

Tips for short trips to Africa

Check your passport now. Immigration controls require six free pages and six months before it expires.

Please bring a travel adaptor plugs since the outlet in Dar are all 220V and British outlets. Don't expect there to be more than one outlet per room.

Checked Luggage. Assume your checked-in luggage will be delayed for three days. Rarely is luggage ever lost, but there is a good chance it will get stuck on the first connection point (typically Newark). Eventually, all airlines will deliver the luggage to the hotel. Hence, pack enough in your carry-on for four days. Even if the luggage never comes, that will give you enough clothes to use the hotel laundry or buy new ones.

I often pack clothes that I do not intend to bring back. A shirt that I had forever and be happy to replace with a memento bought abroad: socks that are on their last leg, T-shirts I will not miss, rather than bringing my favorite tie.

Local markets are great for shirts. For instance, the president of South Africa, the honorable Nelson Mandela, also had his favorite shirt line.

For international travel, one checked bag is free. Mine is typically half empty, so for the return trip home, I transfer the emergency clothes and provisions from carry-one to checked luggage and travel with just my bag back, super light and super easy. Alternatively, I bring a duffel bag cover to check in my carry-on for the return.

Carry-on. Please remember you may have to run to make your connection. A travel-size backpack beats rollers and bags. Also, airlines are strict concerning precisely two pieces, particularly in Europe, so check the dimensions carefully. Also, in Europe, there are restrictions as to weight. In general, the less weight you have, the easier travel becomes. Bring the iPad and leave the laptop at home, or bring the lightest, smallest you can find; you will not run sequence alignments on Safari.

A water bottle is handy depending on how frequent the service on board is. I typically carry a half-liter size, e.g., this one or this one. It has to be empty until you are past security.

The other essential item is a sleeping mask for the airplane and if you need to sleep during the day. Ear plugs are also cheap and a great help; unlike headphones, you won't care if you lose them. Airplane cabins are very loud!

prêt-à-porter. The colors are khaki, linen, and light. It keeps the sun away somewhat, but more critically, bugs are attracted to dark fabrics and bright colors. Everything should fit loosely and comfortably for the nine-hour plane ride. Jeans won't cut it.

Bring a hat that is airy and squish-able. Assume everything you bring will be wrinkled and squished.

Bring sunglasses and a rigid case. Connect the sunglasses with a string on the back. Nothing is worse than trying to watch a presentation (or a lion) and having broken or lost glasses.

I can manage one week of travel with one pair of light sneakers; if I can, I will bring slippers. They come in handy. For instance, between your room and the Ocean, there will be 50 meters of scorching sand to traverse.

Bring an extra pair of socks or plastic shoe covers for the plane. You will want to take your shoes off on the plane to help with blood flow, but so do the other 300 people on board. During the 9-hour flight, everyone is using the same bathroom.

I travel with compression socks, like these ZENZA, which I also use for running.

I bring one white shirt on all my travels. While many of us associate exotic destinations with letting go and vacationing, this is a business meeting for many, including our trainees. Also, we may find ourselves in a more formal environment, such as visiting a hospital, mosque, or dinner setting.

A personal hack: only me and Gweneth Paltrow know about it. Bring one of your pillowcases in carry one and use it in the hotel. You will appreciate the familiar feel and smell and sleep better. Then on the way back, it doubles as a clean cloth container.

Cash. Cash is still king in many places, particularly if you intend to haggle or take short taxi rides. Do not expect your cab driver or market stand owner to have 3G internet, although most do. It is common, and the hotel will help you, to hire a driver from the hotel for a few hours or a half day. The driver will pick you up and drive you to your destination and pick you up when you text them. Did I mention WhatsUp is a must?

The two-wallet trick. Carry one with some cash and a fake credit card to give up when stopped. Have your other credit cards and passport hidden on you. Many pants and some shirts have secret and zippered pockets.

What about bugs? The venue (and most places) will spray, so I see them more as a nuisance than a danger. The two bug treatments are DEET for yourself and Permethrin for your clothes. Both are available at REI. Apply Permethrin one week before traveling to all clothes, including socks, and don't wash anymore. I will not put on DEET at a venue or the beach, only if I go out.

Vaccination is excellent if you already have it; it probably won't make a difference if you still need to complete the series (Yellow Fever, HepA). More critical: your tetanus shot.

Sun protection is more important than bug protection. Bring whichever cosmetics make you feel happy and comfortable; it is unlikely that you can buy your favorite brand abroad, and you may

or may not like the lotions provided by the hotel. Remember—no more than 100 ml in a carry-on.

What about drugs? Ambien is a lifesaver, a sleeping aid your doctor will prescribe for travel. Whether you want to take it for the flight is up to you but do take it every night while you are there. It wears off quickly. I take Aspirin before I go on any long-distance flight. Malaria medication is unnecessary for most places, but you may want it if you travel on Safari. Please consult your physician. I trust mosquito nets over prophylaxis, which every hotel will have, and so does the WHO.

Conversely, malaria testing is available locally and after you come home. Dramamine, if you like to, and Benadryl if you worry about food allergies. Anti-Fungal, anti-diarrhea medicine, Neosporin, and band-aids are always handy.

Of course, all medication goes in a carry-on.

Most important, don't be shy about asking fellow travelers for help. We are 70 people at the hotel, with experience and resources, which I am sure everyone is happy to share (help includes shirts and socks for those who lost their luggage).

Extra gadgets

Talcum powder for your socks if you expect hiking. This is Afrika, and there will be a lot of sweating. European deodorants are typically much more potent than American ones. I buy mine if I have a layover in Europe.

A Turkish towel or a schal. Why, you may ask? Because it doubles as a blanket on the airplane. Planes and airports typically have the air condition cranked up, yet the moment you go outside, it is 30°C. Unlike a jacket, a towel is much more pliable and doubles for many purposes.

Apple AirTags

Door stoppers

Transparent ziplock bags or more sturdy ones

Packing cubes

Pen and paper

Power bank