

Leo Babauta



ULTRALIGHT

The Zen Habits Guide to
Traveling Light & Living Light

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& Living Light

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CONTENTS

Introduction: Why Travel Light? Freedom From Burden	1
Part I: Ultralight Travel	4
Chapter 1: Traveling Light Isn't a Competition	5
Chapter 2: What It's Like to Travel with One Bag	7
Chapter 3: Why We Pack Too Many Clothes, & How to Cut Back	10
Chapter 4: Clothing System	14
Chapter 5: Electronics	19
Chapter 6: Toiletries	22
Chapter 7: Water & Food	24
Chapter 8: What You Don't Need	27
Chapter 9: Don't Pack Your Fears	33
Chapter 10: What Bag?	36
Chapter 11: Getting Through Airports	39
Chapter 12: Apartments & Hotels	43
Chapter 13: Getting Around Cities & Where to Go	45
Chapter 14: Longer Trips	50

Chapter 15: Flexible Mind, Flexible Travel	53
Chapter 16: Useful Travel Apps	56
Chapter 17: Travel Miles & Cards	60
Chapter 18: My Packing List	64
Chapter 19: Ultralight Hiking	67
Part II: Living Lightly	71
Chapter 20: What It's Like to Live Without Too Much Stuff	72
Chapter 21: Less Clothing	74
Chapter 22: Books & Papers	76
Chapter 23: Less Other Stuff	79
Chapter 24: Electronics & Digital Simplicity	85
Chapter 25: Dealing with the Urge to Buy	91
Chapter 26: A Final Word on Living Lightly	95
About The Author	97

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INTRODUCTION: WHY TRAVEL LIGHT? FREEDOM FROM BURDEN

When Eva and I first started traveling (after being too broke to travel for years), we went to Thailand, then Tokyo, and then London and Paris. We lugged around big duffel bags on those trips, which were checked luggage.

They were loaded up with clothes and toiletries and other things to give us comfort and a feeling of preparedness as we headed out of our comfort zone to new lands.

But we'd get tired from dragging those bags not only on planes but also trains, subways, buses, taxis, and walking along city streets. Travel was fun, but weighed down by these heavy bags.

On the London/Paris trip, we decided we needed to make a change. We barely used most of the things in our big bags. Sure, we were traveling lighter than a lot of people, but we realized we had so much we could cut.

So we started by making a list: what did we *not* use on the last trip?

We'd leave those behind next time. What could we do without? We read accounts of other people traveling lightly, both men and women, and decided we were going to cut back.

The result is that our bags got lighter and lighter ... until they were no longer burdens, but things we barely noticed.

The *freedom* that resulted was so incredible. We felt liberated. We could travel faster, farther, happier. Sure, we gave up a handful of comforts, but in return we got the comfort of being unburdened.

These days we move lightly through our travels as we see people slowed down by big roller luggage, or waiting after a flight for their checked luggage. We get stares from the customs people, who ask, "Is that all you're bringing for two weeks?"

We've traveled for a month with one small backpack each, with no problems. We've gone on multi-week, multi-country trips. We are happier than ever when we travel.

Why travel light? Here's what I've found:

- You don't get as tired.
- You can walk around a city with everything you're carrying and it's no problem.
- Getting through airports is faster and easier.
- You can go through multiple countries and cities without slowing down.

- You learn that you don't need as much.
- You start to become comfortable with less, and able to get by on very little.
- You are liberated from burdens!

I don't judge people with lots of luggage, but I will honestly never go back. I've fallen in love with less, and love traveling the world lightly.

I share this book with you not to brag, not to tell you how to live, but in hopes that you'll find some inspiration from what I've learned, and that you'll love traveling lightly as well.

Part I:

Ultralight Travel

In this first part of the book, we'll look at how to travel lightly, and what I recommend.

CHAPTER 1: TRAVELING LIGHT ISN'T A COMPETITION

Once you get into ultralight traveling, it's easy to get into the comparison game: how light is my pack compared to his? Can I get mine smaller so that I'll have some minimalist street cred? I know I've fallen for the temptation, more than once, but I've learned that it's a trap.

This isn't about whose bag is smaller. It's not about being better than anyone else. This is about living life your way, on your terms ... and finding the freedom to do so by not carrying a huge burden on your back.

So don't get into the trap of comparing your stuff to others' stuff. That's not what this book is about.

It's not about getting your bag to a certain size or weight. It's not about showing off your setup to anyone else. I hesitate to share my setup because I worry about coming across that way, and worry about others trying to compare themselves to me.

But I decided to write this book and share what I do for other reasons:

- In hopes of inspiring people to go lighter and experience the joys of traveling light that I've discovered.
- With the idea of challenging people to rethink their way of doing things, to toss out old ideas and experiment with new ones.
- Because I know others who want to lighten their load but don't know how to get started — and I think that by talking about the nuts and bolts of doing this, it might be useful.

Let's make an agreement: you take away any information and inspiration that you find useful from this book, and don't worry about doing what I do, getting as light (or lighter) than me, comparing yourself to me or anyone else. Deal?

Alright, let's do it then!

CHAPTER 2: WHAT IT'S LIKE TO TRAVEL WITH ONE BAG

I'll walk you through a typical trip, traveling with one light bag.

Planning & Packing

I start by planning the trip: researching the destination, figuring out dates, booking tickets and an Airbnb apartment, checking out the weather.

The day before the trip (or often the morning of), I get out my bag and pack. I almost always take the same things, and a lot of those things are stored in one spot in my closet, so packing is as simple as laying everything out, putting them in packing cubes, and tossing them in my bag. It takes 10 minutes. I'll also check in online and get my boarding pass on my phone.

Airport & Plane

I check to make sure I have my passport and other essentials, then hop on a train to the airport. I don't have to check a bag, so long airport lines are skipped.

I have TSA Precheck, so I skip most of the security line and don't have to take off my shoes or take out my laptop ... so it's about 5-10 minutes through security.

Then I'm at my gate in another 5 minutes. Breezing through the airport means I don't have to get there too early. I still get to the gate about 20 minutes before boarding starts, just because I don't like to rush, but it's a stress-free time for me.

I board the plane, put my small bag under the seat, and start reading or writing. Eventually I get tired of this and watch a movie. Then we arrive and I grab my bag, get off, head through immigration checks, and breeze through customs. I skip the wait for checked baggage at the baggage carousel, so I'm usually out of the airport faster than 95% of other passengers.

The City

I get some foreign currency from an ATM at the airport, then jump on a train to the destination city. At this point I can just start wandering around, get a bite to eat, or find my Airbnb apartment and rest.

I explore the city, usually carrying my bag so I have layers to put on

and water if I might need it. Repeat this every day I'm in the city. I might meet up with locals if I have time.

I wash clothes in the sink or shower as needed, usually every 2-3 days, and dry the out in the closet or bathroom, so I always have fresh clothes to wear.

If I'm going to multiple cities, I'll pack up my bag and jump on a train to the other city. Or do the airport thing again, but again, it's a simple and easy affair.

Then I go home, unpack a few things, and that's it! Everything is easy, unburdened, light and free.

Of course, not everything is always that ideal, but I'd say for the most part this represents my travel.