

# 15 packing hacks for traveling with just a carry-on

(Courtesy of Lori Zaino, The Points Guy)

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With a rise in [low-cost carriers](#) (and full-fare carriers now charging for checked bags), traveling with just a carry-on is becoming more popular.

Traveling light has its advantages, like being able to head right out of the airport after your flight and not having to drag a giant suitcase behind you. However, if you can't fathom being able to last a week or even a weekend with just a carry-on, these packing tips will hopefully change your mind.

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## Pick the right carry-on

Having the right carry-on is half the battle. The first step is to consider the size requirement. Each airline has its own, so it may be best to think about which airline you fly with the most and buy a new carry-on that fits its specific rules.

However, you don't want it to be too much smaller than the maximum size, because then you won't be taking advantage of the space you could have. When buying a [new carry-on](#), these are things to consider:

- Is it lightweight? Remember, you may also have a weight requirement to consider.
- Hard shell or soft? Hard is better for durability and travel in rainy climates, but soft wins for expansion and flexibility, and it won't crack.
- Do the zippers open and close easily? Larger-toothed zippers usually last longer.
- Do the wheels roll/spin easily?
- Is the handle comfortable and at the right height?
- Are there enough pockets?
- Is there a lock?

### **Take advantage of your personal item**

Most airlines allow you to take a [carry-on](#) and a small personal item (check your chosen airline's requirements beforehand). This could be a purse, briefcase, regular-size backpack or even a tote bag. Small duffels are usually acceptable, too, and most airlines won't bother to weigh or measure it (though it's still best to stay within the size and weight requirements whenever possible).

Put whatever you need to keep handy in this bag. These are things you want to use in flight, like electronics, moisturizer and a sleep mask, as well as things you might need, like medicine as well as any important valuables you'd rather keep close to you.

### **Consider your destination**

Before actually packing, ask yourself the following questions about your destination:

- What is the weather like?
- Do I have access to laundry?
- What type of activities (like hitting the beach, working, exercising, skiing, etc.) will I be doing?
- Is there easy access to shopping for clothing or toiletries?
- Am I staying in a hotel that offers free toiletries and an umbrella?
- Will I have access to an iron/ironing board/steamer/hair dryer?

Once you have the answers, pack accordingly. There's no need to bring your umbrella if you can use one provided by the hotel.

### **Use an app**

Some packing [apps](#) will handle many of the aforementioned questions for you. For example, PackPoint, a TPG favorite, allows users to customize their trips using filters like destination, length and type of trip, as well as laundry access, international travel and specific plans.

You can even add if you're bringing children along. The app also checks weather data. PackPoint will create a packing list just for you, which you can then modify, as well as check off items as you go.

Using an app to pack means you'll leave no room for error — no forgetting that plug converter or swimsuit.

### **Replace liquids with solids and use samples**

[Liquids](#) are heavy and tend to take up a lot of space within a bag. Plus, you're limited to that small plastic bag of items, each under 100 milliliters. You can easily replace some of these liquids with a more compact solid — things like solid shampoo and conditioner bars and solid perfume. Using solids helps cut down on little plastic bottles, too.

For anything you can't find in a solid, use a sample, which many department and beauty stores give out with each purchase. I store samples in a box at home and dig through them before a trip, seeing what I can take along with me to avoid bringing bulkier, heavier liquids.

### **Use packing and compression cubes**

Whether you're a packing cube addict or you don't even know what they are, [packing cubes](#) can help anyone packing a carry-on. These small, lightweight bags separate items to keep things tightly organized and carefully folded, stacked or rolled.

My suitcase stays organized with packing cubes.

Separating items can also make it easier to see exactly what you're packing and throw out unnecessary items at the last minute. Compression cubes do the same thing, but also compress the air out, allowing you to fit even more in your carry-on than you thought possible.

### **Utilize your space**

When packing your carry-on, start by putting in your largest items first. Then, you can use the extra space to squeeze or fit smaller items in beside the larger items. Socks are often easy to pop in where you have some open room.

Suitcase Tetris is a thing, so don't think twice about unpacking, rearranging and repacking to best fit your space as many times as it takes.

### **Roll heavy, fold light**

Everyone has a different strategy when it comes to folding and rolling. Some people are rollers, and others are folders — but I partake in both strategies. I roll heavy items like sweaters, pants and jeans, and I fold lightweight items such as shirts and fitness clothing.

I carefully and smoothly roll anything that wrinkles easily. Many argue that one technique or the other helps save space. However, I think there's a fine line between saving space and ensuring items arrive wrinkle-free, especially on a business trip (or any trip where I won't have access to an iron or steamer).

## **Cut down on shoes**

Shoes can be the biggest space-stealing culprits. Wear your heaviest pair, and consider wearing the same pair of shoes for a few different events (especially in colder climates where a pair of boots could take up your entire carry-on bag).

## **Use jewelry, cord and clothing hacks**

Remember those little empty areas in your suitcase where I said you could fit in socks? You can also fit in charging cords — but use a cord taco. A cord taco is just what it sounds like: a small taco-shaped leather or plastic holder with a snap that ensures your cords don't unravel and get tangled in all your items.

Necklaces and bracelets can also tangle easily, so putting the chain through a straw (if you want to cut down on plastic, you can always use a paper or stainless steel straw) and carefully placing it inside one of your packing cubes will ensure the chain won't get knotted or distressed during your trip.

The Baubax jacket has features that make it a solid choice for a travel accessory. (Photo from Amazon)

Special travel clothes can also help you pack less. Certain fabrics wash and dry quickly, and wrinkle less than others, so consider bringing specific travel clothing if you'll be on the road for a while. Items like the [Baubax jacket](#) — which has a number of useful pockets and built-in travel items like an eye mask, inflatable neck pillow and safety whistle — or the popular [ScotteVest](#) — which has a pocket for just about everything — can help; since you'll be wearing your items directly on you, you'll save valuable space in your bag.

## **Organize with your travel pals**

When traveling with friends, family members or your partner, discuss who's bringing what. This is especially useful if you plan to share a room, bathroom or home rental with someone. For example, your spouse can bring toothpaste while you bring the shampoo bar. Your friend could bring the hair straightener while you bring the curling iron. There's no need for three different people to bring a Bluetooth speaker. With a little pre-communication, you can save space and share the packing burden together.

## **Go digital**

I love the way a real book feels in my hands. There's nothing like turning an actual page. However, when it comes to travel, my e-book is key. Lugging around heavy books or notebooks isn't practical when traveling — especially with just a carry-on. Consider leaving that bulky camera at home and investing in a new smartphone, which is lightweight and easy to carry. Swap those noise-canceling headphones for noise-canceling [AirPods](#).

Pack in advance — and channel organizer extraordinaire Marie Kondo

When you're feeling rushed, you won't pack well. Packing just before heading to the airport won't give you time to do a second pass, or think about something you may have forgotten. Try to pack at least 24 hours before your trip to ensure you can carefully plan exactly what you need to take.

Once you're done, go back and [Marie Kondo](#) everything — see which items spark joy and take out anything that doesn't. Try to adhere to Kondo's very specific system of folding items perfectly. If you're not the best at folding, YouTube has a shockingly large number of videos that show how to best fold or roll your items.

### **Weigh your bag before getting to the airport**

If you have to adhere to a luggage weight requirement (or just simply don't want to lug around a really heavy bag), weigh your bag when you're finished packing. Don't leave this step until you get to the airport; if the airline deems your bag overweight, you'll be scrambling to throw away important items or find ways to put them in your jacket pockets. Taking out heavier items at home is much easier than being forced to throw them away at the airport.

### **Wear your heaviest items**

We're not saying you have to wear your entire wardrobe on your flight, but if you'll need a coat, save space by wearing it on the plane. (Plus, it may come in handy during an especially chilly flight.) Wearing your bulkiest sweater or heavy jeans is also a solid strategy, but make sure to wear layers in case you get hot during your journey.

We already mentioned wearing your heaviest pair of shoes on the flight, and wearing a scarf is never a bad idea, as scarves can also double as shawls, belts, blankets and more in a pinch.

### **Bottom line**

Traveling lighter is cheaper and just easier in general. If you follow these steps, you too can be one of those people who travels with just a carry-on.