

Advice on Packing for Overseas Travel

How you pack for overseas travel always depends on where you are going and how long you will be gone. Here are some general rules of thumb that can be applied for most overseas trips and adventures.

Less is Better - The number one rule to remember is that you will be responsible for carrying everything that you bring, so only bring what you can carry! This includes carrying luggage up and down flights of stairs, in and out of taxis, cars and buses. Also remember to pack a carry-on bag with a change of clothes, essential toiletries (remember to check latest ruling on **liquids over 3 ounces** in your carry-on) and all of your documentation (passport, travelers checks, letter of acceptance into your program, health insurance card, International SOS card), because sometimes checked-through baggage doesn't arrive at the same time as it's owner.

A good method of packing for a long stay is to lay out everything you think you will need, and then put half of it back. You will be surprised at how easy it is to get along without half the clothes you think you need. Besides, most countries have clothing shops, and you are bound to purchase a few things for yourself (and others!) while you are there. Remember that whatever you buy overseas you will have to find room for in your suitcases and lug back with you. You really don't need to take more than two or three pairs of trousers, shirts and shorts. Learn how to get along with less. The lighter your baggage, the more pleasant your journey will be.

You will find that washers and dryers might be more scarce overseas than in America, so bring clothing that won't require too much care. Be prepared to wash clothing out in a basin if necessary. For great travel clothing, visit Magellans <http://www.magellans.com> or TravelSmith <http://www.travelsmith.com>.

Be culturally sensitive - Another point to remember is that many people in other countries are astonished and put off by how many clothes Americans have. You may think that it's normal to change your clothes everyday – or even more than once a day – but in other parts of the world people may wear the same clothes several days in a row. In some cases this is because they can't afford to buy clothes in the same quantities as Americans, but it is also partly because there isn't as much room to store clothes overseas.

Be aware of how other people dress, and how often they change. You might notice that your own clothes appear new and expensive next to those worn by other students. Try to fit in a little by dressing like your hosts. Avoid wearing university logo attire, if possible, as this immediately singles you out as a foreigner (and a target for pickpockets and other criminals). The more you make the effort to follow the examples set by your hosts, the more you will start to feel a part of your environment, and you won't stand out like a 'loud American'.

Closets are small - You will probably find that in other countries the closets or wardrobes are considerably smaller than what you are used to, so if you take a large amount of clothes with you, you won't have anywhere to put them. You will probably also have to buy hangers once you arrive, as these usually aren't provided.

Rain Gear - You will definitely need some rain gear no matter where you go. A thin waterproof coat with a hood is better than thick ski jacket-like clothing. Umbrellas can be useful, but they are also often awkward to carry along narrow streets and sidewalks. Take a hat, or buy one over there. Avoid cowboy hats and baseball caps, as these types of headgear will immediately identify you as a US citizen, which may not be safe at times.

Layers for warmth - If the climate in your host country is likely to be cold and damp, you will probably need a couple of good sweaters, preferably the kind that will fit inside your coat or jacket. Layering clothes is especially effective in cold, damp weather, but you don't want to end up looking like the Michelin Man. Long underwear can be quite useful for both men and women, and it can double as sleepwear (try Winter Silks <http://www.wintersilks.com> for some really warm, yet lightweight under-clothing). You'll also want some gloves and a scarf, and probably a good pair of hunting (wool) socks in colder climates for wearing around your room.

Look smart - Both men and women will want to take along one dressy outfit in case you should happen to go out to a club or be asked out to someone's house for dinner. This doesn't mean suit and tie for men, it means something other than jeans and a tee-shirt. Some dance clubs expressly forbid jeans and trainers (tennis shoes) as a matter of principle. You will probably also find that when people from other nationalities go out for a night of 'pubbing and clubbing' they tend to smarten themselves up a bit more than Americans do.

Good walking shoes - One thing you will definitely do much more than you do here is WALK. Therefore be sure to take at least one, preferably two, pairs of very good walking shoes. You won't need professional hiking boots or the most expensive L.L. Bean 'authentic Irish gum shoe', but it would be a good idea to get something high-laced and waterproof for everyday wear. If you decide to do some serious hiking, of course, you will need hiking boots, but nothing particularly fancy. Hill and country walking in many overseas locations is usually pretty easy-going except for the mud. Avoid wearing expensive running shoes or tennis shoes, if possible, as these will often also identify you as a US citizen. If you take sandals with you, check to see if open-toed shoes are always appropriate – sometimes they're not (such as in religious shrines or buildings). Also, be careful if you will be hiking in tropical areas where leeches, parasites, and other biting/stinging creatures might be attracted to your exposed feet!

Other Necessities

Bedding and Cooking Utensils - If you are being housed in a hostel, family home, or B&B, you will most definitely need to bring a towel or two with you, as these are normally not provided. You may also need to bring your own linens – a sheet and pillow cases. A duvet (comforter) and pillows will usually be provided, but you may need to buy a duvet cover once you arrive. Hostel kitchens should have plenty of cooking utensils, pots and pans, dishes and cutlery, but if you want to keep food in your room for snacks (if this is allowed), you may want to bring your own knife, fork and spoon with you plus one or two other useful utensils such as a corkscrew or a bottle opener. Check with airlines before taking any sharp items on board that could be mistaken for weapons.

Electrical Items - It is best not to bring electrical items with you overseas, as many countries operate on a different electrical current from the US. Hairdryers and shavers are cheaply bought in most countries and easily sold to the hostels when you leave (who can then sell them to other Americans coming over next year). Or some electrical items feature dual voltage, which normally means that you can use them in countries that have electrical currents of either 110 volts or 220/240 volts. If you must bring your own electrical items with you, you will need to purchase an adapter plug that will fit an overseas wall socket. These can be found in most department stores like Walmart. They are also usually sold in airports or through suppliers like Magellans (<http://www.magellans.com>). Be careful, however, because there are at least 34 different kinds of wall sockets overseas. Don't wait until you get there to look for one. If you intend to bring a large electrical item (not recommended), such as an electric typewriter or computer, you may need to purchase an

adapter and/or a transformer. Check with the experts at places like Radio Shack if you're not sure whether you will need something or not.

Laptop computers - In some cases it is a good idea to bring a laptop computer if you have one with a dual voltage switch. Having a computer handy rather than having to wait to use one of the university's computers or an internet cafe can save you a lot of time when you have a paper due. You must be sure to check that your laptop has a 'universal' switch on the side of it which will convert it from US current (110 volts) to non-US current (220-240 volts) or is compatible with both currents. If it isn't, you will most probably blow up your very expensive computer! You can take a laptop without such a switch, but then you will need to purchase the adapter and transformer as indicated above. Also, remember that if you access the internet overseas it may cost money for every local call. You can save yourself a lot of money by subscribing to Skype (<http://www.skype.com>) for free internet calls.

Contact Lenses - The best advice here is to switch to a chemical disinfectant and bring your own solution from home with you. Be sure to bring enough to last the entire trip, as some solutions are difficult to find abroad. You will probably also want to bring a spare pair of lenses or a spare pair of glasses for emergencies. If you use an electrical disinfecting device you may find that it doesn't operate properly overseas. Also, there are likely to be few plug outlets in hostel or hotel rooms. However, if you must use one, try to purchase the Cooper Vision unit that has a dual voltage switch.

Bicycles - It is not recommended that you bring a bicycle overseas for several reasons: First, you will have to carry it in addition to your luggage everywhere you go. Secondly, you will most likely be charged excess baggage fee by the airline unless you only bring one bag with you. Thirdly, it is very easy and relatively cheap to buy or rent a bike in most countries overseas. Additionally, you may want to consider where you will be doing your riding. Many big cities with busy traffic may not be the safest or healthiest place to be riding a bicycle. You will also need to consider storage of the bike, both while you're there and if you should travel around after your studies. Whereas hostels may be willing to store your luggage for you while you travel, they might not be willing to store a bicycle. You may also find that you are not allowed to bring the bike into the hostel when you're not using it, thus exposing it to the weather and to the possibility of theft. Brand new expensive American bikes are more likely to tempt thieves than well-used local ones.

Backpack or book bag - Be sure to bring some sort of backpack with you for everyday use. Since you will be doing so much walking you will need something of relatively good size to carry things over longer distances than you may be used to. For example, if you are likely to do your food shopping down the road from the hostel, you will probably want to carry your groceries back in your backpack rather than lugging them back in shopping bags (most foreign groceries charge money for their bags).

Walkman or Ipod - If you have one of these you are advised to bring it with you. It makes long journeys more bearable, and it means you can bring some music from home and enjoy some of the sounds you are familiar with. Don't bring too many discs, though, or you may risk either losing them or having them stolen. Also, you may want to bring some extra batteries, since batteries tend to cost more in many countries overseas.

Toiletries - Be prepared to use different products from those you normally use. Even if you find the same name brands of shampoo or toothpaste you may discover that the product itself is different from the one you're used to. If you use something that you feel you can't live without, better take plenty of it along. Otherwise enjoy the adventure of trying new things. (**Women**: there are many countries where it is difficult or impossible to purchase tampons with applicators, as this is seen as wasteful or damaging to older toilet

systems. If this poses a problem for you, bring a supply of your favorite brand with you but be sensitive to local plumbing deficiencies. You can get used to tampons without applicators by trying OB tampons in this country.)

Medications and prescriptions - If you are taking a prescribed medication you will need to see your doctor here before you leave and get enough to last your entire stay abroad. Don't assume that you can get the same medication abroad with an American prescription. You will need to see a local doctor before you can get a prescription written and filled overseas.

Camera and film - By all means, take your camera with you, but guard it carefully. If it is an expensive model it will be a target for thieves. If it is extremely expensive you may want to have it insured before you go, or even leave it home. You can buy film overseas for slightly more than you pay for it here, while developing costs will be about the same, but it is probably far easier to take a digital camera. It may be a good idea to develop your film before you return, just to prevent the possibility of damaged film from ruining all your memories (or buy a protective film carrier), or download all your digital photos onto a CD or laptop. Most airport x-ray machines won't damage film under 1000 ASA, but at least in the States you can ask that your camera and film be handed through the baggage inspection area. You may not be able to do this in some airports.

Other stuff - Be sure to bring along a small alarm clock for those early train departures (and classes, of course). You may also want to bring some photos from home of your family and friends to share with interested natives, or just to decorate your room. And it's a good idea to bring one or two small gifts from your home town or state in case you are invited to anyone's home or in case you meet someone you really like. Gifts from your part of America and from your home school will mean a lot to those you meet.

Tips on packing

- Passports and other documents should be carried with you securely yet readily accessible at immigration and other border checks.
- Put your address inside as well as on the luggage tag in case the suitcase breaks.
- Distribute the weight evenly; breakables and light-to-medium-weight clothing in the hard-sided suitcase(s); heavy sweaters, shoes, etc., in the packs or duffels.
- Double check all container caps. Better yet, put shampoo, toothpaste, etc., in sealed plastic bags. Airplane pressure can open bottles. Aerosol cans should not be carried on board. They can explode if checked in a decompressed luggage compartment.
- Sharp objects such as knives, scissors or letter openers are likely to cause luggage to be delayed or thoroughly inspected, even though they are now allowed again on most airlines. Airline regulations change regularly since September 11th, so call your airline to make sure about specific items.
- Luggage straps that may be belted around the outside of a suitcase will help save zippers or latches and may help you avoid having to salvage your belongings if your suitcase breaks.