on trip (potentially missing lots of things!), difficult to jot down a quick note, difficult to make drawings or sketches, perhaps long time at home (or in hotel room) to create nice presentation (and potentially miss lots of things!), prone to thievery, what do you do in the rain?

The *Ultimate* Travel Journal:

For me, the "ultimate" Travel Journal represents a compromise between "old" and "new."

Using my smartphone, I take pictures and notes along the way: pictures of the landscape and my travels, but also pictures of ticket stubs, postcards, menus, etc. Then, when I have Wi-Fi access, I upload everything to my *Facebook* or blog, or sometimes I just Tweet along the way. But, I also keep a hard copy TJ as well – just a small, hard-bound book – to keep track of goings-on, to make drawings and sketches, be able to press plants and leaves, etc., but also in case my phone battery dies.

The main thing is to find a TJ method that works for you and use it. A well-kept Travel Journal will, indeed, become your favorite souvenir!