

Packing rule no. 46—you can't fold a St. Bernard

By Mary Jo Pitz!

To some people, traveling light means leaving the kitchen sink at home and only taking half of the winter coats even though the destination is the Caribbean.

As old and repetitive as it may sound, packing light is a prerequisite for traveling, unless you have a personal valet to accompany you. However, it seems that experience is the best—and in many cases the only teacher when it comes to cutting down the travel wardrobe to the bare minimum.

I should know because I am one of those poor unfortunates who had firsthand experience teach me the folly of my ways.

As I packed for my winter visit to France, I thought I was a step ahead of everyone else as I bravely eliminated six pair of jeans, two skirts, one of my three sets of day of the week underwear and four pair of shoes. My wardrobe for the entire 20-day journey fit snugly into my Samsonte, with overflow tucked away inside a small shoulder bag.

Puffing and heaving as I lugged by suitcase into the airport's baggage check, the thought crossed my mind that perhaps I had violated Traveler's Rule Number Five and overpacked. But small worry, I reasoned, since I wouldn't have to see that suitcase until I arrived in London.

Well, I made it to London, but as my half-hour wait at Heathrow Airport's baggage claim proved, my suitcase was of a different mind. Panic-stricken at the thought of having no luggage for almost three weeks, I quickly ordered a trace on my lost luggage and checked into my hotel, where I consoled myself by unpacking my shoulder bag.

I figured that the pair of pants, change of underwear and two extra shirts I had packed in the little suitcase would suffice for a day or two. As it turned out, that was all I had to wear for the whole trip.

As our travels unfolded, I began to realize what a stroke of good luck it was to have lost my suitcase. My friends puffed,

panted and groaned through London subways and French train stations, always with their heavy suitcases in tow. However, devoid of luggage, I was able to speed by everyone and spend my nights enjoying the city, instead of staying home nursing sore hands and wetted shoulders.

The few necessities in my shoulder bag, along with a crash course in the joys of hand laundering, were more than sufficient for my European visit. The only difficulty arose trying to find enough space to pack my souvenirs in.

According to a travel guide compiled by the Overseas Opportunity Center in the Nebraska Union, luggage should be lighter than light.

Before leaving, the traveler should pack his bags and walk a couple of blocks and up or down several flights of stairs. Then he should take out "whatever is not worth its weight in sore shoulders. Repeat this process until you are down to an irreducible minimum."

Gene Topp, a supervisor for United Airlines, said that he has seen many overladen passengers come through Lincoln Municipal Airport.

"I can't imagine how they could lift it (their luggage), much less carry it," Topp said.

He advised that any luggage that will fit under an airplane seat would be the best for a short-term vacation.

"Some of this soft-sided luggage doesn't wear well," Topp said, adding that although hard-sided luggage is heavier, it is the best protection against damaged bags.

Greg Smith, senior station agent at Frontier Airlines, said metal suitcases are the best way for travelers to go.

"You don't need that expensive luggage," Smith said. "The best I can think of are metal suitcases. They're not very aesthetic, but when you consider they're shoved in with about 80 to 100 pounds of mail on top, you don't care about looks."

Smith said the best packing guide is to limit everything to one suitcase, noting that he has seen too many overburdened



travelers.

According to Topp, even the most extravagant travelers are limited in how much baggage they can take along on a flight.

For domestic and overseas flights, airlines impose a 70-pound maximum for all checked baggage. Passengers are allowed to carry only one suitcase on board, he said. All extra baggage has a \$6 fee, and if the 70-pound limit is exceeded, travelers must ship luggage via freight.

As far as what to pack, experienced travelers recommend dark wash and wear clothes that will not easily show dirt. Make sure all clothes will match.

Footwear is important, as most trips include a lot of walking. Pack shoes that are sturdy, rubber-soled and well broken in.

A small toiletries bag with travel-size rations of the basic necessities will tuck away in a suitcase corner.

The rest of your packing depends on destination and length of stay. The rule of thumb is to pack everything you think you need, then take out half. After all, where else will you have room for souvenirs?

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