

Travel Talk – Tips on Tipping

by Chase Binder

Some aspects of travel cause more stress than others. Flying is high on the stress-o-meter. Losing your passport or credit card is also up there. But how about tipping? While it may not rank at the very top of potential disasters, the quandary of how much to tip and when hits just about the entire traveling public at one point or another. How much to tip...who to tip...when to tip... how to tip? These questions surface almost daily here in the US, but overlay different cultures, norms and currencies when you're traveling and the whole subject can be a headache.

First, a few rules of thumb. Tip directly to the service person when possible instead of leaving money on a table or a dresser. Tip in cash using local currency—get local cash in small bills from ATM's (often called Bancomats) to get the best exchange rates. Tip housekeepers daily—staff rotations can change daily. In restaurants we tip on the food/beverage amount, not the taxes. It also helps to learn the word for tip or gratuity before you travel.

Assuming you're flying somewhere, let's start with the airport arrival process, using a "park and fly" shuttle or even one of the convenient NH-to-Logan bus services. The drivers load and unload your bags and in the case of the bus drivers, they make sure your bags are tagged and loaded properly for your departure terminal. Bud and I feel this deserves a gratuity—say, \$5 for two larger bags and two carry-ons. Think ahead and tuck a fiver into an outside pocket so you can hand it over and be on your way quickly. Just tip once, of course, after you've arrived at the terminal.

Now you're at the airport and there are several porters waiting to whisk you through the check-in procedures. With today's super-easy rolling luggage, we generally don't use porters. The exception is if we are in a foreign country and trying to make a connection in an unfamiliar airport—as happened to us in Johannesburg, South Africa. Our flight from Dulles was late and our connection to Cape Town was very, very tight. We had been told to look for the fellows in the orange jumpsuits and have a \$20 bill ready. Trip-saving advice! The fellows got us to the right terminal and gate way ahead of the crowd. Again, Bud had a twenty in his hand and was ready to roll. How do you get info like this? Try Google, find a friend who knows the airport or ask



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your flight attendant—chances are he or she will know.

Once you've reached your destination, you'll have the same issue with porters. They can be useful or not, depending on how confident you are about your ground connections and your ability/willingness to move your luggage about. If you're traveling with another couple or a few kids, a \$10 bill might be a good investment to get all your bags to your rental car, onward bus or train.

How about accommodations? Larger hotels have bellboys who will bring your bags to your room. The better ones will walk you through the quirks of the room—how to adjust the HVAC, use the phone and internet, ask for extra towels or pillows, etc. We use our regular per-bag scale of \$5 for two large and two smaller bags. We also always tip the housekeeper, \$2-5/day depending on the service. Larger hotels will normally have a concierge who can be an enormous help getting dinner reservations, taxis and all sorts of things. They expect tips when doing something above and beyond, \$10-20—but also sometimes get kickbacks from restaurants or other places they recommend. We tend to look for advice from bellboys—like where they eat for special occasions or family celebrations. We had the best dinner ever in Rome using this method and the bellboy was thrilled to provide the advice and get the tip.

When we stay at small owner-run B & B's, we use the axiom of not tipping the owner of the establishment.

As for restaurants and bars, the US guidelines of 15-20% for sit down meals, 10% for buffets (for plate removal, drink delivery etc.) and \$1-2 per drink at the bar (or 15-20% for running a tab) works in Canada and much of Mexico.

But tipping is not common in Ireland, the UK and Australia. Tipping customs for food servers are largely based on local laws governing minimum wages, and establishments vary greatly in terms of tip sharing with other servers, busboys and hosts/hostesses. The key to tipping with confidence is to research customs and expectations before you travel. In Europe you will often see "service" as an extra charge—like US restaurants adding a pre-determined gratuity for larger parties. No need for extra tip.

Of course, technology has made the whole world of tipping easier. Many restaurants use digital ordering technology, so splitting bills is a snap. Some service establishments incorporate tip suggestions (percentage and dollar amounts) right on your bill. There are many apps to help as well. Google the subject or look at the Tip Calculator Free app by iHandy for iPhones or Tip N Split Tip Calculator for Android devices. Also, visit globaltippingapp.com for more iPhone options. If you have newer phones, a tipping app is probably pre-loaded – just check out the global component before you travel.

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