

WSJ Print Edition

A laptop can prove invaluable if your phone stops working while traveling.



GILBERTSON/ WSJ Hyatt's all-inclusive resort Impression Moxché by Secrets in Playa del Carmen, Mexico.

Tips for Surviving Loss of Your Phone

BY DAWN GILBERTSON

The following items first appeared in the weekly Travel newsletter.

What would you do if your phone crapped out or was lost on an international trip and there was no quick fix or way to replace it?

Besides freak out, of course. My relatively new iPhone 16 died suddenly on the first day of a reporting trip to Mexico, and I was absolutely lost without it. So much lives on those devices.

Fortunately, you can benefit from my misfortune because I learned a few things.

Make sure you have another device with you. Not everyone lugs a laptop or tablet on vacation, but this was a work trip and my laptop proved invaluable.

I emailed family and friends to let them know I was alive and not ignoring their texts. I also checked in for my flight.

WSJ tech columnist Nicole Nguyen always brings her laptop or iPad Mini. On both: WhatsApp, iMessage, password manager and key DAWN contacts and documents. She also digitizes anything she would need if she lost a passport, like a birth certificate and driver's license.

My experience has me considering a backup burner phone for international trips if I'm traveling solo.

Bring a magnetic battery pack. This helps if your phone troubles stem from gunk in the charging port (hello, sand or water). YouTube tutorials had me convinced this was my problem. I tried my magnetic charger, but it didn't help. When Verizon got my phone to turn back on upon my return, it was 100% charged. Don't leave key credit cards at home. I left my corporate American Express card at home on this short trip because the resort took Apple Pay and I was using cash for transportation and tips. Dumb move. Fortunately, I had another card to pay for the room.

Keep a list of important phone numbers somewhere besides your phone contacts. I don't even know my 25-year-old son's phone number. I just click Boo in my phone. (Sorry, Jack!)

Bring a disposable camera (or the real thing) if your phone usually plays that role. I was able to use my friend's phone for photos on this trip but would have had to otherwise buy a costly camera at the resort to document the trip.

Don't perform phone software updates while traveling. This one comes from Nicole, too. She says doing so can sometimes "brick"—or render useless—your phone.

Birthday month

Check your airline frequent-flier account around your birthday. United offers eligible Mileage Plus members a free upgrade to Economy Plus one time during their birthday month. You must book your trip on United's website or app and sign in to your account to qualify. I wasn't flying United in July so I missed out.

And we quote

"One of my packing philosophies is BIA, which is, 'bring it all.'" —*Actress Tracee Ellis Ross, host of the new Roku show "Solo Traveling with Tracee Ellis Ross."* She says she usually checks at least four bags.

Travel math: -7%

That's the decline in the number of international visitors to the U.S. in May from a year earlier, according to recent figures from the International Trade Association.

Mexico, Canada and the U.K. are the top three sources of visitors.

Thoughts on Southwest's new seat fees

"What they fail to tell you is preferred seating does not mean preferred boarding nor preferred overhead bin space! On Tuesday, I purchased three tickets from Oklahoma City to Fort Myers, Fla., and paid extra for preferred seats. After reading the fine print, the Choice fare I purchased boards in groups 6–8. So, all the precious overhead bin space I thought I purchased with my preferred seat will be gobbled up by those passengers in groups 1–5. I keep envisioning 'preferred' seating passengers in row 6 acting like salmon swimming upstream to retrieve their carry-on baggage in row 25."

—*Susan Abeln, Oklahoma* (Southwest is still working on its new boarding system and says the seat location may trump the fare type.)

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