



# *The Art of Packing*

OR TO ONLY TRAVEL WITH A CARRY-ON



I do not like having checked luggage. Some do, but not me. I have to pay extra for it, I have to wait to have it checked, wait again to get it at destination and sometimes, on complex itineraries, it gets lost or shipped elsewhere. Three or four years ago, I decided that I had enough of that, and that I would only travel with a carry-on. Since then, it's what I've always done, and I've enjoyed that extra freedom.

I know many would like to do the same, or would like to carry less while travelling – 1 suitcase instead of 2, for example. But where to begin? How can you start packing lighter? In this document, I will share some tips, suggestions and discoveries I've made in my journey to lighter packing.

Everything you read here is based on my personal experience, and my needs. They are suggestions and starting points for you to follow and adapt to your own needs. And always remember, at the end of the day, the only things you truly need are your passport and a credit card.

Be mindful of one thing if you start travelling the carry-on way. There is always the possibility that the gate agent decides that your carry-on is too big, and should ride with the checked luggage. You can always argue a little to have them change their mind, but be ready to accept that eventuality. That said, I've never had this issue while flying.

## *Suitcase or bag?*

The choice of using a suitcase or a backpack, or another carrying container is really up to you. That said, I find this is the first step into packing lighter. Pick something that is adapted for your travels. A suitcase is great for cities, cruises and travelling by car, but less so if you're walking longer distances on uneven terrain, moving often or camping.

I have a small suitcase with 4 wheels that fits the standards for carry-on on most airlines. I also have a smallish 40L backpack that has straps so it can be compressed across all dimensions to make it smaller. Both are sturdy and can withstand some roughing up.

Both are very roomy and have compartments (main and secondary) that are easily accessible. Once you've experienced a frantic search for a rain jacket in a surprise downpour, you understand why it's important.

Shop carefully for what fits your needs. Crappy wheels can be troublesome when going from place to place, but an ill-fitted backpack, or one that keeps opening up can also spoil a trip. Ask a lot of questions, bring a bag with heavy-ish items to do some testing. Roll them, lift and carry them, strap them on your back and on one shoulder.

If you don't like them, then move on to one you do – yes, this might mean having a pricier one (or waiting for the holiday sale), but in the long run, you'll be saving money every time you fly.



## *Packing cubes vs clothes origami*

This has been the subject of countless debates, videos, and very likely a research paper. All will tell you it's the best method. After much consulting and watching, then experimenting, I have come to the conclusion that they are all the best method.

I don't believe that there is a one method fits all when it comes to making your clothes take less space. Rolling up might work great for t-shirts, but it will wrinkle that nice shirt you brought for a formal night on a cruise or dinner at a nice restaurant.

I first started with the rolling up technique. It does work well and you can really pack a lot of stuff in that restricted space you now have. You can pattern/layer your clothes, and put in extra rolls to fill up the gaps on the edges. Or line the edge with barrier rolls and fill in the rest. There are drawbacks, however. Besides wrinkling the clothes, after a while of taking and putting back rolls, it quickly becomes a chaos of clean/dirty clothes or just a big jumble. It's even worse in a backpack, where you have one, maybe 2 openings to access the content.



## ***Packing cubes vs clothes origami (continued)***

About a year and a half ago, I gave packing cubes a try. There was a sale, and the Internet said they were a great thing – the best!

Basically, packing cubes are like Tupperware for clothes. They are usually rectangular, made of a soft material/mesh and they zip on top. I was surprised at the amount of stuff I could put into one, to be honest. I folded my t-shirts flat, and added a linen shirt that almost wrinkles when you look at it. Everything stayed nice and flat. The different sizes make it easy to organize tops, bottoms, underwear/socks. No chaos after a few days. Rectangles make it easy to put in a suitcase, too. However, it can be a little awkward in a back pack, and bend to the different ways your bag behaves. I think you can put less clothes than the rolling method, but we are trying to travel lighter...



## ***Toiletries***



This is an easy way to save space and weight. I don't carry soap, shampoo or conditioner. The complimentary ones found in my first hotel room usually do the trick for the entire trip. I can also get samplers/travel format ones in a local drugstore. They can then stay at my last hotel, if any quantity remains. Depending on the trip, I might also forgo shaving. If I have to shave, then I use the local soap, instead of bringing shaving cream.

For what you need to bring – band aids, antacids, hairbrush (travel size, of course), etc., avoid using a big toiletry bag with just the one pocket. It is roomy, but I find it bulky and it can be a pain to squeeze in your luggage as it gets quickly overfilled. Try finding one that folds flat and that has compartments, having a hook on one end is also a plus. As well, having a given number of compartments with limited space means you have to make choices on what to bring, limiting the extras.

## ***What do you need? The necessities. Single or multi use***

If you want to save more space in your luggage, ditch the single-use items, unless you REALLY need them. Try and find clothes that are not for a single purpose. I always try to pack a few polo shirts, which can work in a nicer restaurant, and work as well as t-shirts. I also usually skip jeans to go with “transformer” pants; the ones that unzip and become shorts. They are sturdy, easy to clean, and some models look nice for restaurant settings. You also cut your pant needs by half.

Ladies, I'm told a pareo also works wonders as a skirt/robe/scarf/accessory. It's light, come in all patterns and colors and can be folded pretty tightly.

When possible, you should also try to have clothes that can easily mix and match – tops and bottoms. If you have that one short that can only go with that specific shirt, it's probably best to leave both at home. Even just 3 shirts and 3 pants can give 9 combinations.



***What do you need? The necessities. Single or multi use  
(continued )***

Getting a waterproof jacket with a warm underlayer will also save space. No need for the bulky sweaters or a cumbersome raincoat. Wear it as you go to the airport so it doesn't take precious space.

Shoes are for me the more complex part of the equation. I usually have multipurpose walking/hiking waterproof shoes that fit most settings, but every now and then, I need to add dress shoes or water shoes. Again, I have tried to find shoes that have a small footprint (pun not intended) or that can bend, fold or get squished easily. In many resorts, I found that black running shoes with black soles will also do the trick and fool the maître D. Like your coat, your most cumbersome shoes should be worn at the airport.

When you start packing, think about your trip, what you'll be doing and what is truly needed. Formal nights on a cruise? A dress shirt needs to be in there. Backpacking across Vietnam? The evening dress might be overkill.



## *Need*

When taking out your clothes out to see what to bring, you also have to factor in the need for them. This is a difficult aspect to deal with. To travel light means making difficult decisions and be ruthless in deciding what to bring. Always bring the truly needed, but check if it's truly needed. Be honest with yourself, not one will judge you, but do you really really need it?

Then there's the rest. Part of it might come from the truly needed cull, or be things you think you need. And it's quite possible you don't need any of it. This depends on available space, type of trip any any criteria you judge appropriate. Again, be ruthless. Do you need to bring 2 extra pairs of shorts if you have 4 pairs of transformer pants and a short?

Do not go in the "what if" category – avoid it at all cost! That quickly becomes a rabbit hole that can eat a lot of luggage real estate. I know of people who will bring a winter coat for a summer trip because there has been snow reported there a few years back: "What if there's snow this summer, too?". This is an extreme example, but What ifs usually don't happen very often. And should they happen, you can probably find something on site.

It is a very tough process to go through, but it gets easier as you do it more often. You don't need to go full Marie Kondo, but you will have to leave some things behind you'd usually want to bring if you want to travel light.

Think back at previous trips you've taken. Try to remember what you brought and you didn't wear, or wore it only once (but could've easily gone with something else). Were there things you looked at and said to yourself: "why did I ever bring this?". Those are a great starting point for things to leave behind. I'm sure you've heard the advice "look at what you want to bring, and divide it by half. Then only pack half of what is left". It's a little bit like that.

Bonus tip: I also try to pack a few items that I won't mind leaving behind if I need extra space for a souvenir, like a worn item that I won't be too sad about if it falls apart during my travels, and that I will have to throw away. Extra space or lighter load...

## *Final Words*

Travelling with only a carry on is not for everyone. But everyone should try it at least once, if only to see how time and money can be saved. Having that smaller backpack makes it more convenient for trekking, and you might not even need a full daypack; a small knapsack would do. The same goes for a cruise or a resort. No need to wait for your luggage to change into something cool and to go exploring.

Granted, it also has drawback, and you have to accept certain limitations like limited choice in clothes. Since space is at a premium, you are also limited in your souvenir shopping and alcohol purchase. Remember, no alcohol on a carry-on; just what was bought at the duty-free shop.

Give it a try – start with something small. And the more you do it, the easier it gets. Who knows? Even if you still have checked luggage, those tips might have you travel with 1 piece, instead of 2... or more.

Final note: The pictures you see are 2 examples of trips I've taken: a 10-day Kenyan safari and a 7-day cruise with 2 formal nights. ☺