

I Traveled for 90 Days With Two Weeks' Worth of Clothes — Here's What I Learned About Packing

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When my husband and I decided to quit our regularly scheduled New York City lives and embark on a three-month-long adventure through Southeast Asia, I knew our once-in-a-lifetime experience would come with an equally epic packing list: hiking boots for a trek to the top of Mount Bromo; an evening dress for sparkling drinks at Bangkok's Sky Bar; a half-dozen bottles of sunscreen for days spent lying on Bali's beaches; the list goes on and on.

In all, I estimated my packing list could likely top 114 items — an amount unlikely to fit into the 40-liter backpack we'd bought to carry everything I'd need for those 90-odd days. *Eek.*

To say I felt overwhelmed would be an understatement. But I'm hardly the first person to be daunted by packing. It's a feeling many people get before a

vacation, according to Hitha Palepu, author of "How To Pack: Travel Smart For Any Trip" and founder of Hitha On The Go.

"There's a comfort in being home that's hard to replicate on the road," she tells me. "You have all your creature comforts: your own bed, your coffee the way you like it, and your whole wardrobe at your disposal. To distill everything that makes you feel you — in a tiny bag — can feel overwhelming for a week-long trip. For months? It's almost oppressive."

But, she continues, "months on the road can involve a lot of unpacking and repacking, and more options means more time spent packing and less exploring. Less, in this case, really is more." In other words, Palepu told me, it was time to quite literally lighten my load.

First, it was time to shed all the clothes I planned to pack. Two weeks' worth of clothing — shirts, shorts, and other assorted bottoms that could easily be mixed and matched — is all I need, Palepu insists, and other packing experts agree. When I asked Gillian Morris, CEO of Hitlist, a travel planning app, she advised, "Start practicing wearing the same basic outfit day to day while you're at home. You'll realize it's easy to get by with a few staple pieces, and it's calming to not have to make hard decisions about what to wear in the morning."

Specifically, I'll need two or three shirts for every bottom — six shirts and two shorts — in an assortment of neutral hues such as black, white, and beige, says Leslie Willmott, packing professional, wardrobe consultant, and founder of Smart Women On The Go. "Neutral colors are the most versatile," Willmott explains, "and can go from city chic to country very easily." A white tank top with black shorts, for example, could pass for rooftop-bar attire, then be re-worn days later at a casual lunch or even on a long hike. "Plan to wear each item several times over the trip," Willmott says. "And limit shoes to three pairs." Goodbye, heels.

To make sure I'm packing the most versatile options, Willmott suggests hanging everything I plan to pack on hangers so that I can quickly and easily organize items that coordinate. If an item can be mixed and matched into three outfits, it goes in the bag. If not, it stays back.

To my clothing list, Palepu adds the following: seven pairs of socks, 14 pairs of underwear, four bras — I'll be buying these sweat-wicking sports bras — two

pairs of pajamas, two pairs of workout leggings, a maxi skirt, and a long-sleeve chambray top that doubles as a jacket.

In order to survive with only two weeks' worth of clothes, I'll need to do laundry on the go, and so, Anne McAlpin, packing expert and founder of packing resource Pack It Up, tells me to pack a collapsible duffel bag that can serve as a laundry bag and double as a beach bag or day pack. (It can also hold all the souvenirs we'll surely pick up along the way without sacrificing my backpack's precious space, but I don't tell McAlpin that.)

On days we can't find a laundromat, we'll need to hand-wash our clothes. For that, McAlpin recommends a simple two-gallon Ziploc bag, which we'll need to purchase and pack here, because "the two-gallon size is actually quite difficult to find," McAlpin warns. (As for laundry detergent, Palepu recommends Laundress brand because "it makes an excellent travel detergent," she says.) We can use the bag as a washing machine when our accommodations' sinks won't stop, then hang our damp belongings on a Flexo-line clothesline, which doesn't require any clothespins. Plus, a Tide pen will keep white shirts pristine without taking up much room.

If I have the space to spare, Palepu suggests packing a travel steamer. In addition to fighting wrinkles, "it's incredibly helpful to refresh clothing, which is key when you're re-wearing items for months on end," she says. "I like to add a drop or two of essential oils to freshen."

When I bring up toiletries, McAlpin tells me to only pack what I'll need for the long flight: a tube of toothpaste — or a bottle of eco-dent tooth powder, which Palepu recommends because it's "much more space efficient than toothpaste," she says — and a toothbrush, as well as face wash, deodorant, and a hair brush. Items such as shampoo, conditioner, and body wash will very likely be provided by hotels, McAlpin explains. And if they're not — or I find myself in desperate need of hairspray along the way — I can pick it up at a local store.

Two more essential items include an universal power adapter — a small one that Morris recommends is the Kikkerland universal travel adapter — to power my laptop and Kindle, the latter of which will save space and weight by avoiding books, and ROAV sunglasses, which are stylish and fold small enough to be stored in a pocket, Morris promises me.

How will I pack all this? Every single expert I spoke to recommended packing cubes to sort clothing items and save space. McAlpin suggests buying the cubes in a variety of colors, so that if I'm looking for a shirt, I'll know to grab my green cube, for example. "It took me years to get on the packing cube bandwagon, but using them has changed my life," McAlpin tells me. And by rolling items in the cubes, I'll be able to fit more into each container, she adds.

Otherwise, to pack my bag, Palepu recommends "packing the largest, bulkiest items first, and the smallest and most flexible items last." Specifically, she packs "all my clothes in one half of the suitcase or bag and my undergarments and socks in the middle sleeve's pocket. In the other half, I pack my shoes, my steamer, non-liquid toiletries, and other small items, such as hair tools and accessories. My liquid toiletries are always pre-packed inside my personal item, as are all devices and chargers and medicines, wallet, ID, and my phone."

So, with careful planning — and by significantly cutting the items I had planned to bring — I should be able to easily fit everything in a single bag that won't weigh me down too much. But in case you're tempted to pack more than you really need, I'll leave you with one final note: "A lighter bag is more maneuverable," Willmott reminds us. "Regardless of how much weight an airline allows you, if *you* can't lift it — not your travel companion — it's too heavy!"