

PACKING

I think everyone has his or her own “almost perfect” system of what we “must” pack. And every packing suggestion article I’ve ever read starts out with this same phrase...Pack Light! There, I said it. I’ve also heard a number of times that one should lay out everything you plan on wearing for your trip on your bed; then, pack half and put the rest away! My suggestion is to limit your baggage to what you can carry 2 blocks without any help. That will help us manage our own bags at airports, through customs, on trains, and in and out of vans, etc. For me that means a daypack and a duffel. Even though international baggage limitations are 2 bags and a carry-on, I’d limit it to one checked bag and a “reasonably-sized” carry-on (meaning not one of those monster bags that come rolling down the aisle of the plane to looks of horror from seated passengers who pray that those things aren’t smooshed into the compartment directly above their head).

Luggage

I learned the hard way that EVERYONE has a black, soft-sided duffel. Trying to find my bag in the wall of hundreds of black bags “lost” in the Nairobi airport was depressing. Some type of identifying mark on your luggage is important. Sewed-on patches, liberal use of outrageously-colored tape or yarn, something...

Daypacks and fanny packs are handy for the airplane, taking to the work site, and shopping in town. Keep all important paperwork, medication, irreplaceable items, and a change of clothes in your carry on. Seldom does a Habitat group arrive at their destination with all luggage in tow. Pack what you will need for the entire air flight in your carry-on so you can check your luggage through to your final destination.

My personal preference is to use a daypack instead of a fanny pack. It’s big enough to use as a carry-on, as well as at the worksite or in town. It’s also large enough to hold personal items, some snacks, some clothes in case the weather should change, and some of my tools.

Clothing

As far as clothes go, you really don’t need too much. Really. Plan to wash some of your clothes or have some of your clothes washed every few days.

NOTE: In many developing countries, dryers are energy-hog luxuries. While you will likely want to hand wash some things in a sink or tub, remember that they’ll have to be dried on a line. And if that line is in your room, count on cotton garments taking 2-3 days to dry...

There are two extremes to think about when packing for a Habitat trip -- work clothes and nice clothes. Most of your stuff will be in-between, but perhaps a simple shirt will transform those casual togs into something suitable for church or a nice restaurant. Think about layering, and remember that a large chunk of our time will be spent at the worksite, so bring some things (shirts, shorts, pants) that you don’t mind ruining with dirt, concrete, paint, etc. In fact, I consider my work clothes to be something that I will get so dirty I’ll just leave them there.

Please note that these are suggestions. If you brought everything on this list, it would be too much!

The Basics

Starting from the top, I like to take:

- hat/cap for sun protection and rain protection (I like to bring a backup)
- lightweight rain coat/windbreaker
- fleece vest, pullover, or sweater
- long-sleeve insulating undershirt (1)
- short sleeve semi-dressy shirts (2)
- long sleeve semi-dressy shirt (1)
- t-shirts (3)
- shorts (2, 1 used as a swimsuit)
- pants or jeans (1)
- undershorts (3)
- something (PJ's) to sleep in
- warm-up/track suit (Good for all purpose)
- socks (5) – I'm still searching for the perfect socks...socks that are comfortable, tough, and dry quickly. It's that last qualification that I'm having trouble with. Socks seem to take about 4 days to dry after you wash them, I'll be going back to wool socks with sockliners for the next trip. The research continues...
- hiking boots (not the super-beefy kind, just something with a strong toebox and stiff sole)
- running shoes – I like taking trail running shoes. They work fine on the roads (whether running or walking) and are a bit more stable on rough surfaces and trails. They also work as dress-up shoes in a pinch.
- Sandals (Texas or something similar)
- I also bring a pair convertible shorts/pants as work clothes (along with a t-shirt)

I generally try to avoid wearing anything with a large logo on it when overseas, though I'm finding it increasingly difficult to find "generic-looking" clothes for travel. Another thing to consider is that a lot of "travel clothing" really makes the traveler stick out like a sore thumb. The best way of not drawing attention to yourself is to wear what you normally wear, with a couple of small modifications.

Toiletries:

- Don't plan on buying these items in Europe. You'll find we will not always be in easy reach of convenience stores, the brands are different, the packages may be in a foreign language and the prices are often higher. Here are some things to think about taking:
 - Soap
 - Shampoo
 - Deodorant
 - Dental Care
 - Personal cosmetics and toiletry items
 - Tissues
 - Towel and/or facecloth (even though they're often provided, this is one luxury I allow myself – in Eastern Europe the towels are amazingly thin and seem to actually repel water). I've tried some of those small, packable towels – the newer ones seem to work.
 - Toilet Paper. Just a little emergency stash in case what is provided in-country is not quite to your liking.

Personal items/Medications (your mileage will vary...)

- Prescription medication. Pack it in the bottle you get from the pharmacy (keeps it clear at customs and so you don't get confused yourself).
- Over the counter drugs. If you are susceptible to headaches or cold symptoms or upset stomach, it might be a good idea to pack some pain reliever, cold remedy, and Pepto Bismol.
- A written copy of your prescription in case you lose the medication and need a refill
- First Aid supplies; sterile pads, antiseptic solutions, instant cold compresses--what you want to carry in addition to the team first aid kit I will have for the group
- Insect repellent
- Antibacterial wet wipes (useful for many things)
- Sunscreen, chapstick, lotion
- Prescription eyeglasses, contact lenses and solutions for contact lenses
- Watch (a cheap one that can double as an alarm clock...or bring an alarm clock)
- Sunglasses
- Small calculator for money conversions

Miscellaneous Items to Consider (just consider...)

- Inflatable travel pillow (The U-shape kind helps on long flights and train rides)
- Bandanas or scarves for kerchiefs, soaking and keeping around your neck, washcloths, etc.
- Camping knife/scissors/gadget (if you make the mistake of asking me about my Swiss Army knife, you'll get a full 30 minute demonstration of the 72 gadgets contained)
- Earplugs for the plane or for your roommate...
- Flashlight/headlamp/torch & extra batteries
- 1 or 2 plastic water bottles for individual use (must be water tight)
- Family photos to show new friends
- Journal and writing supplies
- Small notebook, address labels, or business cards (for giving out your address)
- travel guides to read & share, paperbacks to read, share, & leave behind
- Games, cards, puzzles, for airport and waiting time
- Favorite snacks, tea bags, cocoa mix, portable mug
- Plastic bags for dirty laundry, packing shoes, etc.
- Extra duffel bag for bringing home gifts, etc.
- A small bottle of Woolite will help when washing out your shirts, socks and underwear in a hotel bathroom. Also bring a length of line to use as a clothesline.
- Camera. If you're a camera buff, bring what you know you need. If you're simply looking to take some nice shots, try the small, autofocus cameras. Best is one with the flash that can be turned off. Most museums and churches do not allow flash photography. Also remember to bring extra batteries.
- Duct Tape. Hey, I'm a guy. Duct tape goes with me everywhere.
- Film. It is more expensive in Europe. Bring all you need from home.

Tools

If possible, bring basic tools:

- hammer
- nail apron or not-too-bulky toolbelt

- screwdrivers
- tape measure (for Europe, remember it should measure metric units)
- utility knife
- putty knife
- Square or triangle
- Pliers
- Small pry bar
- work gloves (I like leather)

Paperwork and Money

- A driver's license or other photo (school or driver's license) ID (in addition to your passport).
- A safe wallet, purse or pouch to carry your money, ID, credit card (always think about pickpockets)
- Your passport. Carry it with you in a safe pocket/pouch at all times
- A photocopy of your passport. Keep this in your suitcase. Also send me a copy.
- "Money" in the form of ATM card, travelers cheques and a credit card (I generally take \$100 per week for personal things. That seems about right for gifts, mad-money, etc.)
- 2 extra passport photos, for emergency passport replacement
- Emergency contact phone and FAX numbers of family/friends at home
- Voltage adapter. Generally not needed unless you simply can't live without that hair dryer, curling iron, etc. But something to think about. Plug-ins in Europe are different! For items that can handle the voltage (digital cameras and such), a simple adapter plug is all that's needed. Cluj uses 2 prong circular plugs.

Gifts, etc.

Habitat discourages gift giving for the sake of gift giving. We're trying to help new homeowners build self reliance. On the other hand, items that can be shared and left behind are fine in that those items help make a connection. So if you bring something for kids, bring something that you can play with the kids and then make those kids stewards of the items. If you do have items you want to leave behind, we can collect them and give them to the Habitat affiliate who will then decide how to get the items to the most deserving or needing families.

Personal audio – although I would have a hard time existing without my music, it's best to show a little restraint when it comes to being out in public with one's iPod dangling from the ears. If you think about it, such a device would be equivalent to about several months pay for those fortunate enough to have a good-paying job. We don't want to throw our "wealth" in anyone's face.