

10 cures for the chronic overpacker

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Can't seem to travel without an overstuffed bag? We're here to help. If you're a chronic overpacker, these 10 tips will cure you of your bad packing habits forever.

Start with a carry-on

Unless you're traveling with kids, we argue that you don't need to bring more than you can fit in a carry-on. Limiting yourself to a suitcase that will fit in the overhead compartment is a surefire way to force yourself to pack more efficiently. Consult SmarterTravel's [Ultimate Guide to Carry-on Luggage](#) to see which size suitcase you're allowed to bring on board. Bonus: You'll pack lighter, save money (if you're flying an airline that charges for checked bags), eliminate waiting time at the luggage carousel, and never lose your bag again.

Only pack things that can be worn more than once

Our rule: If you can't wear an item more than once on a trip, leave it behind. (Obviously, this doesn't apply to things like underwear and socks—unless you are also packing laundry detergent.) This means you shouldn't pack the really cute shoes that only match one outfit or the blazer that only goes with one shirt. Instead, pack things that can be mixed and matched and worn a few times on your trip. Try to keep most of your clothes within the same color palette so you don't have to worry about clashing.

Pack more tops than bottoms

You'll have a wider variety of outfits if you pack more tops than bottoms. No one is likely to notice if you wear the same pair of jeans every day as long as you have a different T-shirt on the top. Try packing only one or two pairs of pants (perhaps a pair of jeans and a pair of dress pants) and then re-wearing them with different tops.

Bring multipurpose toiletries

Pack toiletries that do double duty and you'll save tons of space in your bag. Things like two-in-one shampoo and conditioner, a shampoo bar that also works as body wash and shaving cream, and a face lotion that also serves as sunscreen can all lighten your load.

Limit yourself to three pairs of shoes

Ideally, you shouldn't need to pack more than two pairs of shoes—one for walking/hiking/being active, and one for dressing up. But if you're doing a lot of walking, it can be good to pack two pairs of everyday shoes (or boots for colder climates) in case one pair gives you blisters. Wear the most comfortable shoes on the plane and pack the other pair.

Minimize electronics

Do you really need your laptop, tablet, digital camera, and smartphone on your trip? So many gadgets multitask these days that one or two should serve all of your needs. If you're packing your laptop for a business trip, you might want to leave the tablet behind and use your laptop to watch movies or read e-books. Smartphones can connect to Wi-Fi and work like laptops for browsing the Internet and checking email—and a flexible keyboard can let you type as if you were on a real computer. Transfer your music to your phone and leave your iPod behind. These gadgets may not seem like they take up a lot of space, but they can add up when you factor in all the assorted cords and chargers.

Leave 'just in case' items at home

Ever find yourself packing a certain clothing item "just in case" you get invited to an extremely fancy event, or just in case the weather strays dramatically from the forecast, or just in case you go to a pool party? Stop doing that. If you're presented with a situation for which you need a drastically different outfit than anything you packed, take that as a sign to go shopping instead!

Don't pack at the last minute

Last-minute panic packing leads to a messy suitcase, forgotten essentials, and mismatched clothing. Start packing early so you're not in a bind if a piece of clothing you need is dirty or you need to buy something for the trip. This also gives you time to trim down after you've started packing.

Plan all of your outfits ahead of time. Decide on one outfit per day (or per occasion, if you will need multiple outfits for each day). Don't pack any more than what you need for each outfit.

Only pack what you love to wear

If you don't wear it at home, you're probably not going to wear it on vacation, either. So leave behind all of those clothes that don't quite fit, aren't your favorite color, or you just don't like. Most likely, if you don't love it, it will stay in the bottom of your suitcase just like it stays in the back of your closet at home.

Pack half the clothes and twice the money

We don't know who said it first, but some of the best packing advice we've ever received is this:

Lay out the clothing and cash you plan to bring on your trip. Now pack just half of the clothes and double the money. The point is that people often overpack and regret bringing certain items of clothing, but no one ever regrets bringing extra money. You really won't need as many clothes as you think!