



The ABC's of ATM's Abroad
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It used to be automatic. Along with passports and airline tickets, travelers would not leave home without their travelers' checks. These days, with fewer merchants accepting traveler's checks and the relatively high fees for buying and cashing them, many travelers have moved to credit, debit, and ATM cards as their source of funds while on the road. Here are some tips for international transactions.

- Visa and Mastercard charge a one percent fee for foreign transactions, and most banks tack on an additional two percent to convert the transactions to US dollars. Check with your credit, debit and ATM card providers to determine which of your cards are most travel-friendly, or sign up for a new card with a provider that waives or reduces the fees (for example, Capital One adds no fee, and absorbs the one percent Visa and Mastercard charge, and Wachovia charges just the one percent.)
- Make sure you have ample available credit and/or funds deposited, and check expiration dates on the cards you have chosen. Remember, many foreign ATM's accept four-digit PINs only, and typically don't display letters on the keyboards. If you use a word to remember your PIN, memorize the numeric equivalent before leaving home.
- Unusual foreign transactions may be flagged as fraudulent, so let your credit, debit and ATM card providers know of your travel plans to avoid a freeze on your account. Take more than one card with you to ensure that you have an alternative should your account be frozen.
- Make a list of convenient ATM locations in your destination cities before you go. Both [Visa](#) and [Mastercard](#) have on-line worldwide ATM locators covering more than 210 countries. Make sure that your ATM card displays a Visa, Mastercard, Cirrus or Plus logo for worldwide acceptance.
- Prepaid debit cards are a safe, albeit more expensive, alternative to a traditional debit or ATM card. You simply purchase the value needed ahead of time and use in ATM machines while traveling. Since the card is not connected to your checking account, there is no danger of being wiped out should it be stolen or lost, but there are usually extra fees involved.
- Make all of your purchases in local currency, and beware of merchants offering to convert your purchases into US dollars. These merchants typically inflate the exchange rates by as much as five percent.
- Cash-to-Cash machines are common, especially in Europe. They look like ATM's - the difference being that you feed in currency rather than a card. While they seem very convenient, they are best avoided as they charge inflated exchange rates. The same is true for the currency exchange booths at many international airports.

Exchange rates and commission fees can be very expensive when converting foreign currency back to US funds, so try to limit your cash withdrawals to just what you need. Use your remaining currency for a last lunch or souvenir, or tuck it away for your next trip.

MasterCard link for ATM locations:

<http://www.mastercard.com/us/personal/en/cardholderservices/atmlocations/>

Visa link for ATM locations:

<http://visa.via.infonow.net/locator/global/>

