

## Travel Gadgets

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### Introduction

Gadgets are probably not the first thing that comes to mind when you think of travel, but there are several devices that can help you make the best of being on the road. Seasoned travelers know that ounces quickly turn into pounds, so do yourself a favor and be selective in what you take.



### Packing Aids

Trying to cram several days worth of clothing into a limited space is nobody's idea of a good time. A set of *packing cubes and folders* – nylon and mesh bags which create distinct compartments in your luggage – can help restore some semblance of order to your packing chaos.



Eagle Creek, eBags, Rick Steves, Lewis N. Clark and Victorinox (among other companies) sell variations of these products, which help to reduce wrinkling. Also, by packing your garments tightly into these envelopes and cubes, you'll compress them sufficiently to leave room for souvenirs of your travels.

Packing cubes maximize the space in your luggage and allow you to separate items by type.

A toiletry bag that has a flatter profile than traditional boxy kits

works particularly well with packing cubes and envelopes. For example, the eBags Pack-it-Flat Toiletry Kit ([ebags.com/product/ebags/pack-it-flat-toiletry-kit/54638](http://ebags.com/product/ebags/pack-it-flat-toiletry-kit/54638)) provides a very space-efficient way to keep you looking your best on the road.



Maximize your luggage space with a flat toiletry bag.

## Luggage Gadgets

Unless your bag is neon-pink or has a leopard print, consider attaching a brightly colored **luggage tag** so you'll be able to quickly identify it at the baggage carousel. If your wheeled carryon bag forces you to hunch over because the handle is too short, try a **luggage handle extender** from Travelon ([travelonobags.com](http://travelonobags.com)).



A luggage handle extender by Travelon can help you avoid an aching back.

If you're traveling with a tote bag, computer case or messenger bag in an urban area, you might consider buying a **theft-resistant shoulder strap**. Pacsafe ([pacsafe.com](http://pacsafe.com)), a company which specializes in anti-theft travel gear, makes a wire-reinforced strap to keep slash-and-dash thieves from cutting through your bag's strap and grabbing the whole thing. Pacsafe also sells an entire line of theft-resistant bags.

## Gadgets to Use En Route

It's hard to enjoy your music or movies while trapped in an enclosed space with dozens of chatty people while jet engines roar outside your window. **Noise-reduction headphones** can help to make your trip more restful and enjoyable. They come in two distinct varieties:

- **Noise-cancellation headphones** feed an acoustically inverted copy of background sounds into your music, resulting in a dramatic reduction of constant noises (like jet-engine drone). It's less effective for voices and screaming babies, though. The Bose® QuietComfort® series of headphones are considered by many to be the gold-standard for noise-cancellation headphones.
- **Noise-isolation headphones**, sometimes called in-ear-monitors or canalphones, take an entirely different approach. They aim to block (not electronically cancel) external noise by creating

a physical barrier between your eardrums and the environment. They basically act like earplugs with embedded headphones. Some people find in-ear headphones like this to be uncomfortable to wear for long stretches. The best models provide a selection of silicone and compressible foam tips so you can find the type which works best for your ears. Popular brands of noise-isolation headphones include Etymotic Research, Shure, Ultimate Ears and Westone.



Noise-isolation headphones block most external sounds.

A cross-country or transatlantic flight may be too much for your portable DVD player or laptop computer's battery. Avoid entertainment interruptions by packing a **rechargeable external battery pack**. After all, you don't want to run out of juice halfway through *Avatar*, right? Depending on capacity, these external packs can extend the battery life of a device by several times. Most batteries offer multiple tip sizes to ensure maximum compatibility with the gadgets you own.

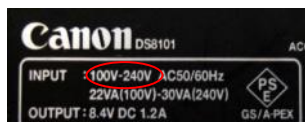


This Energizer external battery pack (in background at right) can extend the run time of your device by many hours.

## At Your Destination

Overseas power outlets often have a different plug configuration and/or dramatically different power output. Check the power supplies for your gadgets to see if you'll need a **power converter** to change local voltage to the 110-volts your gadgets get at home. If your devices are dual-voltage, you're in luck, as you will probably only need a **power plug adapter** (which fits into the foreign wall socket and allows you to plug in your North American devices).

For more information on worldwide plug and voltage conversion, take a look at this guide



If your device's power supply is dual voltage as shown on the Canon battery charger above, you can get by with an inexpensive plug adapter (white device), rather than a costly power converter.

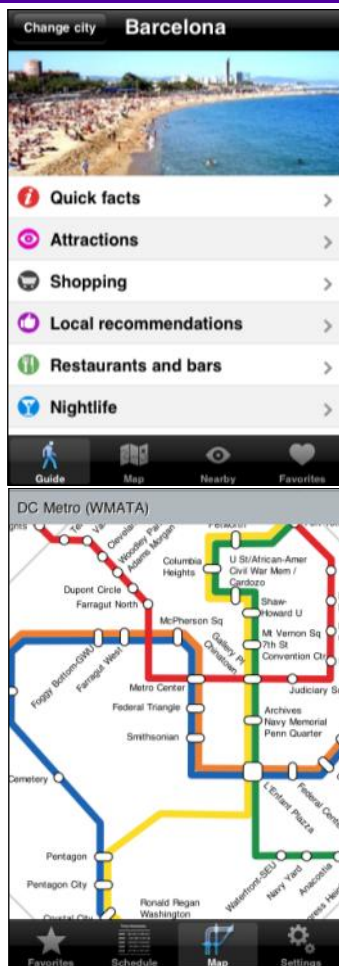
from the International Trade Administration [www.ita.doc.gov/media/publications/pdf/current2002final.pdf](http://www.ita.doc.gov/media/publications/pdf/current2002final.pdf) (240KB PDF).

If you've got a smartphone like a Motorola Droid or Apple iPhone, you have access to many travel tools which can make your life a lot easier. Applications like currency converters, narrative travel guides, dining recommendations and subway tools are available for smartphones. But be careful – some applications require an Internet connection to work, and data rates overseas can be shockingly high.

If you choose carefully, you can find useful applications which do not require an Internet connection to work. If you'd prefer full smartphone functionality in other countries, check with your mobile phone service provider (e.g. AT&T, Verizon, etc.) for special international rate plans before you leave on your trip.

### Conclusion

Using travel gadgets can make every aspect of your trip more enjoyable. Even advocates of a minimalist packing technique can benefit from a few carefully selected gadgets.



Smartphone travel apps can be a great help. These examples are on an iPhone.

If you have questions, comments or suggestions, you can visit me at the Reference Desk, contact me via email ([moetting@hinsdalelibrary.info](mailto:moetting@hinsdalelibrary.info)), or call me at 630-986-1976 ext. 225.

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