

# AmeriSpan's Ultimate Guide to PACKING

Find out how to pack like a pro, in one carry-on bag!



**Congratulations!** You have made the tremendous decision to live and study abroad. Your country has been chosen, your housing is set, and your course of study determined. Now all you have to do is pack and get to the airport. Easy, right? But when you start thinking of all of your clothes and shoes, your books, your toiletries, and all of the things you want to take so that you have a piece of home with you, then all of a sudden, packing becomes a monumentally important chore. This guide will help you determine what to bring and the best way to pack for your trip. AmeriSpan has collected tips from their well-traveled employees and past students to bring you a comprehensive guide on this most important component of your trip. Happy travels!

The mantra of any well-seasoned traveler is to travel lightly. They can't all be wrong. "But I'm going to be living in Guatemala for four months!" you say. "I need all of my wardrobe, as well as my kitchen sink in order to live comfortably." Whether your trip is for four days or four months, pack the same amount. Really.

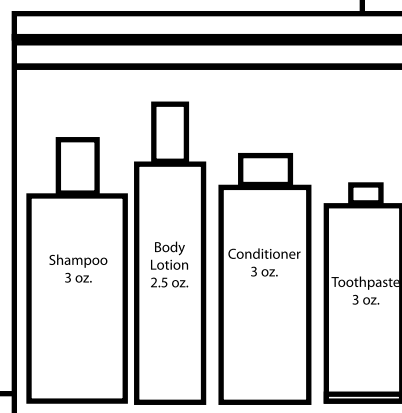
### Choosing Your Bag:

Ideally, you want bring everything that you need in one bag that you can carry-on board the plane with you. Limiting yourself to this one bag will be worth it when you are the lone passenger on your plane who does not have to wait in your destination airport for the checked luggage to finally be unloaded from the plane. By the time those folks get their bags and move through customs, you can be at your hotel having a cold drink.

Aside from picking up extra time at the airport though, having only one carry-on bag limits the chances of your luggage being stolen in the airport or lost by the airline. If you think losing your luggage from New York to Philadelphia is bad, wait until your bag is somewhere over the Atlantic. We had one student who did not retrieve her lost luggage from the airline for almost three weeks, by which time her trip was over. She spent a small fortune replacing her clothes and toiletries, not to mention her electronics. Also, did you know that airlines are now charging additional fees to check luggage? Especially for domestic U.S. flights, and flights to Puerto Rico and Canada, you can save money by not checking baggage and simply packing efficiently into one carry-on bag.

Carry-on is usually limited to 40 lbs. The dimensions differ by airline; some, such as Continental and Delta specify a maximum of 51 linear inches (length + width + height); others such as United Airlines or US Airways go with 9" x 14" x 22". It is always best to check with your specific airline for restrictions.

Post 9/11, you may not bring many items on board. As of 11/14/2006, liquid and gel toiletries in 3-ounce containers or smaller are allowed if they are in a clear plastic, quart-size or smaller Ziplock bag. Larger containers that are half-full or rolled-up toothpaste tubes are not allowed. One Ziplock bag is allowed per passenger. For the most up-to-date information, go to the [TSA's Prohibited Items](#) page.



If you've decided to attempt to only bring a carry-on bag for your trip, the convertible suitcase/backpack is a great option. This is a carry-on bag that can be worn as a backpack (the best ones have hip straps for lumbar support) and can be converted to carry as a regular suitcase. Some have wheels, though these are generally slightly too large to carry-on easily. Before buying a wheeled suitcase, take some time to research and make sure it is the correct decision for you. Realize that in many countries you will not be able to wheel the bag easily over cobblestone streets. Also, due to the support structure required for the wheeled function, these bags are significantly heavier, have less interior capacity, are less suitable for efficient packing (usually just one large compartment inside), and are extremely rigid, making it much more difficult to stow in overhead luggage compartments.

### **Our Favorite Bags: The Patagonia MLC Series.**

Designed to be "Maximum Legal Carry-on," these bags come in several versions: The original [MLC](#), which features 3 carrying options: ergonomic backpack straps, over-the-shoulder, or 2 carry handles; the [MLC Wheelie](#), which has wheels, stow away ergonomic backpack straps, and a regular handle; and the [Burrito](#), which is a folding hang bag. All three are rugged, lightweight, roomy, of excellent quality, and allow maximum space for carry-on luggage.



No matter what bag you choose, a low profile color such as navy or black is ideal. When traveling, use a luggage tag with your name and your school's name and contact information on it. Do not put your home address or phone number, as this gives a potential thief more information than they need to know. If you are checking your luggage, it is a good idea to put this information on the inside of your bag in case it is lost. Leave your Louis Vuitton or other expensive, monogrammed luggage at home.

So now you've got your bag chosen. Whether you're taking our advice by trying to bring only one bag or you're breaking down and checking one bag and carrying one on the plane with you, there are some basics you need to have with you.

### **The Documents:**

Spend some time at a copy machine. Copy your airline tickets, your passport front page, your IDs and your itinerary. Make copies of your prescriptions, any important health care information about yourself, including a vaccination record, and your family doctor's information. Have your important contact information copied, preferably on just one sheet, with the names listed in order of importance. Look at these documents through a stranger's eyes; if you are injured or ill and unable to speak for yourself, how would you want your host family or a friend to locate your information? Have it organized and easy to understand. Have one copy of this information in each bag. Also leave copies with your host family, your school, and at home with your family.

**Tip: Email yourself** a copy of all important information: Airline numbers, credit card phone numbers, driver's license numbers, traveler's check numbers, passport, and friend's addresses. This way if they get lost, replacement will be much easier.

## Toiletries:

Pack your necessary medications in their original bottles with prescription labels. Determine what other toiletries are absolutely necessary and pack those as well. It is best to peruse the “trial size” section of your favorite super-store and buy small size toiletries. Liquids and gels must be in 3 ounce or smaller bottles, sealed into a one-quart Ziplock bag (see the [TSA's website](#) for updated information). Ladies may want to bring their preferred sanitary supplies. Remember this, however; the world is getting to be a fairly small place. Anything you forget, or you determine that you need, can probably be found in your host country. In international hotels in the larger cities, a tourist shop will probably carry your favorite American toothpaste and soap. And if you can't find your favorite essential, ask yourself how every citizen of Peru manages to live without cinnamon Colgate toothpaste and then be adventurous and use the foreign brand.

As far as cosmetics, ladies will do best to pare down their routines to the bare minimum. You will not have the room to bring along your entire makeup collection – and really, you don't use all of that stuff, do you? Invest in a makeup kit that has coordinated eye shadows, a blush and lip gloss in one small case, convenient for a purse or toiletry kit. Add an eyeliner and mascara and you are set for day into night. Ask for travel-sized containers of your favorite cleansers and lotions at makeup counters. Instead of taking up more space in your kit with perfume, invest in a nicely scented lotion, which will do the double duty of moisturizing and giving you a scent.

## Electronics:

If you must bring your hair dryers and curling irons, you have to purchase a converter. Or you can wait until you are actually in your host country and purchase your appliances then with the knowledge that you'll be giving them away before you leave.



Your MP3 player and laptop will also require a converter to tap into foreign electricity. Check your manufacturer's recommendations.

So now we've got your luggage chosen, and your important papers have been copied, distributed and organized and your toiletries have been pared down and packed. You've decided to spring for a cheap hair dryer once you've arrived, so that's not an issue. Lots of room left for clothes and shoes! Let's start packing the important stuff!

## Clothing:

Wait! Now you must do some serious thinking and research. Where are you traveling? What's the [weather](#) going to be when you're there? Is your area given to warm days and chilly nights? Are you going to be there during the rainy season? Beyond the weather, what are the things that you want to do and see? Are you going to be visiting a lot of churches? Dining in fine restaurants? Going to nightclubs? Sitting on the beach? All of the above? Are you again feeling the panic of what to pack? Relax.

Your wardrobe will travel well, be flexible for any activity that you want to participate in, and most importantly, consist of a few easy pieces. Let's start from the foundation up.

## **Underwear and Socks:**

Remember, you will have access to a washing machine. With that comforting knowledge, you can pack FIVE pairs of underwear and women can pack two bras. Just five! You can plan on doing a wash every three or four days or even rinsing your unmentionables out in a sink with some liquid soap and letting them dry.

Bring one pair of dressy socks or pantyhose and three pairs of socks to wear with your comfortable walking shoes. It is best to avoid cotton socks for lots of walking, as cotton absorbs moisture instead of wicking, which can lead to fungal infections and blisters. Choose socks that don't have large toe seams that are made of a synthetic material. As an added bonus, these socks will dry much faster than cotton.

## **Pajamas:**

Bring one set of pajamas and wash them with your underwear every few days. In a lot of foreign countries, blankets are used in lieu of heat at night, so keep in mind that it may be a lot chillier than you're used to. Your best sleeping gear may be a pair of sleeping pants and a long-sleeved shirt.

Now we're moving onto your actual clothes. The goal is to have layered outfits in neutral colors that will easily move from day into evening. Choose colors like khaki, white and black that can easily be mixed and matched, yet be dressed up with easy accessories. Remember, we're going to be washing clothes frequently, so clothes that dry quickly and either don't wrinkle or look okay with a little bit of wrinkle are best. Cotton/poly blends are lightweight and have few wrinkles.

## **Shirts:**

Pack five shirts in a combination of short and long-sleeves. Have one of these be slightly dressier, like a button-down for men or a blouse for women. A blend material that can steam in a warm bathroom would be better than something in linen that would require an iron.

## **Sweaters/Sweatshirts/Jackets:**

Pack one lightweight sweater that can be tied around the waist or shoulders. If you must bring a sweatshirt, pack just one, preferably with a hood, and let this be the sweatshirt that you travel in, as these are generally too bulky to pack. Pack one lightweight, waterproof jacket, such as a windbreaker. Make sure it's in a material that can be easily folded and not take up too much space.

## **Pants/Skirts:**

Pack two pairs of pants, both in lightweight cotton. Preferably, one pair will be black for dressier occasions. Depending on your destination, denim jeans can be a poor choice, as they are bulky, heavy, and take forever to dry. Be sure that your pants pockets have buttons to discourage thieves from your wallet. For women, pack one skirt as well, also in a lightweight material. A longer skirt will take you more places than a micro-mini.

## **Shorts:**

You may think that shorts are standard travel fare, but they are not. In many churches, clubs and restaurants overseas, they are not permitted. However until you see what the standard dress code is for your school and your host city, pack one pair with pockets. You can always buy another pair. For a man, this pair of shorts can double as a swimsuit (or some swimsuits can double as shorts). For women, avoid short shorts and stick with longer Bermuda style shorts.

## **Swimsuits:**

One for a woman. A woman can use a one-piece or “tankini” under a cardigan or other shirt for a camisole-type look. A man can use his pair of shorts as a swimsuit.

## **Shoes:**

Pack only two pairs of shoes. Remember, you’ll be wearing one pair while traveling, so all in all, you’ll have three. Pack one pair for walking, one casual (yet still comfortable) pair, and one slightly dressier (but still comfortable) pair.

## **Accessories:**

Ties and scarves will take up virtually no room in your bag, yet they will make any of your outfits instantly dressier. Some costume jewelry will also elevate your outfit to dressy status. For women, a sarong can be an excellent multi-purpose accessory. Depending upon how it is tied, a sarong can be a beach cover-up, a skirt, shawl, and even a sheet, towel, curtain, or laundry bag.

## **Packing:**

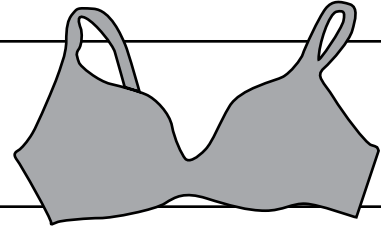
Now that you’ve got your clothes, shoes and accessories laid on your bed, you’re happy with your choices and you can see all of the different combinations of outfits that you can create, let’s pack. Yes, it will all fit.

First, set aside your traveling outfit. Comfortable pants, layered shirts, and your hooded sweatshirt and sneakers are best. You will be waiting in long airport lines and then actually flying for hours. This is not the time to see how well your new stiletto heels look with those low-rider jeans. Keep in mind that your traveling outfit will then become part of your actual wardrobe, so be sure it sticks to the same lightweight fabric, neutral colors rule.

Before putting anything in your bag, lay your clothes out in stacks. Lay your sweater flat first and then unfold your shirts and then lay them flat on the sweater, stacked with the fabric most likely to wrinkle on the bottom and the least wrinkled shirt on top. The same goes for your pants – stack your shorts and skirts with your pants.

Once your clothes are organized into stacks, turn your attention to your underwear. Roll your underwear in balls, and place these balls in your shoes or even your long-sleeved shirtsleeves. Remember, you only have five pair, so they shouldn't be that hard to stash. If you like your socks rolled in a ball, wait until the rest of your suitcase is packed before stashing them in corners. If you like your socks flat, place them on top of any of your stacks of clothes.

A tip to keep bra cups intact is to put a roll of socks in the cups before packing.



Now that your shoes are stuffed with your underwear, place them flat in the bottom of your bag – right on top your important papers packet. The papers go in first! The rule of thumb is to pack heaviest items on the bottom and then lightest items towards the top of the bag. Place your toiletry kit on top of your shoes. Pack your sweatshirt and jacket next, each folded lengthwise. If you are traveling during a winter season, wear your heavy coat rather than pack it.

After your shoes and kit are in the bag, prepare your shirts, including your sweater. With your stack of shirts, fold in the sleeves and then fold the bottom half of your shirts up towards the top so that you have a big shirt rectangle. From the left side, now roll the shirts so you have a big shirt roll. As well as saving space, this will cut down on the creases that a fold would give your shirts. You can even secure your roll with your tie or scarf.

Once your shirts are placed in the bag, fold your pants/skirts pile lengthwise and then roll, again securing with your tie. Put this cylinder next to your shirts.

You should have plenty of room to add your bathing suit and whatever extras you are packing, and you will have room to spare.

At the very top of your bag, accessible immediately, should be your pajamas, rolled in a cylinder, with your toothbrush in the middle. After you've spent hours traveling, the first thing you will probably want to do when you reach your destination is to grab a few hours of sleep. Instead of digging through your bag for the essentials, have them there when you open your bag.

Once your bag is packed, walk it up and down the stairs and up and down your street. If it's unbearably heavy, you must remove something or trade it for a lighter version.

## **A list of small things you might not have thought of to bring...**

1. Two clothespins. If you're rinsing out your underwear and need to hang it to dry or if you simply need to hold together some curtains to get an extra hour of sleep, clothespins are invaluable.
2. Postcards of your hometown. People will love to see where you're from and pictures of your city will serve as an icebreaker for conversations.
3. Solar pocket calculator for foreign currency conversion.
4. Earplugs and eye mask. From the plane to the sounds of a new city, earplugs and an eye mask will get you some quiet when you need it.
5. Packet of tissues/baby wipes. Toilet paper isn't always available when you need it most.
6. Instead of bringing along entire bulky travel guides, take the time to copy the parts most relevant to your trip. You can toss them once you've used each relevant chapter to make room for souvenirs! A great alternative is the [Kindle](#), which can store thousands of books and takes up very little room.
7. Ratty underwear. Bear with us on this one. If you feel you won't have frequent access to a laundry, bring along your oldest underwear that you won't mind losing. Wear it and then just throw it out. It'll take up more room initially in your bag, but on your return trip, you'll have room to spare.
8. A small flashlight. A very useful tool for finding your way through dark streets, accessing your luggage on a nighttime flight, and even reading at night.
9. A cardboard art cylinder. This is great for storing prints or papers that you want to protect and you can cut it down to size to fit in your suitcase.
10. Re-sealable plastic bags in various sizes. Great for wet clothes, liquids and storing small things like jewelry.
11. Combination lock for your suitcase. Invaluable for when you must leave your bag unattended. Why a combination lock? Because keys have a habit of losing themselves!
12. Rubber drain stopper. Many sinks you will come across in your travels won't have a drain stopper. This way you can do some quick laundry or shave with a sink full of water.
13. Small sewing kit. You never know when you're gonna rip your pants...
14. [Calling card](#). Use this to call home, even if you have a cell phone. The rates will almost always be much more favorable.
15. Large towel. This can be used as an extra pillow, a blanket, wrapping breakables, etc.
16. Duct tape. You can use this for everything from repairing your suitcase to sealing cold, drafty windows.

Now that you know how to pack everything you will need for your study abroad experience in one bag, your trip will be far more enjoyable than it would be if you were lugging around unnecessary personal belongings. Just think of all the extra room in your bag for souvenirs of your trip!