

# Journal / Packing List: 2+ Months in Asia in a Mid-Sized Backpack

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Fri, Apr 5, 2024 12:25 PM in [onebag](#)

*I originally wrote this as a personal exercise, but figured I may as well post here in case someone finds it interesting/useful. It's half-journal, half-packing list and details my setup that I find to be the perfect balance between minimalism and practicality. For the last 2 months specifically, it's held up great in Asia across various countries and climates, and throughout some cross-country motorcycling.* <https://preview.redd.it/dkqkn11bnosc1.jpg?width=4032&format=pjpg&auto=webp&s=e8cc3be66a33d0e033147702eac942a62b88ea1a>

I remember one time as a young child playing with friends. Fantasizing, we each sketched our ideal "dream home." Everyone else drew intricate mansions, complete with elaborate swimming pools and multi-car garages. I sketched the floor plan of a small square house, with four identically-sized square rooms: a bedroom, a living room, a kitchen/dining room, and a bathroom/laundry room. A place to sleep, a place to be, a place to eat, and a place to.. uh.. excrete. It was everything I needed. Nothing more, nothing less. They thought I was weird. I thought their mansions were full of lots of bullshit. I suppose I've always been hyper-obsessed with efficiency, and I've never been very materialistic. Those traits have persisted into adulthood. They are why I became an engineer. Today, I may have even one-upped my kid self: **perhaps the ultimate vessel for minimal, efficient living - surpassing even a tiny square home - is a single backpack.** To be clear, I don't live out of a backpack full time, nor do I want to, but I enjoy doing so comfortably for months at a time. For certain discrete periods of time, when traveling, and wanting to fully engage in the experience, it's a useful practice. Why one bag? First, there are the practical reasons regarding air travel. "No rushing to the airport early to check bags, no searching for an overhead compartment, no bag fees or worrying about stuff getting lost, and no adjusting plans to drop off luggage before an adventure," explains indefinite onebagger [Jeremy Maluf](#). Second, there are the more philosophical reasons. There is a sense of weightlessness, freedom, and self-sufficiency that accompanies one bag travel. At some point, a bag becomes small and light enough that it can be carried *without consequence*, no longer of any meaningful concern. "Things" are simply no longer a factor in mobility. Further, the constraint of a single bag is a

useful practice in intentionality, and it's a good reminder that we're able to go long periods of time without needing many things. Finally, without luggage there is a very real sense of traveling as an adventurer, rather than as a tourist. It has taken me several years of trial and error, as well as a good chunk of time obsessively researching small things, to whittle my gear down comfortably to a single inconspicuous backpack. What follows is a breakdown of my bag. I believe it achieves the perfect balance: any more gear, and the bulk/weight of the bag becomes cumbersome; any less gear, and it becomes impractically minimalistic for daily needs. This post is far from original. It's just a drop in the ocean of travel influencer blogs detailing onebag setups. As such, I'm not trying to impart any groundbreaking wisdom here. It's just a personal exercise in appreciating what I have, admiring its efficiency, and brainstorming potential tweaks. Most importantly, it was just fun to compile. I'm not trying to sell anything here (none of the links below are affiliate links), though some part of me does hope someone else may find this list useful. **Key:** ★ = Legitimately game-changing gear

<https://preview.redd.it/6iqjmqyfnosc1.jpg?width=4032&format=pjpg&auto=webp&s=2c68cc514aa1200de393ef94b6a93966c5e7d1f5> # Backpacks \* **Tortuga Setout Divide** What really sets this backpack apart is its solid capacity given its small dimensions (thanks to its suitcase-like shape). It's the most spacious bag I found that still fits under airline seats, though I mostly store it overhead to save legroom (technically it exceeds "personal item" size restrictions, but I've never had an issue). Further, this bag is *incredibly* functional and for \$125 it's held up for 4 years without a single sign of wear. It checks all my main boxes for a solid backpack: comfortable straps, water bottle pocket, quick access pocket, laptop pocket with false bottom, and organizer pocket for miscellaneous small items. The main pocket can be halfway unzipped from the top to access like a regular backpack (great when on the go), or fully unzipped to open clamshell like a suitcase (great when unpacking in the room). The four external clips are super useful for attaching large or dirty items externally. I modified it slightly by cutting out the bulky internal luggage clip. The bag has been discontinued by Tortuga. \* **Matador Freely16** ★ My favorite item on this list. I'll never use a drawstring bag again. Rainproof, durable, and ultra-compressible. Features zipper pocket, water bottle pockets, and comfortable straps. Unlike other ultra-compressible bags it's comfortable, aesthetic, and holds its shape. Perfect mini-pack for beach, hiking, and day-trips. I also use it as a gym bag and grocery bag. \* **S-Biner** Clipped on the outside of my pack. Strong, tiny S-shaped carabiner with near infinite utility. I mostly use it to clip bags to the outside of my backpack when I need extra space. \$5 on Amazon. <https://preview.redd.it/tx73hf9mnosc1.jpg?width=4032&format=pjpg&auto=webp&s=2c68cc514aa1200de393ef94b6a93966c5e7d1f5>

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6 # Tech \* [Apple MacBook Air M2 13-inch](#) A MacBook. It's portable, lightweight, and has crazy battery life. Charges at full speed via my tiny Anker charging brick. \* [Apple iPhone 13 Mini](#) Incredible value at \$450 refurbished. All the best iPhone features without the hefty price tag. Fantastic dual camera system (12MP main and ultra wide) lets me document life in HD. Supports two eSIMs, which is godsend for international travel and avoids fumbling around with physical SIM cards. Small and light in my pocket. Okay battery encourages minimal phone use. \* [Apple AirPods Pro](#) ★ Switches seamlessly between my Mac and iPhone. Noise-cancelling is a must-have for flights and gym, and impressive enough that I don't need to travel with large over-ear headphones. I use these [COMPLY foam tips](#) or they'll fall out of my ears. This generic [silicone case](#) lets me clip to things so I don't lose them. \* [Samsung Duo Plus 256GB Flash Drive](#) USB-C flash drive with built-in USB-A adapter compatible with all devices. Stores my movie backlog and a backup of my digital assets

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70 # Charging \* [Anker Powercore III 5000](#) Nothing crazy. Tiny power bank I bought for 3500 yen (\$23) in Tokyo. Charges my phone twice. Anker is a solid brand. \* [Anker Nano II 45W USB-C Charger](#) ★ Tiny and fast! Single power brick that charges my MacBook and every other device in my bag. Gone are the days of the *massive* MacBook power adapter hogging bag real estate, blocking multiple power outlets and falling out of the wall. \$28 on Amazon. \* [Apple USB-C to Lightning Cable](#) Charges my iPhone and AirPods. \* [Generic Braided USB-C to USB-C Cable](#) Charges my MacBook, power bank, and drone. \* [inCharge X Mini 6-in-1 Charging Cable](#) ★ A tiny, universal backup cable in case either of the above cables is lost or broken. \* [Generic Mini USB-A to USB-C Adapter](#) Useful for charging on airplanes, buses, etc when there are USB-A ports but no outlets. \$9 on Amazon.

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# Clothing \* [Eagle Creek Pack-It Clean/Dirty Half Cube](#) ★ The *\*single\** most important item in enabling everything to fit in a single backpack. Fits my entire mobile wardrobe in a compact, easy to organize cube. I can simply remove it from my pack when arriving at a destination, freeing my bag to serve as a daypack. The two-sided design separates clean from dirty clothes while still consolidating everything in a single cube of consistent size. This is a far better system than having to manage and pack separate clean and dirty cubes whose sizes will vary over time. Discontinued by Eagle Creek; [new version](#). \* [Eagle Creek](#)

**Pack-It Isolate Compression Cube S** Useful for isolating the very dirtiest/smelliest clothes, especially socks. The strong compression zipper *seriously* compacts items and saves space. \* **Generic Shoe Bag** Simple. Isolates smelly shoes. \* **Uniqlo Pocketable Parka** Ultra light, tiny compressible rain jacket. Seems waterproof, but has yet to be tested in a true downpour. \* **Rip Curl Boardwalks** ★ 2-3x: one khaki, one washed navy, and/or one salmon. Hybrid shorts that double as a swim trunks, so I don't need to pack a bathing suit and can hop in the ocean at any time. Pricey but high quality; I've worn them weekly for nearly 3 years with no signs of wear. I bought them half-off on Black Friday. \* **Thermal Base Layer** Ultra-warm, lightweight long-sleeve crew and leggings for cold weather that can be layered under anything. Avoids the need to pack bulky warm clothing. Specifically, an Under Armour crew and **Uniqlo HeatTech tights**. \* **Shoes** [Variable by climate/location] Usually flip flops + tennis shoes, or tennis shoes + Stan Smiths will cover all bases. \* **Clothes** [Variable by climate/location] Underwear, socks, shirts, tanks, Adidas joggers, jeans, athletic shorts, athletic shirts. <https://preview.redd.it/oqdn1mamnosc1.jpg?width=4032&format=pjpg&auto=webp&s=8ccff3edbd3b91bd86e1d420f6f24fd7a510dc42>

# Toiletries \* **Toiletry Kit** Generic case, toothbrush, toothpaste, floss, nail clippers, tweezers, mini first aid (band-aids, Neosporin, Tylenol, anti-acid), mini deodorant, mini shampoo and body wash. \* **Wahl Half Pint Trimmer** Tiny electric trimmer for both shaving and body grooming. Works dry and saves the need to pack shaving cream. It's not the best electric trimmer, but the smallest cordless one I could find with decent reviews. Powered via a single AA battery. It's a bit weak so shaving is slower than I'd like. I'm still on the lookout for a compact USB-C rechargeable trimmer, but have yet to find one. <https://preview.redd.it/79qr8g78oosc1.jpg?width=3587&format=pjpg&auto=webp&s=1420336ee4e3e8cb84a052eff4421f6d8ad2016c>

# Mini Kit \* **Generic zipper pouch** \* **AirTag** For tracking. God forbid this backpack gets lost or stolen. \* **Safety pins + zip ties + Ziploc baggies** Useful for repairing backpack or other items. Ziplock baggies are always handy. \* **Small combination lock** For hostel lockers. Combination lock saves the need to keep track of a key. \* **Earplugs** \* **SIM card removal tool** <https://preview.redd.it/rloommamnosc1.jpg?width=4032&format=pjpg&auto=webp&s=447b82aed1f39f2588eb53fd62cb7c11f36d3f69>

# Miscellaneous \* **Hydro Flask 24oz Standard Mouth** Keeps cold drinks cold for 24 hours. There are few things more satisfying in life than ice water on a tough hike or in a hot climate. 24oz is too small, so eventually I will replace with the **32oz lightweight widemouth**. Only downside with Hydro Flasks is that they dent easily when dropped, and dents break their

insulation, so I've had to replace mine once. \* [House of Clouds Microfiber Beach Towel](#) ★  
The \*perfect\* beach towel. Super compact, so I bring it everywhere. Microfiber material picks up \*no\* sand, so I never track sand into my bag. Unlike many other lightweight microfiber towels, it still feels like a solid towel. It's large and thick enough to lay comfortably on, and absorbent enough to dry off well at the beach or shower. \* [Money Clip Wallet](#) Compact and holds my state ID, cash, PNC debit card, and: [Capital One Quicksilver Visa](#) ★: In my opinion, the ultimate all-around credit card. No foreign-transaction fee, no annual fee, flat 1.5% cash back on everything with no redemption minimum, and no rewards or points fuss. It also has great digital features, including the ability to generate unique virtual credit card numbers for each online vendor, and the ability to instantly enable/disable these virtual cards which is useful for avoiding unwanted recurring subscriptions. \* [AOOKO Sunglasses](#) This Chinese website [DHgate.com](#) sells sunglasses for \$15 under the "AOOKO" brand that definitely aren't perfect Ray-Ban replicas complete with branding, cases, and packaging. Shipping to the US takes a month. Fun fact: one eyewear company, Luxottica, holds a monopoly on the sunglasses industry and controls 80% of the world's eyewear brands such as Ray-Ban, Persol, and Oakley. They also own retailers Sunglass Hut, LensCrafters, and Pearle. This is why sunglasses are unfairly priced and Ray-Bans cost \$200. \* [Generic Bullet Journal](#) ★ For years I experimented with nearly a dozen digital task management apps. None of them worked. I similarly tried, and failed, to journal consistently during this time. Then the [Bullet Journal Method](#) came along and solved both those problems in one fell swoop. Such a simple method simultaneously made more productive, more intentional, and less stressed. I use a generic \$10 dotted notebook from Amazon with some great little features including page numbers, two bookmark ribbons, a pencil loop, and inner pockets. \* **A Book** Relatively bulky and heavy but worth it to me. A Kindle would obviously save space, but I just can't stand reading digitally. A physical book A) is more satisfying to hold, B) is more spatially intuitive in my mind, C) allows physical note-taking, and D) forces me to focus on a single topic rather than be tempted by massive digital library. Additionally, the single-book constraint forces a very intentional choice and enhances travel by setting a mental theme (either matching local history/culture, or the main activity I'm partaking in) for a given trip. \* **Spiral notebook** Also bulky and heavy, but I like scrap paper to jot notes, draw diagrams, and organize my thoughts clearly. Digital notes just aren't the same, and I don't like to pollute my bullet journal with scrap notes. \* **BIC mechanical pencils** \* **Pen** \* **Passport + photocopies** \* **Chain # #** Sometimes \* [DJI Mini 2 Drone](#) Tiny 249g drone with an impressive 12MP camera and 30 minute battery life. I can

throw it in my Freefly16 pack for a hike and barely notice it's there. This ["BUMB" medium-size organizer case](#) from Amazon fits the drone and controller \*perfectly\* with great padding. I obsessively searched the measurements of every organizer, tech pouch, and pencil case on Amazon until I found this, because all the dedicated Mini 2 cases are unnecessarily huge for such a small drone. Great use of my time. Also, I ironed on this [SpaceX DM-2 mission flight patch](#) from the first crewed test flight of the Crew Dragon, because I am a nerd. \* **Hiking boots** Pair of North Face hiking boots I got on Black Friday. # Possible Additions and Tweaks \* **Rubber bands + small duct tape roll** Additional repair materials for the mini kit. \* [Hydro Flask 32oz Lightweight Widemouth](#) Current 24oz capacity bottle doesn't go very far. The lightweight series 32oz is nearly identical size and weight, with an additional 33% capacity. \* [USB-C Rechargeable AA Battery](#) Effectively makes the Wahl trimmer "USB-C chargeable." Avoids the current issue where if my AA battery dies the razor is dead until I go out and buy another battery. \* [Wahl Peanut Cordless Trimmer](#) Upgrade to the low-power Wahl Half Pint which takes forever to shave with. Includes attachment combs unlike the Half Pint. Pricy at almost \$80. \* **Lightweight packable jacket** # Epilogue So that's the bag. What next? Can it get any more minimal than living out of one bag? Maybe. In high school, I was fascinated with the idea of living out of a tin can. Well, not "living" that way, but being able to survive in the wild using nothing more than a survival kit small enough to fit in an altoids can. The sort of thing, like a first aid kit, that you throw in the trunk of your car. So that in case you get stranded somehow, you could survive for a week or so before rescue. I actually had built my own, though you can buy pre-made ones cheaply. For what it's worth, the "meta" for the best pocket survival kit as of 2013, was the [SOL Pocket Survival Pak Plus](#). It was the clear consensus among pocket survival kit reviewers, people who would literally go out into the woods for days at a time trying to survive with them. **Next post:** "\*Part Two: One Can"