

Complete Guide to Packing Light For the Modern Traveler (Avoiding All Checked Bags Fees)

In this guide, I will highlight how to prepare and pack Light and Smart and have everything you need to LOOK at ease, like you're on a staycation in your town (going out to dinner, exploring cities and towns and dressing like in your area). You will NOT NEED to buy new clothing specific for the trip.

This is meant for a 7-10 day luxury vacation experience for a traveler who will be getting on an airplane, and staying at a hotel, Airbnb, bed and breakfast, or at a local family/friend's house.

At the end of this guide, you will find a practical checklist that will help to plan your bags. There are two packing problem scenarios. You can actually pack too much where your bag won't close or exceed the carry on weight/size. You can also pack too little where you will need to buy clothing (can be costly) and essentials on your trip unintentionally.

In 2019, on most airline carriers, you can "carry on" one bag that will fit in the overhead bin (size and weight will vary between airlines) and one personal item. International travel is the same as traveling within your country.

Why carry on your bags?

-you will avoid the expensive checked in bag fee (for the average \$60 per bag, where you could go to a dinner in a restaurant or even stay in a low budget hotel for a night.)

-your bags won't get lost (and your valuable things) if they are with you (and checked bags do get lost or delayed). Also, you won't waste valuable time retrieving your bags

-it will be easier for you to go from the airport to the place you're staying at if you have less baggage

-you will have less to keep track of throughout your trip

With those reasons, here's how I do it as a modern woman with carry on bags only (and for men you will most likely have even less stuff!):

I have my personal item as a **soft** duffle shoulder bag (that can fit under the seat in front of me if necessary). When you're in the airport, this duffle bag can sit on top of your larger roller bag for easy transport as a vertical stack. There are inexpensive travel solutions you can purchase to strap these bags together. It's easy to take the bags this way, with you to the bathroom if you are traveling alone. You could use a backpack also which is easier to transport, but the duffle is recommended. Why? Keep in mind backpacks are easily stolen (I've heard it happen) and you would want to have a lock around your zipper for your valuable compartments, as there are many pick pocketers throughout the world (and they love backpacks). Also a backpack is a bag that you can't take into most museums. A reasonable-size duffle qualifies as a handbag so you would be able to.

Inside this recommended duffle bag (personal item to carry on):

You can fit another smaller handbag (cross body is recommended but shoulder bag is another alternative) that I will carry on my trip on side trips and in the evenings after I land.

-One quart plastic Ziploc bag with 3 oz or smaller plastic bottle liquids

-makeup bag (or toiletry bag for men). You may need these personal items when you're in the airport to refresh when you land. Include toothbrush, dental floss, toothpick, brush or comb and lip balm with SPF.

-one laptop or Ipad and reading material (paperback book or magazine that can easily fit anywhere). Don't bring thick or hard books, or too many devices or you will have to keep track of them. And if you're moving around, like on a tour or from city to city, you'll have to make sure they are with you all the time. If you bring non-valuable material you don't mind leaving, it will make your trip lighter and more enjoyable to soak in the new experience. With movies, shows, and music entertainment on the airplane, you don't need much additional entertainment. I download all the podcasts I want to listen to on my phone before I fly

-electronic chargers should I need easy access to them in the airport or on the plane ride (charger cords, self chargers, etc.)

-all my valuable items for the trip (jewelry, wallet with zippers is recommended, any other electronics, etc.)

-daily vitamins, medicine, a protein bar or similar, and mints

-tissues (they come in handy)

-glasses/sunglasses/contact lenses, cases and glass wipes

-plane ride comfort items like a warmer pair of socks for the airplane ride where it gets cold, and an eye mask if you will wear, scarf, hoodie jacket, universal ear buds with the small round hole output for the airplane entertainment, headphones for your phone (downloaded music, podcasts, videos, etc.)

-pen and paper or small notebook

Light tip:

Don't bring a hair dryer if you are staying in a hotel. Hotels have them and they take up a lot of valuable space in your bags. You may also need a converter for another country, otherwise your hair dryer could be on the wrong voltage and short/blow out without you ever getting your hair dried (or blown out). If you must, as you're not sure if your place will have them, bring a small travel one (or hair dryers are not costly overseas compared to the real estate and weight it takes up in your bag).

Don't bring a professional camera unless you are "on assignment" as a photographer or that is one of the reasons for your trip. It's extra items to keep track of and extra weight. Many phone cameras have as nice camera lenses as most SLR type cameras.

Smart tip:

Pack your house keys in a bag that doesn't identify your address.

Buy travel size tubes and plastic vials to carry your best lotions, moisturizers, hair products, liquid makeup, hand sanitizer, etc. You may have to make some decisions, but I'm always able to bring 10-20 of my favorite items and never have to hit a convenience store when I land. I like to have my things with me! Remember to bring a small tube of toothpaste as you may want it when you land. The funny thing is, if you don't bring it, you won't have it on your trip. I know this sounds too logical, but if you think like this, you will not forget your things. I bring hand sanitizer as sometimes you will not have access to a restroom, and I also use it to clean my electronics and screens should they get dirty.

When you're traveling from the airport to the place you will be staying, if you're in a car keep your personal bag with you upfront in the vehicle. Treat this personal bag as your important bag you can't afford to lose.

Additional items to bring:

I take a carabiner clip to clip my additional light jackets to this personal bag. If you find a down jacket they are light, compact, versatile for different climates, and mildly waterproof, and you will be able to crumple it into a small clipped bag and attach it with this clip. They are the best for travel when the weather can change quickly. The only time you wouldn't need a jacket like this is if it's summer, or you are traveling somewhere that doesn't drop below 60 degrees that time of year. When the temperature dips below 55 degrees, I always bring a scarf that I tie around my bag that is good on the airplane where it can get cold. You can even put a hair tie or a baseball cap around your personal bag straps. Just keep in mind, if you wear a baseball cap, in most countries you'll automatically be stereotyped as an American.

I also wear a jacket/blazer or hoodie (if I want to be comfortable) for the plane ride as it gets cold. If it's winter, and you have to wear a winter coat, wear the winter coat onto the plane so it doesn't take up valuable bag space.

I carry a wallet on my body that is a crossbody wallet. I use a pac-safe wallet for my passport/ID and money, that has a fabric cord with metal that will be hard to cut through should a pickpocket try (that's the practical side of me). This can be carried around when you have to carry your passport (e.g. there is not a safe where you are staying or you are traveling from location to location). You can also get an under the clothes wallet belt. I find these uncomfortable but they work.

Also keep a TSA lock tied to your bag but don't lock your bag. It can come in handy when you're traveling between places for additional safety precaution, and don't want your bag to accidentally open.

Pillow for the plane and where you are staying. It's hard to sleep on planes in general seating, so this could make a difference for your comfort.

Roller bag (carry on bag that fits the size or weight requirement of the airline you are flying, that will fit all your clothes, shoes, and items not in your personal item bag)

Inside this roller bag (bag to carry on):

- Clothes (T-shirt, more dressy tops, daytime pants, casual stretchy pants, evening pants or bottoms)
- Shoes (comfortable and dressy, usually 4 pairs total including the pair I am wearing the day I leave)

-Socks that fit right with your shoes you are taking on the trip. These days there are so many type of socks so you want to think about this so you don't have to fidget all day with your slipping socks or socks that don't work with the shoe

-Undergarments – enough for at least a week

-Sleepwear and Robe (yes a lightweight robe!)

I rarely wear the same outfit twice. Not that anyone would care or know but it may make a difference on how you perceive your vacation. Clothing can be inspiring. Colors evoke emotion. You may be more simple, and in that case, you may have less to pack.

Others say don't pack many shoes. I say pack enough shoes! The last thing I'm going to buy on travel is an overpriced pair of shoes that I've never worn or tested out that you'll be sorry for, for the remainder of the trip! If you've ever hurt your feet or crushed your toes on travel, you know what I mean. I always pack already tested and worn: 1) a pair of flip flops, 2) tennis shoes, and a 3) couple pair of dressy shoes like sandals or close toed shoes like boots or a leather bottom flat shoe. They fit in a bag ontop of all my clothes. They weigh a little more like a pound or two each, but it's worth it. Wear your heaviest shoe the day you are flying out.

Light tip:

Wear a pair of boots onboard the plane, if it's fall or winter season. If it's spring or summer, wear close toed shoes with socks so you don't have to walk through security, barefoot. Sandals and flip flops and compact to pack so pack those in the roller bag.

Smart tip:

I always pack a few plastic or grocery bags. They always come in handy for packing on the way back. I also bring an additional one quart ziplock bag in case on the flying home trip, that one used for traveling to flying destination is reusable.

For pants, pack a couple pairs of jeans and a dressy black pants (or white pair if it's summer with a Tide eraser in case you spill anything). Men, please don't wear the same pants or shorts the entire trip. Unless you're traveling alone or dress in the same outfit everyday back at your home, you will come off as a "non-traveler" to your companions and others you know will notice even if they say nothing.

I bring plenty of t-shirts and I even bring a silk robe. It's so thin and I always have something when I come out of the bathroom.

I bring peppermint tea bags for headaches and stomach aches, to make hot tea.

Additional Items:

Packing a water bottle can come in handy. Bring one you are willing to lose (not your favorite one). Europeans aren't into water bottles like Americans who have a cabinet full of different water bottles, so they can be pricey to buy depending on where you are or have a touristy label on it. Water bottles also look better in photos than a plastic water bottle.

Bring an additional towel. It can come in handy for many reasons. Also, depend on where you are going, you may want to bring toilet paper. In Europe, you don't need to worry about this.

Pack an umbrella so you have it handy. You can usually find these items easily in cities, but it is so light, you can fit it in your bag and not have to hunt for one when you need it. When you bring an umbrella, it won't rain and if you don't have one, it will rain. Is that true? If you're prepared, you won't have to worry about it.

Men seem to forget belts. If you decide not to wear the one with you, then be sure to pack a belt.

Season specific:

Summer: if the climate will be hot, bring a battery operated fan and bandana/handkerchief. I also bring sunblock to prevent strong sun as soon as you leave the airport.

Winter: If it's winter, bring warm gloves, a hat, and at least one scarf.

Why a Travel Planning Checklist?

So now you have WHAT TO TAKE, how do you actually get down to make sure you don't get to your new destination, and not have your things, because you forgot it, or planned too little (underpacked) and are wearing the same outfits, purchasing or borrowing from others?

For example, you could be in a relatively expensive area like Scandinavia, and need a sweater. Quality sweaters can be several hundred dollars in those areas, so you're better off bringing your own quality sweater, so you don't have to buy a cheap substitute and lose valuable travel and vacation time trying to unintentionally shop. Or wearing a cheap shoe your entire trip.

And what if the opposite occurs, when you pack your bag, and your bag won't close or it exceeds the weight or size for carry on (overpacked)? Then you are back to the drawing board of re-packing.

So for these reasons, it is best to plan ahead and create a CHECKLIST based on how many days you will be on vacation. The first day will be your travel day so you will not include that day. So if you are going for a 7 day trip (from the day you fly out), you will need to plan clothes for 6 days as the first day will be your day of traveling/flying wear.

Fill in the details and counts in () for each checklist item at least one week before your trip. Keep this list handy so you can add to it before the day of packing. Recommended: **start this list one month before.**

Packing Checklist (print out and keep handy)

Roller bag (carry on):

- Shoes (List exact shoes you have or will buy before the trip, and how many pairs)
- Socks (For the shoes you plan on bringing, how many and type)
- Daytime Tops (List specific ones, include t-shirts you want to bring, and how many)
- Evening Tops (List specific ones you want to bring, and how many)
- Daytime Pants/Skirt/Shorts (List specific ones you want to bring, and how many)
- Evening Bottoms/Skirt/Shorts (List specific ones you want to bring, and how many)
- Yoga or sweatpants
- Jeans (how many pairs)
- Jackets (one jacket should be enough for one week).
- Under wear/under garments
- Sleepwear
- Robe and flip flops or slippers
- Bathing suit or bathing trunk
- Day of Traveling Wear (Describe this outfit – top, jacket, bottom, shoes/socks, belt)
- Smaller bag or “man purse”
- optional additional items: umbrella, water bottle, towel, peppermint or favorite tea bags
 - location specific items (e.g. toilet paper)
 - season specific items (e.g. battery operated fan, bandana, gloves)
- Accessories (jewelry, watch, belt, scarf, etc.)
- additional plastic bags and one quart ziplock bag

Personal item bag (carry on):

- carabiner and lock
- body wallet (either pac-safe crossbody or under clothes)
- plane ride comfort items: hoodie, small pillow, warm socks, scarf if needed, hair tie or hat tied to bag

___ One quart plastic Ziploc bag with 3 oz or smaller liquids (toothpaste, eye or contact drops, lotions/creams, and any cosmetic liquids like mascara, face/hair gels, and liquid hair spray (no aerosols allowed on carry ons))

___ makeup bag or toiletry bag for men (describe specific items you want to bring and have with you)

___ cosmetics (non-liquid)

___ lip balm (non-liquid)

___ disposable razor (one allowed)

___ toothbrush, dental floss, and toothpicks

___ bandaids

___ comb or brush

___ laptop or Ipad reading material (book or magazine).

___ electronic chargers and headphones should I need access to them in the airport or on the plane ride (headphones, self chargers, etc.)

___ all my valuable items for the trip (money currency, house keys, electronics, passport and ID, etc.)

___ daily vitamins and any medicine

___ a protein bar, dry snack, mints and/or gum

___ tissues

___ glasses/sunglasses/contact lenses, cases and glass wipes

___ pen and paper or small notebook

___ Check before you leave the house: Passport, ID, Phone, Wallet with credit card(s) and some money, and House Keys.

5-Step Packing:

1. 2-3 days before your travel day, start taking out the items from your list you've created. If you are short on space to pack, use your bed or a table. Pull out outfits and lay them out day by day in separate piles. This will be helpful when you are making sure that you have what you need each day. This organization will save you from not having enough or too much packed. These are your essentials.
2. Pull out clothing that are nice to have but undecided on, and put them to the side. If there is still room in your bag, then you can add some of them.
3. Be sure also to leave enough space for additional souvenirs you may purchase.
4. Weigh your bag.
5. Add or subtract based on the weight and meeting your airline requirements.

Some Additional Travel Planning Advance Do's:

9 months out:

Make sure your passport is more than 6 months out of the expiration date (for international travel). Go ahead and arrange for a new passport when it expires, even if you don't have travel plans, because you never know when you will fly out and want to do it "last minute."

A week out (suggested):

Call your phone carrier letting them know which countries you will be and setup any global plans needed (e.g. if you will be international)

Call your credit card companies informing them where you will be and dates for they can help prevent any fraudulent activity

Decide if you want to have local currency with you or how you will get local currency at your destination

24 hours or the day before flying out:

Check in online and/or arrange flight seating if you don't have assigned seats and can get them 24 hours in advance.

Don't forget: On the day of travel, be sure you have a printed or an easily accessible version of your flight information.