



PACK MAN

Battle of the sexes in a suitcase.

Recently, Rob and I were packing for a five-day getaway. Already daydreaming about teeing-off and sipping poolside cocktails, Rob had his suitcase zipped and ready to go in twenty minutes while I was still choosing sarongs (they're light, maybe take all four) and obsessing about which swimsuits to bring (they're small, better pack one for each day). About an hour passed; he walked into the bedroom. "Go with the red dress," he said while stepping around landmines (read: piles of my clothes). "You've got to admit that men are much better packers," he added, tripping over the travel steamer.

Not ready to concede, I choose to argue. "I'm a great packer. Look how I fold my lightweight cashmere cardigans in tissue paper so they won't get wrinkled. Look how I can masterfully sit on my suitcase and close it" (although the zipper seems to be stuck and it's only a quarter way around).

"It's overstuffed," he observes. "No, I just need to shift my weight," I reply, breaking a freshly manicured nail. "And notice how deft I've become at asking for travel samples of moisturizers and other toiletries so I can have room for more shoes."

"Hmm: five pairs of black pants?" Rob catches a glimpse while I'm shifting things around in order to get the suitcase to close. "Wouldn't it be more rational to bring just one pair of black pants and wear them twice?" Rational? Twice? These are not words in a women's travel vocabulary.

But for the relationship's sake, I admit that men might in fact be more adept at traveling light. While most of them have enough metaphorical baggage to fill up five overhead compartments, they never stuff anything too heavy into their Tumi cases.

"Maybe it dates back to pre-historic times," Rob theorizes. "Me man, me hunt, me carry, and me don't want to schlep more than I actually need."

So I shoot back, "Me shop, me buy, me have no idea what I'll be in the mood to wear tonight, let alone five days from now..."

"It boils down to the simple fact that men are more logical and women more emotional," he responds. I let this one slide because when it comes to packing, it rings true.

Maybe it's in their genes or the fact that men don't think in terms of skinny-day jeans, ate-too-much-the-night-before-

jeans or these-give-me-a-better-butt jeans (all of which, by the way, are folded into my suitcase).

My ex-boyfriend (pre-Rob) was a magician of a packer. Packing for a business trip, I'd walk out of the room for a glass of water and come back to find that any sign of clothes had magically disappeared into his small carry-on. He also could get dressed and out the door quicker than anyone I'd ever known. (Although I soon realized that his swift exit routine spoke more to his commitment issues than to his clear sense of style...)

Upon questioning some experts about packing tips for men, they shared some of their own stories, (which made me feel better about my overstuffed suitcase, weighty carry-on and the fact that I snuck some additional items into Rob's luggage...)

"I'm in the fashion business so I might pack a bit more than other guys but it's nothing compared to my wife who needs a Sherpa to carry her luggage," Mario Bisio (owner of Mario's in Portland and Seattle) confides. "She takes about six wardrobe changes per day.

"Our stores sell both men's and women's so I've noticed the differences. Women ponder 'what if none of my outfits match the mood I'll be in when I get there.' Men think more in terms of 'how many days will I be there and what do I need to wear.'"

John Braeger of Garys in Newport Beach agrees. "My wife carries an entire separate bag just for shoes. And she's very protective of them which means they must travel with her on the plane, which in turn means that I have to pack lighter because I'm carrying a bag of shoes in addition to my own luggage."

"Women don't like to wear things twice in a short period of time. We also change our minds. And we don't want to be stuck wearing the sophisticated dress if we're feeling more flirtatious," explains Nicole Allowitz, who along with partner Daniel Hernandez styles the Access Hollywood team (Billy Bush, William Potts, Sean Robinson and Nancy O'Dell) for their nightly TV show, red carpet events and appearances. "I'm in the middle of packing for a vacation to Hawaii and I've basically packed everything but the kitchen utensils. I'm also the one who has to pay the overweight luggage fee every time I travel. Did you ever see a guy checking in and having to fork over fifty dollars because he packed too many shoes?"

So how to look stylish and pulled together while travelling? Following a template of a five to seven day business trip and a five to seven day tropical vacation, Bisio, Braeger, Allowitz and Hernandez offered the following tips.

For a five to seven day business trip:

-Two suits ("One navy and one grey," advises Bisio. "If you stick to a color palette then you can coordinate and interchange the shirts and accessories.")

-A shirt and tie for every day of the trip. ("You might not wear a tie everyday, depending on your profession but they are small

and it's good to have options here," says Braeger.)

-Shirts are easiest if they are white or blue, which go with everything. ("But you can throw in a black shirt for a casual evening," says Hernandez)

-One sportcoat.

-One extra pair of pants that will work with either suit jacket or sportcoat and one pair of "nice" jeans. (For casual dinners, you can mix the sportcoat and dress shirt with the jeans or just wear the shirt with the jeans.)

-One pair of dress shoes, one pair of casual loafers ("But these days, the great rubber sole loafer looks casually chic with a suit so you need only those," says Bisio.)

-One outfit for working out, including footwear.

-The necessities, (which hopefully every guy knows how much to pack). And one small case for toiletries ("while we women have six" remarks Allowitz.)

Hernandez also mentions a "cool t-shirt, which doesn't take up much space but can also work under a jacket for more casual times during the trip." Adds Braeger, "weather dictates what coat you'll be wearing; wear it on the plane." Bisio notes that "you might want to bring a packable raincoat."

For a five to seven day vacation in a warm climate:

-Two swimsuits at most.

-Two pairs of shorts.

-One pair of "nice" jeans.

-One pair of khakis or linen pants. (Don't worry if they get wrinkled," says Bisio.)

-One lightweight sportcoat for casual dinners.

-One outfit for working out.

-One pair casual loafers, one pair sandals or flip-flops, one pair tennis or work-out shoes.

-Polo and T-shirts ("here you can pack extra because they are lightweight and can fit into nooks and crannies of your suitcase," says Bisio)

Other general tips:

- "If it's a four or five star hotel, they will have a dry cleaning or pressing service so you can re-wear your suits," says Hernandez. "Roll your T-shirts and most of your vacation wear."

- "Packing in plastic with tissue paper will cut down on wrinkle problems," adds Allowitz,

- "For business trips, turn your jackets inside out and pop out the sleeves if you're going to fold your suit jacket," suggests Bisio.

- "Pants go on the bottom of the suitcase; the next layer will be T-shirts, socks, workout wear. Try to use these to level off for the next layer, which will be your suit jackets and sportcoat. Folded shirts should always be packed last."

- "Everything should be on wheels, particularly if you're traveling with your wife or significant other," adds Bisio. Unless of course you want to hire the Sherpa. ●