

# Ten Tips for Shooting Video Abroad

From Episode 106



If you have the chance to shoot video outside of your home country, embrace the opportunity to explore a new place, but watch out for the pitfalls that come with working in unfamiliar territory.

In this episode, Andrew King and Kelly Shores from Sparksight deliver real-world tips, tricks and examples of things to do to make your video shoot “across the pond” simpler, smoother and more enjoyable. Shot in front of Windsor Castle, outside of London, England, this episode draws upon experiences in producing a customer interview video for a UK-based client (hence the location) as well as past experiences shooting in Canada, Asia, the Caribbean, and Australia. Andrew and Kelly cover ten things you may not have considered in shooting abroad as well as suggestions for successfully addressing each item.

## 1 Book It

As obvious as it sounds, book in advance online! Just like traveling locally, advanced booking can save you a lot... not just in discounted early bird rates, but also in transaction fees. Most credit cards (and bank cards) charge foreign transaction fees on *every purchase*, even ATM withdrawals. If you use your card on every hotel and meal, those fees will add up quickly, and before you know it the bad exchange rate will be the least of your worries...

## 2 Avoid the Bobbies

To keep your production from being shut down, research the rules and regulations in your destination country regarding filming, especially if you'll be doing any filming outdoors. You may be required to obtain a shooting permit or license of some kind if you want to shoot in downtown London or Paris... check with the film bureau and see what they say. Sometimes you can obtain a waiver or qualify for permit-less shooting if your production is small enough (like a monthly video blog, for example).

## 3 Custom-ize Your Trip

Going through customs is always intimidating, even if you've got nothing to hide. When you're doing a video shoot, however, you might have something to hide... or at least sugarcoat. That's because your production is potentially taking away from local jobs, and you might be required to get a work visa or other permit.

So try to schedule some personal time during your trip that you can refer to when you're asked why you're in the country... but remember: as a general rule, saying too much is as bad as not saying enough. Be relaxed, and answer simply, and you should be fine.

Another tip for staying cool at customs is to split up your gear with your crew. If you have an entire TV studio in your bags, you'll be stopped for sure. Carry some of the items, and have your crew carry the rest.

## 4 Get Help from the Locals

Often times, it won't make sense to fly your entire crew and gear out to a foreign country. Instead, consider hiring local crew members, especially ones who can bring out at least part of the gear you'll need. Light kits and heavy tripods will make traveling a pain, but hiring a crew member who meets you at your shoot location with the heavy gear will make things a breeze.

The service we use and highly recommend is Crews Control out of D.C. They can provide international, vetted crew members for any positions you need.

## 5 Ship, Don't Schlep

Another solution for heavy gear-schlepping is to ship your it ahead of time. Carry your camera and small electronics with you, and when you arrive at your destination, a large, heavy package can be waiting for you, ready for your production. Some shipping services will even meet you at your shoot location with the shipment. Just make sure that if you go this route, you insure the heck out of your gear...



## 6 Keep an Inventory

Although it can be a bit painstaking, make an inventory list of your more expensive equipment, including serial numbers. In reality, you should have a document like this if you own *any* equipment, but especially when you're traveling you should keep a list on you at all times. If something gets lost in transit, it will expedite tracking and recovery if you're able to give them the exact serial numbers. This list can also help you at customs in the event that you are suspected of importing goods for resale.

## 7 Em-power Yourself

It's very important to research the power situation at your destination. If you've ever traveled abroad, you're familiar with the varying outlet shapes, but it's important to know that the adapters you can buy in most any store do not necessarily *convert* the power. That is, a typical U.S. device might need 120 volts, but in Europe the outlets can dish out up to 240 volts. Laptops and video cameras usually have built in converters (the box attached to the wall plug) that will take the 200+ voltage and downvert it as needed.

But if you have numerous devices that don't have this conversion, you can buy a separate unit at any electronics store and bring along a power strip. These can get quite heavy, so it may be a consideration if trying to travel light.

**\*One important note:** Most of your electronics will do fine with the voltage difference, oftentimes without an adapter, but you should *never* plug in lights without being sure that the voltage matches your bulbs exactly. Otherwise, you'll either blow a fuse or a bulb. Or both.

## 8 Keep in Touch

Phone bills can kill your budget, so take some steps to save money when you're getting in touch with people locally and abroad.

1. Check with your carrier about international roaming plans: They'll have packages for phone AND data plans that will save you money on the trip.
2. Buy a pay-as-you-go disposable phone: When you need to get in touch with locals (such as your clients, hotels, etc), it might be best to buy something like a TracFone. Relying solely on payphones will get surprisingly expensive, not to mention limiting.
3. Bring an unlocked cell phone and buy a local SIM card: Great for local calls, and usually not too bad to call back home.
4. Skype: There are several options with Skype, particularly Skype Out, which works like a calling card and allows you to call land or cell lines back home for a basic minute rate. Then, you can ask them to call your Skype number, or get on Skype themselves, at which point the call is FREE.

## 9 Have Fun

You're already in a cool, different place, so you might as well enjoy it while you're there. Schedule a little time to see the sights, so you have some stories to tell to make your co-workers jealous.

## 10 Prepare for Format Issues

Similar to the power differences, you need to research and prepare for difference in video formats. Between NTSC, PAL, SECAM, M-SECAM, etc, there are a lot of ways your gear can be incompatible or obsolete. If your final product needs to be PAL, shoot PAL! Conversions can get sticky. Check your destination's standards and match them with the deliverables.

