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PACK LIKE A PRO FOR YOUR NEXT TRIP

By Elena Reed, style & image consultant www.evolutzia.com.au

Holiday preparation shouldn't involve packing all the clothes you own to cover every possible wardrobe need. Prepare like a pro with these tips from style expert Elena Reed.

"Just in case" packing is a common but ineffective strategy used by most travelers, Reed, from Evolutzia, says. Many people burden themselves with "a truckload of clothes" only to come home with most of them unworn.

"The secret to effortless dressing is planning before you go," she says. "Where are you traveling? What's the climate like? What will you be doing? How will the others dress? If you don't know, ask. Call the friends who you are visiting, or contact the organiser of the conference you're attending. Check with your travel agent or simply Google your destination.

"It's such an obvious step yet so few people ever do it."

Once you know the weather details, select an appropriate eight to twelve items of clothing that mix and match easily. These can translate into forty different outfits, Reed says.

"It's not as hard as it seems: [the items] must be in colours and styles that complement each other. Take more tops than bottoms. Three pairs of shoes is all you should pack for any trip. Consider your activities when deciding on the styles. Pack a range of accessories, as these can make the same clothes look radically different."

If you travel frequently for business, it's a wise strategy to create a list of your mix-and-match items to make packing easier, Reed advises.

This should include:

- two suits (or a smart and a casual jacket that match your bottoms);
- four shirts or tops that coordinate with both suits. Two should be in solid colours and two in prints;
- one knit that can be dressed up or down;
- one pair of jeans or shorts;
- accessories that can translate from day to evening;
- shoes and a small carry bag; and
- toiletries and personal items

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If you've planned well, the actual packing should be a breeze, Reed says. She advises:

- Pack lightly but tightly. "Wrinkling is caused both by under- and over-packing."
- Place heavy items at the bottom of your suitcase - it will be easier to wheel around.
- Place shoes along the border of your suitcase. Bundle each pair together, with soles out and heels at opposite ends. Use the insides of packed shoes for fragile items.
- Button smart shirts and jackets - they will crease less.
- Don't fold garments in half - this will create a crease line across the middle.
- Roll some of your clothes instead of folding them. This works well with jeans, t-shirts, pants, skirts and sports shirts.
- Use plastic or light fabric bags to put individual bundles in. "If airport security searches your luggage, you'll be grateful that you did. It's also easier to unpack once you arrive at your destination."

Now, it's time to choose your luggage. There are a few things to keep in mind when selecting appropriate luggage, Reed says.

While you might be tempted to save money by buying from a discount store, "your trip could turn into a nightmare if it falls apart halfway through. A designer suitcase on the other hand might be a fancy style statement but it's not your best option when it comes to functionality. Practically speaking, you want a quality bag made by a reputable luggage brand."

Soft-sided bags make the best carry-on luggage because they are light and expandable, but they are vulnerable to damage so be wary of checking them in, Reed says. On the other hand, hard-sided bags will protect your belongings but are heavier and more difficult to handle, so opt for a semi-soft bag to suit most occasions.

Design elements to take into account when making a purchase, Reed says, include:

- large rubberised wheels - "these are a must to save yourself from too much pulling and pushing";
- a lockable handle - "choose one long enough so you don't have to hunch";
- self-repairing synthetic zippers - "They will hold together. Metal ones won't."
- a hook for an additional bag - "Wonderful if you do some shopping";
- plenty of pockets, both inside and out - "You'll save time trying to find things";
- a lifetime warranty. Many companies offer these, but Briggs & Riley claims to be the only one that offers free-of-charge repairs, even when your bag is damaged by an airline, Reed says. Happy traveling!