

Small But Practical Travel Companions

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You've got your suitcase packed, your passport and travel documents are sorted and you are ready to embark on that overseas adventure you've been dreaming of. You have gone over your checklist again and again, to ensure that you haven't forgotten anything and you are trying to keep what you are taking to a minimum.

After years of traveling, often to remote locations and developing nations, here are my top twelve recommended items you may wish to consider packing in your bag or carry on luggage to help you along your way. None of these articles is heavy or large and most should come in handy when you least expect it.

1. Single dollar bills -- Apart from a couple of countries that frown upon the US dollar, American currency is widely regarded and accepted throughout the world, especially in poorer nations where the sight of a crispy greenback is most welcome and sometimes preferred in lieu of local money. Having ten or twenty single dollar bills with you will be invaluable if you arrive at a destination without local currency, banks are closed and there isn't an ATM in sight. They also make great tips for service and can be used to bring the price down when bargaining in markets. Never underestimate the power of green.

2. Zip lock bags -- Why weren't these things invented when I started traveling in the mid 1980's? Zip lock bags have a million uses when you're on the road -- from carrying liquids to avoid spilling (laundry detergent, shampoo bottles, even left over wine, if you don't wish to carry a bottle) to storing found treasures like sea-shells and sand from your favorite beach. I usually take at least ten with me and find that they are all used by the end of a trip.

3. Safety pins -- It may seem like a basic item and in fact it is. But if you have ever had a button fall off a shirt in a strategic location and you are miles away from a shop or your luggage, a safety pin can mean the difference between a great day out, and returning to your hotel feeling angry because you've wasted an entire day. They also come in handy if you keep cash in your pocket -- just pin the pocket closed from the inside of your pants/skirt and would-be pick-pockets won't stand a chance.

4. Key ring / chain -- Why a key chain you may ask? Often older style hotels, especially in Europe, will give you a massive key ring weighing what seems like pounds for your hotel room key. They do this to discourage you from losing it or forgetting to return it at the end of the stay. Although some people leave their key at reception when they leave for the day, I prefer to carry my key with me, and just pop it on a small key ring, or a chain around my neck for ease.

5. Personal cards -- You may be a student, in between jobs, considering changing jobs or you may prefer not to tell someone you barely know where you work. In any case, a simple card that you can print at home using your computer can be a handy way to give

out your contact details, especially if all you want to do is relay your e-mail address. Have these on hand in your wallet to give out when asked.

6. Small souvenirs / gifts from home -- People always appreciate gifts, especially young children. Travel in Latin America, Asia and Africa and you will brighten their day with a small furry toy or souvenir from your country of origin. As an Australian, I always carry a few little koalas or kangaroos that can clip onto things, and for the 50 cents each that they cost me, the smiles I receive in return are priceless. Avoid gifts with flags on them though as sometimes blatant displays of nationalism are not appreciated.

7. Journal / glue or tape -- If you are like me, you gather cards, matchbooks, receipts, tickets and small paper-based mementos when you travel. They get stuffed into pockets, zip sections of your suitcase and more often than not, get misplaced by the time you return home. Keeping a small journal or writing book with you will firstly encourage you to write about your travel experiences but it will also allow you to put everything you collect in one place. Sounds simple but you would be surprised how helpful it can be.

8. Photocopy of your passport / ticket and documents -- Spending five minutes copying all your documents before you leave may save you hours and a lot of grief on your vacation. Obviously keep your copies separate from the originals. A photocopy of your passport is great ID to carry if you don't want to risk losing your passport on a night out. Also in the horrible event of theft, you will have a back up of all your documents. You should also keep a written copy of your credit card numbers somewhere safe with you for the same reason. As an addition to this, if you are traveling in Europe and shopping along the way, try and photocopy all your receipts especially if you want to claim the tax back. I made the mistake of spending thousands of dollars on a recent trip to Italy, lodged my tax refund with original receipts at the airport and never saw a penny of refund.

9. Small bottle opener and small knife -- Obviously these items are not allowed in your hand luggage when you fly but pack them in your suitcase and carry them in your back pack for day trips (make sure you remove them before leaving for the airport or going to places like museums). There's nothing better than going to a fresh produce market and picking up local meats, cheeses, fruits and vegetables for a picnic al fresco. Add a bottle of wine and you have a cheap and cheerful alternative to an expensive restaurant lunch.

10. A Universal Adapter -- Traveling to multiple destinations used to mean lugging around various plug adaptors, or in the case of Peru, one country has different plug shapes and voltage depending on what city you are in. Baring in mind that the US and Canada are in the minority when it comes to the 110 voltage system, save your traveling appliances by purchasing a universal adaptor that will do all the voltage and plug conversions for you. They are widely available online and in travel/luggage stores. **Brookstone** (www.brookstone.com) has a Universal Voltage Converter for Travel for \$30.

11. Washing line / washing liquid -- Years ago I would have suggested laundry powder but these days, traveling with a white powdery substance in your luggage may

not be a good idea. A basic elastic washing line that can be hung up in your hotel room or even in between two trees can mean clean clothes and dry towels in a hurry with no exorbitant hotel laundry service fees. I tend to ignore hotel signs that say "no clothes washing in rooms" -- what are they going to do -- take away your wet knickers?

12. Mini hard drive for downloading digital photos -- This is a newly added item to my "must have" list. If you are like me and think nothing of taking a hundred digital photos in a single day, this is the gadget for you. You'll never run out of space on your compact flash card when you transfer your photos to a mini hard drive. Although they may cost a bit (ranging in price from \$70 to around \$400 depending on memory capacity), the newer models like the Iomega USB 2.0 Mini Hard Drive weighs a mere 3.5 ounces, fits into a shirt pocket and can hold 40 GB of data, including video and still images, without the need for a power cable, so you needn't worry about additional cables and different plugs sizes and voltage. The 100GB Hitachi Hi-speed mobile Disk USB 2.0 External Hard Drive has a huge storage capability but weights slightly more. Visit www.computer-memory-store.com/portable-external-usb-hard-drives.html for discounted prices on these practical additions.