How to Pack for Your Trip



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Getting packed for a trip is one of the the most rewarding yet stressful acts when preparing to travel overseas. This booklet teaches you how to pack with confidence for any destination.

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A Porter in Palestine

We were about a week into our trip to Israel and the West Bank. Walking through the war-torn town of Hebron, in the West Bank (or Palestine) in the heat of the day, I found myself carrying two heavy bags for hours as we toured both the Israeli and Palestinian sides of the town. Our visits were incredible and very eye-opening, but I was constantly having to readjust the bags I was carrying, which only worsened as I, the tour leader, needed to stop at a store on a couple of occasions to purchase water and snacks for the group.



And worst of all, neither of the heavy bags I was carrying were my own—they were the bags of two travelers who had insisted on bringing them but were now too exhausted to carry them on their own. If only they had listened to my consistent advice to limit their luggage and keep unnecessary items at home or in their hotel rooms.

The Most Coveted Item in Travel



In all my years of leading groups, there's one item more requested than any other: a packing list. In my early days of organizing trips, I sent information about packing last. After all, I naively reasoned, packing isn't urgent, and travelers can wait for a checklist until after receiving more important information about passports, flights, and vaccinations.

Although I don't think I was wrong, I now send a packing checklist to travelers as soon as possible. And why wouldn't I?

Anticipation Is Golden

For many travelers, the anticipation of a trip is almost as exciting as the trip itself. This makes perfect sense.



For me, preparing for a trip is like getting ready for the Christmas season. Putting up lights, decorating a Christmas tree, buying presents, and watching holiday classics—that is almost as much fun as Christmas Day.

In a similar way, a lot of travelers like to prepare for an upcoming trip by purchasing luggage, buying needed accessories, and shopping for new outfits. For travelers such as these, sending a packing list as soon as they register for a trip is a wonderful way to get them excited for what is to come, even if it's still months away. And, as such, we will now turn to what items should be packed when traveling overseas.

General Advice: Keep Luggage to a Minimum

Let's start with the basics. How many bags should you take, and exactly what size bags are we talking about? The decision is ultimately up to you, but **I recommend limiting luggage to the essentials.**

Although your luggage will mostly be confined to the airplane, your hotel room, and transportation to and from, you will still need to carry it more than expected: in and through airports; to and from a bus, train, or taxi; inside and outside of your hotel accommodations; uphill and downhill; and many places in between.

I speak from experience when I write that there is nothing glamorous about lugging around giant suitcases; they're heavy, difficult to navigate on curbs, stairs, and escalators, and they take up a lot of space—a precious commodity when leaving the United States.

Personally, I suggest limiting your luggage to one 9" x 21" x 14" carry-on bag and one personal item, such as a backpack or handbag. This is what most pilots and airplane crew members do, so we should take a lesson from them.

The airline industry continues to cut every corner, and I see no reason to pay extra money for luggage that I can store in an overhead bin, or for that which the airlines could potentially misdirect or even lose. **Besides, when traveling light, you have more mobility, you stick out less in a crowd, and you do not require extra services from drivers and porters, who will require a tip if they have to handle your luggage.**

For these reasons, you should definitely consider the notion that "less is more," especially since it is easier now than ever to wash clothes when traveling.









The World Is Closer Than You Think

It's not uncommon for travelers to bring twice the number of items they need when traveling. They do so under the illusion that they will actually wear two or three outfits a day. However, the truth of the matter is that many travelers only wear one outfit a day, which can be shed or added to if you wear clothes in layers—as I heartily recommend.

Instead of bringing extra clothes, plan realistically and question whether you will really wear that shirt in the back of your closet that you haven't donned in three years. **Also, believe it or not, there is no international rule that you can't wear the same pants two days in a row—or even more.** If so, I would have been arrested years ago.

In a related way, some some travelers overpack because they assume other countries do not sell toiletries, snacks, and cosmetic supplies. I do recommend, of course, bringing your own toothbrush, deodorant, hygiene products, and other such toiletries, but you do not need extras.

Because of globalization, most countries have the exact—or very similar—kinds of products you have back home.

I recommend bringing only what you REALLY need and leaving the rest to purchases you can make at a convenient store, pharmacy, or supermarket when overseas. Depending on which country you are visiting, you may actually be able to find a product at a better rate—and it's also a lot of fun buying products with new designs and interesting flavors.

Long story short: Umbrellas, sunblock, socks, pens, adapters, headphones, Tylenol, tissues, Tampons, toothpaste, sweatshirts, sandals—every country has them, so don't stress if you have to buy something when overseas. That's part of the fun of traveling.

The ABC's of Clothing

The ABC's of clothing are:
(a) **a**ppropriate,
(b) **b**reathable, and
(c) **c**omfortable.

(A) Appropriate

Clothing that is appropriate possesses two traits. First, it's culturally appropriate, meaning that you do not, for example, wear seductive clothing in a traditional and conservative society. Be sure to respect the culture and try not to attract unnecessary attention to yourself. Also, it's important to remember that historic sites, museums, and government buildings may



require a certain dress code; learn what that is BEFORE you board your plane or, at least, before you leave your hotel that day. And it goes without saying that clothing for women and men is different. This is a double standard and not fair, but it is very common.

Depending on your exact destination, societies often apply stricter standards for women's clothing, such as expecting women to wear something covering their heads, shoulders, or legs, especially at religious sites.

For this reason, I recommend women to pack a scarf since it can quickly turn into a head covering or worn below the knees for religious sites and museums.



Second, appropriate clothing contains that which is suitable for the weather and climate you will be visiting. If you are traveling to India in the summer, for instance, you don't need a coat. But, if you are visiting England—even in the summer—take a raincoat.

(B) Breathable

By "breathable," I am referring to clothing that can be easily aired out and reused without being too heavy or needing too much time to dry. When on the road, wearing clothing that is breathable will allow you to wash it in your sink (or bucket if camping), air it out overnight, and still make use of it the next day.



Moreover, all major hotels provide laundering services for a fee, or you can bring detergent packets to wash clothing in your hotel room. And if the weather is warm, which it often is in the high season of travel, breathable clothing will help you stay cooler.

(C) Comfortable

Comfort speaks for itself in most situations, but especially when wearing clothes for fifteen hours a day, and possibly for several days in a short amount of time.



For some reason, people love buying new shoes or sandals for an international trip, only to discover that they cause foot blisters or are uncomfortable. I recommend only bringing tried-and-true footwear on trips—shoes you KNOW are comfortable and able to withstand extreme use. Go ahead and wear out your old shoes on your trip, and plan to purchase new shoes when you are back home. There is no need to get foot blisters on your first day overseas.



What If I Can't Live without the Internet?

I write in a companion booklet about social media and international travel, but the bottom line is that most people can't survive without the internet. I get it, and you can be rest assured that most places you visit offer internet access.

Nowadays, practically all hotels offer Wi-Fi access, though it can be limited, restricted to the lobby, or only available for purchase. When out and about, many public places provide Wi-Fi services.

For communicating to people on your trip and at home, I use WhatsApp. You can download this app on your phone free of charge. WhatsApp provides free phone calls, video chats, and text messages once you have an internet connection. Elsewhere, I also write about purchasing a travel plan with your cell phone provider, which will enable you to have phone, text, and internet coverage when traveling overseas.

Laptops and Tablets

There is nothing that ruins your trip like a laptop or tablet that is lost, broken, or stolen. And what's worse, the average traveler does not usually need these items.

To be sure, everyone is different, and I respect that tablets double over as TVs, cameras, phones, and desktops; **but think carefully before bringing any major electronics on an international trip.** I rarely bring anything more than a phone, since it will allow me to do most anything a tablet can do, and it's much harder for me to forget my cell phone somewhere or have it stolen.

If you do decide to bring a laptop or tablet, take the necessary precautions:

- Make sure it has a very firm casing that can withstand being dropped or stepped on.
- **Create a passcode and ALWAYS use it.**
- Be incredibly careful about your internet connection, knowing that cyber criminals never stop—even on vacation.
- Avoid sites requiring passwords when on a public network.
- When not in use, keep it in a safe or other secure place. If I bring a tablet with me, it's always in my hotel safe unless in use.
- Always carry a backup cord. If you lose your cord or it's stolen, your device is useless if you don't have one since cords are region-specific.



Adapters and Convertors

One last thing when it comes to electronics: Most countries use a different electrical system than the US. While American appliances run on 110 volts, most other countries do not. **Be sure to do a search online to determine what type of voltage is needed where you are visiting.** Fortunately, most devices these days offer dual voltage, which means you only need to purchase an adapter to ensure your device will be charged when overseas.



What about Money?

Should you use credit or cash overseas? It depends. In European countries, you can purchase almost anything with your credit card; in less developed countries, however, cash is king. Always have some available.

In general, I recommend making as many purchases as possible with your credit card (the one with the "chip" is ideal), as credit cards often have the best exchange rates and no (or limited) foreign transaction fees. Of course, inform your credit card provider BEFORE your travel dates and destinations. For those who would like to carry pocket change in the local currency, there are many ways it can be obtained:



- Withdraw local currency out of your debit card from ATMs (not credit cards), which are available at airports and close to hotels and city centers.
- Bring your local currency and change it at respectable banks and exchange houses, which are available at all airports and near major tourist sites.
- Exchange your currency at hotels (many hotels are able to make small exchanges).
- Do NOT use your credit card to withdraw money, unless absolutely necessary (due to high exchange rates).
- Avoid exchanges at tourist places since they charge the highest fees (regional banks are best).
- If you have a crypto wallet, use it for purchases, and research ahead of time what cryptos are used.



In some public places, the use of bathroom facilities requires cash, so it is best to always have the equivalent of a few dollars for the use of bathroom facilities, tips, subway tickets, or snacks.

Prescriptions and Medications

It goes without saying that prescription medication is probably the most important item you might carry in

your luggage. When traveling overseas, be sure to keep your prescription medication in the bottle you received it in, request at least a week's extra dose in case you face a travel interruption, and leave it in a bag you have easy access to (not in a checked bag).

Worst case scenario, it is possible to get prescription medication overseas. For over-the-counter medication, plan to bring whatever you think may be needed: something for a headache, upset stomach, or motion sickness. For everything else—from allergies to an unexpected UTI infection—you will likely be able to find it in-country.

Pharmacies in other countries usually provide knowledgeable staff members who can help you find the right medication for your ailment, and I have used their services all over the world. Simply describe your condition to someone at a pharmacy and look online for the main ingredient in the drug you would use back home. What's best, in many countries around the world, the pharmacy will allow you to purchase only what you need, not buy an entire packet. Finally, be sure to also bring along prescription glasses or contact lenses. And if you wear prescription sunglasses, carry those in a protective covering so that they do not break or crack when traveling.

TSA Regulations

The TSA regulates that all liquids must be in a bottle 100 ml (3.4 ounces) or less. Anything greater WILL BE discarded. This applies to virtually ALL liquids—shampoo, lotion, water, perfume, mouth wash, you name it.

If your bottle contains more than 3.4 ounces, it will be confiscated. For any snacks you pack, make sure they are placed in a clear bag that can be easily separated from your other items.









Travel Post-Covid

As we all know, the world fundamentally changed during and after the global Covid pandemic, and travel has been especially impacted. Different countries, airlines, and establishments enforce different rules, but there are still some universal items that travelers should take.

Here are your main considerations.

- You should always take hand sanitizer, but be sure to take smaller bottles that comply with TSA regulations.
- You should also take disinfecting wipes that can be used to wipe away germs on all kinds of surfaces that travelers encounter when on the road: seats, bathrooms, doors, tables, and so on.
- You should always have a couple of face masks with you. I, personally, use a combination of disposable and reusable face masks. For instance, on airplanes, trains, and buses, I use disposable face masks that I can discard immediately after use. When visiting sites on my itinerary, I wear a reusable face mask that I wash each night in my hotel with detergent and hang it out so that it is fresh and dry by the morning.
- You may need to present proof of vaccination, a negative Covid test, or recovery from Covid. Be sure to research your location beforehand and be prepared to demonstrate that you are Covid-free before boarding your plane.
- There are rapid Covid kits that you can purchase and pack for trips in case you need to take a test overseas. Be sure to purchase the right one (e.g., PCR).
- In consultation with your medical provider, consider bringing preventive supplements or over-the-counter medication.

Conclusion

Before going on any international trip, review the packing list that follows in full and with care. Like Santa Claus, I recommend checking the list twice, but be especially nice to yourself if you discover that you forgot something when you arrive overseas. Nobody is perfect, and after twenty years of leading international trips, I occasionally forget items I intended to pack.

Packing Checklist

Must-haves for Trip

- Valid passport and vaccination card
- Credit card and/or debit card; cash as desired
- Prescription medications
- Eyeglasses or contact lenses

General Advice

- Limit luggage to essentials.
- Pack comfortable footwear and clothes.
- Aim for one suitcase and one carry-on.
- Read TSA regulations BEFORE packing.

Electronics

- Research and buy required voltage overseas. This will almost always be different from US.
- Arrange international phone coverage with your provider BEFORE leaving.
- Get apps like WhatsApp, Tango, and Zoom so you can communicate easily.
- Download TV shows, songs, and movies that you want to watch when traveling.

Medications / Toiletries

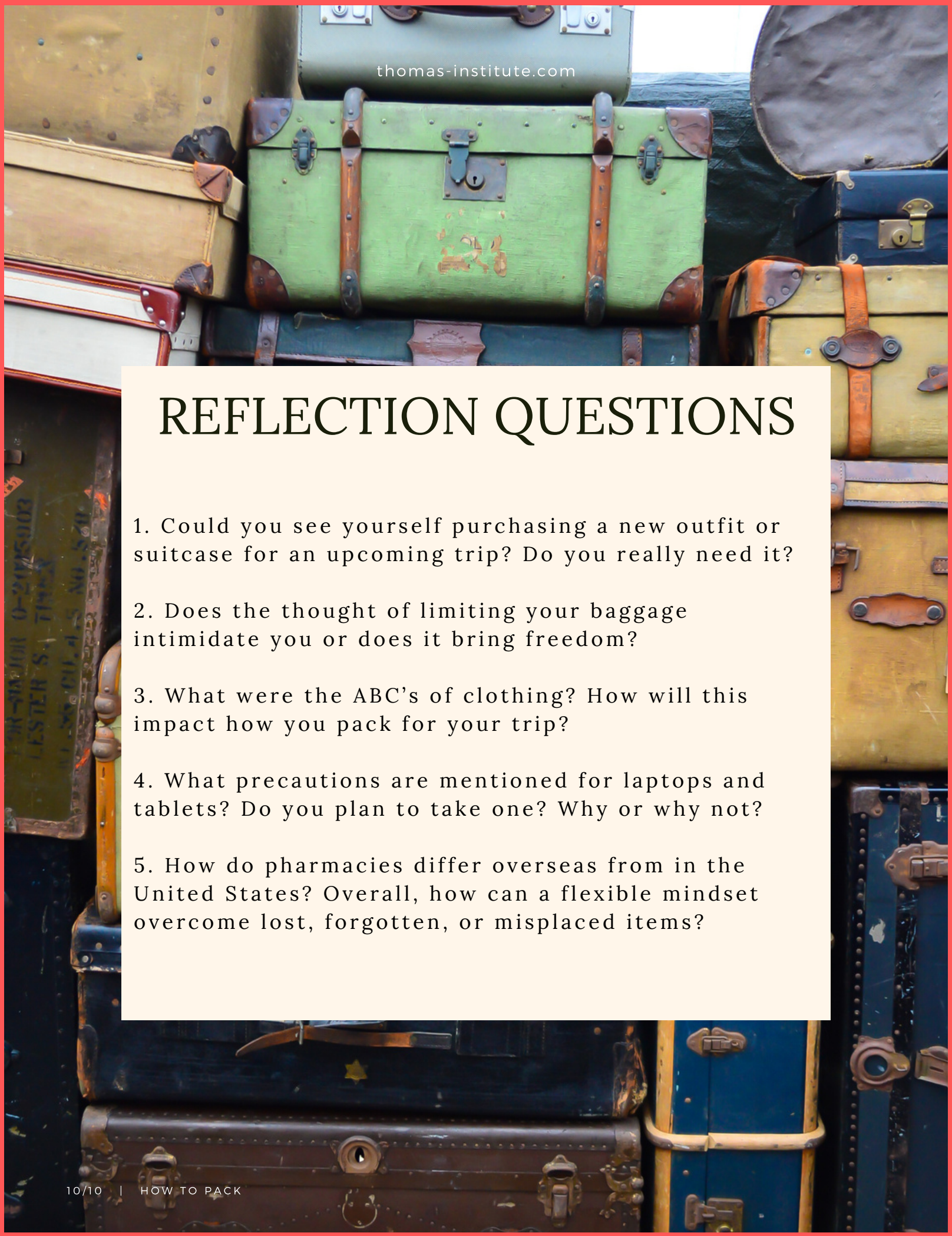
- Prescription medications in separate containers with labels (and pack extra dose)
- OTC medication for upset stomach, cramps, allergies, headache, motion sickness, etc.
- Toothbrush and paste, floss, razor, feminine products, deodorant, tissues, soap, detergent
- Face masks, sleeping mask, neck pillow, hand sanitizer, mouthwash, lip balm

Clothing

- Pack clothing that is ABC-worthy: appropriate, breathable, and comfortable.
- Research clothing norms in your destination country, especially as relating to gender.
- Wear clothes in layers that can be easily added to or shed depending on the weather.
- Pack clothes and accessories corresponding to the weather and climate you will encounter.

Miscellaneous

- Sun block, sunglasses, bug repellent, hat, and scarf (especially for females)
- Disposable bags for dirty laundry and sufficient space for dirty or wet items
- Small bag/backpack for day trips, journal, pen, tablet, books (novels, devotionals, etc.)
- Snacks that are good for traveling (granola bars, peanuts, oatmeal, dried fruit, tea bags)



REFLECTION QUESTIONS

1. Could you see yourself purchasing a new outfit or suitcase for an upcoming trip? Do you really need it?

2. Does the thought of limiting your baggage intimidate you or does it bring freedom?

3. What were the ABC's of clothing? How will this impact how you pack for your trip?

4. What precautions are mentioned for laptops and tablets? Do you plan to take one? Why or why not?

5. How do pharmacies differ overseas from in the United States? Overall, how can a flexible mindset overcome lost, forgotten, or misplaced items?



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