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HOW TO SURVIVE A BORDER CROSSING

Border crossings can be intimidating hives of corruption, bureaucracy, and lawlessness. In some countries all you need for a smooth ride is a clean criminal record – but not all.



1 Prepare in advance. Make sure you have the correct visas and spare passport photos, and fill out any forms ahead of time. Stop in the largest town before the border to get the lowdown on when border officials take their siesta and whether there are any short cuts.

2 Carry plenty of cash, some in the currency of the country you're entering, so you can move through town quickly.

3 Look the part. If you're headed to a music festival or full-moon party, don't dress like you are. The goal is to fit in. Dress too smart and you'll be singled out as someone who can afford bribes; too shabby and you'll look like someone agents are paid to keep out of the country.



4 Submit to the power trip and smile. Border officials have a reputation for letting you know who's boss. Let them feel like they are in charge, don't question extra 'fees' that are tacked on last minute (unless they are unreasonably high), and don't get rattled.



5 Avoid the two worst border crossings in the world. The Darién Gap, between Colombia and Panama, is crawling with armed narco-traffickers and guerrillas: neither country wants you entering here. If you travel from Alaska to Russia via the Bering Sea there's a very good chance you will be detained and questioned.

6 Once through a checkpoint, head straight for a waiting bus, pre-arranged ride or pre-booked hotel. Borders are the worst places in which to look lost, confused or as if you want to hear about your options from a 'friendly' local.

