

How to look fashionable while traveling on a budget

By Anna Marden | GLOBE CORRESPONDENT MAY 31, 2012

A cashier at the Urban Renewals thrift store in Allston turned me away, because I had missed the “cash only” sign on the way in. I put my items on hold and trekked several blocks to find a Bank of America (I refuse to pay ATM fees). I was on a tight budget, determined not to spend a penny more than necessary. I’ve just graduated and I’m about to travel Europe for seven weeks.

It’s that time of year: Students, recent grads, and other travelers are getting ready to embark on summer trips abroad. Here’s my story of packing on a budget along with some tips, if you want to follow my example. My packing mantra: Be fashionable, be practical, and spend as little money as possible.



STEVE COLE IMAGES/ISTOCK

I was at Urban Renewals (122 Brighton Ave., Allston, www.familythrift.com) because I needed to buy modest, stylish, and lightweight outfits for visiting mosques in Istanbul. I owned no maxi skirts or long-sleeved button-downs prior to this shopping trip. My rule while thrifting: Never spend more than \$5 on anything, unless it’s awesome and fits perfectly. I bought a maxi dress, maxi skirt, L.L. Bean button-down, and 100 percent silk blouse, all for less than \$20. For any summer vacation, thrift shops are great for finding light, inexpensive clothes. Look for a secondhand sarong, too, because it folds up really small and can double as a beach towel. One thing you shouldn’t buy at a thrift store is a suitcase, unless you want to risk getting bedbugs.

Speaking of suitcases, my old carry-on lost a wheel over spring break, so I was in the market for a new one. Carry-on bags are ideal for traveling, because they can help you avoid checked bag fees. I gave myself a \$40 limit for a bag. As per advice of my grandma, I went to T.J. Maxx (www.tjmaxx.com, locations around Boston). After finding nothing in my price range in the luggage department, I spotted a display of hideous, brightly colored rolling suitcases next to the shoes. A smallish, hard-shell, rolling suitcase, in sea-foam green, covered with hot pink hearts, was on sale for \$39. After examining the bag for a few moments, I decided it's so ugly it's kind of cute. I bought it. At least it won't get mixed-up with someone else's.

In order to save space in my little suitcase, I ordered some vacuum seal garment bags on Amazon.com for \$5, plus \$3.95 shipping. Amazon.com is my favorite site for cheap travel necessities. I also used it to find a universal power converter (\$9.99) and an extra rechargeable battery for my camera (\$3.65). I thought about buying a European phone on Amazon, but decided to borrow one from a friend instead.

That goes for everything: Before buying travel supplies, check with friends and family to see if you can take something on loan. Another quick tip: Get a cheap set of travel containers at a dollar store to fill with your own shampoo, lotion, and sunscreen. Buying mini tubes of whatever at the drugstore is insanely expensive. That said, since my trip is longer than two weeks, I'll need to buy some toiletries when I get there.

Now for the shoe issue: I've been warned not to pack more than two pairs of shoes. Luckily, I already have a good pair of closed-toe walking shoes, but I needed a pair of comfortable sandals that would double as dress shoes. Again, I gave myself a \$40 budget. I always start at Zappos.com. I know online shoe shopping is a little risky, but Zappos has free shipping and returns. Plus, every shoe style has a video showing what they actually look like on someone's feet.

I found a great pair of sandals called Katerina, by Soft Styles. They're strappy, lightweight, with good arches, and nothing between the toes. Unfortunately, they were \$5 over budget and my color/size combination was sold out. I checked Shoes.com, Endless.com, 6pm.com and some other go-to online shoe stores for similar styles without success. Finally, I did a quick search on eBay.com, and there they were — the Katerinas — brand new, in black, for just \$29.99 plus \$6.99 shipping. They arrived at my door within a week. Not only do they fit perfectly, but they're just as comfortable as I imagined. I'm ready to go.

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