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The Trip Planning Spreadsheet: A Five-Sheet Setup You'll Actually Use

The original instinct is to put everything for a trip in one giant spreadsheet, which sounds organized but turns out to be the reason nobody opens it after day one. The setup below splits the planning across five small sheets that each do one job, so the planning sheets stay clean and the execution sheets stay glance-able while you're actually traveling.

Title the workbook something specific to the trip — *Scotland Trip — Master Plan*, or *Christmas in New York 2024*, or whatever names it clearly. Generic titles like *Travel* end up buried in your drive within a week.

Sheet 1: Trip flow

This is the planning sheet you'll spend the most time on. It's also the only one that travels with you — the rest are reference and prep.



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Date	Day	City/ area	Sleep location	Key activity	Drive miles	Drive time	Energy level (L/M/H)	Notes



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The energy level column is the part most planners skip and most planners regret skipping. Mark each day as low, medium, or high based on what you've packed into it, then look at the column as a whole. If you see three or four highs in a row, the trip is going to break someone, and the time to fix it is now, not at hour fourteen of day three.

The drive miles and drive time columns serve the same purpose — they keep the plan tethered to physical reality. A two-hour drive on the map is rarely a two-hour drive in practice once you factor in coffee, bathrooms, kids, weather, and the scenic detour someone wants to take. Pad the time column by twenty percent and the plan stops collapsing on travel days.

The location notes column is what saves you when something has to change mid-trip. Three months from the booking, you won't remember why you picked the place near the harbor over the place near the train station. Write the reason down when it's fresh. Future you will thank the present you.

Sheet 2: Lodging tracker



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City	Dates	Hotel or rental name	Price per night	Location notes	Booked?	Confirmation number



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Sheet 3: Attractions and ideas — the parking lot

This is where every interesting article, recommendation, and *we should do this* idea goes during the planning phase, before you've decided what's actually making the trip. The discipline that makes this sheet work is the priority column. Force yourself to mark every entry as Must, Nice, or Skip, and then only move the Musts into Sheet 1.

The Nice items live here as backup options for slow afternoons and the Skip items earn their place by being written down and then crossed off, which is more satisfying than it sounds and prevents you from re-litigating them halfway through the trip.



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City	Attraction	Priority (Must / Nice / Skip)	Time needed	Notes



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Sheet 4: Transportation

This sheet is mostly for the trips with multiple modes — flight to one city, train to another, rental car for the third leg. For simple trips you can fold this into Sheet 1. The reason it gets its own sheet on bigger trips is that travel logistics tend to break in chains, and having all the segments in one view makes it easier to see how a delayed flight ripples through the rest of the plan.



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Segment	From	To	Mode	Distance	Estimated time	Notes



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Sheet 5: Booking checklist

Category	Criteria to check before booking
Lodging	Location, parking, breakfast included, noise level, refundable rate
Transport	Flexibility, cancellation policy, baggage rules, transfer windows
Activities	Weather backup, kid-friendly options, advance reservation needed
Budget	Daily target, splurge categories, where to save

This sheet is the one you build once and reuse across every trip from now on. It's the institutional memory of your family's travel preferences, and the longer you keep it, the more it tells you about how you actually like to travel rather than how you think you do.



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An AI prompt for the spreadsheet

Once Sheets 1 through 4 are mostly filled in, paste the contents of Sheet 1 into AI with this prompt:

Here's the trip flow for an upcoming trip. Help me identify pacing issues, days that need margin, opportunities to simplify the logistics, and any backup options I should have ready in case something falls through. Be specific about which days you'd flag and why.

The phrase *be specific* is the one that earns the response. Generic prompts get generic feedback. Pointed prompts get pointed feedback, which is the only kind that helps when you still have time to change things.

