

Don't Leave Home Without Them

Travel essentials that you'd never think to pack

by Zachary Barowitz | Illustration Traci Yau

In the mid-1990s I spent a month sleeping under a sunshade on the beach in Tel-Aviv with some other lost souls. One morning we woke up to find two new dormers with us. One had a five-foot-tall backpack filled with every conceivable superfluity. The other brought only a sleeping bag and a Glock pistol. While it may be pushing it to call his approach Zen-like, to me he embodied the simplicity that Thoreau was endorsing when he said, "Beware of all enterprises that require a new set of clothes."

No bit of wisdom is as useful when packing for a trip. If you can't stand the thought of your stuff getting lost, stolen, or ruined, you'd better not bring it. Forward-thinking nomads travel light, knowing they can survive with a T-shirt, jeans, some flip-flops, and the following surprisingly handy items:

HEAVY-DUTY PAPERCLIPS

The more clothes you bring, the more dirty ones you'll have to lug around. Instead, pack just one change of clothes and rediscover the ancient practice of hand washing¹: Plug the sink, or, if you're already using the sink stopper as an ashtray, fill a plastic bag with water and cover the drain. Wear your socks

in the shower for a thorough drubbing. Bring a clothesline² and use pretzel-shaped paper clips³ to hang clothes on it.

DECOY WALLET

Although I stash my important stuff in homemade secret undershirts⁴, I still carry a decoy wallet⁵ to misdirect thieves and maintain peace of mind. When my phony version was stolen⁶ on a street-car in Quito, Ecuador (right after a kid threw up on my lap), my wad of traveler's checks was tucked safely out of sight.

CLEAR PACKING TAPE

One morning during a bike trip across Ireland, I was awakened by what sounded like a bucket of water sloshing all over my bivy bag. As it turned out, I had none-so-wisely chosen a cow pasture as a campsite. The heifer responded in kind by choosing my bedroll as a toilet. The next night, I played it safe and fenced myself in using sticks, trees, branches, and packing tape⁷. Don't take a roll of tape in your suitcase—it's too bulky. Instead, remove the inner cardboard ring with a knife and then press the strip flat⁸. Bonus: The tape loaf can be carried in a back pocket and used to shim wobbly Internet cafe tables.



1. Bring a cup of laundry powder in a plastic bag. It may give pause to airport security officers, but it will come in handy when you tire of going commando.
2. Slipknots work best for tensioning cord. If that means nothing to you, it's time to refresh those Eagle Scout skills or make friends with a sailor.
3. You can, of course, drape your clothes over the line, but take it from this former laundry kingpin: That's an inferior method, and they won't dry as fast.
4. Remove the sleeves of a pocketed T-shirt or men's button-down and cut the collar into a V-neck so that it's invisible under other shirts. Stash your passport, cash, and ATM and credit cards in the pocket. If the wad bulges unnaturally, put a decoy in your outside breast pocket to disguise it (see next note).
5. To con wily pickpockets, fill the fake wallet with someone else's family photos, old library cards, and supermarket coupons.
6. From my front pocket, by the way. That's how much attention I was paying. I have since sewn Velcro closures onto every pocket of my travel pants and shorts. Coming soon to a runway near you.
7. Not the heavy-duty type. Buy the kind of packing tape that can be torn easily with one's fingers.
8. Do the same with your toilet paper. Yes, you should always travel with your own TP.