The Travel Money Cheat Sheet

Five rules that remove almost every avoidable payment fee abroad

1. Use a card with no foreign transaction fee

A standard bank card adds ~3% to every purchase abroad. On a $2,000 trip that is $60 for nothing. Bring a no-FX-fee Visa or Mastercard as your primary card.

2. Always pay in the LOCAL currency (decline DCC)

When a terminal or ATM offers to charge you in your home currency, decline it. That offer (Dynamic Currency Conversion) typically costs 3-7% extra. Local currency, every time, no exceptions.

3. Make fewer, larger ATM withdrawals at bank ATMs

Most ATM fees are flat per withdrawal. One $250 pull pays the fee once; five $50 pulls pay it five times. Use bank-owned ATMs and skip standalone machines in tourist areas and airports.

4. Carry a backup card from a different issuer

One declined, frozen, or swallowed card should be a nuisance, not a crisis. Keep a second no-FX card from a different bank, stored separately from your wallet.

5. Plan arrival day before you land

Decide on the plane: how you get data, why you skip the airport exchange counter, and where your first withdrawal happens (a bank ATM, in local currency). Tired improvisation is what fees feed on.

The pocket version

No-FX card. Decline DCC. Big single ATM pulls at bank machines. Backup card, separate pocket. Arrival plan decided on the plane.