

How I pack for Europe.

Things I stopped packing, and what I bring instead.

One medium checked bag. Packing cubes. No styling tools.

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The short version

If you only read one page

1. **Check a medium bag.**
   Not a large one. A bigger bag just means you pack more.

2. **Cube everything.**
   Packing cubes are a life saver. Vacuum bags are not.

3. **Build around one jean jacket.**
   It's interchangeable, so everything else works with it.

4. **Wear Vionic.**
   Comfortable shoes are not optional on cobblestones.

5. **Never real jewelry.**
   My earrings are from Amazon. Nothing to worry about.

6. **Pack small, buy the rest there.**
   Full size only if you need it. European outlets fry US hot tools.

The bag

Medium, checked, and good quality

Why I check it

I check a medium bag. I'm not dragging a bag through the airport, I'm not fighting for overhead bin space, and the one full-size product I can't live without can come with me. TSA's 3.4 oz liquid limit only applies to carry-ons, so anything bigger goes in checked luggage.

Why medium, not large

My biggest mistake was packing too heavy and packing too much. A large bag gets filled. A medium bag forces the edit, and it's easier to lift onto train racks and into small European elevators.

Why quality matters

A cheap rolling bag was another mistake. Cobblestones are hard on wheels and handles. Spend the money on a bag that rolls well and holds up.

Know the weight limit

On most major airlines, an economy checked bag can weigh up to 50 lb (23 kg). Budget airlines inside Europe can be stricter. Ryanair's standard checked bag is 20 kg (44 lb). Check your ticket before you pack, not at the counter.

Packing cubes

A life saver. Vacuum bags, not so much.

Why cubes work

Everything has a place, and you can see what you have. You unpack in two minutes, and the bag stays organized all trip, even after you've dug through it for the third time.

How to use them

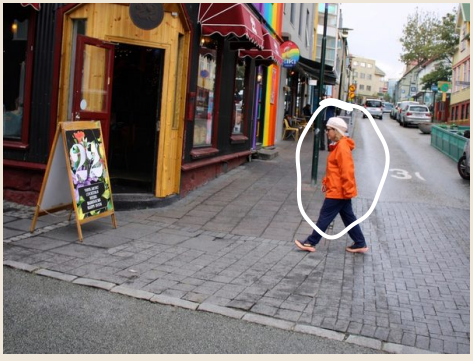
One cube for tops, one for bottoms, one for underwear and sleepwear. Put shoes in a bag at the bottom. When you get to the hotel, the cubes go straight into the drawers.

Why I gave up on vacuum bags

They're cumbersome and poor quality. And they shrink the space, not the weight, so you end up with more stuff and a heavier bag. That's the mistake I was trying to fix in the first place.

Exhibit A: one orange jacket, all week in Reykjavik.





The jean jacket capsule

Same jacket. Lisbon, then Paris.





I bring a jean jacket because it's interchangeable. It works over the dress, with the jeans, with the skirt, day or night. Every top works with the jeans, the pants, and the skirt. I even put a shirt on over the dress for a new look. I think we call it a capsule now.

About a week in a European city

- 1 jean jacket
- 1 pair of dark jeans
- 2 pants
- 1 skirt
- 1 dress
- 5 tops, interchangeable with the jeans, pants, and skirt
- 2 pairs of Vionic: one for walking, one a little nicer
- 1 crossbody bag
- 1 pair of everyday earrings

Shoes, bag, and jewelry

Comfortable feet. Nothing to lose.

Vionic, every trip

Europe means walking all day on cobblestones, so my shoes have to be comfortable first. Heels stay home. If I'd need a taxi to wear them to dinner, they aren't coming.

One crossbody, worn on the front

It holds my phone, wallet, and lipstick, and it stays where I can see it on a crowded tram or metro.

Never real jewelry

One pair of everyday earrings from Amazon. If they get lost, I'm not ruining a trip over it, and there's nothing worth locking in the hotel safe.



Toiletries and hair

Pack small. Buy the rest there.

Full size only if it's necessary

I don't bring full-size products unless I really need them. For me, that's the one product that works on my unruly hair. Most everything else, you can buy the exact same thing in Europe anyway. Put anything liquid in a zip bag in case it leaks.

No styling tools in Europe

Most US hair dryers, flat irons, and curling irons run on 120 volts. Most of Europe runs on 230. A plug adapter only changes the shape of the plug, not the voltage, so a US-only tool can burn out the first time you use it. Hotels almost always have a hair dryer. Use theirs.

What you do need

A plug adapter for your phone and charger. Most of continental Europe uses Type C and F plugs. The UK and Ireland use Type G. Check the label on your charger. If it says 100 to 240V, an adapter is all you need.

Check the label

INPUT 100–240V: dual voltage, just bring an adapter. INPUT 120V only: leave it home.

Mistakes I made

So you don’t have to

1 Packing too heavy

If I can't lift the bag by myself, I've packed too much. Now I pack, then take out a third.

2 Packing too much

An outfit for every day and shoes for every possibility. I wore the same few things anyway.

3 Vacuum bags

Cumbersome, poor quality, and they made it too easy to overpack.

4 A cheap rolling bag

Wheels and cobblestones don't mix. Buy the better bag once.

5 Bringing my blow dryer

The hotel had one. They almost always do.

The checklist

Tick it off before you zip the bag.

Wear on the plane

- [ ] Vionic walking shoes
- [ ] The jean jacket
- [ ] Compression socks
- [ ] Crossbody, worn on the front

Personal item

- [ ] Passport and ID
- [ ] Printed itinerary and bookings
- [ ] Phone, charger, power bank
- [ ] Plug adapter
- [ ] Medications

Checked bag

- [ ] Packing cubes
- [ ] Jeans, 2 pants, skirt, dress, 5 tops
- [ ] Second pair of Vionic
- [ ] Everyday earrings
- [ ] Sleepwear, underwear, socks

Toiletries

- [ ] The one full-size product you need
- [ ] Travel sizes for the rest
- [ ] The makeup you actually wear
- [ ] Sunscreen and sunglasses

Leave at home

Styling tools · vacuum bags · heels · real jewelry · a different outfit for every day · the third jacket · an umbrella · the guilt

Now go somewhere.

Your bag will thank you.



Good soles.

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Sources

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