

# Wacky Packing

Take it from a pro: These ordinary items have ingenious travel uses

By Laura Daily

Illustration by Hernando Marín

Ask a traveler what he or she considers a packing “essential” and you’ll likely hear: comfy shoes, earplugs, an empty water bottle. Me? I never leave home without a set of clothespins, a sheet of cardboard, and a small roll of duct tape (created by rolling tape onto a cut-down cardboard toilet paper tube).

As a professional travel journalist, I’ve had to be resourceful on the road. I’ve found innumerable ways to repurpose common household items to make trips by car, air, or ship easier and more comfortable. In addition to the duct tape, here are nine other packing-related travel hacks worth trying.

**Binder clips:** Use as a money clip to carry cash separate from your main wallet. The two wire handles can also be used as a key chain. You can also utilize them to prop up a smartphone when watching videos on the airplane or to secure drying laundry to balcony furniture so your clothes don’t blow away.

**Blunt-nose scissors:** These are useful for cutting cardboard, tape, or string. TSA regulations prohibit long, pointed scissors in a carry-on, so get the ones designed for preschoolers.

**Balloons:** Inflate a balloon and drape your clothes over it for a portable drying rack.

**Clothespins:** Clamp drapes closed to ensure privacy or to block out a hotel room or ship cabin.

**Paper clips:** Replace a zipper pull or use as a temporary connector if the tiny screw falls out of your eyeglasses. Also, a paper clip is the perfect size to hit the reset button on electronic devices.

**Empty pill bottles:** They hold a week’s worth of cotton swabs. At the beach, stash some cash and a key in one (it’s waterproof), while leaving your wallet in a secure location. They’re also ideal for keeping change sorted, especially when traveling to multiple countries.

**Dental floss:** It’s not just for trussing a turkey. Substitute floss for thread to reattach a button, and even use it as a knife for softer foods such as cheese. Bring unflavored floss unless you like your Brie minty fresh.

**Plastic straws:** Keep necklaces separate and untangled. Unclasp the necklace, slip one end through the straw, and then resecure the clasp.

**A thin sheet of cardboard:** Cover annoying colored lights from TVs, thermostats, light switches, alarm clocks, and other devices with a roughly 4-by-6-inch sheet cut into smaller pieces and secured by duct tape. Remember to remove the cardboard when you check out.



**What’s the most unusual thing you pack?** Write to us about it at [westways@aaa-calif.com](mailto:westways@aaa-calif.com). Put “Wacky Packing” in the subject line. We might print your contribution in a future issue or online.

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