

Mrs. Sullivan's Guide to Money in Europe

This document was highly researched for our trip to Italy, was updated for Prague & Vienna, and now has been updated again for Ireland.

Each SCC member will need – at a minimum - \$200 on the trip. This will cover any non-included meals, plus a little left over for souvenirs.

Ireland is in the Euro Zone.

Each Euro equals about \$1.11, as of the exchange in August 2015. This may fluctuate up or down as we get closer to our trip. You can drive yourself crazy thinking about exchange rates, so just make the shift in Euros.

For example, lunch is going to cost 5-10€. A nice purse about 50€. Scarves 2-10€. Just the same as here, plus some, but in Euros (€) not dollars (\$).

For this guide, I'm going to talk about these different types of "money":

- Cash
- Pre-Paid Credit Cards (Functions like a credit card, but only has as much as you load it up with).
- Debit/ATM cards (cards which take money directly out of your bank account).
- Credit Cards (cards that let you make purchases or cash advances that you pay for later).

CASH:

(Please note that when I use the \$ sign, I truly mean USA dollars. If I mean Euros, I'll use the € sign)

Of the \$200, you child will need about \$20 in cash for the airport, \$10 each way, for snacks, a drink, etc. While technically the planes include meals, it's not a bad idea to have some snacks and a drink once you're through security, because we're not yet sure when meals will be served. We will most likely have a snack, dinner and breakfast on our overnight flight.

They do NOT need to be purchasing souvenirs at airports, so they really don't need any more than this.

PrePaid Credit Cards:

These are cards you load with money before your child leaves. It only has as much available as you put on it. However, with most, you can add more HERE while they're THERE if you need to. AAA and Walmart seems to have the best products. Other companies have pre-paid credit cards, but not all can be used internationally. Read the small print on the user agreement VERY CAREFULLY before you purchase one!

The Walmart basic Money Card has the lowest fees of all the cards I looked at, and unlike a lot of PrePaid Credit Cards, CAN be used internationally. However, you must start the process now – the temporary one you buy at the store (see below) can NOT be used internationally, only the permanent one you get in the mail can.

There's two ways to get one of these:

1. Go to the store, buy a Walmart Money Card (\$1.88 issuance fee), and load it a little money. You will have in your hands a "temporary card" that you can use immediately, but it can NOT be used internationally. You'll have to call and activate the card, and in 7-10 business days, you'll get the "permanent card" in the mail that can be used internationally. Since they're not going to need it for a while anyhow, you may want to.....

2. Go online to walmartmoneycard.com and apply online. This way, you'll save the issuance fee, and you'll get the "permanent card" directly in the mail, in the same 7-10 business days. I'm not sure if you have to activate the card as well by calling a number and answering questions, or if that's taken care of in the online application process. Once you have your number, you can add money by direct deposit, money pak or electronic transfer from your bank account. There is a monthly service fee plus various fee to reload the card

Keep in mind they charge a \$3 per month service fee. You may want to wait a bit to apply for one, but don't wait too long.

What I found attractive about these cards is that you can use them at an ATM to get cash (be sure to register a PIN number), OR, just like a credit card (it will say Visa or MasterCard on it). Also, the fees are less than regular credit cards or ATM cards. Parents can buy them for their kids, and have their children's names put right on them.

Benefit – easy to use, can reload at home if your kid needs more while in abroad, widely accepted. Drawback: if your child drops or loses it, it's just like losing all their cash – anyone else can pick it up and use it. While you like to think that merchants would check ID, it's not likely.

Be sure to check out my comparison at the end.

Debit/ATM Cards:

I was thrilled to just use my ATM at a machine in Ireland. It did the conversion for me, and just spit out Euros. However, when I got home, I realized I had paid a lot for that 20€. But it sure was easy!

Benefit – ease of use, if you drop it, not one can use it (unless you're silly enough to have written your PIN number on it!), does the conversion for you. Drawback - fees

Be sure to check out my comparison at the end.

Credit Cards:

Credit cards; Visa, MasterCard and American Express are widely accepted, but like here, American Express less so because of their higher fees.

Check your card member agreement – **read the small print** – or call your credit card company to find out what their fees are before you go.

Europe has a "chip" system, and most credit cards are encoded with extra-security personal information. US credit cards tend to not have this, and if you get a gum-smacking 16 year old check-out girl who has never dealt with American tourists, they may not know what to do. However, all they need to do is manually enter the numbers, and it will work just fine. Also, it's ALWAYS a good idea to call your credit card company ahead of time and let them know you're going out of the country. If they don't know, they may think your card has been stolen and they'll cut it off.

Benefits – widely accepted, can pay it off later. Drawbacks – fees, if you're not aware of them, sometimes have to explain that they have to manually enter numbers. Be sure to check out my comparison at the end.

Travelers Checks:

I'm not even mentioning these here, because they're really a thing of the past, and not easily recognized or accepted.

Fee Comparison:

I took all the cards out of my wallet, and some others I had laying around, and ran this comparison, which I feel is pretty typical.

Credit Cards	
American Express Delta Sky miles Credit Card	2.7% of each transaction after conversion to US dollars
Kroger Visa	2.8% of each foreign purchase transaction or foreign ATM advance transaction.
Capital One credit card	NO foreign transaction fee (but read other small print)
Debit/ATM	
Wells Fargo Debit - Purchase	3% of transaction amount after conversion to US dollars
Wells Fargo Debit - ATM	\$5 each withdrawal at ATM outside US.
SunTrust ATM	\$5 each withdrawal at ATM outside US.
Pre-Paid Card	
Prepaid Card A - Purchase	3% per transaction. Confusion at the customer service hotline about whether it could be used overseas or not.
Prepaid Card A - ATM	\$4.95 per transaction
Prepaid Card B - Purchase	2.8% of each transaction after conversion to US dollars
Walmart MoneyCard – Purchase	2% of each transaction after conversion to US dollars
Walmart MoneyCard – ATM	\$2 each withdrawal at ATM outside US.

Conclusion:

Rick Steeves has good articles which I used to develop this. His advice? Basically, use your ATM once to get some walking around money in the local currency. You'll be charged \$2-\$5 for the privilege, so you don't want to be withdrawing 20's every time you pass an ATM.

For everything else, use your credit card, or if you choose, your prepaid card. Walmart's MoneyCard has the best fees of all – only 2% compared to 2.7-3% for purchase, and only \$2 for an ATM cash withdrawal, versus the \$5 on my bank cards, plus spits out local currency from the ATM. But read the [small print!](#)

PLEASE discuss your child's "money style" with your child AND their chaperones. We want our children to learn important life skills in managing their money, but we also want to make sure they don't blow it all and have nothing left for non-included lunches, snacks and souvenirs.

Please also discuss money security with your child – hotel rooms have personal safes, and it's important to only take what they need (in cash or a safely concealed credit or cash card) each day.

Help them set a budget for what they'll spend on snacks, lunch and dinner, plus what should be spent on gifts and souvenirs, keeping in mind that \$1 does NOT equal €1.