

Pack Light, Pack Light, Pack Light

The importance of packing light cannot be overemphasized, but, for your own good, I'll try. You'll never meet a traveler who, after five trips, brags, "Every year I pack heavier." The measure of a good traveler is how light she travels. You can't travel heavy, happy, and cheap. Pick two.

Limit yourself to 20 pounds in a carry-on-size bag. A 9" x 22" x 14" bag fits under most airplane seats. That's my self-imposed limit. At ETBD we've taken thousands of people of all ages and styles on tours through Europe. We allow only one carry-on bag. For many, this is a radical concept. "9 x 22 x 14 inches? That's my cosmetics kit!" But they manage and they're glad they did. And after you enjoy that sweet mobility and freedom, you'll never go any other way.

You'll walk with your luggage more than you think you will. Before leaving home, give yourself a test. Pack up completely, go into your hometown, and practice being a tourist for an hour. Fully loaded, you should enjoy window shopping. If you can't, stagger home and thin things out.

When you carry your own luggage, it's less likely to get lost, broken, or stolen. (Many travelers claim that airline employees rifle through checked luggage.) A small bag sits on your lap or under your seat on the bus, taxi, and airplane. You don't have to worry about it, and, when you arrive, you can leave immediately. It's a good feeling. When I land in London, I'm on my way downtown while everyone else stares anxiously at the luggage carousel. When I fly home, I'm the first guy the dog sniffs.

Pack light...and pack smart. Post September 11, you can't bring anything potentially dangerous--such as knives, scissors, nail files, or cigarette lighters--in your carry-on bag (though these items can be packed in checked luggage). Now I leave my Swiss Army knife at home and still carry on my bag as usual. You can take an entire set of knives to Europe if you like--but you'll have to check your bag.

Even before 9-11, some airlines were limiting carry-on luggage weight as well as size. For example, British Air and SAS have a maximum of 13 and 18 pounds respectively. It's only worth fighting to carry on your bag if you have a tight connection. Call your airline (or read the fine print on your ticket) for details. If you have to check your bag, mark it inside and out with your name, address, and emergency phone number. While many travelers lock their bags, I never have.

Too much luggage marks you as a typical tourist. It slams the back door shut. Serendipity suffers. Changing locations becomes a major operation. Con artists figure you're helpless. Porters are a problem only to those who need them. With one bag hanging on your back, you're mobile and in control. Take this advice seriously.

Backpackademia—What to Bring?

How do you fit a whole trip's worth of luggage into a small backpack or suitcase? The answer is simple: Bring very little.

Spread out everything you think you might need on the living room floor. Pick up each item one at a time and scrutinize it. Ask yourself, "Will I really use this snorkel and these fins enough to justify carrying them around all summer?" Not "Will I use them?" but "Will I use them enough to feel good about carrying them over the Swiss Alps?" Regardless of my budget, I would buy them in Greece and give them away before I would carry that extra weight over the Alps.

Don't pack for the worst scenario. Risk shivering for a day rather than taking a heavy coat. Think in terms of what you can do without--not what will be handy on your trip. When in doubt, leave it out. I've seen people pack a whole summer's supply of deodorant, tampons, or razors, thinking they can't get them there. The world's getting really small; you can buy Dial soap, Colgate toothpaste, Tampax, Nivea cream, and Bic razors in Sicily. Tourist shops in major international hotels are a sure bet whenever you have difficulty finding some personal item. And if you can't find one of your essentials, ask yourself how 300 million Europeans can live without it.

Whether you're traveling for three weeks or three months, you pack exactly the same. Rather than take a whole trip's supply of toiletries, take enough to get started and look forward to running out of toothpaste in Bulgaria. Then you have the perfect excuse to go into a Bulgarian department store, shop around, and pick up something you think might be toothpaste....

Backpack or Suitcase?

Whether you take a backpack, a soft-sided suitcase, or a wheeled bag is up to you. Packing light applies to any traveler. Hard-sided suitcases with tiny wheels are impractical. Bobbling down Europe's cobblestones, you'll know what I mean. (If you want a wheeled bag, get a soft-sided bag with bigger wheels.)

Most young-at-heart travelers go the backpack route. If you are a suitcase person who would like the ease of a backpack without forgoing the "respectability" of a suitcase, try a convertible suitcase/backpack with zip-away shoulder straps. These carry-on-size bags give you the best of both worlds. I've designed a carry-on size bag, which I live out of for three months at a time.

Unless you plan to camp or sleep out a lot, a sleeping bag is a bulky security blanket. Even on a low budget, bedding will be provided. (Hostels provide all bedding free or rent sheets for a small fee, and often don't allow sleeping bags.) Don't pack to camp unless you're going to camp. Without a sleeping bag, a medium-size backpack is plenty big.

Pack your backpack only two-thirds full to leave room for picnic food and souvenirs. Sturdy stitching, front and side

pouches, padded shoulder straps, and a low-profile color are backpack virtues. Many travelers figure an internal frame is worth the extra money and get a high-tech bag for \$150 to \$200. Packing very light, I manage fine without the extra weight and expense of these fancier bags. I'm not wild about the bags with a zip-off day bag. I travel with the convertible backpack pictured here and supplement it with a separate day bag.

Entire books have been written on how to pack. It's really quite simple: Use stuff bags (one each for toiletries, underwear and socks, bigger clothing items, camera gear and film, and miscellaneous stuff such as a first-aid kit, stationery, and sewing kit). Roll and rubber band clothes, or zip-lock them in airless baggies to minimize wrinkles.

Clothing

The bulk of your luggage is clothing. Minimize by bringing less and washing more often. Every few nights you'll spend 10 minutes doing a little wash. This doesn't mean more washing, it just means doing it little by little as you go.

Be careful to choose dark clothes that dry quickly and either don't wrinkle or look good wrinkled. To see how wrinkled shirts will get, give everything a wet rehearsal by hand-washing and drying once at home. You should have no trouble drying clothing overnight in your hotel room. I know this sounds barbaric, but my body dries out a damp pair of socks or shirt in a jiffy. It's fun to buy clothes as you travel--another reason to start with less.

For winter travel, you can pack just about as light. Wear heavier, warmer, and waterproof shoes. Add a down or pile coat, long johns (quick-drying Capilene or superlight silk), scarf, mittens, hat, and an extra pair of socks and underwear since things dry more slowly. Pack with the help of a climate chart (see the appendix). Layer your clothing for warmth, and assume you'll be outside in the cold for hours at a time.

During the tourist season (April through September), the concert halls go casual. I have never felt out of place at symphonies, operas, or plays wearing a decent pair of slacks and a good-looking sweater. Pack with color coordination in mind. Some cultural events require more formal attire, particularly outside of the tourist season, but the casual tourist rarely encounters these.

Many travelers are concerned about appropriate dress. European women wear dresses or skirts more often than pants. American women generally feel fine in pants, but in certain rural and traditional areas, they'll fit in better and may feel more comfortable in a skirt or dress. Women who prefer to wear slacks don't pack a dress and have no regrets.

Your clothes will probably mark you as an American. Frankly, so what? Europeans will know anyway. I fit in and am culturally sensitive by watching my manners, not the cut of my clothes.

Some churches, mostly in southern Europe, have modest dress requirements for men, women and children: no shorts or bare shoulders. Except at the strict St. Peter's in Rome and St. Mark's in Venice, the dress code is often loosely enforced. If necessary, it's usually easy to improvise some modesty (buy a cheap souvenir T-shirt to cover your shoulders and borrow a nearby tablecloth for a skirt/kilt to cover your legs). In southern cities--no matter how hot it is--grown men look goofy in shorts.

Go casual, simple, and very light. Remember, in your travels you'll meet two kinds of tourists--those who pack light and those who wish they had. Say it once out loud: "PACK LIGHT."

What to Pack

Shirts. Bring up to five short-sleeved or long-sleeved shirts in a cotton/ polyester blend. Arrange mix according to season.

Sweater. Warm and dark is best--for layering and dressing up. It never looks wrinkled and is always dark, no matter how dirty it is. Some people prefer sweaters with buttons or zippers.

Pants. Bring two pairs: one lightweight cotton and another superlightweight for hot and muggy big cities, and churches with modest dress codes. Jeans can be too hot for summer travel. Linen is great. Many like lightweight pants/shorts with zip-off legs. Button-down wallet pockets are safest.

Shorts. Take a pair with pockets--doubles as a swimsuit for men.

Swimsuit. Especially for women.

Underwear and socks. Bring five sets (lighter dries quicker).

One pair of shoes. Take a well-used, light, and cool pair, with Vibram-type soles and good traction. I like shoes by Rockport, Ecco, or Easy Spirit. Sturdy, low-profile-colored tennis shoes with a good tread are fine, too. (Some people bring along an extra pair of sandals in case the shoes get wet.)

Jacket. Bring a light and water-resistant windbreaker with a hood. Gore-Tex is good if you expect rain. For summer travel, I wing it without rain gear but always pack for rain in Britain.

A tie or scarf. For instant respectability, bring anything lightweight that can break the monotony and make you look snazzy.

Moneybelt. It's essential for the peace of mind it brings. You could lose everything except your money belt, and the trip could still go on. Lightweight and low-profile beige is best.

Money. Bring your preferred mix of a credit or debit card, an ATM cash card, an emergency stash of traveler's checks

(optional), a couple of personal checks, and some hard cash. Bring American dollars (Europeans get a kick out of seeing George Washington fold up into a mushroom) for situations when you want to change only a few bucks. I rely on an ATM card with a credit card and \$400 in cash as a backup.

Documents and photocopies. Bring your passport, airline ticket, railpass or car rental voucher, driver's license, student ID, hostel card, and so on. Photocopies and a couple of passport-type photos can help you get replacements more quickly if the originals are lost or stolen. Carry photocopies separately in your luggage and keep the originals in your money belt.

You'll want a careful record of all reservations (bring the hotels' written confirmations) along with a trip calendar page to keep things up-to-date as your trip evolves.

Small daypack. A small daypack is great for carrying your sweater, camera, literature, and picnic goodies while you leave your large bag at the hotel or train station. Fanny packs (small bags with thief-friendly zippers on a belt) are a popular alternative but should not be used as money belts.

Camera. Put a new battery in your camera before you go. Bring a protective and polarizing lens, midrange zoom lens, cleaning tissue, and a trip's worth of film. Store everything in a low-profile nylon stuff bag, not an expensive-looking camera bag.

Picnic supplies. Bring a small tablecloth to give your meal some extra class (and to wipe the knife on), salt and pepper, a cup, a washcloth (to dampen and store in a baggie for cleaning up), and a Swiss Army-type knife with a corkscrew and can opener (or buy the knife in Europe if you want to carry your luggage on the plane). A plastic plate is handy for picnic dinners in your hotel room.

Zip-lock baggies. Get a variety of sizes. They're great for packing leftover picnic food, containing wetness, and bagging potential leaks before they happen. The two-gallon jumbo size is handy for packing clothing.

Water bottle. The plastic half-liter mineral water bottles sold throughout Europe are reusable and work great.

Wristwatch. A built-in alarm is handy. Otherwise, pack a small *travel alarm clock. Cheap-hotel wake-up calls are particularly unreliable.

Earplugs. If night noises bother you, you'll love a good set of plugs such as those made by Sleep-well.

First-aid kit.

Medicine and vitamins. Keep medicine in original containers, if possible, with legible prescriptions.

Extra eyeglasses, contact lenses, and prescriptions. Many travelers find their otherwise-comfortable contacts

don't work in Europe. Bring your glasses just in case. Contact solutions are widely available in Europe.

Sunscreen and sunglasses, depending on the season and your destination.

Toiletries kit. Sinks in cheap hotels come with meager countertop space and anonymous hairs. If you have a nylon toiletries kit that can hang on a hook or a towel bar, this is no problem. Put all squeeze bottles in zip-lock baggies, since pressure changes in flight cause even good bottles to leak. Consider a vacation from cosmetics. Bring a little toilet paper or tissue packets (sold at all newsstands in Europe). Fingernail clippers and tweezers (for retrieving lost bank cards) are also handy. My Sonicare electric toothbrush holds a charge from home for 30 one-minute brushes.

Soap. Not all hotels provide soap. A plastic squeeze bottle of concentrated, multipurpose, biodegradable liquid soap is handy for laundry and more.

Clothesline. Hang it up in your hotel room to dry your clothes. The handy twist kind needs no clothespins.

Small towel. You'll find bath towels at all fancy and moderately priced hotels, and most cheap ones. Although \$30-a-day travelers will often need to bring their own towel, \$60-a-day folks won't. I bring a thin hand towel for the occasional need. Washcloths are rare in Europe. While I don't use them, many recommend *quick-drying synthetic towels.

Sewing kit. Clothes age rapidly while traveling. Your flight attendant may have a freebie for you. Add a few safety pins and buttons.

Travel information (minimal). Rip out appropriate chapters from guidebooks, staple them together, and store in a zip-lock baggie. When you're done, give them away.

Map. Get a map best suited to your trip's overall needs and pick up maps for specific local areas as you go.

Address list. A list of e-mail addresses and mailing addresses will help keep you in touch. Taking a whole address book is not packing light. Consider typing your mail list onto a sheet of gummed address labels before you leave. You'll know exactly who you've written to, and the labels will be perfectly legible. Or just send mass e-mails as you go (bring a shrunk-down print-out of your e-mail address book in case you can't access it online).

Postcards from home and photos of your family. A zip-lock baggie of show-and-tell pictures is always a great conversation piece with Europeans you meet.

Small notepad and pen. A tiny notepad in your back pocket is a great organizer, reminder, and communication aid (for sale in European stationery stores).

Journal. An empty book to be filled with the experiences of your trip will be your most treasured souvenir. Use a

hardbound type designed to last a lifetime, rather than a spiral notebook. Attach a photocopied calendar page of your itinerary.

Optional Bring-Alongs

Robe or nightshirt. Especially for women.

Inflatable pillow (or "neck nest") for snoozing on the plane.

Pillowcase. It's cleaner and possibly more comfortable to stuff your own.

Hair drier. People with long or thick hair appreciate a travel hair drier in the off-season, when hair takes a long time to dry and it's cold outside (see Electricity, below). These are generally provided in \$100+ hotel rooms.

Light warm-up suit. Use for pajamas, evening lounge outfit, instant modest street wear, smuggling things, and going down the hall.

Teva-type sandals or thongs.

Slippers. Great for the flight and for getting cozy in your hotel room.

Small flashlight. Handy for reading under the sheets after "lights out" in the hostel, late night trips down the hall, exploring castle dungeons, and hypnotizing street thieves.

Stronger light bulbs. You can buy these in Europe to give your cheap hotel room more brightness than the 25- to 40-watt norm.

A good paperback. There's plenty of empty time on a trip to either be bored or enjoy some good reading.

Radio, Walkman, MP3 player, or recorder. Partners can bring a Y-jack for two sets of earphones. Some travelers use microcassette recorders to record pipe organs, tours, or journal entries. Some recorders have radios, adding a new dimension to your experience.

Collapsible cup.

Office supplies. Bring paper, an envelope of envelopes, and some sticky notes such as Post-Its to keep your place in your guidebook.

Small roll of duct tape.

Mailing tube. Great for art lovers, this protects the posters and prints you buy along your trip. Trim it to fit inside your backpack.

Collapsible umbrella.

Tiny lock. Use it to lock your backpack zippers shut.

Spot remover. Bring Shout wipes or a dab of Goop grease remover in a film canister.

Insect repellent. Especially for France and Italy.

Gifts. Local kids love T-shirts and hologram cards, and gardeners appreciate flower seeds.

Poncho. Hard-core vagabonds use a poncho as protection in a rainstorm, a ground cloth for sleeping, or a beach or picnic blanket.

Hostel sheet. Hostels require one. Bring your own (sewn up like a sleeping bag), buy one, or rent a sheet at hostels (about \$4 per stay). It doubles as a beach or picnic blanket, comes in handy on overnight train rides, shields you from dirty blankets in mountain huts, and will save you money in other dorm-type accommodations, which often charge extra for linen or don't provide it at all.

Adapters (electrical plugs). See below.

Electricity

Try to go without electrical gear. Travelers requiring electricity need a converter to make their American appliance work on the European current and an adapter to allow the American plug to fit into the European wall. Many travel accessories come with a built-in converter. Look for a voltage switch marked 120 (U.S.) and 240 (Europe). Often, buying a new travel appliance with a built-in converter can be cheaper than buying a separate converter (often \$30) to use with your old appliance. Regardless, you'll still need an adapter. Secure your adapter to your appliance plug with duct tape; otherwise it'll stay in the outlet (and get left behind) when you pull out the plug.

British/Irish plugs have three big flat prongs, and continental European plugs have two small round prongs. Many sockets in Europe are recessed into the wall. Your adapter should be small enough to fit into this hole in order for your prongs to connect. Cheap converters with built-in adapters have prongs that are the right size but are unable to connect.

Many budget hotel rooms have only one outlet, occupied by the lamp. Hardware stores in Europe sell cheap three-bangers that let you keep the lamp on and still plug in your toothbrush and Game Boy.