

The Ultimate Packing Cheat Sheet

A CARRY-ON CAPSULE WARDROBE, THE COMPLETE CHECKLIST, LAYERING MADE SIMPLE, AND WHAT TO WEAR BY SEASON — ONE PAGE YOU'LL USE ON EVERY TRIP.

Curated by Clara Bennett, Lead Editor · whattopack.net

01 The travel capsule wardrobe

[Full guide →](#)

A travel capsule is a curated 12-15 piece collection where every top matches every bottom, built here on the proven 54321 formula so a few items mix into roughly 20 outfits within a carry-on.

TOPS

- 5 mix-and-match tops (thin high-quality knits + crisp shirts that layer)
- Stick to a single base color like navy or black with 2-3 accent colors

LAYERS

- 2 outer layers for warmth without bulk
- 1 trench coat or packable down vest for weather protection

ACCESSORIES

- 1 large silk or wool scarf (head covering, shoulder wrap, or airplane pillow)
- 1 versatile belt or high-quality watch to elevate a daytime look

BOTTOMS

- 4 bottoms total (skip heavy denim jeans — slow to dry, bulky)
- 1 pair of dark chinos for restaurants and dressier days
- 1 simple black dress that works dressed up or down

SHOES (WEAR THE BULKIEST PAIR ON THE PLANE)

- 1 pair of walking sneakers (\$80-\$150, good for 20,000 steps a day)
- 1 pair of versatile boots or flats
- 1 active shoe

02 The complete packing checklist

[Full guide →](#)

A categorized, carry-light checklist drawn from our ultimate travel packing guide, covering everything from clothing to documents so you never forget an essential.

CLOTHING

- ☐ Lightweight waterproof jacket for unexpected rain
- ☐ Comfortable walking shoes broken in before the trip
- ☐ One slightly dressier pair of shoes
- ☐ Thin thermal base layers instead of bulky sweaters
- ☐ One pair of quick-drying jeans or light bottoms
- ☐ A capsule wardrobe of versatile, mix-and-match tops

TECH

- ☐ Universal travel power adapter with multiple USB ports
- ☐ Portable power bank (at least 10000mAh)
- ☐ Charging cable for your phone
- ☐ Noise-canceling headphones for long journeys
- ☐ E-reader in place of physical books

EXTRAS

- ☐ Reusable water bottle (empty through security)
- ☐ Eye mask and earplugs for in-flight rest
- ☐ A pen for filling out customs forms
- ☐ Protein bars or snacks for unexpected delays
- ☐ A small laundry kit for spills on the go

TOILETRIES & HEALTH

- ☐ Compact first aid kit with bandages and antiseptic
- ☐ Prescription medications in original labeled containers
- ☐ Broad-spectrum sunscreen (at least SPF 30)
- ☐ Hand sanitizer with 60%+ alcohol
- ☐ Daily probiotics and electrolyte powder packets
- ☐ Sanitizing wipes for high-touch surfaces

DOCUMENTS & MONEY

- ☐ Passport in an RFID-blocking pouch
- ☐ Printed copies of travel insurance documents
- ☐ Secondary ID and boarding pass in an accessible pocket
- ☐ A small amount of local currency for cash-only cafes
- ☐ Printed copy of your first night's hotel address

03 How to layer

[Full guide →](#)

The classic three-layer travel system moves moisture off your skin, traps warm air, and blocks wind and rain so you can adapt to a 20-degree swing without going back to your hotel.

BASE LAYER

- Sits directly against your skin and wicks sweat away before it turns cold and clammy, regulating body temperature all day.
- Thin merino wool tee that fits snugly against the skin.
- Silk thermal underwear for ultra-minimalist, space-saving packing.

OUTER LAYER

- Acts as a windproof, water-resistant shell that blocks wind and rain while staying breathable.
- Breathable, waterproof jacket with underarm vents and an adjustable hood.
- Pocketable parka that folds into its own pocket for sudden showers.

MID LAYER

- Traps the heat your body generates in small air pockets to provide insulation without the bulk.
- Lightweight fleece or a thin wool cardigan.
- Packable down vest such as the Uniqlo Ultra Light Down.

Match your fabrics, layers, and colors to each season to stay comfortable and look polished all year round.

SPRING

- Layer strategically with breathable fabrics so you can adjust as mornings go from chilly to warm afternoons.
- Use a light trench coat or denim jacket as your outer shell for fluctuating conditions.
- Choose footwear that handles light rain but stays lighter than winter boots: loafers, leather sneakers, or waterproof ankle boots.
- Pick soft hues like mint green, lavender, and sky blue paired with neutral bases like beige or light gray.

AUTUMN

- Transition to richer textures and heavier weights like corduroy, suede, and light wool blends.
- Lean into jewel tones such as emerald green, burgundy, and deep sapphire.
- Apply the 'Third Piece' rule: add a vest, blazer, or cardigan over a top and bottom for a finished, warmer look that's easy to remove.
- Switch to sturdier footwear like Chelsea boots or brogues, paired with thicker socks to extend lighter trousers into late fall.

SUMMER

- Favor natural fibers like linen and silk over synthetics: they let air circulate and can lower your body temperature through evaporation.
- Wear loose silhouettes such as wide-leg trousers and breezy midi dresses to keep cool instead of tight-fitting garments.
- Add sun protection with tightly woven, light-colored fabrics, a wide-brimmed hat, and UPF-rated clothing for long hours outdoors.
- Pack a gauzy oversized button-down or silk scarf for cooler coastal evenings without adding weight.

WINTER

- Layer technically: start with a merino wool or silk base layer to keep skin dry and warm without bulk.
- Build a middle layer for insulation using fleece or down-filled vests, topped by a heavy wool overcoat or technical parka.
- Protect your extremities with a cashmere scarf, lined leather gloves, and a wool beanie to prevent heat loss.
- Avoid too many tight layers: leave a small 'air gap' between layers so warm air can form your best insulation.

05 Carry-on essentials

Your personal item is your in-flight survival kit, so pack the high-use must-haves up top and respect the liquids rules before you reach security.

IN YOUR PERSONAL ITEM

- ☐ Passport (plus printed copies) and essential medications
- ☐ Universal travel power adapter with multiple USB ports
- ☐ Portable power bank with fast-charging cables for electronics
- ☐ Phone, headphones (noise-canceling) and snacks in an accessible top pocket
- ☐ One change of clothes in case your main bag is delayed
- ☐ Sleep kit: earplugs, eye mask and a breathable neck pillow
- ☐ Digital tablet pre-loaded with movies or offline books
- ☐ Light snacks like protein bars or unsalted nuts
- ☐ Sanitizing wipes for tray tables and armrest surfaces

LIQUIDS & RULES

- ☐ Follow the TSA 3-1-1 rule for liquids in your carry-on
- ☐ Swap full-sized toiletries for travel-sized versions or solid alternatives
- ☐ Pack solid toiletries like shampoo bars to save liquid space
- ☐ Use a dedicated toiletry bag to clear security checkpoints quickly
- ☐ Bring a collapsible water bottle and fill it up after you pass through security

This is the short version. What to Pack has month-by-month “what to wear” guides and packing lists for cities across Europe — refreshed for 2026.

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