



chapter *one*

Leaving It All Behind: How to Care and Prepare Before a Trip

*T*ravel is exciting. Leaving home, not so much.

In this chapter, I talk about the fears and doubts of leaving your attachments behind.

How do you go away from home fearlessly and comfortably when your home, your job, your pets, and maybe even your children have to stay behind?

How should you manage all this anxiety and come out a strong and brilliant warrior to take on those travel dreams?

How do you bring about a state of harmony, balance, and fierce preparation, the sum of which will reward you with a true peace of mind?

The reasons behind all fears vary. Let us tap into a long list of what lies beneath the surface for you. As you read the rest of this section, ask yourself: *Why do you fear what*

you fear? What is at the root of your fear? The answers will help you focus on the right tips and advice here to crush those fears.

Leaving Home Behind in 15 Practical Steps

I admit I like to think of myself as a professional traveler. I dispense unsolicited travel advice to anyone who drops a hint about the subject and I can hardly wait to jump on my next flight. Yet my home is a haven and a sanctuary. It is where I belong and where I feel most comfortable. Even as a seasoned traveler, I admit to the butterflies and the twenty seven times I walk around the house checking everything before leaving.

So you see, I completely understand your anxiety about leaving your home and your comfort zone behind.

“

Home sweet home, how hard it is to leave thou behind!

”

You worry about what can happen when you are away. You may not feel comfortable trusting others to watch over your home. You may not correctly plan for all the

necessities to take along. You may forget to take care of something prior to departure. You may not find out right away in the unlikely event that something goes wrong at your home. You may simply not want to leave that wonderful comfort zone and venture out into the unknown, especially as a new traveler.

Leaving the comforts of home and family behind to go away for any length of time is daunting at first. No argument there but you learn to manage it and improve it over time and slowly it becomes *easier*. You start to take great care in preparing your home for your absence. You make all the necessary arrangements and you see to it that everything is well looked after. Just like me, you may still experience a little anxiety before leaving, which is natural, but beware to prevent the anxiety from turning into a fear that keeps you from traveling altogether.

A fear of not leaving home *today* is a regret of not having travelled *tomorrow*.

How to Crush the Fear

With a concrete plan to be executed prior to travel

You can crush the fear of leaving home by preparing for your travels with confidence, starting small and letting the repeatedly good experience speak for itself.

These guidelines, a refined process over years of travel, ease my anxiety surprisingly well every time. Follow them if they make sense for you and trust that leaving home will be worth the experience.

- 1. Understand the Odds:** The odds are low that something will go wrong in your absence and even lower that it would be catastrophic. The odds are lower still when you take precautionary steps (namely, these steps over here!). Trust the odds and find comfort in believing your house will be fine and probably even enjoy the quiet shutdown for a while.
- 2. Think Ahead:** Start thinking about and planning your trip at least 2 to 3 weeks in advance. Get the idea of leaving into your head. Remind yourself that everything will be in good hands with all of your smart preparation. Believe it. Reinforce this positive thinking before going into full-on prep mode.
- 3. Trust the Caretaker:** Decide whom, if anyone, will look after your home. Do not ask a neighbor or a friend for the sake of convenience. If there is a shadow of a doubt about the person who holds a key to your home, do not choose them. There are few people you tend to trust implicitly; ask one of them. You can thank them with a small souvenir from your destination or better yet, by returning the favor when they travel.

4. **Stop the Mail:** Instead of having your sitter get your mail, just fill out a form with your post office online to stop it a few days in advance and start it back upon your return. It's a completely free service in the US.
5. **Plan Your Shipments:** Do not order anything right before you leave, if possible. It is best to avoid packages sitting in front of your home as it clearly indicates your absence.
6. **Let Family or Close Friends Know:** Even if they do not live close by, ensure at least one family member or a trusted friend knows about your absence. If you already have someone as your house sitter, then skip this one.
7. **Share Your Itinerary:** It is important to know in advance your day-to-day or at least, your week-to-week itinerary and to share it with your house sitter and/or the family member. They should have the means to get in touch with you at all times. When you make yourself reachable, you instantly ease one of your own biggest anxieties.
8. **Use a Security Alarm:** This could be a hassle and an expense but it can also bring peace of mind. Depending on your alarm system, you may be able to forgo the service and just set up the alarm itself to trigger a loud sound in case of break-ins. Trust in the power of your neighbors to alert the right authorities if by a miniscule chance, anything were to happen.



9. **Shut Down Power and Water:** If gone for extended period, take precautions by shutting down power to your electronics—simply unplug the cords—in case of thunderstorms. Also turn off the water to washer/dryer to prevent accidents.
10. **Leave Quietly:** Do not make a huge scene of putting suitcases in your car in broad daylight. Do it with garage door closed or early in the morning or late in the evening prior to your departure.
11. **Leave a Few Lights On:** Try to leave on the same indoor light that you normally do at nights. The front porch light also works. The ideal solution is daylight-sensitive lighting that makes your absence even more obscure.
12. **Set a Natural Temperature:** In the winter, turn down the thermostat significantly without freezing your plants or any pets that will be staying at

home. In the summer, turn off the air conditioning unless there is chance of serious heat waves. Use common sense to save on power.

13. Do Not Leave Your Garbage Bins on the Street:

Unless you have a house sitter that will take care of this, do not leave out your garbage or recycle bins for collection in your absence. Plan for this in advance the previous week.

14. Be Discreet About Your Travel Plans: With social media, it can be fun to let the world know about your travels. Do so discretely without sharing dates and details and always give an impression that someone is living in your house during your absence.

15. Set Up Camera(s): If you are concerned, set up a few cameras that you can then access using your smart phone or an Internet connection. I only recommend this one if you are paranoid and after the first 14 steps, perhaps you won't need this after all.

Leaving Jobs and Responsibilities in Good Hands While Away

I do not know about you but I used to feel that my work ethics were in serious conflict with the idea of taking a vacation. In fact, I was a master workaholic; you could not work harder than me for all you tried. Then one day, the stress and a mini-meltdown shook me up with a rude

awakening and I have been treating my travels with as much priority as my work since then.

“

I travel a lot; I hate having my life disrupted by routine.
~Caskie Stinnett

”

Fears and anxieties around leaving job and responsibilities behind are extremely common but you may not even know that you harbor these fears so let's do a quick assessment.

Do You...

- ...believe without a doubt that the world surrounding your work life will stop turning without you?
- ...think it is just not the right time to take time out — others can but you are not ready yet?
- ...feel convinced that you are very close to another breakthrough or another promotion?
- ...agree that it is impossible to go on vacation in a down economy?
- ...believe that you going on vacation is possible motive for the company to fire you?
- ...consider it all a sacrifice for now but soon things will slow down and you visualize a great stopping point in the horizon someday?

If you were nodding in response, you certainly harbor a level of paranoia for leaving your responsibilities behind. Worry not; you are not alone for feeling this way. Still, these fears and doubts may be prevalent but that does not make them justifiable.

If you find a person who has *not* regretted those missed opportunities and lost chances for fulfilling their travel dreams over the fleeting years, then skip this section. Otherwise, listen up!

The people that you admire for their spirit, way of life, and richness of experience take the time out of their busy careers and important responsibilities and sensitive projects to rest, to go on an adventure, and to leave home for a while. They take vacations from their job and responsibilities. They schedule the act of traveling into their ambitious career agenda and refuse to compromise the urgency of now for the ambiguity of “someday”.

They believe that their travels provide the ideal balance for life with a successful career. I can't help but agree. In fact, I have been far more successful in my career path since I incorporated a travel-rich lifestyle. The experience will leave you with far more energy to devote to that next project or toward that next promotion. The time away will rejuvenate your body and your mind and reset the clocks that have been running nonstop for far too long.

You must do this. You must learn to work hard and to play harder because you do your best when you do both well. You must take a break *from* your job so that you can give your very best *to* your job. You shall and you will with these guidelines to crush the fear of leaving work behind.

- 1. Shift Their Mindset About You:** When you live the life of a workaholic chained to a desk and a Smartphone, you will be expected to behave no differently. You can change this expectation by shifting your mindset and approach to your work. Work is not everything in life and not doing work during your every breathing moment does not render it any less important. Instead, it focuses on balance and a mental well being that will help you outlast the hardest working person around. Cultivate the right mindset first.

How to Crush the Fear

By setting all the right expectations in advance

- 2. Set Limits:** You can start by setting limits on your time. This does not in anyway mean compromising the quality of your work. It means doing what is most impactful without responding to every little task that provides no value but takes up your time. It is about working smart, identifying important tasks, delivering your best without giving up your

life. Vice Presidents of Fortune 500 companies do it all the time and the demand on their time and attention is extreme. Trust me, you can do this. Start small. Start now.

- 3. Share Your Plans:** If you have not taken time off in a while, no one will expect you to be gone. If you are a key player in your organization or in your own business, you need to do some planning ahead. As soon as you know your travel plans, inform all your co-workers and especially your management, your boss, and your customers. Do not welcome the feeling of guilt. Make and share plans for your absence carefully and in great detail. Transparency of your plans earns you the respect of your peers and business partners.
- 4. Identify Your Backup:** If you are leaving while in the midst of an important project, ask the project manager to find someone to fill your role. Focus on who will be in charge in your absence. Delegate to others. You can return the favor later. Having a point of contact for your responsibilities during your absence will set your mind at incredible ease. Believe me, your customers and clients and co-workers understand, even if they never admit it. No one expects even the most successful person to be chained to any job five days a week all year long.
- 5. Set up Voicemail and Email Notification:** Be professional about setting up all notifications during your absence and point people in the direction of



your backup team or else let them know when you will get back in touch with them after your return. Do not incorporate an apology in your outgoing vacation message. Instead, set expectations clearly on when you will be returning the inquiries.

- 6. Set Vacation Expectations:** It is important to disconnect when you are on vacation. Perhaps you disagree because you think the least you can do from vacation is check back with the office. And thus you will commit your largest error. The day that you check back in with your office from vacation sets the terrible expectation that you are available even during this sacred time away. Instead, disconnect and completely soak up the experience in front of you, not the one you left behind or the one waiting for you upon return.

7. Take Time to Recuperate: When you return from a vacation, especially if you have not taken one in a long time, you will need time to recuperate and adjust on several levels, anywhere from jet lag, climate adjustment, catching up at home, rest and being back into the work environment. It is very likely you won't be at the top of your game right away. Try to not schedule a huge deliverable such as a presentation or a big commitment due right upon your return. Give yourself a few days and acclimate to the work world before you begin to run again at full speed.

And you *will* run at full speed, perhaps even faster, because you took the time to rest, to get away and to soak up another part of the world.

Ensuring Children's Well-Being and Contentment in Your Absence

Sometimes, opportunity knocks but you can only enjoy its full splendor without the little darlings. You can either leave your children behind and go forth with this experience or let the opportunity entirely pass you by.

You are the only one who can make the right decision in regards to the care of your children and yet I cannot impress enough upon you to at least sincerely consider every travel opportunity before dismissal. A time away

from life's huge responsibilities resets the perspective, rejuvenates the soul and revives the spirit.

In other words, you deserve it, need it, crave it and shall love it.

For this section, I wanted to bring the advice of experienced travelers who make exemplary role models as parents and have successfully left their children behind when traveling. My good friends, Emiel van den Boomen and Katia Singletary graciously accepted my invitation. They share a wealth of information with us here.

The Highlights of the Interview with Emiel

Emiel Van den Boomen is the creator of The Act of Traveling blog, which tells travel stories around the digital fire. He is also the father of two young children and excels at a parenthood style that beautifully embraces traveling. He lives in the Netherlands.

The most encouraging part was to learn how much anxiety and nervousness Emiel and his wife had felt for leaving the children behind during their trip to Brazil. This proves that people who choose to leave their children behind share the fear and nervousness as strongly as other parents who opt out of travel altogether. The fear is completely normal. What matters most is the extent of the role that the fear plays in your decision-making process.

When Emiel and his wife had a special trip planned for Brazil, his son was just a toddler but he prepared his daughter extremely well. He clearly explained their entire itinerary to her by marking the places on the map and by creating a calendar to let her know exactly where they were and when. He explained to her that this trip was a special one requiring Mom and Dad to go alone. Emiel made certain that she also understood she could contact them anytime.

Sharing the *right level of information* with your children can be the difference between their feeling of neglect and comfort. Communicating with them on why they cannot come along on a trip and how much more fun they shall have with their caretakers can put both you and your children at extreme ease. Always keep them in the loop and never let them second-guess why they are staying behind. Here is the rest of his advice:

How to Crush the Fear

By believing that time away benefits both you and your children

1. Believe that you, as yearlong caretakers of your children, deserve to have time away together with your partner/spouse.
2. Inform your children in advance with details about your trip, your itinerary, and your day-to-day events on the map.



3. Create a calendar for your children so they can imagine you in your destination every day and “follow you along”.
4. Be fine with pursuing your travel wishes rather than just becoming consumed in the lives of your children.

It was natural for Emiel and his wife to go back and forth between guilt and pleasure. Finally, the ideal perspective came to them and helped them cope and go on this trip peacefully.

He told me that the benefits of temporary detachment between you and your children can even surprise you in the end. It seemed it surprised Emiel and his wife when their children had such a good time at their grandparents, as did the couple in Brazil on their own.



It hurt at the beginning [to leave the kids behind] but it is important that you have babysitters that you can trust 200%. It hurts, yes, but as soon as you get on the plane, you accept it. The kids are somewhere safe and you are going to have fun and enjoy this trip because you are caretakers the whole year and you deserve it.



The full audio of this interview is available in the Appendix.

The Highlights of the Interview with Katia

Katia Singletary lives with her husband and three beautiful children in North America. She is French by origin. I admire her parenting and traveling style a great deal. She was very kind to share her advice on how she successfully manages the situations when her children do not come along for the ride.

Guilt must be the most natural feeling parents experience when it comes to leaving children behind. Sometimes it ranks even higher than worry so I asked Katia whether guilt plays a part in her motherhood. My favorite response from Katia was this, “What’s important for people to remember is it’s not you who makes you feel guilty, it is others who are going to make you feel guilty. “

She explained that her life does not stop upon becoming a mother. “I am a woman first, then a wife, then a mother.” Katia then referred to the big cultural gap where in her observations, some women tend to lose their sense of identity after they face motherhood. It is a shame to see that they may set aside their own needs and desires for a long time—sometimes for years—in the name of “good” parenthood. The irony is that better parents, happier individuals, and extremely good role models for children emerge from the fulfillment of those needs and desires.

How to Crush the Fear

By reassuring your love, explaining why and ensuring their happiness at home

The most enlightening part of this interview for me was the way in which Katia and her husband frame their going away for their children:

1. They tell them how much they love them.
2. They explain to them that the trip would not be fun for them.
3. They tell them exactly where they are going and explain their day to day itinerary.
4. They explain that they do not leave them behind out of punishment or because they don’t want them around.

5. They explain that they need time together as husband and wife.
6. They relax the rules around treats and games that are not otherwise allowed at home.
7. They write a letter for the children, one for each night of their travel, in advance.
8. They make sure the children have a family framed photo with them.
9. They reassure them that they are reachable by phone instantly.
10. They call every night and check on them and both of them speak to the children.
11. They leave for no longer than 10 days once a year and then a few weekends throughout the year.
12. They make the children feel special and structure their stay with the caretaker to make it like a special holiday for them. Naturally, they choose the best and most trustworthy care for the children.

These 12 power tips allow Katia and her husband to travel a fair amount on their own while still clearly putting the happiness and well-being of those children first. Her approach is clean, logical, and sensible. She is also setting a good example for her children on cultivating a happy marriage.



In your case, it may be a marriage, a relationship, a partnership or even time alone for yourself. Whatever it is, treasure it as much as you treasure your relationship with your children.

In fact, some of the happiest moms I know have hobbies and activities and life pursuits outside of the life of their children. By showing your child that you respect yourself and your own dreams as a human being so that you can then become a better parent to them, you give them the greatest gift and set an amazing role model for them to follow.

The full audio of this interview is available in the Appendix.

Arranging for Your Pet's Safety, Good Care and Happiness at Home

I have not owned pets since leaving home for college years ago. It is not for lack of loving animals. Oh I love them fiercely but I rank their happiness higher than my selfish desire to bask in their unconditional love. I travel far too much to enjoy a furry friend at home but believe me, if I owned a pet, I'd have no qualms leaving them behind for the occasional trip. Even pet owners deserve a vacation away from home and it is important that you not let this fear get in the way of your opportunities to travel.

Pets need love, affection, and care and they belong in households where they can have that in abundance. Leaving your pet behind can seem daunting and emotionally hard to bear. Aside from the heartache of leaving the presence of your darling furry friends, you worry about their safety, their good care, and their happiness.

Well, my friends, information and preparation ease all anxiety and to top it all, where pets are concerned, absence does make the heart grow fonder. The interview below will empower you with the best knowledge and preparation to brace leaving your animals in excellent care and leaving home with ease of mind.

The Highlights of the Interview with Deana

I spoke with Deana Gunn who has a great love for her dogs; the happiness of her dogs is imperative and non-negotiable.



When she goes camping and hiking, they come along but when she travels with her husband or the whole family, the dogs stay behind. Here's her advice:

1. **Complete Safety of Your Pet:** The safety of your pet is of utmost importance. Making sure that your little animal is safe and far from harm in your absence is the number one concern and one to address long before leaving. It is also the one thing that will give you peace over anxiety when you are away from home. It is crucial that you do not compromise on the safety.

You can ensure the safety of your pet by taking some time before your first trip and doing your