



TRAVEL TIPS

A Pre-Vacation Checklist: Get Your House In Order

Plan in advance and set up bill payment before hitting the road 

(NAPSA)—Whether you are leaving on a long-awaited vacation, an extended business trip or a weekend getaway, preparing to head out of town can often be both time-consuming and stressful. The last thing you want to do is add to the to-do list. However, taking care of household responsibilities before you leave can make your return home much more relaxing and alleviate stress while on the road. This way, you won't feel a wave of panic—on the beach or in the boardroom—when you remember that you forgot to feed the dog or pay an important bill.

Here are four tasks you should take care of before leaving home and some time-saving ways to check them off your list.

Make home look like you've never left. Whether you're 100 or 1,000 miles away, your house should appear inhabited as a safety precaution. To do this, purchase low-cost timers that can be programmed to turn on and off radios, televisions and lights. Piles of newspapers next to the front door can be a clear indication that no one is home. Avoid this by holding subscriptions and mail with the postal service (downloadable forms are available online at www.usps.com) or opt to receive bills electronically through bill payment services to permanently reduce clutter.

Take care of business. To avoid missed payments for utilities and other important bills, set up automatic bill pay before you leave. Using a Visa card is an easy, convenient and secure way to pay household bills such as util-

ities, cable TV and insurance when you're traveling. This time-saving tool can benefit everyone, especially frequent business travelers who are often away from home. Choose a one-time payment or automatic payments to ensure that your bills are paid on time every month no matter where you are. More information is available online at www.visa.com/billpay.

Prepare your pets and plants. If your four-legged friend isn't leaving town with you, hiring a pet sitter or making reservations at a kennel will help your pet receive the proper care. To prevent returning home to overgrown landscaping and dead house plants, make arrangements to have your yard cared for in your absence. For short trips, set a timer for your sprinklers and consider placing house plants in shaded outdoor areas near a sprinkler. Or ask a reliable neighbor to feed your pets and water your house plants.

Give yourself a break on energy costs. Before leaving, turn off your water and gas and unplug common appliances such as microwaves and televisions. This will both reduce unnecessary usage and prevent damage caused by energy surges. Consider setting your thermostat 10 degrees lower than the outside temperature or simply turn it off. If you'll be away for an extended period of time, turn off your pilot light for maximum savings.

From putting lights on timers to setting up automatic bill pay, following these tips can minimize pretravel stress and help make your return home sweet.