

Attention overpackers: the luggage diet begins now

TWO WORDS OF PRE-DEPARTURE advice: lose weight. We're not talking about a boot-camp regime for topping Teotihuacán's Pyramid of the Sun, either, but about dropping pounds by packing less. "People always take too much," says Tony McCurdy, owner of Vancouver's Wanderlust Travellers' Store. "Take half of what you think you need," echoes Dwight Elliot, owner of the city's independent all-travel company The Travel Bug.

Good advice. But how to deal with the insecurity of thinking one absolutely can't leave home without it?

Take heart, paranoid packers. McCurdy understands. "Overpacking stems from a lack of confidence. Inexperienced travellers haven't proven to themselves they really can get by with less." The self-help cure: note all items to be packed, including quantities of each. Toss the list in your bag, pack, then, while away, record anything forgotten – but really needed – on that same list.

Back home, cross off anything not used, then adjust quantities. Put the revised list back in your bag. Next trip, start from the pared-down version. Repeat several times and McCurdy promises "you'll get it down to an art form." Or, try Europe travel guru and author Rick Steeves's rule: pack what you think you need, unpack; then take half the stuff and twice the money.

The next step? Indulge in the latest luggage and assorted accoutrements, knowing you've already won half the battle against the bulge. Today's material of choice is a tough, ballistic nylon, with uprights the preferred format and wheels de rigueur. "Almost everything has wheels now, no matter what size," notes McCurdy. Particularly popular with his clientele, notes Elliot, is "convertible wheeled luggage" – backpacks with wheels that are the perfect hybrid for self-guided travel, whether hoisting luggage up and down escalator-less European metro stations or negotiating gravel tracks in Turkey. Many also come with a detachable daypack. And most of the newest luggage lines feature built-in organizers: snap-out toiletry bags with "wet pockets" for carrying liquids; fold-out garment bags that reduce wrinkles and detach for hanging in hotel



closets; plus numerous side pockets for easy retrieval of oft-used items.

The latest innovation, however, is what the industry calls "packing solutions." Eagle Creek was a frontrunner with its Pack-It System, which spawned what Elliot calls "the cube phenomenon." Essentially zippered or Velcroed mini-bags, these cubes come in all sizes and colours for systemized storage. McCurdy suggests cubic colour-

coding: for example, socks in the blue "box" and underwear in the "red." Other helpful features: double-sided (move smelly socks to the opposite compartment after use), padded (for delicate items) and waterproof cubes. Both McCurdy and Elliot also recommend folder bags for grouping larger items and reducing creases. Still having trouble fitting in bulky items? Try compression sacks to remove air and flatten for up to 80 per cent more space. Also, look for expandable luggage to allow room for souvenirs and gifts.

Today's hottest trend with frequent flyers? "Anything light, anything carry-on. Everyone's absolutely convinced their airline will lose their bags; it's almost an obsession," says Elliot – though "what qualifies as a carry-on remains a bit nebulous, depending on the destination and the airline." And as McCurdy points out, a carry-on compulsion can backfire on those who haven't kept up with the latest airport security bulletins: "All carry-ons are subject to a pre-boarding search and some of your stuff could end up in the garbage can." (Not sure? Pack it as checked luggage.) Just remember: less is more. ▣

–Lisa Ricciotti

avoid bottle shock

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- are 100 mL/100 grams or less
- fit comfortably into one clear, closed and resealable plastic bag with a capacity of no more than 1 litre; one bag per passenger
- are for infants under two years of age and contain only baby formula, baby food, milk, water or juice
- contain any non-prescription liquid medicines or a liquid medical prescription labelled with a name matching that on the passenger's boarding pass □

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