

10 Things to Pack for a Long-Term Mission Trip

This is an article originally published on the blog of minimalist traveler writer, Genevieve Parker Hill, in 2014.¹

Thomaida is a writer, blog reader, and traveler whom I met when she came to Palestine as part of a long-term volunteering/mission trip. Enjoy. - Genevieve

Type of Trip

Extended Volunteer/Mission Trip/
Pilgrimage a.k.a. Around-the-World-
to-Help-Children

Length of Trip

Indefinite

Destinations

India, the Middle East, Western
Europe

Overview

In November 2013, I set off for a trip to volunteer with Orthodox Christian ministries in various places, beginning with an orphanage outside of Kolkata, India and continuing to a school in the West Bank, Palestine. While I packed with the intention of continuing to volunteer after these first two assignments, instead I returned to the United States via a 5-week tour of France, Germany & England, to seize a job opportunity in line with the same goals and mission that inspired me to take this journey.

1. Two Kinds

Rick Steves says that there are two kinds of travelers: those who packed light and those who wish they had. I agree and I'm still in the second camp. As much as I wish that I could throw everything on my back and jump onto a moving train, that's not the kind of trip I planned and let's face it, that's not the kind of traveler I am. So, yes, **PACK AS LIGHT AS YOU CAN.** Then read on to learn why I'm still glad I brought more than I wanted to.

2. Tell Your Story

I packed a letter-size laminated US/World map and an inexpensive, 20-pg photo album with pictures of friends, family members and everyday happenings in my life at home. These are two tools that helped me to share about my life and relate with new friends, in many cases across language barriers. Alternatively, you might consider making a little slide show to flip through on whatever electronic device you bring.

3. Compartmentalize

I'm a huge fan of packing sacks, regardless of brand. They help me to stay organized even after I settle into a location. The other thing I did was to create designated Ziploc bags for my office, first aid & medications and electronic accessories. For example,

the "Office" bag held pen refills, a permanent marker, binder clips, a highlighter, sticky tack, post-its, and a glue stick. The "First Aid" bag had Band-aids, anti-diarrhea medication, vitamin-C packets, hydrocortizone cream and so on. Another Ziploc held chargers, plug converters, cords, and extra batteries. This way, even on the road, everything had a place. I also packed a few extra Ziplocs in varying sizes.

4. Fashion vs. Function

Knowing that my travel destinations could involve the beach, a formal event or a professional work setting, I had to plan for variety, but focus my packing on the known activities: playing with children and going to church. Long skirts were a must for the conservative cultures and monastic environments that I intended to be a part of, so I brought three. Additional favorites were: a merino wool pullover, a cream-colored long-sleeve shirt with some lace detail to help dress up some outfits, a lightweight henley with adjustable sleeve-length, black leggings, and a pair of comfortable, sturdy mary-jane style Privos. A daily moisturizer with SPF was the MVP

¹ Part 1 - <http://genevieveparkerhill.com/blog/2014/09/02/top-5-packing-tips-for-a-long-term-mission-trip>, and Part 2 - <http://genevieveparkerhill.com/blog/2014/11/04/5-more-packing-tips-from-a-long-term-missionary>. Retrieved February 24, 2021

of my cosmetics, but I also used a little makeup, sparkly hair accessories and earrings for special occasions.

5. Technology on the Road

I didn't want to lug my laptop around the world--what a hassle! As a writer, however, it's the one tool I used every day. I brought along an extra hard drive for biweekly backups and packed it in a separate bag from the laptop in case of theft. In addition to writing a blog, editing photos and keeping up with my family and friends via Skype, I used the laptop extensively in each volunteer position. I purchased a new camera for the trip because documenting my experiences for readers at home was a priority. My older point & shoot camera came along as backup for excursions involving sand, water or questionable security.

Another gadget I like for journeys big and small is the humble headlamp. It's great for reading in bed after you've crawled under the mosquito net for the night.

6. Guidebooks

During trip prep, I love reading guidebooks for historical and cultural insight, maps, and background info about top sites. I thought I would easily find guides as I went, but this wasn't the case. Airport bookstores or large, chain bookstores (where you could find them) were the most reliable places to find guides.

7. Bearing Gifts

Previous volunteers clued me in to what gifts I could bring for the orphanage at my first destination, such as mosquito nets, coloring books and printer ink cartridges. You may also consider some easy-to-pack items unique to your home region. For friends at my second destination,

I purchased gifts in India. For hosts at my third destination, I brought something from Turkey and so on.

8. Exercise

I walked a lot and used the stairs more, but let's face it, I wasn't active in the same ways that I am at home. I packed two exercise bands and although I didn't do as many bicep curls as I planned, I was thankful for my occasional mini-workouts.

9. Final Preparations

In the 10 days between my last day of work and take-off for my trip, here's what I did: took a private 1-hour camera lesson, picked up leather inserts to boost the support in my well-worn walking shoes, purchased an international driving permit at AAA, distributed copies of my itinerary, financial info and contact information to trusted friends, drafted a power of attorney, requested a PIN code for my credit card and alerted them of my travel plans, renewed my drivers' license (which was due to expire while I was gone), and purchased travel insurance.

10. Teachable Moments

Although I made a few "mistakes" in my packing, I don't regret anything because it all worked together to make a memorable trip.

- **Too many shoes?** I packed 4 pairs of shoes + flip flops, which seems like a lot for a light packer. I was glad to have extra shoes after I accidentally left my trusted walking shoes on a bus.
- **Consider a Global SIM.** I found out that in some countries it takes 3 or more days to activate a local SIM card. I think I should have

had my phone unlocked and purchased a global SIM (from companies such as gosim.com or worldsim.com) so that I had an emergency communication option available at all times. I ended up purchasing a phone in India and local SIM cards as I went. Now I have a phone loaded with fun Indian ringtones that I can use anywhere.

- **Bring a nit comb** and favorite lice treatment if you're going to be working with children. I didn't wear my hair back, gave lots of hugs and got lice. What's the positive side? I bonded with one of the older girls while she picked nits out of my hair for two hours and after two weeks of combing and searching, multiple home remedies and lots of washing, I was nit-free! I'll know exactly what to do when facing lice in the future.
- **Be prepared for air pollution.** India and Palestine have poor air quality for different reasons. I wish that I'd packed a nasal rinse system to help alleviate the coughing and sinus issues I had. Instead, I learned how to rinse with a cup and now I have a new survival skill!
- **Brush up on driving manual transmission.** Not only will you be ready to help out with driving anywhere in any car, but in many cases you may find that stick shift cars are cheaper to rent and more readily available.

For Further Reading

Two books that I referenced in preparation for this trip were Ron Wolf's *Vagabonding* and Lonely Planet's *First Time Round the World*. Although my travel style is less vagabond and more volunteer/pilgrim/tourist, I found practical advice and inspiration in both of these books. One great suggestion they made, for example, was to ship souvenirs home as you go, so you don't have to carry the extra weight in your suitcase. Additionally, I read packinglust.com and travelfashiongirl.com, among other girl-written travel blogs, to keep my naturally functional style balanced with a little bit of fabulous.

While on the road I met up with two other writers whose blogs and travels inspired me prior to departure. Whatever you take away from what is written here about packing and traveling, I hope that you'll also consider that the Internet is a window revealing just a small view of the amazing relationships and places out there to discover. I challenge you to move from the virtual and the vicarious to the rewarding experience of meeting each person and destination with all your senses.

May your journeys be blessed!

Thomaida wrote a series of articles about her volunteer pilgrimage covering India, Turkey, Israel/Palestine, France, Germany and England, available to newsletter subscribers during that time. Now she lives, writes and dreams up new ways to make the world a better place in Portland, Oregon. You can learn about her current projects at beautyfirstfilms.org.