

# Packing Suggestions for International Moves

This is the list referenced in the book *Flourishing Across Cultures*.

This document is meant to help you consider what to pack, what to leave behind, and provide some helpful, experience-based packing tips and tricks. The underlying assumption is that you plan to live comfortably—not extravagantly nor in poverty. Taking only one bag or two bags sounds noble and adventurous, but many regret it.

If you are moving with a moving company and a container, you can ignore any limitations, but read on for additional ideas.

Any strongly recommended items are highlighted yellow.

Find out if items you like from your home country are available in your host country. If they are at relatively the same price, or are inexpensive items, consider buying them after you arrive rather than packing them.

A good rule of thumb for what to bring is “best, favorite, and necessary.” If not one of those, you might at least consider leaving it.

**NOTE:** Links to specific products are simply suggestions or examples based on personal experience.

## What to pack

### Highly recommended:

- Take a cell phone power bank per person
- Get a lightweight luggage scale
- Take enough cash for a return ticket and travel to the airport plus living expenses for a few days.

Category	Consider taking	Recommend leaving
<b>Electronics</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Noise-cancelling headphones (for language)</li><li>• Bluetooth speaker</li><li>• Computer/phone and charging cords</li><li>• Universal travel plug adapter</li><li>• HDMI adapter for TV</li><li>• Kindle or e-reader</li><li>• Small Alexa or Google assistant device</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Items with a different voltage that are not dual-voltage</li><li>• Large electronics</li></ul>
<b>Kitchen</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Favorite specialty items</li><li>• Favorite chef's knife</li><li>• Specialty coffee equipment</li><li>• Oven thermometer</li><li>• Specific items/spices not available in your location</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Not-favorite items</li><li>• Most pots &amp; pans</li><li>• Basic kitchen tools available locally</li></ul>

Category	Consider taking	Recommend leaving
<b>Bedroom &amp; linens</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Your favorite pillow</li> <li>If you love your bedding and it will fit, consider taking it</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Most bedding</li> </ul>
<b>Bathroom &amp; toiletries</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Basic toiletries for your first few weeks</li> <li>Specific toiletries important to you (hair products, skincare, makeup)</li> <li>Ask if a shower filter and refills are recommended</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Non-essential items</li> </ul>
<b>Health</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Take a basic first aid kit</li> <li>At least a 1 month supply of any required medications available locally</li> <li>At least 6 months' supply of any medications not available in your host country, or longer if there is infrequent travel on your team or proximate teams</li> <li>Common meds that aren't available</li> <li>Small specialty exercise equipment</li> <li>Glasses (2 pair) &amp; contacts with updated prescription</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Do not take prescription medications that do not have their prescriptions on them</li> </ul>
<b>Clothing &amp; shoes</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Culturally appropriate wardrobe</li> <li>Clothing that is not culturally appropriate to wear on visa runs</li> <li>Warm house slippers if floors are cold</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Excessive amounts of clothing or shoes</li> <li>Old, worn-out clothes</li> </ul>
<b>Misc.</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><a href="#">Luggage scale</a></li> <li>A few items that feel like home to you</li> <li>Packable items that can facilitate you doing a favorite hobby: guitar, a few favorite craft supplies, hiking boots, etc.</li> <li>Favorite journal &amp; a few extras</li> <li>Favorite bible &lt;if allowed in your host country&gt;</li> <li>A few favorite books</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>If it's not mentioned on this list and you're unsure, just ask.</li> <li>Not-favorite, non-essential, bulky items</li> <li>Too many books</li> </ul>

## How to Pack

These are ideas, tips, and tricks I have learned after traveling over two million miles and visiting a few dozen countries, plus what others have shared with me.

This is a lot of information. Read it through quickly and then take each piece when you are ready.

## General Notes

- Get a [luggage scale](#) well in advance, and know the airline limits to avoid unexpected fees. Make sure all luggage straps and locks are on your bag when you weigh it and keep the weight a pound under the maximum because airport scales may weigh differently. Some airlines are quite particular.
- Plan ahead. Try to pack over time. You do not want to run to the airport with no sleep because you were up the whole night before packing. You might think you do, but you do not.
- At least a week before you leave (two weeks is better), pack everything, including carry-on bag(s), to make sure you have space, can get last-minute items, and are within weight limits.
  - Allocate at least one full day to pack. It will take longer than you expect. You will need to redistribute weight.
  - Lock all of your bags but one or two (as few as possible).
  - Live out of your unlocked bag(s) and your carry-on bag(s) for your final days/weeks, so you can have all of your major packing out of the way and can spend your final days with friends and family.

## Carry-On Bag Contents

- Energy bars/snacks for unexpected delays
- A water bottle to fill after security (flights are dehydrating)
- Inexpensive, TSA-approved toiletry bags [like these](#) are helpful as you may not find Ziplock-style bags in your host country
- First aid kit including any meds you might need for the first two weeks
- Clothes for two days, including sleepwear
- For children: pack an age-appropriate goodie bag for each child for each flight
  - If children have their own carry-on bag, ensure it can strap to yours when they tire carrying it. Some ideas: [Carry-on hook](#) or [handle strap](#)
  - Inexpensive new toys, special snacks – the key is they don't get to open it until after you take off.
  - Ideas for young children: Band-Aids, things to draw or color, small pack of new crayons or colored pencils, books with reusable stickers, nothing loud or electronic without headphones your child is accustomed to wearing. (You do not want to pack a new set of headphones only to find out your child will not wear them or they do not work.)
- All of your electronics, jewelry, and cash. Do not put these in your checked luggage!
- Your luggage scale. You will need it up to the very end and it takes up little space.

## Checked Luggage Notes

- [Nesting suitcases](#) (consider an extra matching carry-on for a couple/family).
  - I use the linked cases, which have favorable reviews and a good weight-to-volume ratio.
  - If you buy luggage, avoid black as most bags on the belt are black. It is easier to find your luggage if it is all the same color or color family.
  - Why nesting? You may not have much storage space in your new place.
  - Good luggage is not cheap. Cheap luggage is not good.
- Duffle Bags are great for bedding, clothing, and anything vacuum-packed:
  - [Totes](#) or [heavy-duty duffle bags](#) are great for the initial move due to their wonderful weight to capacity ratio.
  - A light-weight, foldable [large duffle bag](#) and [small duffle bag](#) weigh very little and can save you if you get to the airport and have to repack, or travel and buy things that won't fit in your luggage. Always carry one when you travel.

- [Tubs](#) also work. Confirm that they comply with airline requirements
  - Use to pack things that are in boxes, as corners are more likely to tear a duffel bag.
  - Zip tie all four corners and then tape on 6-8 extra zip ties on the top. If customs looks in them, they can re-zip tie them to keep the lids on.
  - Write your name, personal e-mail address (not organization), and phone number in sharpie on the outside and inside.
  - They can storage in your new home or stack to take less space.
- Use [luggage straps](#), ideally 2 per bag (one top to bottom, and one around—may not work on tubs).
  - Helps with identification when collecting your luggage and protects against failed zippers/clasps.
  - Write your name, phone number, and e-mail address on them in case your primary nametags are lost.
  - Consider a bright color for easier identification.
- Use [TSA -approved locks \(alternative\)](#) for duffel bags or bags without built-in locks.
  - Use for your carry-on bag(s) as well, in case something happens and you have to check it/them.
- Luggage tags
  - [These](#) are easily recognizable and won't tear off.
  - Name, e-mail, and phone only (with country code)
- Budget for extra checked bag(s) if needed and allowed .

## Packing

- Use [vacuum bags](#) and 2-3 gallon Ziplock-style bags
  - These keep your things dry in case your bag is sitting on the tarmac in a downpour. Opening a bag with moist, smelly items, some ruined, is not a nice way to start your life overseas.
  - If your zipper or clasp fails, these also avoid things spilling out on the conveyor belt.
  - You will likely use more than you think you will need, so leave time to get extras.
  - Consider 1-2 extra-large vacuum bags for comforters, bedspreads, and pillows only.
  - Put everything else in medium and large bags (the small are not that useful).
  - Leave a little air so they aren't rock hard. This makes them easier to pack.
- Mix clothes in different checked bags
  - If one bag is lost you are not completely without clothing.
  - If traveling as a couple or family, put sets of clothes for each person in each checked bag.
- Document what is in each bag. If one is lost or delayed, you know what you are missing.
- Liquids - Put them in a sealed, quart-sized zip-lock freezer bag or other clear [TSA-approved plastic bag](#)
  - Plastic to keep leaks off of everything else in your bag.
  - Liquids—unscrew the tops and put plastic wrap or a piece of plastic grocery sack over the mouth, then screw the lid back on (if the container does not already have a separate seal)
  - For glass bottles or other glass items, place in a plastic bag and then wrap in socks or T-shirts
    - Could also use bubble wrap but it takes up space you may not have
- Pack special notes or cards from people (helps with homesickness).
  - Put them in a zip-lock bag to keep from getting damaged if something leaks.
- Pack a good first aid kit for your home, and a smaller one for your carry-on bag.
- Be prepared to pay for extra checked bags if your team allows

## Digital

- Scan or photograph medical records, including all prescriptions, home-country doctor info, prescriptions, eyeglass prescriptions, etc. in a Google doc or other on-line source.

- Make a document for someone in your home country with all financial records (accounts, wills, financial/medical power of attorney, etc.).
  - Do NOT take your original wills with you. These need to be left with the executor.
  - Leave the ORIGINAL power of attorney, durable power of attorney, and medical power of attorney with the person who has the delegation. Take a copy with you (physical and electronic)
- Backup your computer and phones – get remote backup software like [SOS-online](#) or [Backblaze](#)
  - Do a full backup at least a week before you leave (the first one can take a long time), then set it to backup automatically. Do another backup just before you leave.
- Take pictures of things that are special that you cannot or do not want to take.
  - E.g., paintings, family photos, special Christmas ornaments, other fragile décor – and then have someone store these for you. Sometimes it is nice to have the reminder.
- If you have art you love, consider having it professionally digitized, then print it (watercolor on watercolor paper, oils on canvas) and pack in a mailing tube to have framed when you arrive.
- Consider a USB-powered (to adjust for voltage) electronic picture frame. (Make sure the tube will fit in your suitcase!)
- **Do not bring** anything irreplaceable. If you do, make a list so you remember to grab it if you have to quickly evacuate. Make sure they are small items that are easily packed.