

GENERAL INFORMATION

Dear STARLING'ers

the document below will help you on your way for a worry-free trip. Please read this document carefully! You will find crucial information such as the travel documents you need, vaccinations, information about electricity while traveling, etc. If you still have questions or something is not clear, you can always contact us via email and we will help you as best we can.

Kind regards,

Billy and the STARLING team

TRAVEL DOCUMENTS

For the most up-to-date and correct information regarding travel documents, please refer to your country's foreign affairs website.

On these sites you will find all the correct information about required travel documents and the necessary links to the embassies.

PASSPORT AND IDENTITY CARD

A valid passport (= red booklet, international travel passport) has an expiration date. Some countries require your passport to be valid for 6 to 8 months after returning from your trip. Before departure, check the expiration date of your passport.

A passport is different from an identity card. The red book (passport) versus identity card.

For some trips, we will ask for a copy of your passport. With the app 'KopieID' you can disable the copy of your passport.

NOTE: Controls at airports have become strict. Even within Europe, this is strongly noticeable. If you have a passport, we therefore recommend every traveler to travel with a valid international passport. Even within Europe where this is generally not required. Please note that this is non-binding advice.

VISUM

To enter certain countries, you need a visa. For most countries, this can be done online. The term used for this is e-visa. Before the trip begins, we will assist you with this process in a timely manner. Please await communication from us. If you search for the right information yourself, please make sure that you always end up on the official website of the country in question.

For some countries, applying for an online visa is not possible and you need to contact the embassy or consulate of the country you are traveling to.

A visa grants permission to enter and stay in a country for a limited period of time. If you need a visa, you will also always need an international passport.

LOSS OF YOUR TRAVEL DOCUMENTS

If your identity card and/or passport is lost or stolen abroad, it must be reported to the police.

With this report and passport photos, you can obtain a (provisional) document at the Belgian embassy. The procedure is easier if you have a copy of the lost or stolen documents. Make sure you have the copy with you when you travel, have it available digitally and/or have forwarded it to us before the trip.

The lost documents can be blocked via DOC STOP (BE) or the site of foreign affairs NL. This way you prevent fraudulent use. Your guide and the STARLING team will of course help you with this where possible.

DIGITAL OR PAPER?

Visas, certificates, proofs, etc. are often in your pocket digitally. However, we very strongly recommend having all necessary documents in your pocket in hard copy as well. It is a small effort and can help you further if your smartphone lets you down.

INSURANCE, FLIGHTS & PRACTICAL INFORMATION

Travel assistance insurance is mandatory and not something to omit. Make sure this is in order!

**** ESSENTIAL: Make sure you always have your insurance company's policy numbers and contact information in your pocket! ****

Flights

Can we book the flights if they are not included in the trip? Yes, we certainly can! Before departure we will always make you a proposal for the flights. You are then still free to book the flights through us or on your own.

We look for a good balance to book the flights at the right time. We find that waiting until shortly before departure usually has no significant impact on the price except when your trip falls in a vacation. Early booking of flights is then strongly recommended.

NOTE: if you wish to book your flights earlier than the time we suggest, you can! Just send us the flights before you book (to contact@starlingreizen.be), so we can check if everything is correct.

Checking yourself in can be done in different ways. Below we are happy to explain the different options. Airlines push online check-in as a convenient option. If you don't feel comfortable with this or if it doesn't work for you, know that you can always check in at the airport. If check-in is not possible at the airport, we will check you in and be sure to inform you of this.

ONLINE CHECK-IN

Checking in online makes everything go a fraction faster at the airport. In most cases, you can check in online from 24 hours (sometimes 36h or 48h) before departure via the website of the airline you are flying with. You check yourself in and afterwards you will receive a confirmation via mail/text.

Please note: If you have booked your flights via STARLING, there may be unknown co-travelers attached to your e-ticket. It may then not be possible to check in only yourself. You can then choose to check in at the airport.

What documents do you need?

international passport or identity card
your e-ticket (on which you will find your ticket number and/or booking code)
your visa or electronic travel authorization (if required)



How can I check in online?

Search via google for 'online check-in + *LUCHTVAARTMAATSCHAPPAPIJ*.

Go to the website of the airline you are flying with; enter the booking code, the last name(s) and possibly the departure date and flight number; click on (online) check-in and select the passengers you want to check in; go through all the check-in steps, choose seats and book any additional baggage; carefully read the conditions for hand baggage; print/download your plane ticket on your smartphone if available.

Important! Once you have checked in, nothing can be changed about your booking. In case of unexpected events, we recommend not checking in.

AIRPORT CHECK-IN

Don't feel comfortable checking in online or won't do it? This is absolutely no problem!

You can also just check in at the airport at the counters in the departure hall. The staff at the counter will then go through the entire check-in process for you.

Please note that with low-cost airlines such as Ryanair, for example, it is mandatory to check in online. This is something we do for you.

When you use express check-in (self-service) at the airport, stewards are always available to help you.

- Look for the self-service machines in the airport
- choose or change your seat;
- add your frequent flyer number;
- print your boarding pass.

HEALTH

VACCINATIONS NEEDED?

Are you choosing a destination near or far? Always check the health recommendations for your vacation destination in time before you leave! There is a simple way to protect yourself effectively and long-term against certain travel infectious diseases: vaccination.

Check well before departure whether you need vaccinations.

TRAVEL PHARMACY

It is wise to take a limited basic pharmacy with you.

If you have a chronic condition, your travel pharmacy should obviously include your usual medicines. Take enough of them with you and also provide a spare prescription: that way you are prepared for the unforeseen, too. If you wear glasses, it is also useful to bring a spare pair and possibly have a copy of the ophthalmologist's prescription on hand.

In addition, your travel pharmacy should ideally include the following items:

- remedies for diarrhea;
- an agent that can disinfect cuts and other wounds;
- compresses, bandages and bandages;
- a remedy for motion sickness;
- sunscreen with a high sun protection factor;
- a fever thermometer; paracetamol for pain and fever;
- ibuprofen for pain and fever.



EMERGENCIES

In an emergency, details about your health can be useful to local doctors and nurses.

If necessary, remember to bring an English text that states the following information:

the disease(s) you are suffering from; the medication you are taking (name of the drug, dose ...). If you need to bring a lot of medication, ask your (family) doctor to make a detailed list of it. If necessary, you can then present this list to customs; Hypersensitivities or allergies; your blood type.

*** ESSENTIAL: make sure you always have the policy numbers and contact information of your insurance company with you! ***

SEASICKNESS

Many people do not know whether they will get seasick or not. Therefore, we would like to share the following tips with you, which in most cases will lead to less or no seasickness. Our motto for going to sea: better prevention than cure!

- Get enough sleep beforehand (this could be the most important tip to avoid seasickness);
- do not eat extremely fatty foods the day before;
- breakfast normally and never get on the boat with an empty stomach. Cookies or a light snack during the boat trip is recommended;
- do not consume (excessive) alcohol the day before the trip and drink plenty of water during the trip;
- preferably do not drink coffee in the morning;
- try to relax. Seasickness is sometimes between the ears (certainly not always!). If you think about seasickness beforehand or are constantly thinking about it, you are also more likely to get seasick.

Do you know you are sensitive?

- Take a seat at the back or center of the boat;
- do not read on the boat;
- look into the distance with the naked eye;
- avoid looking through binoculars;
- feel seasickness coming on, close eyes and rest (if possible lie flat and sleep in a stable place on the boat);
- dress warm enough so that you definitely do not cool off.

Medications to prevent seasickness

- Meclozine = Agyrax and Postafene
- Dimenhydrinate = R calm dimenhydrinate
- Promethazine = Phenergan. This is the strongest drug of the three. This is also phototoxic (i.e., do not use in sunny areas!). Also definitely not to be combined with alcohol. Anyone who wants to use Phenergan should take it beforehand. Be sure to consult your physician;
- Scopalamine.
- Yeast extract.

MOSQUITO REPELLENT MEASURES

In some countries it is advisable to take extra precautions against mosquitoes because they carry diseases. The Institute of Tropical Medicine or a travel clinic near you, provide the following tips as mosquito repellent measures. If you implement these correctly, the chances of mosquito bites will be lower:



wear clothes that cover arms, legs and feet. In the tropics, a long-sleeved t-shirt with a hood is a very useful piece of clothing! If necessary, wear clothing impregnated with insecticide (permethrin), for example, from Nosi Life® or Colombia Bug Shield®; possibly lubricate all non-covered body parts with insect repellent. Despite its effectiveness, we recommend avoiding products containing deet. Deet is a corrosive product that damages clothing, optical equipment, photographic equipment, etc. It reduces sun protection and should not be carried in hand luggage. We recommend icaridine or citriodiol. If there is a (ceiling) fan in the room, you can use it to keep mosquitoes away. Mosquitoes do not like wind and airflow; sleep under a mosquito net. Hang the mosquito net over the bed and tuck the edges under the mattress.

We strongly recommend proper lubrication in countries where you are at risk for dengue, zika and chikungunya. After all, this is your only protection.

TIP: in a specialized outdoor store like the Mountain Hut (see below under partners), they will always help you with insect repellent.

ON YOUR TRIP

We strive for everyone to have the best possible travel experience and you can contribute to that too! Therefore, we ask you as a traveler to be considerate of your fellow travelers so that everyone can look back on an unforgettable trip afterwards.

Some ways you can make this possible:

- change seats in the car every day so that everyone has the opportunity to have a different view. If you suffer from car sickness, take precautions with e.g. R-calm;
- keep your travel companions in mind when viewing and/or photographing wildlife! Try to make sure that everyone has a chance to see and/or photograph wildlife.
- Don't go first in the front row every time but rotate. Give others the chance to enjoy the wildlife from the front row as well. Don't agree with this vision point? Then we advise you to look at our customized trips. During a tailor-made trip, you don't have to take anyone else into account;
- don't scare the animals: keep voices low and move slowly. Above all, movement is essential.

INTERESTS

Remember that this is your trip! Therefore, please take the time to let us know your interests in advance so we can pass them on to our guide. Are you unsure if the trip is right for you? Then it is best to contact us by phone. We always try to match the right profiles to a trip. If we find that a trip is not suitable for you, we can still change your registration. The last thing we want is for profiles not to fit on a group trip.

Ask many questions during the trip and don't be shy to remind the guide of your special interests. Keep in mind that we have to combine the interests of the whole group. Therefore, always consider your fellow travelers as well!

PROBLEMS DURING THE TRIP?

Our team and guides work hard to reduce or avoid unwanted surprises and make logistical adjustments when necessary.

Please bring any concerns to the attention of our guide so he can try to resolve them for you during the trip. Bring concerns to the guide's attention in a respectful manner. In doing so, also respect the balance and dynamics of the group by discreetly raising the problem with the guide. It is not really helpful to just throw a problem into the group. Try to avoid an offensive attitude.



The last thing we want to hear at the end of a trip is, “It was great, but ...”. After all, once the trip is over, we can’t fix problems on the spot.

RESPONSIBLE & ECOLOGICAL TRAVEL

- Do not leave trash or traces, do not damage nature;
- respect the locals: want to take a picture? Then ask. Don’t stand around laughing at local customs either, because most people, rightly so, consider that an insult;
- do not buy wrong souvenirs such as coral or other endangered plants or animals;
- do not take pictures with wild animals on offer – these animals are unfairly held captive for the profit of the “owner,” a practice STARLING does not want to encourage;
- be economical with air conditioning, water and light;
- bring a reusable water bottle;
- avoid using plastic where you can.

DIGITAL DETOX

A digital detox is going completely offline for a while. Turning off your smartphone and laptop allows you to fully enjoy the world around you. That is also what traveling with STARLING is all about.

Sometimes a digital detox is unavoidable – because you are in a place with no coverage, for example – and sometimes it is a conscious choice.

Why should I choose a digital detox?

- You are more aware of your surroundings;
- you have more time;
- it makes you feel more relaxed;
- you enjoy each other’s company more;
- you sleep better.

How can I maintain my digital detox?

- Choose a destination without wifi or one outside Europe where you don’t take advantage of free roaming. Take a book with you or get to know your travel companions so you have less of a need to look at your smartphone;
- inform colleagues, clients, friends and family about your vacation well in advance, so they know you will not be reachable during this period;
- handle your administrative matters before your trip, so you don’t have to interrupt your digital detox to pay urgent bills, for example;
- let the welcome message of your voicemail and the absence message of your e-mail know the date you will be available again: switch off apps from work and social media (such as Facebook, Whatsapp,...);
- use the ‘do not disturb function’ on your smartphone to determine when messages and notifications should not go through. You can also determine for whom you do want to be reachable at all times.

Internet and telephony



Despite our advice to opt for digital detox, a lot of travelers have questions regarding Internet and telephony. A lot of locations during our travels these days do have wifi. You can also often buy a SIM card at the airport if you wish (ask us or your guide for more information in advance). Another solution is to buy a SIM card with data from Airport Telecom. Finally, the world of e-SIM is currently growing tremendously. You can buy a digital SIM card for travel over the Internet (google: e-SIM and the country you are traveling to) and load it on your phone via a QR code. Please note that not every destination is possible and not every phone can currently do this!

EQUIPMENT AND LUGGAGE

PRACTICAL INFORMATION – electricity

Nowadays you can find a lot of practical information on the Internet. One of the most well-organized sites is that of LANDENKOMPAS. Here you can find all useful information per destination, such as information about electricity.

FLYING WITH LOTS OF LUGGAGE

Going on a trip is quite a move. Especially if you like to take your optical equipment, photographic equipment, field guides or even just clothes for all circumstances. Fortunately, quite a lot can fit in a valise, travel bag or trekking backpack. But exactly how much can you take? What belongs in your suitcase? What can, may or should you take in your hand luggage? Knowing what and how much you can take is crucial for a smooth trip. Below we give you a series of tips for flying with (a lot of) luggage. Feel free to be creative and combine them to your heart's content!

Flying with lots of luggage = making choices

To travel is to make choices. To make those easier, we have a simple trick: prioritize items that have two functions. A scarf is such an item: it comes in handy in both hot and cold destinations and you can use it to tie something up.

The choice between carry-on baggage and check-in baggage is not always easy either. In Economy Class, you are allowed one piece of each type. Ask yourself what is really indispensable for a successful trip (camera, charger, lenses, binoculars, etc.) and what items are most valuable. Those you put in your carry-on luggage, everything else can go in your large luggage. Usually this means that you don't put your optical equipment and photographic equipment in your checked baggage.

Because of the hand luggage restrictions, both in terms of size and weight, you often have no choice but to put fragile items in your checked luggage as well. Our tip: stuff clothes and towels around your fragile gear to absorb shocks. Your tripod will also sit well in your checked luggage.

TIP: check the airline's terms and conditions! Sometimes they clearly state that you are not allowed to check in photographic material in your checked baggage. Something to keep in mind if your carry-on luggage weighs more than actually allowed.

It's also best to check which materials should go in checked baggage or just in carry-on luggage. Batteries, for example, require extra attention. It is best not to leave rechargeable lithium batteries in your camera. These should be placed in a plastic bag in your carry-on baggage. Nor should they be in your checked baggage.

SUITCASE, HARD CASE, BACKPACK OR DUFFEL BAG?

What do you put your stuff in? There are a few things to weigh up here. The weight of your suitcase itself, the sturdiness, manipulability and – oddly enough – how it looks. A duffel bag or trek backpack doesn't look expensive and thus attracts fewer grasping hands. Moreover, they are distinctly different from the majority of luggage, making them less likely to get lost and they are often a lot lighter.



Finally, such a travel bag is more convenient during the trip itself. Unlike a hard suitcase, they can be easily compressed and stack better.

Expect the unexpected when packing

When packing, also think logically about what you will put where and what clothes you will put on. An example: in a northern destination, you will be able to use warm clothes. Since you won't need them on the plane, you tend to leave them in your checked luggage. Still, it is wise to bring warm clothes on the plane. After all, no one can guarantee that your luggage will effectively be with you on your flight. It sometimes happens that luggage is delayed for a day. Especially when you have a layover. An added advantage when you have all your warm clothing with you. Upon arrival, you are less likely to be shivering from the cold in your Low Country winter clothes. So put on your full Northern outfit already better for travel. The unnecessary layers can be put under your seat on the plane. Convenient on arrival and you save space in your luggage.

The maximum dimensions of your baggage

Usually, the weight of checked-in checked-in baggage is allowed to be 20 to 23 kg. If you exceed that weight limit, you usually have to pay extra (per kilogram). Each airline has its own rules and limits. Google those in advance. Type in 'luggage + *LUGGAGE AGENCY*' (e.g. luggage Brussels Airlines) and you will quickly get the information you are looking for.

Keep in mind that international flights sometimes have different limits than national flights (15 kg). Not unimportant if you take national flights during your trip. Also for national flights you can normally always pay extra (per kilogram).

HANDBAGGAGE

For those who like to take a lot of photographic equipment with them when traveling, hand luggage is a tough thought.

Hand luggage or carry-on luggage weight limits are usually between 8 and 12 kg. Airlines are sometimes flexible, sometimes very strict. Paying extra for heavier bags is not an option with carry-on luggage, unless you book for business class (which can be quite pricey) or e.g. priority plus (affordable for the extra service you get) on the low-cost airlines.

The dimensions have limits and usually hover around 55 x 40 x 23 cm. Before you leave home, check the allowed dimensions for carry-on luggage.

TIP: certain bags immediately take into account the correct dimensions (e.g. the bags from our partner Mr. Jan Gear).

An average photo bag with contents quickly weighs 10 to 15 kilograms. On many airlines, this is too much. If your carry-on baggage weighs (much) more than allowed, you run the risk that the people at the check-in desk will speak to you about this. They will then try to force you to check in some of your carry-on baggage.

With any luck, you can count on a lot of understanding at the check-in counter if you calmly explain that your equipment is worth a huge amount (name a total amount) and exactly what the contents of your bag are (all photo material). Usually this will suffice.

Remember: the person behind the counter is always right. We advise you not to get into discussions. You can possibly show your goodwill and put some things in your luggage. You can also refer to the airline's general terms and conditions (previous tip). Right now, a jacket with lots of large pockets and pants with large pockets is a nice last resort that they can't argue with much. You can put a lot into this if you have to...

PHOTO MATERIAL AND OPTICAL MATERIAL AS HAND LUGGAGE While packing



Before you go to the airport, it is important that you distribute your luggage as efficiently as possible. To carry as much valuable photography and optical equipment as possible in your hand luggage, we use these tricks – with varying degrees of success.

Light photo bag

More and more brands are offering photo bags that are specially designed to be taken on the plane as hand luggage. Their dimensions are within the permitted dimensions and they fit neatly into the aircraft storage compartments. They also weigh little while being spacious on the inside.

TIP: keep your bag at the check-in desk discreet and, if possible, out of sight. Practice beforehand to lift it smoothly, so that it is not noticeable that it is quite heavy.

Laptop bag

Although you are officially only allowed to take 1 piece of hand luggage, airlines usually allow an extra laptop bag. Usually it is not weighed. If you take a spacious laptop bag (not a backpack), you can also store some of your other belongings in it. Think of some small lenses, flashes or even a small body.

It is better not to put your laptop in your photo backpack, even if it has a compartment for that purpose. A laptop makes your backpack heavier and makes it look bigger.

A tripod is sometimes allowed as an extra piece of hand luggage, although it is better not to combine this with an extra laptop bag (bringing 3 pieces of hand luggage is probably not possible). Extra advantage: you save the weight of the tripod in your checked luggage. Disadvantage: you stand out.

Photo jacket and clothing with spacious pockets

Without a doubt the most important tip of all! If you're boarding a plane and the above tips didn't help enough, this could be the ultimate solution. There are no real restrictions anywhere about the material you store in your jacket.

Another option is to immediately wear a photo jacket. Photo jackets can be found in photo shops, fishing shops and army stocks ('tactical jackets'). Make sure they are light and not too warm, have large compartments and do not stand out.

You can possibly wear them under your regular coat. When push comes to shove, you can quickly get rid of a few lenses and a body from your hand luggage. If necessary, you can also wear a body with a lens around your neck. Normally they can't say much about this either.

TIP: trousers with large pockets can also accommodate a lot of material.

Although we can't promise anything, we hope that thanks to the above tips you can travel more relaxed with a lot of luggage. Do you still have a specific question? We are happy to help you! These tips are a guideline for you, but STARLING is not responsible for what you do with them. Below is another tip that we do not recommend but would like to share...

PHOTO MATERIAL IN YOUR HOLD LUGGAGE

Pros and cons of checking in

Checking baggage has advantages and disadvantages. Weigh this for yourself. It can be useful if you don't have to carry the weight at the airports (especially when you have to transfer). You can't forget your things anywhere (e.g. after the security check) and you don't have to put your luggage in the storage compartments on the plane.

The main disadvantage of storing equipment in your checked luggage is that you no longer have control over it after check-in. It can be thrown, it can arrive at its destination later and in the worst case it can be stolen or lost.



Don't check in everything

To save yourself some headaches, you can choose to only check in what really doesn't fit in your hand luggage without exceeding the weight limit. For example, only check in the heaviest item from your photography kit. Think of your telephoto lens, sufficiently protected in a sturdy Pelican Case or in the original lens case.

You can also lock a suitcase securely. The disadvantage is that this stands out as being extremely valuable.

Tip: put your suitcase in a cover or simple travel bag to be less noticeable.

Pay extra

When you check in your photo equipment, you will most likely have a second piece of checked baggage. So you will have to pay extra. It will cost you on average 50 to 100 euros per journey (you pay separately for the outward and return journey). You can specify a second item to check in when booking the flight, or at the check-in desk at the airport.

CONTACT

If you have any questions, don't hesitate to email us or call us! Below you can find STARLING's details.

DURING OFFICE HOURS: +32 (0)9 395 05 35

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Please only use the emergency number in urgent cases. For less urgent questions, you can email or call us during office hours. Our office is open Monday to Friday from 9am to 5pm.

STARLING is a travel organization affiliated with the Association for Flemish Travel Agencies. Our license number is 9505. More information about insurance and licenses can be found on our website.

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