

# The fine art of packing

Here are the secrets for fitting things into your bag—preferably your *one bag*—tightly and quickly. **By Michele Meyer**

I learned to pack light early in life, because I had to. My dad's motto is: If you can't carry it, forget it. The year we lived abroad in England, I brought only essentials and a few mystery novels, all in one suitcase. Dad skipped the frivolities, carting only a briefcase, and on our return managed to squeeze in heirloom wine glasses. Everything he touched always fit or folded neatly.

I inherited those skills—and they've been put to the test. When I worked as a fashion writer, I had to look chic out of one carry-on bag for three months on assignment. Ever since, I've never exceeded that limit, whether traveling a month or a year, for pleasure or business.

I've since so refined the practice of packing that friends invite me over to stuff their bags. With a few tips, you can be a pro, too.

**Selection** First, whittle your clothes from *War and Peace* size down to a haiku by laying out what you hope to tote. Then pick only half of them, preferably fewer. Struggling? Imagine having to carry it all from the airport to the center of town, as I once did when Milan taxi drivers were on strike. Luckily, there are ways you can keep things to a minimum.

Women travelers should build a wardrobe around one color, such as black or navy, so everything matches. Avoid white; it stains. Fashion writers live in black, because the stylish,

seasonless color is easy to keep clean and works day or night.

By pairing different combinations of tops and bottoms, either sex needs only three days' worth of clothes to create the appearance of a varied wardrobe, no matter how long the trip. The exception: underwear and socks or hose (carry one pair per day, plus a spare). Except for dressy cruises, you can extend a limited wardrobe into the evening with accessories—a tie and blazer for men; jewelry and a shawl, sweater, or jacket for women.

Try to stick to one pair of walking shoes and one of dress shoes—and make them comfortable. The alternative can be embarrassing. One woman I know, while touring a Middle Eastern cemetery in bad footgear, twisted her ankle, interrupting a funeral that was under way. She had to be wheeled out on the cart used to carry the coffin.

Check out the weather at your destination. For chilly situations, take only clothes you can wear in layers.

Wherever you go,

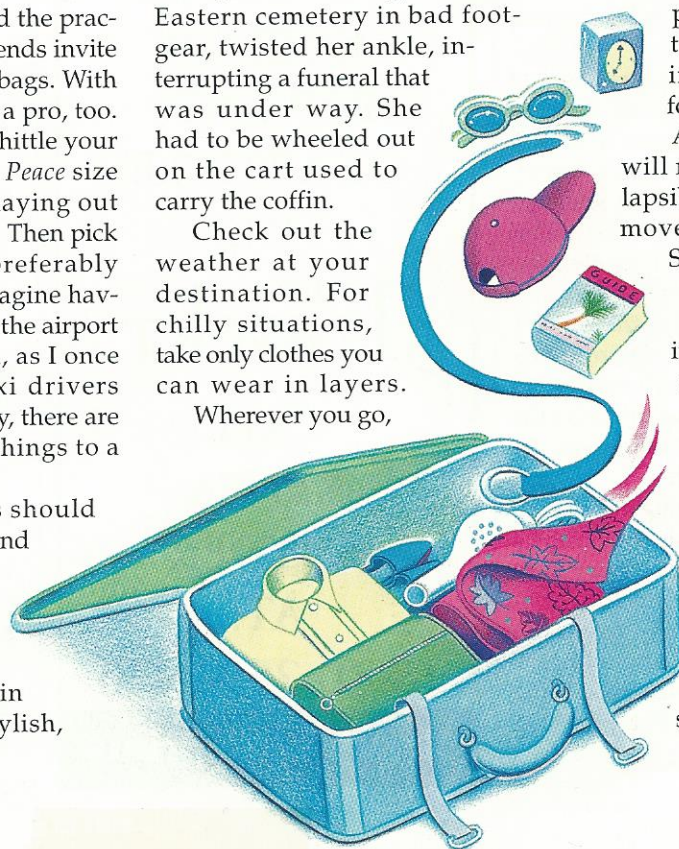
lighten up! Stick to easy-care, quick-dry fabrics—cottons, washable silks, light knits. Skip jeans; they take forever to dry. Also try to avoid heavy wools, pleated materials, linens (which wrinkle), and angoras (they shed like cats).

**Packing** If you travel often, keep a collection of necessities pre-packed. That'll give you time to pare the nonessentials. Store in your suitcase such items as deodorant, vitamins, toothpaste, toothbrushes, comb or brush, ear plugs, nail clippers, travel alarm clock, penlight, mini-sewing kit, medicines, spare glasses, and sunglasses. Men might add a razor, and women a travel-size set of makeup musts.

Department stores and pharmacies often offer toiletries and makeup in sample sizes ideal for travel.

A few odds and ends will make life easier: collapsible umbrella, spot remover, Swiss army knife, Scotch tape (good for mending hems, sealing up lint), and plastic sandals for the beach or public shower.

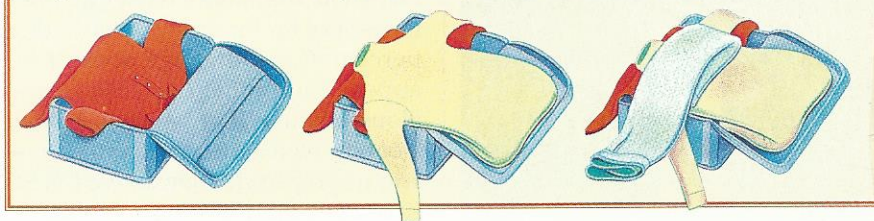
If you're traveling abroad, add a money converter, an electrical adapter plug, and perhaps a crushed half roll of toilet paper and a flat rubber drain stopper to plug the sink so you can wash





### To minimize wrinkles...

... take your first garment (red) and lay it so it fills the suitcase and hangs out the bottom. Lay the next piece (yellow) so part of it hangs over the top. Follow with a horizontal piece (green) that hangs out the one side of the suitcase and then another hanging out the opposite side, and so on. Place articles so the shoulders or waists are inside the suitcase and bottom hems dangle. Then fold in the ends one by one, lowest garment first, so they crisscross.



clothes with shampoo. Bring enough local currency for a few days. Leave jewelry at home.

Visiting a new city every day? Then live out of your suitcase the easy way, by putting everything into clear plastic bags—one for underwear, one for socks, and one for toiletries, says Josette Weidhaas, a St. Louis travel agent with whom I spoke. "That way you can take something out without demolishing your suitcase. Even if you emptied it on the floor, you could repack in three minutes."

To make the most of your luggage

space, roll clothes that don't wrinkle as tightly as a burrito. Stuff hosiery and underwear into shoulders and shoes. Wear your bulkiest clothes on the plane (your raincoat can double as a blanket). Call ahead to learn if the hotel offers hair driers, robes, and toiletries. If your haircut requires a drier or curling iron, consider getting one that doesn't.

When possible, photocopy travel and reading material so you can pitch it as you go. Christopher McGinnis, author of *202 Tips Even The Best Business Travelers May Not Know*, suggests



tearing a novel in half and carrying only the part you'll read.

**In case of disaster** Your carry-on should be your lifeboat. Use it for valuables, breakables, and any prescription medicines—enough to last the whole trip, plus a day. Add other necessities for three days. Only a tiny percent of lost luggage doesn't reappear within that time. My fellow Houstonians, Charmaine and Dave Denney, were among the unlucky—and unprepared. They arrived in St. Kitts, but their belongings didn't. They bought the only clothes available that fit, baggy trunks and a string bikini. "We didn't know which was worse: wearing clothes we'd been in seven days or those awful swimsuits," Charmaine says.

To guard against lost luggage, know thy bags. Buy brightly colored luggage or wrap bags with a belt so other passengers will not mistake yours for their own. If the family is checking bags, put some of everyone's belongings in each, so no one person loses everything should a suitcase disappear.

Write down essential numbers—passport, traveler's checks, credit cards, eyeglass prescription, and phone numbers of hotels, travel agents, insurers, and doctors. Keep one copy on you (ideally in a hidden money pouch), another in a suitcase, and a third at home with a friend or your travel agent. Bring a packing list so you won't miss anything when repacking. Keep a duplicate list at home should your luggage be lost.

**Damage control** Avoid spills by placing all leakables and breakables in separate Ziploc bags. Tote extra plastic bags for wet swimsuits, and a larger bag for dirty laundry.

As my brother, Peter, who hikes and skis worldwide, learned the hard way, "Air in a closed container will expand at high elevations or in unpressurized airplanes. So if you don't enjoy toothpaste, insect repellent, or sunblock all over your clothes, squeeze some air from those containers before you pack them." That will leave room for expansion.

To fight wrinkling, separate clothes with dry-cleaners' bags or, in humid climates, tissue paper. Button

jackets and shirts; zip trousers and skirts. Put shoes, umbrellas, and other heavy items at the back of the suitcase, opposite the handle.

You can also interfold shirts, skirts, dresses, pants, and jackets so they cushion each other from creasing (see diagram). Lay garments flat in the suitcase with their bottoms hanging out at different angles—bottom, top, side, side. Then fold the ends over each other in the same sequence.

If all fails, remember that most hotels offer irons. If not, steam your clothes by hanging them in the bathroom while running a hot shower.

**Outdoors** Packing for outdoor trips means being choosy about what you buy. Pick multiuse garments of fleece or Gor-Tex, most of which are light, waterproof, and quick to dry. Bring a wide-brimmed hat for sunny days; warm vest and waterproof jacket or poncho for storms, cold nights, and high elevations; and two day's worth of shorts, pants, socks, and long underwear. Rinse and reuse as you go. (Polypropylene garments weigh little and dry fast.) Pack clothes in a backpack that converts into carry-on luggage. Wear your hiking boots on the plane.

**Children** Plan on entertaining kids—or apologizing to the whole planeload of people for their behavior. Fill their backpacks with nonspill snacks, books or comics, and games. Include enough diapers, wipes, baby formula, clothes, and children's medicine to survive on should your luggage go astray. Bring a night-light. Remember, though, you don't have to cart the nursery. Most locales have supplies. And if your children pack, check their work. One friend told me about a nine-year-old who waited five days before telling his parents he'd forgotten to include underwear and had been wearing the same pair the entire trip.

**Finally** Leave space for treasures you find on the road. And resist that last-minute urge to throw something in. Remember: Memories travel best of all—and they take up no space. □

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Houston-based writer Michele Meyer has just taken off for Paris. Grenoble. Geneva. and Venice—with one carry-on bag.