

Travel Advice from a First Time World Traveler

This being a short list suggestion of which I should wish to remind myself prior to packing for my next trip abroad. Make of them what you will.

1) Take a light meal or snack for the plane, but no more. Additional food items will only serve to slow down your integration into the local culture. I took a two week supply of my favorite chocolate with me to England. I had a wonderful time eating it, but I might have had an even better time sampling the local fare. I missed out. Never again. I'll pack for the plane and no more next time.

2) Leave plenty of empty space in your suitcase. I'm thinking filling it up only halfway is best. Trust me, it is annoying to have to squeeze your suitcase closed everyday. And for all those emergency items you are bringing along just in case, well, if you're going to a civilized country there will be something similar--if not flat out better--than what you might have taken along. Besides, I've never been on a trip and not gone shopping. It really makes no sense to pack that extra pair of pants or dress shirt, when you know you're going to buy another pair when you are there anyway.

3) Forget about the souvenirs. Bring back pictures instead. If you really must bring back a present for someone, stay away from food items. Between customs, spoilage, breakage, and personal preference, any type of food is simply not worth the effort.

4) As to camera's I recommend having one and carrying it with you at all times. It completes your tourist garb and lets the locals know that it is OK to approach you, say Hello, and offer advice about their town. As to the type of camera, I would have liked to have a super-powered optical zoom model (to replace the binoculars that I never used), but then the cheap one mega-pixel camera that I had held 1250 pictures on one measly gig of memory, and the AA batteries that it used were easy to find, so there is a

trade off. Still, I lust for a better camera, one that can zoom right in and make it look like I took that bird's picture while sitting in the tree next to it. And then--as if that wasn't enough--I'll be able to take the resulting photograph and blow it up so large, I'll be able to see the lashes on the bird's eyes and holes in its beak.

The rest of this article does not have to do with packing, but with the trip itself.

5) Don't try to do it all. Most destinations that I went to were far more deserving of my time than the one or two hours I gave them. If you must use a guidebook, use it to list out the five or ten best attractions around your destination, and then plan to spend an entire day at each one, (or as close to sun up till sun down as you can get). Of the places I went, almost all of them had a café along with both indoor and outdoor attractions. No matter the weather, there was enough to occupy me for an entire day.

6) Which likely brings us to wet weather gear, or whatever type of gear is appropriate to the locale. Get that winter coat. Plan on buying one the first day. Same with the rain gear. You don't need to pack it with. Whatever the weather of your destination, they will have the appropriate gear readily available for purchase. Buy it. Use it. And when you find that it is raining, remember that this means that you have the gardens and other outdoor attractions all to yourself... along with your umbrella, rain jacket, waterproof pants, quick drying shirts, and swamp boots. There is a reason that this is the stuff the local stores are selling after all. Like the plane fare, hotel room, and endless meals out, this is just another one of those expenses. Suck it up, and you will enjoy the trip oh so much more.

7) As to meals out, once again I say ditch the travel guides. Just ask a few locals, "If you could recommend one place in town, what would it be?" Then ask them, "Why?" Ask this to a few people and not only will you get that all important social interaction with the natives, but you'll likely find a grand place to

eat. The locals rarely steered me wrong. However, I will note, where a person would like to eat, and where you can afford to eat, may not have a great deal of overlap. Perhaps you will need to practice, and fine tune the question and interchange to meet your own personal needs.

I think that about sums it up: travel light, take your time, go slow, and take the advise of the locals. They've been there a while, and--believe it or not--they know what they are doing.

{Travel light and move slowly: five months and counting in my latest locale...}

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