

Food and travel have captivated Janet Podolak throughout the three decades she's written for The News-Herald. Her stories will take on a new dimension as she blogs.

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Art of packing specific to the trip

Soon I'll be off to France. I'm shown here with the clothes I'll wear on the flight and the things that need to go in my personal bag.

The act of packing for a trip is meditation, a time to contemplate the hours of transit, the adventures, the social interaction and overnights ahead.

Parameters for a writing research trip are quite different from a vacation, although the same pitfalls can occur without mindful packing.

Research trips typically involve a heavy schedule planned and implemented by others, following an itinerary received a week or two before departure. Hotels are one-night stands and baggage is the responsibility of the traveler.

I pack to meet airline restrictions for carryon, which means one bag will fit in the overhead compartment above my seat and a second, smaller bag can go under the seat in front of me.

Carryon affords flexibility - a proactive, desirable thing in this era of travel.

When your bag and its contents are beside you, it's easier to cope with unexpected changes and take advantage of rare blocks of unexpected free time.

After a long haul flight, free time often means a hot shower in the airport. Many airports now make them available for a fee and they're spotlessly clean and incredibly effective refreshers, especially after sleeping in your clothes in a narrow seat. See <http://tinyurl.com/2da4cde> to read last year's blog about airport showers.

I'll have a three-hour layover between my arrival Monday morning at Charles DeGaulle airport in Paris and the departure of my connection for Montpellier, on France's Mediterranean coast to the south. Given the need to clear customs and travel to another terminal for the connecting flight that's not nearly as much time as it seems

But know where the Air France showers in Charles DeGaulle are and I will pack a Freshhanger (see below) on top of my bag so that my clothes can also be refreshed and have their wrinkles steamed out as I shower.

That's good, because I will join a walking tour of Montpellier directly from my midday arrival the airport, with hotel check-in still several hours (and miles) away. The itinerary calls for dinner at 8 (which will be 1 a.m. back home) so a 22-hour day without sleep is almost a certainty that first day. I pack very specifically for the trip, making sure to include hiking boots if walks in the mountains are expected, as they are with this trip to Languedoc. Not having the correct footwear can ruin a trip. Catch this Sunday's Travel section for a photo of me sliding down a glacier — a victim of incorrect footwear. Here's how I have packed for this five-day trip. The list includes the clothes I will be wearing since I need to dress up each night for dinner and pieces will alternate.

Once I always packed in large plastic zipper bags until my daughter gifted me with one large plastic bag with a double zip on top.

Light fabrics this time of year allow clothing to slide easily into that bag. Underwear and socks are tucked into shoes. The bottom of the bag is covered with a 2-quart plastic bag that provides a layer of waterproofing and can serve to hold soiled laundry to be washed en route.

Once my belongings are in the bag it's placed on a chair or another firm surface and I sit on it to squeeze out all the air. That squeezes my clothing into a 4-inch thick, tightly sealed package — just the right size for my suitcase, with room on one end for my camera, and one-quart bag with toiletries, which is double-bagged for leakage.

Flying in comfortable nonrestrictive clothing encourages sleep on overnight international flights. In coach I can pull out the bag placed under the seat in front of me to use as a footrest because my legs are short. I bring an inflatable pillow, sleep mask, earplugs, and shawl, which can serve as a blanket since airlines often are out.

If I arrive at the hotel early enough to wash out underwear it usually will be dry the next day. If it's not, the in-room hairdryer will finish job.

So my clothing doesn't acquire a stale scent I unpack every night and use the Freshhangers to air it out. Before I discovered them I always added a couple fabric softener sheets in my bag.

The compass is along because I am not good at keeping a sense of direction and I try to include some directions in my stories. Its also valuable when I'm on a subway underground and need to know which way to turn once I emerge into the city above.

The ties on the nylon tie sack configure as a backpack, so can be great for carrying my umbrella, maps, notebook while exploring a new place on foot.

What size for carryon?

My carryon bags include my laptop, camera and Flip-Cam, for documenting the adventures.

4 pairs pants, including jeans

3 tops, including 1 T-shirt

2 tanks

1 jacket

3 changes underwear

2 socks

2 pair shoes

1 pair boots

2 Freshhanger

Also: a compass, small towel, nylon tie-sack