

Now that some airlines are charging extra for luggage, fight back by lightening your load and don't check anything. Of course, there are occasions when dragging along heavy bags is necessary. You do it usually just because you've always done it for those long overseas journeys, such as cruises and group excursions. However, if you really want to be smart, most of those trips don't require checking luggage.

My spouse and I retired nearly 20 years ago, and since then we've flown all over the world, sailed on many cruises and joined at least a dozen group excursions. We've also back-packed independently throughout Europe by train, taxi and bus for two weeks or more.



Would you believe, except during the first retirement years when we took along everything but the kitchen sink, we wised up and never, ever checked our bags since. And maybe the most important benefit has been that we've never lost anything, nor had to wait at airport merry-go-rounds for hours after each flight hoping nothing was missing. Today's average of lost and pilfered checked luggage is from five to 12 percent per flight, depending on airport and nation location. You can avoid those troubles by traveling light.

1. Put all those big leather suitcases away and buy wheeled bags made of flexible fabrics up to the size limit for carry-ons. Be sure they have extra outside, zipper-closing pockets for quick access to documents, as well as see-through webbing on the inside lid for items you use frequently and need to grab quickly. This should take care of all your needs for up to a three-week trip, if you don't expect to attend any dress-up events. If you need it, take along another bag small enough to go under your airline seat, preferably a small backpack with over-the-shoulder straps.

2. The day before departure, lay out the clothing, footwear, hygienics and other stuff you feel is absolutely necessary. Put it in nice neat piles. Then go through and take away 25 percent or more. Yes, leave a quarter of the stuff behind. We guarantee you won't regret it, and the truly

necessary stuff should fit nicely into your carry-ons. If you've mistakenly left out any vital items, such as over-the-counter medications, you can always buy them at airport and shops elsewhere.

4. For trips of longer than two or three days, take as many washable items as possible, including sweaters, jackets and other outerwear. Then, every night in the hotel or aboard ship, take some items you've used that day into the shower with you. Pat dry thoroughly with your bath towel and hang all night as close to the room heat source as possible.

5. One of our favorite tricks is to take along worn-out clothing that will never be needed again. We often joke that underwear, shirts, socks, shoes and other old items that have given years of faithful service deserve to go on one last vacation with us. Seriously, after you leave all the worn stuff behind, you'll have a much lighter load on your homeward trip, or more room in your bags for those useless souvenir doodads you foolishly purchased.