

# How to fit your life into a suitcase

## Packing Tips For Long-Term Travel

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Packing for an extended trip can be very overwhelming, as we are forced to downsize months, or even years, of our life into one, 50lb suitcase. We want to be prepared, without compromising style - and we definitely don't want to be charged with that excess baggage fee.

The hardest part of packing is choosing clothing to bring. I'm rather attached to my collection of pretty dresses, vintage scarves, and strappy shoes. I need to have them with me on the road. I mean, when you think about it, prior to my departure to Portugal I didn't know a soul in Lisbon, yet I had many eventful nights in my Jeffrey Campbell, thigh-high boots. These boots are a must, purely to keep me company... although they are incredibly impractical for my seaside escapades in Lisbon.

Thankfully, I've packed for long-term travel several times and have learned from my mistakes in over-packing. The thigh-high boots will bunk with my parents until my return. Here are my tips for maximizing your wardrobe for extended travel...

**1. Only pack what you love and know you look good in.** If you don't feel 100% confident in an outfit, you're not going to wear it in a new city where you're already subject to possible vulnerability as an outsider. Start by picking your absolute favorite pieces from your wardrobe - a mix of basics AND colorful, patterned pieces is a good way to start.

I think there is a common misconception that you should stick to one color palette and basics when creating a "capsule wardrobe" - however, this just isn't me. I love patterns and color. You can see in the photos on this blog post how I've transformed several more colorful garments into multiple outfit options.

**2. Focus on versatility.** My favorite trick for packing is seeing how many outfits I can make with one item. If a shirt you love only goes with one pair of trousers, it isn't a practical option for your trip. I often surprise myself with my creativity at this stage - creating unique outfits with garments I'd never think go together.

**3. Dresses are your best friend.** Not only are they stylish, they are incredibly versatile. You can dress them up or down with the right accessories. Use them as a cover-up for the beach or add tights for chillier days. I pack styles made with lightweight fabrics, to maximize space. Bonus points if they have pockets.

**4. Jackets and other layering pieces are a must** for chilly airplanes and cooler days on your trip. They also have the power to transform an outfit I usually pack one jean jacket, one leather jacket, one or two cardigans or sweaters, and possibly a rain jacket or light coat, depending on the season and destination.

**5. Pack 5-8 pairs of shoes.** Shoes can add weight to your suitcase quickly, so you want to be conservative, but also prepared for any weather and terrain. One pair of basic, flat sandals are great for everyday and beach activities, sneakers are for hiking and working out, leather ankle boots are chic and water resistant for rainy days, comfy ballet flats go with everything, and chunky, block heeled sandals or pumps offer a dressed-up option that will keep you standing straight on cobblestones and uneven pavements of the world. This list totals 5 pairs, but I double up on stylish flats and heels because that's what I wear most.

**6. Scarves pack the most power for their punch,** in terms of travel accessories. Pack a few in multiple patterns, sizes, and styles. Scarves add color and class to an outfit and can be worn in countless ways. One of the scarves in this post is worn in my hair for one look, around my neck for another, and as a top in another! I also happened to use that same scarf to cover my eyes while sleeping on the airplane to Lisbon. They also make effective blankets in route to your destination and are lovely to hang on blank walls in your new accommodation when unworn. I intend to write a separate blog post dedicated to my passion for the utility of scarves. Stay tuned...

**7. Pack all of your underwear.** It takes up minimal room and is the one thing that you can't re-wear without a trip to the laundromat. I always pack at least 14 pairs to get me through the first couple weeks at my new-home. And I usually buy more upon arrival.

**8. Things to leave at home:**

- Trendy jewelry (It's heavy and it just gets tangled while traveling - stick to a few classic pieces that go with everything).
- Any more than one pair of jeans or leggings (You'll die of outfit boredom.)
- Stilettos (Unless you're going to Vegas or something... they're heavy and awkwardly shaped to pack. Also, you'll trip all over the cobblestones just about everywhere in Europe.)

- Full bottles of toiletry items. (Too heavy - everything you need you can buy abroad. Just pack travel size to get you through the first few days.)

*I want to clarify, I'm not a backpacker. While many of these tips work for backpacking, this is specifically geared for those of us who spend extended time (at least a month) in one place, such as a digital nomad, Erasmus/study abroad student, etc.*