

Max Paradox

PROBLEM? RELAX. YOU'VE GOT THIS!

A tongue-in-cheek guide series ;)

The Suitcase Won't Close, and I'm Still Packing “Just in Case”

**How to Pack Faster, Take What You Actually Need,
and Stop Hauling Half Your Home
on a Three-Day Trip**



**We've got a problem. But relax.
It can be solved—and we'll even have something
to laugh about.**

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INTRO

The trip is tomorrow morning. Your suitcase is open on the bed, and somehow it already looks as if you are relocating under government protection. There are four shirts for a three-day trip, three pairs of pants, two sweaters, a jacket, another jacket that is "lighter," shoes for walking, shoes for dinner, shoes for the possibility that the first two pairs suddenly become unacceptable, and one shirt you have not worn in eighteen months but have now identified as a strong candidate for an entirely imaginary evening. Beside the suitcase sits a toiletry bag large enough to require planning permission, plus a charging cable for a device you are not even bringing. You pull the zipper. It resists. You sit on the suitcase. It continues to resist. For a brief moment, you consider whether the manufacturer has made the suitcase too small.

The suitcase would like to enter a statement into evidence.

Then comes the most dangerous sentence in travel preparation: "I'll just add one more thing." One more thing becomes a rain jacket. The rain jacket reminds you of an umbrella. The umbrella raises the issue of weather generally, which leads to a warmer layer, because evenings can be chilly. Then you remember that there might be a nice restaurant. Then, for reasons that would not survive questioning, you add workout clothes. Apparently a three-night hotel stay is exactly when the person who has not gone for a run before breakfast since 2019 is finally going to rediscover cardio.

This is why overpacking is not really a suitcase problem. You already understand the technical operation of luggage. Open container. Put things inside. Close container. Civilization has made harder things work. The real difficulty is decision-making under uncertainty. Every item asks a tiny question: "What if you need me?" And because you do not know the weather, the exact plan, your mood on Saturday evening, whether someone will suggest a nicer restaurant, or whether society will suddenly introduce mandatory hiking, the safest answer seems to be: "Fine. Come with me."

That is how a spare sweater becomes a risk-management strategy.

"Just in case" feels sensible because sometimes it is sensible. A spare shirt can save you after coffee launches an unexpected attack. Medication you actually use belongs with you. A jacket is a good idea if the forecast looks committed to rain. The trouble starts when "just in case" expands from likely inconvenience to every scenario your imagination can produce while standing in front of a wardrobe. Maybe it will be colder. Maybe hotter. Maybe there will be a pool. Maybe there will be an upscale dinner. Maybe everyone will suddenly say, "Great news, we found a place where the dress code is smart casual, but with trail shoes."

At that point, you are no longer packing for a trip. You are packing for alternate timelines.

Timing makes it worse. Most people do not calmly pack at two in the afternoon with a cup of tea and the serene confidence of someone who has completed a checklist. They pack late. They pack tired. They pack while the one pair of pants they actually want is still in the washing machine. They check the hotel website to find out whether towels are provided, get distracted by breakfast hours, then

reviews, then a complaint from someone two years ago about the firmness of a mattress, and ten minutes later they know far too much about room 214 but still have not packed a toothbrush. Tired brains love the fastest possible solution to uncertainty, and the fastest possible solution is often: throw it in.

There is another reason suitcases become crowded: you are not only packing for the person you are. You are packing for the person you might become on the trip. You bring a 600-page novel because perhaps you will finally read. You bring running gear because perhaps you will wake naturally at 6:30 a.m. and greet the dawn with healthy enthusiasm instead of treating the alarm as a hostile negotiation. You bring a notebook because this could be the weekend you begin journaling. A camera, because maybe you will take serious photographs. A laptop, because perhaps inspiration will strike and you will work on that project for two quiet hours in the hotel.

Your suitcase slowly becomes a support group for your aspirational identities.

The irony is that all this extra preparation is supposed to create peace of mind. Often it creates the opposite. More things mean more decisions, more searching, more unpacking, more repacking, and more moments spent wondering where you put the cable that you definitely remember seeing five minutes ago. By day two, clean clothes, worn clothes, maybe-clean clothes, and "I only had this on for dinner" clothes have formed a classification system that would challenge a museum archivist. You open the case looking for socks and discover a book you have not touched, a second pair of shoes you forgot you brought, and a mystery adapter whose purpose remains unknown but

which has now travelled farther this year than some relatives.

Then you return home with a quarter of the suitcase untouched and make a solemn promise: next time, less.

Next time arrives.

The same sweater gets another holiday.

This book is not going to turn you into the kind of person who spends two weeks abroad with one toothbrush, three T-shirts, and the spiritual calm of someone who can wash underwear in a hotel sink at midnight without questioning their life choices. Extreme minimalism is not the goal. The goal is practical control. You should be able to pack faster, choose things for real reasons, carry what you actually need, and stop using luggage as storage for every unlikely problem the future might produce.

That means learning to ask better questions. Not "Could this possibly be useful?" because almost anything could possibly be useful. A flashlight could be useful. A sewing kit could be useful. A second flashlight could become useful if the first flashlight experiences professional difficulties. The better question is: "What specific part of this trip requires this?" Another useful question is: "What happens if I do not have it?" Sometimes the answer will be serious, which means the item earns its place. Sometimes the answer will be, "I wear the same sweater again," which is less dramatic than your packing brain originally suggested.

You will also learn to build a system that works in ordinary life, not just under ideal conditions. A system that only works when you begin packing four days early, have perfect information, a spotless bedroom, and forty-five uninterrupted minutes is not a system. It is a lifestyle

advertisement. Real packing has to survive late evenings, changing weather, sudden work trips, children, partners, forgotten laundry, unclear plans, and the moment when you realize the charger you thought was in the drawer is actually behind the sofa.

The aim is not to eliminate every mistake. You will occasionally forget something. You will sometimes bring too much. There will be trips where the weather behaves like it has personal issues, trips where plans change, and trips where you discover that the one thing you left behind would, annoyingly, have been useful. The goal is to stop treating every possible inconvenience as proof that you should carry backup solutions for the entire human experience.

A good packing system gives you enough preparation without asking you to transport your anxiety in physical form.

Eventually, the moment you are looking for is surprisingly simple. The suitcase is packed. It closes easily. You know why the important things are inside. There is no final frantic tour of the house collecting random objects. No second round through the wardrobe. No last-minute addition of something you have not used at home in six months but have suddenly decided deserves international travel.

You look at the suitcase and think: that's enough.

Not perfect.

Enough.

And then you leave.

Chapter 1 - You Are Not Packing Things. You Are Packing Possibilities

It starts with a perfectly ordinary shirt.

You hold it up, look at it for two seconds, and think, "Yes. That could work."

Into the suitcase it goes.

Then another shirt. That one is more casual. Useful. A third is slightly nicer. Sensible. A fourth is the one you wear when you want to look like you made an effort without appearing to have made an effort, which is apparently a category modern adults are expected to maintain. Then you add a sweater because evenings can get cold, a lighter sweater because the first one is "quite warm," and a hoodie because sometimes you just want to be comfortable.

Nothing strange has happened yet.

Except you are leaving for three nights.

The problem is not that you have forgotten how many days are in a weekend. The problem is that you are no longer packing for the weekend. You are packing for a collection of possible weekends, each with its own weather, social schedule, mood, restaurant standards, and emergency wardrobe requirements.

There is the weekend where the weather stays exactly as forecast.

The weekend where the temperature suddenly drops.

The weekend where someone says, "Let's go somewhere nice tonight."

The weekend where the nice place turns out to be much nicer than expected.

The weekend where you spill something on yourself.

The weekend where you spill something else on yourself immediately afterward and begin to suspect the universe is running quality assurance.

Then there is the mysterious active weekend. This one appears during packing even if no one has mentioned activity of any kind. You see your running shoes and think, "Maybe I'll go for a run."

Will you?

At home, your relationship with early-morning exercise currently consists of occasionally seeing other people do it through a window.

But travel has activated hope.

Into the suitcase go the running shoes.

This is the central mechanism behind overpacking: uncertainty gets converted into objects.

Not always consciously. You are not standing there thinking, "I feel uncomfortable about an unpredictable future, so I shall convert this emotion into fourteen kilograms of textiles." You are just responding to a sequence of tiny questions. What if it gets cold? What if these pants get dirty? What if the restaurant is fancy? What if the hotel gym is incredible and your entire personality reorganizes around it?

Each question has an easy answer.

Bring something.

That is what makes the mechanism so efficient. Taking an item ends the uncertainty immediately. You no longer need