Exploring Idyllic Amsterdam
by Robert Bestor

It’s a question that almost always comes up when we travel. We might be walking down a quiet, shady lane, or sitting in a bustling restaurant, or perhaps we’ll be packed shoulder to shoulder into a crowded metro train or bus. And the question that we ask is, “Could we live here?”

Of course, as tourists we get the highlights. We eat the best food, see the top sites and spend a lot of delightful afternoons sipping coffee in charming cafes. We don’t have to fight the morning commute, or do the grocery shopping or go to the dentist.

We’ve been fortunate enough to have the pleasure of this philosophical relocation debate in some very alluring cities. While we’ve been enchanted by many of them, they’ve all come up just a bit short in the “could we live here” debate. In the past we’ve decided that Paris is a bit too big, Bangkok a bit too noisy, and Reykjavik more than a bit too cold and dark. And while we have no intention of leaving our picture-perfect little town of Ashland, Oregon, when we contemplated that question on our recent visit to Amsterdam, we both decided that it sure would be a lot of fun to give the “world’s biggest village” a try.

We spent about six days there in late January and were captivated by picturesque canals, crooked buildings, busy cafes, and a nearly complete lack of automobile traffic, due, of course, to the amazingly large number of bicyclists riding about the city. This lack of cars, coupled with its pancake flat terrain and its compactness, make Amsterdam a very walkable city. It felt that no matter where we were headed next, it was always a short, pleasant stroll with lots to see along the way. If you’ve read our newsletter before, you’ll know that those features make it the perfect destination for us.

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Chilling Out in Iceland
by Nancy Bestor

When Bob and I decided to stop over in Iceland for a few days after our winter trip to Europe, I realized I had no idea what to expect. My images of Iceland were entirely made up from my imagination. You know, expansive tundras, burly and weather worn fishermen, glaciers at every turn, venison as the delicacy, and animals with great big tusks. It’s entirely possible I was mixing up images I had seen of the Alaskan wilderness (on tv mind you—I was a big fan of Northern Exposure), but who can argue with one’s imagination?

It turns out I was wrong (and I am just as shocked by this as you are). Iceland, and more specifically Reykjavík, is a delightful place that captivated us. The city is small, but very cosmopolitan, and its buildings are painted in wonderfully bright and rich colors. We ate at a variety of delightful

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The Best Travel Products for Your Summertime Travels

It’s that travel time of year again, and it’s also time for some new and updated travel products to get you on the way to safer, more comfortable and easier trips, whether you’re hitting the road for your grandson’s graduation, or jetting off to an African safari. Read on for some of our favorite new travel gear!

Luci Light Solar Lanterns
We’re delighted to now offer a wider variety of Luci solar powered lanterns, including the new “Pro Series” that boasts a 2-way USB port. The new USB port allows you to plug in for a full charge in 2-3 hours, or to use your Luci Pro as an emergency cell phone charger! The Luci Pro Solar Light ($34.95) gives you up to 50 hours of light on a single charge, which takes about 14 hours of direct sunlight. It has four lighting modes, a handy strap, and a battery level indicator. All Luci solar lights are collapsible, waterproof, and lightweight. We also stock the Luci Pro frosted light ($34.95), the multi-colored

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Exploring Idyllic Amsterdam...

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We arrived very early on a Sunday morning when just about everything was closed. We were able to find a little cafe serving fresh pastries and hot coffee where we relaxed and waited for our Airbnb check in time. The corner studio we rented in the Jordaan neighborhood ($175 per night) was perfectly sized for a couple on a short stay. It was spotlessly clean and had a fabulous canal view from its large and plentiful 3rd floor windows.

Soon we were off to adventure. On the first day in a new city, we often like to book a local tour to get the feel of the where we are, and if it’s a food tour, even better. The overwhelmingly positive online reviews of Hungry Birds, a small, personable food tour company in Amsterdam, led us to book a walking tour through food stalls and to little cafes and bars with Zosia, one of the Hungry Birds owners. Zosia taught us lots about Amsterdam’s food and drink culture, and the first of our delightful food stops was Amsterdam’s famous FEBO, an automatic fast food restaurant. Just put in your coins, and out comes a fresh, hot dish. We sampled veal, beef and saté croquettes, all surprisingly delicious. Other culinary delights of the tour included a Surinamese chicken sandwich, herring and kibbeling (Dutch fried codfish), poffertjes—a small Dutch puffed pancake-like treat—topped with powdered sugar and butter, pea soup with black bread, and chocolate chip cookies from Van Stapele Koekmakerij, very likely the best chocolate cookies we have ever had. After rolling our way back to our Airbnb, we took a stomach break, and then hit the streets (or canals as the case may be) to burn off some of the millions of calories we consumed that day.

That evening, we “met up” with our old travel buddy Rick Steves for his Central Amsterdam walking tour. Highlights of this included the somewhat hidden Begijnhof, a quiet little courtyard refuge in the heart of the city with a beautiful garden, a small church, and a couple of rows of very well-kept houses that have sheltered women since the 14th century. We also took in the flower market, which is as pretty and impressive as you might imagine, as it is in the capital city of Europe’s largest flower exporter. Steves also pointed out some key architecture in the city, which has fascinating buildings of all shapes and sizes, and in a surprising number of cases, leaning significantly this way and that.

At the top of our Amsterdam to-do list were the Van Gogh Museum and the Anne Frank House. Both are powerful and moving. The Van Gogh Museum is a truly amazing collection of the master’s works, along with those of other artists from his era. We were bedazzled by Van Gogh’s vivid colors, compelling subjects, and the opportunity to see the world through the eyes of this troubled genius. We spent a few hours there soaking in as much as we could, astonished at how he saw the world and his ability to put those visions onto canvas.

While the Van Gogh Museum celebrates the beauty of which we are capable, the Anne Frank House is a somber reminder of the ghastliness that we all too often create. The experience of walking through these dark, cramped rooms and revisiting the story of the Frank family is sobering. Pictures, quotes and videos tell their pain-ful, yet vital story. Ironically, in a city that now strives for tolerance and practicality, this is the most important site.

No account of Amsterdam would be complete without addressing both the red light district and marijuana shops. First off, both are somewhat avoidable if they are not your cup of tea. The marijuana shops are known as “coffee shops.” They number in the hundreds and look just like an ordinary cafe. They blend right in with their neighbor businesses and if you are not seeking them out, you’ll likely walk by many more than you notice. The red light district occupies a few square blocks in the center of old Amsterdam and when we ventured there early one evening it was surprisingly tame and even a bit touristy. Nancy was surprised to see many “working women” in the glass doorways texting and playing games on their cellphones. The district was clean and busy with couples and even some families out for a stroll. A German friend who we visited later in the trip agreed, and, of its lack of salaciousness, noted that nowadays it is pretty much a place where one can relax and enjoy an ice cream cone.

Often people ask me what I like about a particular destination. And while there are always sites, food and experiences that stand out, sometimes, I think the best answer is that I just like being there. I am often captivated by the feel of a place. I know, that’s pretty vague. But unfortunately that’s my best answer for Amsterdam. And while sites like the Van Gogh Museum and the Anne Frank House stand out, more than anything, I just felt excited, intrigued, and comfortable during our visit.

Take Amsterdam’s Brown Bars for example. Amsterdam is littered with centuries old drinking establishments, many dating to the 1600s. Each one we visited was warm, cozy, dark and slightly cramped. Wooden beams, wooden stools, wood- en paneling and wooden bars, all with a patina that can only be created by decades of use — just the place to enjoy an ice cream cone.
I Want to Ride My Bicycle—Dutch City Cycling

by Robert Bestor

One of the reasons I am ready to move to Amsterdam is that it is far and away the most walkable big city I’ve ever been to. I’ll grant you that as big cities go, it’s a bit small (remember, “world’s biggest village”). But still, it’s a major European capital where walking is a pleasant and viable way to get things done. And what makes it that way? Bikes. That’s right, bikes.

Amsterdam is a great place to walk because it’s an even better place to bicycle. Bikes rule Amsterdam. Pedestrians come a close second. And cars, faced with a lack of parking, and having to navigate narrow streets and tight corners, come in a distant fourth behind public transport.

Full disclosure. I ride a bicycle. I ride for exercise and I ride for fun. Also, during the summer months, I pedal the 10-minute route from our home to Travel Essentials and back. I save a little gas money, get a little exercise and don’t take up a valuable downtown parking space in our busy little town. It works for me.

But after visiting Amsterdam, I am jealous! Pretty much everybody rides, from the very young to the very old. With children heading to school, moms carting around their toddlers, laborers hauling around their tools, and business professionals cycling in power suits with briefcases strapped on tight, it is no wonder that about half of Amsterdam’s trips are made by bicycle. And interestingly, they all seem to ride a beater. There are no fancy bikes on the streets of Amsterdam. But that might be because bikes often sit outside in all kinds of weather.

Our 3rd floor apartment looked out over a major intersection and canal crossing at Bloemgracht and Marinxstroaat. While taking in the view, I couldn’t help but notice the continual stream of bicycle traffic going all directions. At the stop lights it was normal, at all times of day or night, to see dozens of cyclists and just a handful of cars all easily rolling through when the light turned green. In similar cities, at similar intersections, I am used to seeing cars backed up forever, clogging the roadways and honking their horns, trying to inch along while blood pressures rise. The difference is stark.

Amsterdam has a cycling culture that goes way back. According to some, during World War II, with bicycles filling the city streets and slowing down Nazi convoys, cycling was seen as a expression of resistance. After the war though the automobile began to take over. Then, in the ’70s, with pedestrians being killed by cars at an alarming rate, the public demanded that city planners make their roads much more difficult for cars and much, much easier for bicycles. The oil crisis of the same time helped the movement and over the decades safety measures like bike paths and protected bike lanes have increased dramatically. So much so that cyclists do not wear helmets. Why not? Because in Amsterdam, and throughout the Netherlands, cycling is not thought of as a dangerous endeavor.

Because bikes rule, pedestrians do need to pay attention. Our Hungry Birds food-tour guide Zosia noted that the people of Amsterdam are warm, welcoming, and tolerant, except when they are on their bikes! She said that when they are riding, they are taking care of business, and if you cause them to slow, you’ve stolen some of their precious momentum and they’ll need to work to get up to speed again. It seems that every cyclist has a perky and friendly bell that they ring when needed. And even as a somewhat aware tourist, I heard that bell a few times. But it sounds a lot more like “I’m here” than “Get out of my way!”

And despite a love of frites (french fries stands abound) and countless other delectables, the World Health Organization says that the Netherlands is the only European country not headed for an obesity crisis. I’m guessing it’s the cycling.

Like Amsterdam, Ashland, a small town, is compact and relatively flat. Like Amsterdam, Manhattan, a big town, is still compact and flat as pancake. So why not? And if more walking and more riding means more frites, I’m all in!

And that’s the beauty of travel. Now, when I ride my bike to work (or eat french fries), I feel a little bit closer to the Dutch, even though they are half a world away.

Notes:

- Amsterdam’s Central Train Station has parking for more than 10,000 bicycles.
- Amsterdam, with a population of 1.1 million, has approximately 140 bike shops and is home to about a million bicycles.

—Robert Bestor, co-owner of Travel Essentials, loves cycling, almost as much as he loves Nancy. She may or may not have written this note.

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of both hard use and attentive care, create an unmatched ambience. Throw in a little art deco stained glass and lighting, and a bar keeper who knows how it’s done, and Nancy and I were right at home. Jevener, aka Dutch gin, available in both oude (old) and jonge (young) distilled types, is served in a tulip shaped glass and filled to the brim. Brown bars also serve beer in a 8-ounce glass, which seems about right to me. And let’s face it, any business that’s been around for nearly 400 years must be doing something right. I couldn’t help but think, “It sure would be nice to have a place like this to duck into once in a while on my way home from work.”

Even though it’s easy to picture myself living along a canal, cycling to and from work, and meeting Nancy afterward at our neighborhood brown bar, we’ve got deep roots here in southwest Oregon with family, friends, fun and business. And even if we didn’t, we’re far too old, and certainly not wealthy enough, for the Netherlands to welcome us with open arms. So we’ll both be at work on Monday.

Notes:

- The four hour long Hungry Birds tour, at about $90 each, included all food and drink. I highly recommend it.
- We purchased timed entry tickets to both the Van Gogh museum and the Anne Frank House online before we left the US. Neither the museum nor the Anne Frank House currently sells tickets on site, only online. Advance planning is important, as tickets for both often sell out.
The Best Travel Products for Your Summertime...

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Luci light ($24.95), the original Luci 2.0 outdoor solar lantern ($19.95) and the original Luci Lux frosted solar lantern ($19.95). They’re a great addition to your emergency preparedness kit, as well as a great gift for the outdoorsy type!

GoToob+ Bottles
Our favorite leak-proof travel containers just got better. The redesigned Go-Toob+ bottle is still carry-on friendly, with the same features customers already love, including its soft yet rugged silicone that is food safe and makes it easy to get every last drop out. And it now offers several new features including a 27% larger opening for easy filling and cleaning, a contoured base that allows your GoToob+ to stand up, and best of all, new sizes that take full advantage of the maximum 3.4-ounce carry-on size limitation set by the TSA. The GoToob+ also features a LoopLock collar, which makes it nearly impossible to accidentally open the cap, and allows it to hang from a hook or clip. It’s available in three sizes, 1.7 ounce ($6.95), 2.5 ounce ($8.50) and 3.4 ounce ($9.95), all of which are carry-on friendly. And we have also three packs too.

Royal Robbins Expedition Top
Our best selling women’s top will keep you looking polished whether you’re out on the trail during the day or out on the town for the evening. This versatility makes the Expedition Chill ¾ Sleeve Top from Royal Robbins a great travel garment. It is made from quick drying, wrinkle resistant and breathable polyester that features a bit of stretch too. With thermoregulating mesh on the back neck panel, it will help keep you cool in warmer temperatures, and also features UPF 50+ protection from the sun. The ¾ length sleeves roll up and button for an adjustable fit, and there is also a hidden zippered pocket that’s perfect for stashing credit cards, id and cash. This lightweight top packs easily and with a variety of colors and prints to choose from, is a great addition to any travel wardrobe.

Relay Backpack/Computer Bag
With graduation and Father’s Day just around the corner, we’ve got your casual, yet professional, business case needs met. Briggs & Riley’s Verb line offers a variety of briefcases and messenger bags, and one of our favorites is the Relay, a business case that converts from a professional looking shoulder bag to a backpack, for a more casual, comfortable look. A front organizer panel features pockets (including one that is RFID safe) and slots for cords, cards, pens and more. It also offers a zip slip pocket, so it can easily slide over the handle of a rolling suitcase. The Relay weighs in at 2.9 pounds, and measures 16 x 11.5 x 6.5.” And of course, it comes with Briggs & Riley’s “Simple As That” unconditional lifetime guarantee.

3 Dial TSA Lock and Cable
Sometimes you just feel the need to lock your luggage. Perhaps your room isn’t quite ready and you have to leave your bags with your hotel. Or maybe you have to check out, but need to come back later for your bags. No matter, Eagle Creek’s TSA Lock and Cable ($15.95) is an excellent choice. Locking your bags together with the cable provides extra security for your belongings (it’s not too hard to steal one suitcase, but taking two suitcases that are locked together does look a little suspicious). Or maybe you want to leave your suitcase locked in your hotel room to a stationary object, like a bed frame. The flexible 50-inch cable is included specifically for that purpose. Versatility is key to the best travel gear and with the TSA Lock and Cable you can use the 3-Dial combination lock like you would any other

“I do not want to get to the end of my life and find that I just lived the length of it. I want to have lived the width of it as well.” — DIANE ACKERMAN
The Best Travel Products for Your Summertime..

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the Ozone 22” is a rolling bag that meets domestic carry-on standards, and offers lots of excellent features. With a single telescoping handle and large wheels, the Ozone provides easy access to the main compartment for convenient packing, and an organizational panel pocket to keep your smaller stuff accessible. There’s also a large zippered pocket on the rear panel of the bag. Osprey also offers a lifetime warranty on the Ozone. If weight is your number one consideration, then this under five pound carry-on is for you.

Memory Foam Evolution Pillow
The new S3 Evolution Pillow from Cabeau has some great new features that make our best selling neck pillow even better. The S3 ($39.95) features form fitting memory foam and comes with an adjustable seat strap system, for easy attachment to an airplane seat’s headrest wings. This keeps your head from falling forward or sideways when trying to catch a few zzz’s. An adjustable front clasp helps size the pillow for a perfect fit. The S3’s cover is moisture wicking to keep you cool, and machine washable for when you drool (hey that’s a rhyme). It also includes a zippered storage case that compresses the S3 to half its size. The memory foam Cabeau S3 Evolution Pillow offers the best head and neck support, and it’s clear that our customers recognize this as the most comfortable travel pillow on the market.

SteriPEN Water Purifier
We’ve got two new SteriPEN styles for adventurers who are traveling to countries with questionable tap water, or who need to ensure quality water from streams and lakes. Using UV light, the SteriPEN Classic 3 ($69.95) purifies water for drinking in about a minute. It comes with a micron screen pre-filter that removes particulates that can get in the way of UV light in water. It takes 4 AA batteries - alkaline, lithium or rechargeable (not included), with a battery life that ranges from 100-300 treatments, depending on battery type. The SteriPEN Red Cross purifier ($79.95) also purifies water in about a minute using UV light, but is USB rechargeable, from either a computer, wall outlet or solar panel. On one charge, it can treat about 20 liters of water. Both SteriPEN styles destroy more than 99% of bacteria, viruses and protozoa in water, and are a great alternative to buying bottled water.

Carry-on Liquids Bag
Cocoon’s quart-sized carry-on liquids bag ($15.95) takes the place of flimsy, single-use zip lock bags for the task of transporting your liquids through security. With waterproof, welded seams, and a water resistant zipper, it will keep any spills inside the bag, and not all over your suitcase. Its transparent sides allow you, and TSA employees, to easily see your contents. And Cocoon’s commitment to both quality and durable construction means it will last for trip after trip after trip. It can also double as a minimalist toiletry kit, for the traveler who doesn’t need products to look beautiful (who are you?).

Want more travel stories, tips and advice?
Email service@travelessentials.com to receive our monthly email newsletter.

“I Google ‘new country, Denmark, culture shock’ on my phone and drink coffee furiously. I learn that Danes drink the most coffee in Europe, as well as consuming eleven litres of pure alcohol per person per year. Maybe we’ll fit in just fine after all.” — HELEN RUSSELL, THE YEAR OF LIVING DANISHLY
Staying Warm in Iceland...

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restaurants, and explored unique sites and architecture. We didn’t meet, or even see, any bearded, weather worn fishermen. Instead we met friendly young restaurant owners, clerks, and tour guides, happy to talk about their country and its customs. The surrounding region—we drove about three hours out of Reykjavík one day—although expansive and remote, was fascinating as well. We did indeed see glaciers, and fabulous waterfalls too, but no frozen tundras, and the only wild animals we saw were Icelandic horses. We also managed a soak in a “secret” hot springs lagoon. Let me tell you, soaking at night in an outdoor hot pool while it is snowing all around you just might be the most civilized way to spend a winter’s evening. I’m sorry we couldn’t stay longer and see more of Iceland, but we’ll just have to go back. Here are some highlights of our short stay in this Nordic island country.

We were traveling to Europe in late January/early February on a great winter deal with Iceland Air ($460 rt Seattle/Amsterdam). Since the 1960s, the airline has offered free stopovers in Reykjavík of up to seven days when en route from the US to Europe, or vice versa. But in the last five years, Iceland has upped its marketing game and touted this program. And through social media and the like (#mystopover), tourism has greatly increased. We took Iceland Air up on its offer, and stopped for three days.

A visit to Iceland is not cheap. Seriously, not by a long shot. But the country’s tourism board has done an excellent job of making it easy to get around and to arrange bus transportation to and from the airport into Reykjavík, and even arranged for our return trip to the airport to include a several hour stop at the famous Blue Lagoon.

One could certainly rent a car, but since we were only going to be in the country three days, and one of those would be spent exploring Reykjavík—which can easily be done on foot—we decided to skip the car rental. We pre-booked a night time tour, in the hopes of seeing the Northern Lights, as well as a day-long Glacier Walk & Secret Lagoon tour too. On a tip from a friend who had been to Iceland previously, the Northern Lights tour was booked for our first night, because if the weather doesn’t look good, the tour will be cancelled, and you can rebook for another night of your stay. Spoiler alert—the weather did not cooperate for Northern Lights viewing on any of the three nights we were there, so we did not take the tour. But it was fully refunded ($96 each). Again, we’ll just have to go back.

The Glacier walk tour ($330 each with Icelandic Mountain Guides), included all transportation, equipment, and a lovely Icelandic tour guide by the name of Eli-O. Bob and I and one other couple spent a full day with Eli-O, on a tour that combined glaciers, waterfalls and hot springs of the South Coast of Iceland. It started with a 2½ hour drive to Sólheimajökull, a glacier tongue or falling glacier, from the larger Mýrdalsjökull glacier. After donning helmets, safety harnesses, ice axes and crampons, we trekked onto the glacier, and explored stunning deep crevices, ice stairs carved by guides, ice caves, and more. It was an exhilarating two hours. The blue ice of the vast glacier was like nothing I have ever seen. Yes, this tour was expensive, but it was so worth it when we were standing on the Sólheimajökull glacier, looking at the ice all around us. As we climbed down off the glacier, it started to snow. Our visit could not have been more perfect. We stopped at a tiny coffee shop near the parking lot, and bought two small hot chocolates for $12, and even those were worth it.

After leaving the glacier, Eli-O took us to two waterfalls, Skógafoss and Seljalandsfoss, both powerfully impressive. And then, just as dusk was settling in, we drove to the “Secret” Lagoon, a natural hot springs in the small village of Fludir. This geothermal pool was built in 1891, and it is the oldest pool in Iceland. It’s not really that secret, it’s just more traditional and much less populated than the tourist favorite Blue Lagoon. The water was a warm 100-104 degrees, and as we soaked for an hour, it snowed off and on, making the evening even more enchanting.

The city of Reykjavík is a gem. More than two thirds of the country’s population lives in Reykjavík—about 220,000—and it has a thriving restaurant, museum and boutique shopping scene. There was lots of snow on the ground as we began our day in the city, but that didn’t stop the intrepid explorers that we are. We left our Airbnb ($153 a night), in the heart of downtown, on the ground as we began our day in Reykjavík, and explored stunning deep crevices, ice stairs carved by guides, ice caves, and more. It was an exhilarating two hours. The blue ice of the vast glacier was like nothing I have ever seen. Yes, this tour was expensive, but it was so worth it when we were standing on the Sólheimajökull glacier, looking at the ice all around us. As we climbed down off the glacier, it started to snow. Our visit could not have been more perfect. We stopped at a tiny coffee shop near the parking lot, and bought two small hot chocolates for $12, and even those were worth it.

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Getting Yourself Into a Carry-on Bag

by Nancy Bestor

I’m writing this story for our loyal Travel Essentials’ customers and newsletter readers. But I’m also writing this story as a reminder to myself, because I have a confession to make. After 24 years of owning a travel store, I still pack too much. Every trip, I pack more clothes than I end up wearing. I come home from every trip with at least two or three shirts and a pair of pants that I didn’t wear.

While the legal size of a carry-on bag has not gotten smaller since we opened Travel Essentials in 1994 (save for Alaska Airlines’ new carry-on size regulation, more on that in the end notes), it has not gotten any larger either. And limiting yourself to a 22 x 14 x 9 inch suitcase for a long trip does require some planning. You can’t just throw everything you think you might want into a suitcase. But it can be done. Other than our bike trip to Jordan, Bob and I both carry-on no matter how long we are traveling for and no matter where we are going. Here are some tips and reminders for myself—oh, and for you all too.

I often pack “extra” clothes “for an emergency.” What I need to remind myself is that if I have a clothing emergency, I can go out and buy something. And, it’s also probably important to note, in 35 years of travel, I have never had a clothing emergency. (“I’m sure this means my pants are going to rip in the crotch on my next trip.”)

I pack versatile clothing. My pants are always dark tan or black, and then all of my tops can be mixed and matched therein. Versatility allows almost all of my clothes to work for a walk or hike through a town or mountainous region, or for a nice dinner at a sit down restaurant. I take three pairs of shoes, never more. I wear on the plane (always my most bulky/ heavy pair, because who cares how I look on the airplane, and I take them off once I’m seated). One of the other two pair is always sandals (unless I’m in Europe in the winter), and the other pair is a nicer looking shoe. All of my shoes are comfortable enough that I can walk in them, for up to 10 miles a day. They aren’t fancy, but they are nice. Keens have been my go-to sandal for years. They make a good looking sandal that I can walk in for miles or wear with a skirt. Dr. Martens in basic black are my favorite walking shoe. They are attractive, I’m totally hip when wearing them (eye roll from the peanut gallery here), and they’re comfortable enough to do a great deal of pavement pounding.

I wear my clothes over again. Who cares? No one is keeping track of what I am wearing, believe me, NO ONE. I’m pretty sure Bob doesn’t even notice (eye roll from me here). If a garment doesn’t have super noticeable spots on it, and it doesn’t stink, I am going to wear it again, and maybe a third or fourth time too. When we walked for five days straight in Southern Portugal, I wore the same shirt for five days in a row. It was a lightweight, short sleeved Smartwool t-shirt, and I’m here to tell you I perspired quite a lot on that trip, and it did not stink. Truly. That’s the beauty of wool. I wear wool socks from Smartwool and Darn Tough when I travel for the same stink-proof reason. And wool dries very quickly as well, when I break down and decide I need to wash them.

As my friend, world-renowned packing guru Anne McAlpin says, if you can pack into a carry-on bag for one week, you can do it for three, because you can wash your clothes wherever you go. We’ve been known to send our clothes to local laundries in Thailand, Jordan, and India, to name just a few places. We also wash out clothes in our hotel sink on every trip. Sometimes it’s just our quick-drying ExOfficio underwear, but other times it is shirts, socks, and even shorts or pants. They’re likely not getting as clean as they do when we wash them in our washing machine at home, but a good hand washing in the sink gets most of the dirt, grime and smell off, and that’s good enough for me. I never travel without Woolite laundry soap travel packs and a travel clothes line.

I take small amounts of toiletries. I buy a small travel-sized tube of toothpaste (or two for a longer trip). I put my shampoo into a 3.4 ounce leakproof Go-Toob+ travel bottle. I do the same with my contact lens solution, my suntan lotion, and my conditioner. And, to quote Ms. McAlpin once again, every country in the world sells soap and shampoo. Going to the store in a foreign country and finding everyday items, just like the locals do, is another great cultural experience.

Carrying on your luggage gives you flexibility. You know the airline will never lose your suitcase, as you’ve got it with you. And when you deplane at your final destination, you don’t need to wait for the bags to come off the baggage carousel. You can head straight out of the airport and beat everyone to the taxi cabs.

Even though suitcases have wheels and telescoping handles, making it easy for you to wheel them to and from your destination, you do still have to pick them up and carry them sometimes. And lately, we’ve been staying in lots of apartments and Airbnb’s in Europe where we have to walk up steep staircases. It’s hard enough for me to haul my carry-on up those stairs. There is no way I could carry a larger bag up without assistance. The same with putting it above my seat on a train.

The bigger your suitcase, the more you’re going to put in it. Limiting myself to a carry-on size means I am taking less with me when I travel. New York Times reporter Susan Heller was once quoted as saying, “When preparing to travel, lay out all your clothes and all your money. Then take half the clothes and twice the money.” I couldn’t have said it better.

Notes:
• Some non-US airlines have smaller carry on size and weight restrictions. Always check with your carrier before flying to see what their size restrictions are.
• As of June 1, 2018, Alaska Airlines has changed their carry-on size policy. But Alaska’s new carry-on size is now the same as all other major carriers, 22 x 14 x 9. Previously, Alaska was the only major US carrier with a more generous carry on size allowance, 24 x 16 x 10. Now, however, they are aligned with everyone else.

“If you can pack into a carry-on bag for one week, you can do it for three,” says packing guru Anne McAlpin.

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We ate at two delicious spots in the city. The first in the old marina, a seafood restaurant called Sea Baron. This unassuming restaurant is famous for its lobster bisque soup, served with bread, and it did not disappoint. The soup was quite delicious (at $13.50 for a bowl, this is a reasonably priced meal in Reykjavík). The other recommended restaurant is right downtown, Icelandic Street Food. Another casual restaurant, Icelandic Street Food serves three dishes, or at least that’s all they were serving on our visit. Lamb soup, shellfish soup, both served in large hollowed out bread bowls, and a fisherman’s special, a mashed fish and potatoes dish. The soups, when purchased in the bread bowl (about $15 each), are all you can eat. You can buy one type, and go back and try the other type for free, which Bob and I both did. There were complementary crepes for dessert, and the owner Unnar, an incredibly cheerful and friendly gent, even gave us free beer coupons for his bar down the street, which we also took advantage of. I highly recommend both.

Our last morning in Iceland was well thought out, thanks to the Icelandic tourist board. As mentioned earlier, we purchased round trip tickets to and from the airport into Reykjavík. But our return ticket first took us to the Blue Lagoon, Iceland’s famous geothermal spa. Advance booking is a must, as it is quite a popular tourist spot, and not cheap either. All that being said, however, the Blue Lagoon is also, in Bob’s words, “dynamite.”

The Blue Lagoon is about 20 minutes from the airport, which is why most people visit on their way to or from it. Located in a deserted region of lava fields, it is a man-made lagoon, fed by the water output from a nearby geothermal power plant. Once Bob and I waited in line to check in and receive our wristbands, we separated to our respective men’s and women’s changing rooms—where soaping and showering before entering is a must—before meeting out in the lagoon. The water ranges from 90-104 degrees, depending on where you are in the huge lagoon. Although there were lots and lots of people there, it didn’t feel crowded, because the lagoon is enormous. If we got too close to anyone, we just drifted to a new section.

Our package included an algae mask, a silica mud mask, a towel, and a drink from the lagoon bar. We both chose a smoothie, but a little later each bought a beer ($12 each), because how many opportunities are we going to have to drink a beer in the Blue Lagoon in Iceland? We spent a little time in the sauna and steam room, and under the man-made waterfall, but really, most of our time was spent floating around in the geothermal water. I was worried before arriving that we would have too much time at the Blue Lagoon, as our airport bus was not scheduled to pick us up until 2:30 and we arrived at 9:30. The truth though? When it was time to catch our bus, after soaking four+ hours, neither of us wanted to get out. That’s how dynamite the Blue Lagoon is. No doubt it is spendy, as our package deal was $140 each. This didn’t include the storing of our luggage ($5.50 each), nor the above mentioned beers, nor the $13 sandwiches we bought when we finally got out of the water. But if I had the chance to do it again, I wouldn’t miss a beat. I guess I’ll just have to go back.

—Nancy Bestor is the co-owner of Travel Essentials. She is grateful there are no photos of her in the algae mask, soaking in the geothermal hot spring.