

The Grown-Up's Guide to Running Away from Home KNORR

1

converters and transformers do not convert cycles, appliances with motors may run faster or slower.

Some things, such as televisions and VCRs, won't work at all in certain countries overseas, because the actual broadcast or tape systems are different.

Gizmos and How to Use Them

You've heard of adapters, converters, transformers, and the like. If you've never had to use them, here's a brief description of what they are and when to use each.

An adapter plug attaches to the U.S. plug, enabling you to plug your appliance into the wall outlet, which will be of a different shape overseas. This is purely a question of size and shape. The adapter will *not* convert the electrical voltage or cycles.

A converter can convert power for an electric appliance (for example, from 110 to 220 or vice versa). Converters will work for short-term, high-voltage use on simple appliances, such as hair dryers, vacuum cleaners, coffee makers, and so on. As a general rule, they work for appliances that don't have to be kept plugged in regularly. Check the manufacturer or supplier of your converter to see what they recommend.

Do *not* use a converter with electronic items. Even mundane products, such as a programmable clock radio or toaster oven, could have electronic parts these days, so be careful that you don't assume wrongly. Anything with an electronic component requires a transformer.

A transformer will enable you to use electronic appliances such as computers, copiers, or fax machines. A transformer works with either electric or electronic products, so if you're unsure, choose the transformer over a converter. Buy the proper size transformer, based on the wattage of the appliance. Check with the manufacturer of the transformer to see what one will work with the electronic appliance you intend it for.

You can purchase adapters, converters, and transformers at travel stores and electronic shops, such as Radio Shack or through catalogs such as Franzus, (203) 723-6664; Magellans, (800) 962-4943; or Walkabout Travel Gear, (800) 274-4277 or (800) 852-7085.

I was impressed with Walkabout Travel Gear's customer service. They provide complete information on electric current requirements overseas and helpful advice about what you need to adapt. You can download a complete electricity index from their Web site (www.walkabouttravelgear.com/wwelect.htm) or e-mail them at walkabouttravelgear.com.

The Great Lamp Debate

There are two schools of thought about taking U.S. lamps (110 volts) overseas, where the power is 220 volts.

lightning, I'm sure, but it does provide everyday protection from the surges and spikes that you can encounter overseas—or anywhere for that matter.

The Modem

The hardware your computer uses to connect to the phone line is called the *modem*. Some computers come with modems installed; otherwise, you can have one installed. Either way, be sure to buy a modem that's error correcting, as most new ones are. Overseas phone connections are, alas, not always as good as those in the States. You'll need the error correction to overcome the additional "noise" on the phone lines.

I purchased the top-of-the-line International Modem with my IBM laptop. It's worked beautifully. Many other modems can accomplish what you need; talk to a computer pro to see what they suggest.

The Phone Jack

The United States uses one type of phone plug, called a RJ11, which connects your phone, or in this case, your computer modem, to the wall outlet. In other countries, the phone plug is configured differently, so you'll need an adapter for the phone plug, just as you need an adapter for the electrical plug. You can find these at specialty suppliers, even on the Internet itself.

Walkabout Travel Gear is one retailer that has all the above equipment, complete with helpful personnel to answer your questions on using it. Call them toll-free at (800) 274-4277 or (800) 852-7085. They provide a Web page (www.walkabouttravelgear.com/wwelect.htm) that includes everything you ever wanted to know about electricity around the world, complete with a listing of which countries have which voltage and what adapter plugs work where. Indispensable!

Printers

In North America electricity is delivered at 110 volts and 60 cycles per second, or 60 hertz (Hz). In Europe it's delivered at 220 volts and 50 Hz. A transformer will adapt the voltage but not the cycles. A computer can handle the difference in cycles, but a printer can't. This is probably why you won't find a printer that works on both 110/220 voltage, as does a notebook computer. It wouldn't help.

If you want to print from your notebook computer in a country where the cycles per second, or hertz, differs, then buy a printer at your destination. I found mine in France, and though it was a bit nerve-racking setting it up with French instructions, having set up printers in the States enabled me to manage with intermediate French and a dictionary. Often, the information is printed in several languages, among them English, making the whole process even simpler.

The Grown-Up's Guide to Running Away from Home

Technical Information

Walkabout Travel Gear

www.walkabouttravelgear.com/wwelect.htm

This site is packed with essential information on international electricity, voltage, plug adapter, and modem requirements overseas. Provides the option to purchase the adapters, converters, and transformers needed for any area in the world.

Communication

TeleAdapt

www.teleadapt.com/

On-line catalog for products includes a Traveler Help Desk with tips on how to hook up overseas using phone adapters, plug adapters, modems, and more.

Work, Learn, or Volunteer

Club Med

www.clubmed.com

Trips for couples, singles, and families—and the second screen provides information on jobs available.

Earthwatch

gaia.earthwatch.org

Information on the Earthwatch program and upcoming expeditions.

Hospitality Net Virtual Job Exchange

www.hospitalitynet.nl/job

Lists jobs overseas for people in the hospitality industry.

Overseas Jobs

www.overseasjobs.com/

Provides hints on getting a job outside the United States.

Peace Corps

www.peacecorps.gov/

Information on volunteers, applications, countries, and opportunities available.

WW Teach

members.aol.com/wwteach/Teach.htm

Provides tips and links to information on international education and schools, including international teaching jobs.