

Ep #139: Travel Light: Carry-On Only Packing and Essential Tips



Full Episode Transcript

With Your Hosts

Alex Payne, Jess Field, and Pam Lorg

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Ep #139: Travel Light: Carry-On Only Packing and Essential Tips

Alex: Here at TMS, each one of us travels carry-on only. We get a lot of questions on how we make that happen, so tune in to find out. Plus, see how we survive jet lag and more travel tips.

Welcome to *Points Talk with the Travel Mom Squad*. We are three moms who've discovered how to leverage credit card welcome offers to get hundreds of thousands of dollars of travel expenses for nearly free. We've used credit card points and miles to take vacations to places like Hawaii, Paris, Greece, Maldives, Japan, and so much more. And the best part? We each still have 800 plus credit scores. Imagine being able to take the vacation of your dreams for nearly free. It's totally possible, and we're here to show you how.

Alex: Hey, I'm Alex.

Pam: And I'm Pam, Alex's mom.

Jess: And I'm Jess. Let's talk points. As many of you know, we pretty much exclusively travel carry-on only and we get a lot of questions about how we make that work. So today we are sharing some tips that we have for packing carry-on only as well as some additional sort of random travel tips. And I know this is a little bit different than our normal episodes because it doesn't directly tie into credit cards, but if you didn't have points and miles, you wouldn't need to travel carry-on only because you wouldn't be going anywhere. So I feel like it kind of ties in that way.

So Alex, kick us off with some tips for carrying-on only.

Alex: Okay, well I'm going to tie in some points and miles stuff too, Jess, so you're going to be happy, but... First of all, a lot of times, people might think, why in the world would you want to just travel in a carry-on? Like that sounds really hard. And honestly, I am shocked by the number of people that ask us how we do this and want an episode on this. So we've been asked so many times, we're like, okay, we just got to do it. There's been even if it's not directly points and miles related, so many people want to know how in the world we do this. And it's kind of funny because I joked to Jess, and I'm like, I don't

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know what to say on a podcast episode about this. My only suggestion is pack less stuff. And there's the episode, just bring less things.

But we did come together and we thought of some actual tips besides bringing less stuff. But first of all, why we do just bring carry-ons. A lot of times when traveling through airports, but especially through train stations, when you're traveling through Europe and you're on those cobblestone streets, it is a pain to have a bunch of luggage. And so that is a huge reason for us why we just travel with carry-ons, is it is just so much easier than having to deal with more stuff.

Another reason to travel with carry-ons, we do a lot of positioning flights, especially if we're traveling internationally and we're trying to fly in a premium cabin, like business class. And if we're taking a positioning flight and we check a suitcase. So for example, positioning, if I'm flying from Salt Lake to New York and my big business class flight takes place out of JFK to Europe, for example. I am going to have to check my luggage at Salt Lake, get to JFK, go outside of security, go pick up my luggage, go recheck it in at the check-in counter, and that just takes time. And it is a lot of time, and it can already be a little stressful if you're doing a positioning flight, you do not want to miss that second flight. And so I like to take out any possibilities or have as much control over the time and the situation that I can, and carry-on gives us so much more control. We don't have to worry about that extra time of having to go check our bag.

Jess: I actually just had an experience where we flew from Dublin to Chicago, and then I was going to try, we landed in Chicago at 2:00 PM, and I wanted to try to fly home to Houston from Chicago that same day. And so it was like there was an option where I could fly about 2 hours after we landed in Chicago, or around 6 hours after we landed in Chicago. And Dublin is really nice because they have US pre-clearance there. And so what that means is you're basically going through immigration and customs in Dublin.

So when you land in Chicago, you're just landing at a standard domestic terminal. And so by carrying on only, I was able to get that flight 2 hours after we landed. Whereas if I had to exit security, go get my bag, re-go through security, like 2 hours would have been tight, I feel like. I would have been nervous that, I would have been nervous that I wasn't going to make that. But I confidently was

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like, okay, I'm going to get off the plane. I had plenty of time because I just had my carry-on bag, you know. And so it can really make a difference.

Alex: Yeah. Well, because you not only have to check the bag, you've got to go back through security. And so it's just like that has a lot of time that you need to account for.

The other thing is, so here in Salt Lake City, you have to collect your bags, and then you go through customs. A lot of times, you go through customs, and then you collect your bags. But there's some airports where it's the opposite. And so at those airports, if you're carrying on, you beat everybody in the customs line because you don't have to go collect your bags. So that just makes it go faster too. And I will say one of the biggest, biggest reasons that we carry on is we don't have to worry about our suitcase getting lost. And my mom has had experience with that.

Pam: Yes, twice actually. Once was when we went to Greece and Alex can well remember me being 3 days without my suitcase. And luckily, some insurance benefits kicked in. I was able to go buy some stuff that got reimbursed, but it was not fun at all. So then from then on, I'm going, I am I am carry-on only. But then another time, coming, we were flying my sister and I to Florence, and they just wouldn't let us check our carry-ons in.

So sometimes you have to be careful because international flights, sometimes the airlines may be smaller. When you're going from one country to another, they have stricter rules on how much weight you can have on your carry-on. And so I did have to check my carry-on bag in. And not one piece of luggage on that flight, not just mine was lost, but the whole flight was lost. Everybody, nobody, it was the biggest pain I've ever encountered in my life. It was, we were only there for 2 nights. We spent half of our time trying to figure out our luggage. Let me tell you, it was a nightmare. So I will try to avoid that as much as possible.

Alex: I don't understand how they forget all the luggage because don't they like take in weight requirements? Be like, oh wow, this plane's really light today.

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Pam: No, it was even worse because they, I think they took us out to the airplane, we sat there for a while because they said the weight's off. And then they still loaded us and they took off, and obviously they didn't reconcile those weight problems. It was a head-scratcher for sure.

Alex: Oh man. Yeah, so that's a huge one for me because when we're going on these trips, we have to get a lot of content to share on Instagram stories and all of that. And so like I want to have my stuff for creating all this content. I don't want to be like having to go to the store and also just cutting into your travel time.

I mean, we were in Greece and I vividly remember us going to different stores in Athens so we could find my mom a bathing suit, find her some clothes, and it's just, you don't want to spend your vacation going and shopping for things to hold you over. So the biggest question we get, too, is when we say we travel carry-on only is people want to know which, like if we have a carry-on luggage that we all love. And each one of us has the Away Bigger carry-on.

The next question people ask is, well, does the Bigger carry-on fit in oversized bins? And it does. The only time that I have like, and this is on like Ryanair, easyJet, all those cheaper European carriers, I've had no issues fitting that carry-on bag there. The only time it didn't work out was flying Air Tahiti, the little short hopper flight from Tahiti to Bora, but like no carry-ons fit. Like they're just really tiny. If you have a backpack, you can get a backpack in there, but they don't even like it's not even an option to like take your rolling carry-on unless it's a tiny, tiny, tiny one.

And then when we flew Singapore Airlines from like we were flying premium economy, and our suitcases totally fit. Like if we were in business class, they would have been like, "Oh yeah, no problem. Here you go. Put them in." But because we were not in business class, our like weight limits, our suitcases were just over the weight limit. And so that's something to consider, but like that's happened twice over the however many years I've had this suitcase.

Pam: You know what, I'd just say something, Alex, about the Away suitcases? We love them. They are not cheap, but their warranty protection is amazing. I

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have had 2 suitcases and I think I've bought maybe 4 of them because I bought a Bigger one too, and my husband has one. I have their regular carry-on and then the Bigger carry-on, twice my zipper broke. No questions asked. You know, on one, they had me send the suitcase back when in the box that the new suitcase came in. The second one, they just said just throw it away. So amazing warranty protection.

Alex: Well, and you even had had that last one for what, like four years?

Pam: Yeah, or longer. Yeah, it was one of my, it was my first one that I bought.

Jess: I will also say that I do not check suitcase dimensions and weights on every airline's website. I take, I take the stance of, like, I'm going to show up. If they make me check it, I will check it, but otherwise, I'm going to get a mobile boarding pass so that I do not have to go to the counter, so that they do not see my bag with their own eyes. I'm going to go through security. I'm going to sit at the gate, minding my own business, and unless they approach me and say, "Ma'am, we need to weigh your bag and we need to check your bag," I'm just going to assume that everything is great.

And so people will message us and they'll say, "Well, I know you have the Away Bigger Carry-On, but this airline says the dimensions are this." And I'm like, I have never once looked at the dimensions on an airline's website. I'm just going to do as I please until they tell me otherwise because, like Alex said, other than that Singapore flight, I've never had an issue with it. And I'm sure that...

Alex: Did you have to check your bag when you went on Air Tahiti?

Jess: Yeah. You have to. I think they say like, if it has wheels, you have to check it.

Alex: Yeah, they're, and I was like, do I really have to do this? And then I got on the plane, I was like, oh yeah, I really had to do this. My backpack's barely going to squeeze in.

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Jess: Yeah, it's like a propeller plane and so it's just very small. So yeah, I kind of just get my mobile boarding pass and mind my business until I'm told otherwise.

Alex: Yeah, same. I also, the Away policy, it's literally, it's called a lifetime guarantee. And so you're paying for quality and you're paying for service. I had the same thing happen. We, it was actually on that Singapore trip, my zipper stopped working. I had only had the suitcase for I don't know, a few months. They asked me to send them a picture of what had happened, and then they said, okay, great, pick out a new one and we'll send it to you. And like the easiest thing ever. So yeah.

Jess: And we're not sponsored by Away, but we would love to be. So just putting that out there.

Alex: Yes.

Jess: And this is all our opinion, not anything we're being paid to say.

Alex: We will put links in the show notes though to any of these, like travel products that we are talking about in this episode, if you want to check them out.

Okay, another thing with traveling with carry-ons is we all use packing cubes. I used to do like the roll, my rolling technique, and just stick stuff in. And then I was like, are packing cubes that great? Are they better? Yes, they're better. Like I've tested it, and I think packing cubes are the way to go. I also like that when I get to the destination, I just take out my packing cube and put it in the dresser. And so then it's like, I like unpacking, and this is a very easy way to unpack.

Pam: Do you roll them in your packing cube?

Alex: No, I used to, and now I just stack them on top of each other. I feel like I actually get more room. I use compression packing cubes that I just got on Amazon, and then I can like fit more stuff in. And that works really well. I know Jess, you don't use, what you use a different ones.

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Jess: Yeah, they're called To and Fro packing cubes. And I honestly got them because the owner messaged us and said, like, she's a small business owner, she's in Texas, and so I was like, yeah, I'll try them out. And so she sent them to me, and now I'm just obsessed with them. And they're cute.

Pam: And they're so cute.

Alex: They're by far cuter than mine.

Pam: Yeah, I bought them just because they're cute, and I actually do a combination of the cubes, and I still roll. So I do kind of a combination.

Jess: I will say one thing, I like to do is if we're going to multiple destinations, like I've done this with Pam and Alex because we went to Singapore and Kuala Lumpur, and then recently we went to Madrid and Barcelona. I will have a packing cube for each city that we're going to. And so then like when we got to Madrid, I just unpacked my one packing cube with all my Madrid clothes, and then when we were done there, I put it away. And then when we got to Barcelona, I just unpacked that packing cube. And so it's like I could just leave a bunch of my clothes in my suitcase that I didn't need. And so that's another tip that I have if you are going to more than one destination.

Pam: This is the first time I've heard this. And I like that idea. Thanks for the tip, Jess.

Alex: So for myself too, and I know this is going to be hard for some people, but I only take 2 pairs of shoes. Every great now and then, I'll take 3 if my third pair are literally like my Tevas, which are tiny and super thin. Like, and there's been times I'm like, oh I really want to take these shoes, but it's just not worth the luggage space to take a pair of shoes that I might wear once that go with one outfit really well. It's like this other pair will go fine. Maybe they're not going to be as cute, but they'll go just fine with that outfit.

So I take 2 pairs of shoes. Usually I wear my heaviest, so often times that means I'm like wearing my, like if I plan on like we're going to a destination,

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we're going to be doing a lot of walking or hiking, like I will wear my Nike like, I don't even know what kind of shoes I have, but whatever, my Nike tennis shoes, you know, like more fitness type shoes. I will wear those because those are my heaviest and bulkiest shoes. If I'm not taking those, I'm going to wear like my Sambas or something because those are still small, but they're not as big as like, you know, my sandals or things like that. So that's what I like to do. What do you guys do with shoes?

Pam: I do the same thing. I wear my heaviest, which are usually tennis shoes. I usually bring a pair of flip-flops, which takes no room at all. And then maybe another casual, comfy type of shoe.

Jess: Yeah, I'm the same. I usually wear my sneakers on the plane and then I'll pack one other pair of shoes. I will say that we're pretty casual travelers, like we're not bringing heels on any trips, and so that helps a lot. And like we just went to Iceland and Ireland and I was like, sure, hiking boots would be like helpful to have for maybe one or two of the days, but it's not worth half the, it's not worth the luggage room that it's going to take up to bring those. So I'm just going to make do with what I have. And so it's a lot of that, just saying, like, in a perfect world, sure, I could fit all this in there, but like, what's the bare minimum that I'm going to need on this trip?

Alex: Yeah, and that's the thing. I think, at least for myself, I would imagine you guys are the same. I'm to the point now where I travel in just a carry-on, and actually, you'd be surprised the Bigger Carry-Ons can actually fit quite a bit of stuff, but even still, I come home from a trip and I'm like, "Oh, I didn't wear this. Oh, I didn't even use this." Like I'm still bringing more than I need in a carry-on. And sometimes it's because, like, oh, I really liked this outfit and it's still clean. Maybe I'm going to wear that shirt again.

Like you don't need 5 pairs of jeans. I will bring one pair of jeans and then besides that, I'm bringing like I have a lot of lightweight pants. Like Vioris are really lightweight, they don't take up a lot of room, or like linen pants. Those kinds of bottoms allow you to pack more of them because they're so thin. Jeans just take up a lot of room. So I really usually only bring one pair. So what are what are some other tips that you two have that I haven't shared?

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Pam: Well, I was the girl in my past life before all of this that had the full-sized suitcase and a carry-on and a backpack, and my husband was behind me, lugging everything around. And I thought that I had to change every night for dinner, and I had to have multiple outfit changes, and I am not that. I did, I think I did one trip, I can really remember doing one. I think I was in Italy, and we were getting on trains, and I'm having to go downstairs and upstairs, and I'm trying to carry all this stuff, and nobody can help me because everybody else had their own stuff. And I go, never again. It was a nightmare. And so I completely switched that.

Now I will say that I do have a herniated disc, so I have some back problems, and so there are some times if my husband's coming along, it's great because he can help me with my carry-on to put it away. You guys can help me, other daughters can help me because that is a little bit of a problem for me.

Sometimes, coming home, I will check my bag because I just don't want to deal with it. Because it's like, you know what? I don't care if it gets to me a little bit later. It's okay. It's just getting there.

Alex: Well, when you don't have a layover, your odds of it getting lost go down significantly, too. So if you've got a direct flight, you're in a better spot.

Pam: Exactly. Now, one of the things that I do, is I do figure that I'm going to end up doing some washing in the hotel sink. And that's just part of my plan. I don't, you know, I'll bring less underwear, I'll bring fewer t-shirts, things that I can easily wash. I don't even bring special soap. I use the hotel shampoo or the hotel bath gel. I'm not picky, you know. And then there have been times where I'm like, oh my goodness, I this t-sh, this sweatshirt got filthy. I cannot get it to wash in the sink and dry it in the time I'm going to be at this hotel. And I'll go ahead and send that out for, you know, with the hotel laundry. This can be especially cheap when you're in Asia or somewhere.

Another tip that I have is that I carry all these Amazon single-use packets of sunscreen and insect repellent with me. And half the time, I don't even use them, but it's just kind of this nice thing to know that I've got it if I want it. And they're just single-use little packets, rip them open, the sunscreen will usually

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last me a couple times. And so that has worked to really keep down on the toiletries.

I don't plan to wear a lot of makeup when I'm traveling, so I don't bring much because I'm usually in sunglasses all the time, so people can't really tell in pictures anyway. So I don't carry much of that.

I have gone on some really long trips, like 2-week trips with carry-on, you know, on a backpack, and been just fine. And again, like Alex says, I have actually not worn some things. And so if I can do it, and believe me, I was the queen of overpacking before I started all this, and I found that I can get by with a lot less and I don't have to just have the cutest outfits anymore. It's all about the trip, the experience, not about what outfit I'm wearing. And so I have I am a reformed packer for sure.

Alex: What about you, Jess?

Jess: I am also a recovering overpacker and it's just like so freeing to be able to just travel carry-on only. One of my big tips hasn't been mentioned is AirTags. Get an AirTag for your carry-on even if you're not planning to be separated from it because like I said, you never know if the airline's going to say, "Oh, your bag weighs too much, you need to check it," or, you know, it doesn't fit in the overhead bin for some reason.

So I have an AirTag in both, in my bag that I carry on, my backpack, and in my carry-on Away suitcase. And that way I can always track where it is because I'm a control freak and I don't like relying on the airline to tell me where my stuff is in case I need it.

The other thing is I always travel with like a hoodie or a sweatshirt, and I just tie it around my waist. And so my go-to travel outfit is a short-sleeve shirt with joggers, tennis shoes, and a hoodie tied around my waist. And that way, if it's cold on the plane, I can throw that on, or it's just like a nice way to have a jacket with you and not have to try and fit it in your bag. And so that's another thing.

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I think a lot of hang-ups for people that check their bags is liquids. And so I do have a pretty extensive skincare routine, but I just get the little reusable containers for all my liquids, and I put them in there. So I'm not bringing my full-size skincare liquids. I just put them in the reusable containers. I bring my own shampoo and conditioner. I do the same for those. And so I feel like if I can do it, I, granted, I'm like Pam, I don't wear a ton of makeup on trips, and so it's more, I have way more skincare than I do makeup, but I feel like you can make it work.

I have gone, I did a trip earlier this year where we spent a week in Hawaii, and then we flew to Chicago, and it was in January. And so obviously those were 2 very different climates that we were dealing with, and I still traveled carry-on only. I made it work. And so, yeah, I think a lot of people catastrophize, and I used to do this too, and I'm like, okay, but what if I need this and what if I need this? And so they just bring everything for every possible situation. And chances are you're going somewhere.

Like my, like Ted used to say this, he was like, "We're going to London. You know they have clothing stores in London, right? You know they have drug stores in London, right?" Like if you forget something, unless you're going to Antarctica, chances are you're going to be able to find whatever it is you forgot for that one specific situation at your destination. And so I try to really only pack things like I know I'm going to need, and not let that voice in my head say, "Well, what if this happens? Well, what if this happens?" So, yeah, those are my tips.

Pam: You know, one thing that I have started doing which is kind of newer is I do have a little bag with all those kind of essential things like, you know, shampoo, conditioner, medication, you know, some ibuprofen, some Tylenol, my really good earplugs to help me sleep, my eye mask, and I actually keep that little, that bag completely loaded and ready to go all the time. So when I get back from one trip, I look and see what I've used and I replenish it. I replenish my, you know, cotton swabs, whatever is needed, and that has saved me and made me stress out less. So I know that I have all those things ready to go, and by keeping it replenished, I don't need to worry about it every single time. That's helped me a lot.

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Okay, we're going to go on to travel backpacks. Now, when you're traveling with carry-on only, a backpack, some sort of a bag is pretty essential for me. I like to be sure and have something that maybe I have the things I'm going to need on the plane, absolutely for sure. Um, they want to know what kind of backpack I use, and I laugh because I have had so many Dell credits from the American Express Business Platinum card that I have probably 6 backpacks. And I would say that I, I just grab one. I'm not really

Alex: 6 backpacks and 6 printers.

Jess: I was going to say, are the backpacks in the same closet as the printers, and you just grab what you need?

Pam: Yeah. So I'm not really loyal to any backpack. I just grab one and go. Um, I change them all the time. I think I found a couple that I like better that I tend to gravitate to more, but I'm not really, you know, that loyal. Now, Jess and Alex, you guys use the Away Everywhere Tote. It slides right onto your suitcase. I, you know, I still, I think those are nice if I was never going to check, but if I do have to check or if I check coming back, then it's a pain for me to carry one of those. It's kind of like a big, heavy purse. And so I really tend to like to have a, the backpack, it works better for my body.

Alex: I am laughing because if you, my mom's backpack stresses me out.

Jess: It is so big. It's like as big as the carry-on, honestly.

Alex: It is so big. I don't know what she keeps in it, but it is overflowing. I mean, I don't know how she finds anything. And so when she says, I just don't know, it's like a heavy purse. I'm like, our totes are way smaller than your backpack. It cracks me up.

So I'm going to try to find a picture of her in the airport with her tote because it's always, I'm laughing because I can picture her now. She's got her suitcase rolling on her Away Carry-On and then she's trying to get her big old suitcase on and it's flopping over and it's she's looking for something and it's always just like,

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I don't know how she does it with this big old suitcase, but I'll get a video of it sometime so you all can see her big old backpack and put, I'll put it on stories, but...

Pam: And now you have ruined the image of Pam the savvy traveler. Thank you very much.

Alex: No, you're a savvy traveler. Your backpack's just anxiety-inducing for me.

Jess: I will say, I have used backpacks and I've used tote bags, and I don't really feel strongly one way or another. I will say, I feel strongly about it having the little thing to slide over the handles because that makes it so much easier. Like I have a backpack for Molly, just because it's easier for her to wear a backpack. You better believe, it has the thing to go over the handles, because it's like, it just makes it so much easier that it's not falling down, or making the bag tip over. And so that is my only requirement, that it be able to slide over the handles.

Alex: Well, and I think yours does slide over, Mom, but she just doesn't use the slider, and that's why it's falling over.

Pam: Or it's packed too full that I can't get the slider to go over. Okay, I need to change my ways.

Alex: I will say, too, that I do have a backpack I got off Amazon, and I kind of will rotate between the two, just whatever I feel like using that trip, and I'll, we'll put a link to both the totes and the backpack. If you're looking for a more economical option, the backpack from Amazon is going to be much cheaper than the Away Everywhere Tote, but the tote actually fits a lot, and I like how organized things, something with a backpack, you open it and you've got to dig to the bottom to find what you're looking for...

Jess: Yeah, that's my issue with backpacks, too.

Alex: With a tote, you can open it and just see everything. Nothing's buried at the bottom, it's all kind of side by side. So that's what I like about a tote.

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Jess: You know what I want to get? I want to get one of those backpacks that has like the zipper portion at the bottom. Have you seen those? It's like, there's a zipper at the bottom, and so it's like you can keep stuff in there that, like, you only need, like your chargers. You know there's like things, we'll get on the plane and Molly's like "where's my iPad charger?" And I have to start digging in my tote, but then I could just put it in that little compartment in the bottom. I need to try one of those.

Pam: Hey, I have a request. The next time we're all traveling together, I want you guys to teach me how to pack in my backpack, cause I swear I'm going to be completely organized every single time, and every single time, I am an absolute hot mess.

Alex: Mom, nothing would bring me more joy. Do you, this is... when I was a kid, you guys, we would be at church, and I would organize my mom's purse, because it would be, like I'd be sitting there doing church organizing her purse, and it brought me a lot of joy. So I would love nothing more than to organize your backpack for you.

Pam: You know, I am not a slob

Alex: She's not. She's not.

Pam: My house is very organized.

Alex: She's actually really type A. She's a really type A person, and so it's just it's so surprising that there's certain things that don't bother you, and your backpack and your purse have been one of those things.

Pam: They bother me. I just haven't been able to figure out how to fix it and make it work. So I'm enlisting your help next time, guys.

Jess: You got it. All right, we got you. We got you.

Pam: So let's talk about some of the things that we do put in the travel bag. Obviously, chargers. I actually put my international adapters in there, too. My laptop, obviously, goes in, any medications, a travel pillow. Alex does that. I

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don't use a travel pillow. Eye mask, definitely. We have our favorite eye mask that we are all loyal to when we travel internationally, during nights, especially. Any snacks or treats, lip gloss. For me, it's Vaseline. I love Vaseline. I don't know. I'm just very old school that way. Glasses or contacts, usually an extra sweatshirt. I get really cold on planes, so I usually have a... if I'm going domestic, any part of it, any part that I'm not going to be in business class, where I have a nice blanket, I'm going to pack a blanket. So that takes up a lot of room.

Alex: Do you know what I think takes, I'm going to guess what takes up some room is your chocolate-covered raisins from the Capital One lounge.

Pam: Yes, stopping by Capital One does.

Alex: Hey, that's a great use of that space. That's a great use. Nothing wrong with some Capital One lounge treats. And I get to be the recipient of it when I travel with her. She always brings enough cookies for me, too.

Pam: Exactly. So we're going on to something that they're not asking me to talk about, and I don't understand this. They make total fun, again, of Pam about jet lag. I suffer from really good jet lag and I need to really listen to these hints because this is not where I'm the best. And Jess is really good about this. So Jess, please school me.

Jess: All right. It's not that you're not good at it. I think that you just are like, I'm tired. I'm going to, I don't want to deal with the feeling of being tired. Whereas I am like, I'm going to force myself to have a miserable first day because I know it's going to make the rest of the trip easier.

And so I will say Alex and Pam call me the jet lag queen. Um, I do feel like once you have a kid, it's so much easier because you're used to not sleeping for a long period of time, especially if you have a Molly who didn't sleep through the night for her entire first year. You are more adaptable when it comes to a lack of sleep.

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So my number one tip is to fly business class and have a bed on a plane. That makes a world of a difference, but I know that is not always possible, especially if you're traveling with your family. I try to plan flights where I'm landing at my, if I have an overnight flight, I'm landing at my destination, you know, midday, early afternoon, and so I don't have to try and stay up quite as long.

I will say Iceland was the toughest time I've had with this, and that was because it's such a short flight that, you know, we left Chicago at 10:15, what, we landed in Reykjavik at 9:30 AM. It's only a 6-hour flight. So when you factor in like how much sleep you can actually get, you know, once you're up in the air, once they turn off the lights, I probably got 3 and a half hours of sleep. And then you land in Reykjavik at 9:30 AM, and you have to try and stay up all day long. And so that was tough for us. I usually aim to stay up until 8:00 PM the first day in Reykjavik, we stayed up till 6:00, and I was like, I can't stay up anymore. Like this is torture.

And so I do think getting out in the sun, in the sunlight, helps kind of reset your circadian rhythm. And so if you can get out and explore and be in the sun, then that is great. I try to stay hydrated. I try to drink a lot of water on the plane. As soon as I land, I find caffeine. That is my one rule because I mean, assuming I want to stay up longer. I try to actually limit my caffeine leading up to my overnight flight so that I can sleep well. And then when I get to my destination, I immediately try and find coffee and, you know, reset things with that. And then I try and also get on my destination's eating schedule as well.

So like I said, we landed in Iceland at 9:30, we went to a little bakery and got breakfast. That felt like 3:30 AM to my body, you know, so I would not normally be eating at 3:30 AM, but I try to immediately just get on the schedule of wherever I am. So if that means eating breakfast, even though I'm not super hungry, then I do that.

I take melatonin on the plane to help myself fall asleep. I have the eye mask that we will link in the show notes. I actually just bought a second of those eye masks today because I'm going to do like Alex does, and I'm going to use one at home and then just leave one in my travel backpack so that it's always ready to

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go. But earplugs, travel mask on the plane, help a ton. And yeah, that's what I do.

It's really the biggest hurdle is the first day. The biggest hurdle is the travel day, where you're just really tired and you really want to take a nap, and it's just realizing, okay, I'm going to power through, and then after one night, I'll sort of reset myself, and then the rest of the trip will be much easier. Alex, I know you use an app. What is that app that you use?

Alex: Yeah, well, I use it sometimes. Sometimes I'm kind of lazy and don't use it. I think it's helpful when you're first getting started traveling internationally and you don't really know what's the best thing to do. I feel like we've done it so many times, we kind of like have a routine.

But I've used an app called Flykitt. They actually sent all three of us a package, and we used it when we went to Singapore where it's like you put in the app. I'm pretty sure, don't quote me on this, I think you can use the program for free where they will make a schedule for you like nap at this time, wake up at this time, have caffeine at this time and you just put in your flight schedule and what time you normally wake up and when you want to be going to sleep for the night and it will create a schedule for you.

There's another one like similar called Timeshifter that you can use. Flykitt, like they sent us like some light-blocking glasses and these medications, like pills you can take. It's basically, but I feel like you could just go to CVS and purchase these pills for...

Jess: It was like vitamins.

Alex: They're vitamins. Yeah. It's like take vitamin, I don't even remember what like vitamin D or B12 or something like that. The other ones, I don't remember what the other ones were, maybe like some fish oils were some of them. So I think you could kind of create your own kit for a like way cheaper than what it worked. But I, I truly felt like it worked.

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Like I was, and it was like eat, eat it this, like you need to have a lot of protein or, you know, eat, eat a snack at this time with these many, with like these vitamins and then take a nap here. I felt like it worked really well, especially when we went to Singapore, that is a wild time change. Really wild time change. And I felt like we recovered pretty quickly, and going home wasn't even an issue. And I feel like going home sometimes from Asia can be kind of tough, but it actually, I thought it worked pretty good. So if you're really nervous about it, you could check out Flykitt. You could even, I think their kit is like \$100. If you want to go the whole thing, I think you could figure it out yourself and do it for a lot cheaper, but that's just an option.

I also think for myself, one thing is when I reach my destination, doing whatever I need to do to make sure I get good nights of sleep, because I've been in times where I've been to Europe and I'm waking up in the middle of the night and I can't fall back asleep. And that can be really frustrating. So I think taking, I will take melatonin for a few days into my trip as well to help me sleep at night. So I'm not waking up in the middle of the night and if I do, then I'm like, well, I guess maybe I'll take another melatonin or, you know, using that sound machine and eye mask throughout your trip in addition to on the plane, you know, keep that going to create like the best sleeping environment you can because that can be a little tricky dealing with the waking up in the middle of the night when you're in Europe can happen.

At least for me that'll, that has happened in the past, but since I started doing some of these things, it happens less and less, and I've been able to sleep really good. And I actually love when we come home from Europe because I'll go to bed super early. Like I'm in, I'm asleep by, you know, 8:30. I'm in bed, and then I'm waking up at 6:00 and I'm just like, I'm feeling so productive. I'm getting so much work done. And then on the flip side, I come back from Hawaii and I'm like, I'm not tired and I stay up too late and then I wake up too late. So coming home from Europe is really actually pretty nice, I think.

Pam: I think the hardest thing for me for jet lag is Asia. Asia is tough, so many time zones. And I think from now on, I definitely have to really use the apps and that's the time when I would be willing to pay for Flykitt, you know, for the

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convenience of it, just because that is a rough one for me. I mean, I have had a couple times coming back from Asia where I've felt sick for, you know, 5 days or so, and I'm going, something is really wrong with me. If I'm not better by tomorrow, I'm going to the doctor's. And then a couple days later, I'm just fine. I go, no, it was just jet lag again. So it can be rough.

Alex: Yeah.

Pam: Okay, so next we're going to get into visas and the new UK ETA Electronic Travel, what is it, what is ETA?

Alex: Electronic Travel Authorization.

Pam: Okay. And those are not new. They've been around for different countries. It is new to the UK, and it is such a popular place to travel. It's really important to know. So one of the things that are really important to do when it comes to visas or these ETAs is to check well in advance. So for me, you know, once I know I'm going, you know, I'm going to check and kind of get an idea of what I need to do.

Jess didn't do this one time. And so now I can get back at Jess for she's usually got, she's usually got every, all her ducks in a row. But Jess, tell us what happened with you one time when you didn't check out whether you needed an ETA.

Jess: Yeah, so Ella and I were going to Australia, and we were flying from LA to Sydney, and so we flew to LA, and then we went to the lounge. We were flying business class, so we went to the lounge in Sydney, and they called our name over the intercom. And so we went to the desk and they said, "You need a, you need a printed boarding pass." We had just gone straight, you know, we hadn't gone through security, we had just landed in LA and gone straight to the lounge. They said, "You need a printed boarding pass." So I said, okay, so I give them my passport, and they said, "We need your visa." So I hand them my Capital One Venture X.

Alex: Oh my God. That's amazing.

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Jess: They say, "No, your visa to enter Australia." And I said, "Oh, what? What?" We didn't know we needed a visa. Luckily, they have an app, and you can, you know, you can basically get your visa within minutes, or at least that was my experience. If you're going to Australia, please don't wait until the day of to get your visa. And so they and we had, I think, 5 hours in the lounge, luckily. And so we downloaded the app, filled out the information, and within like 10 minutes we had gotten our visas, and we were able to get our boarding pass.

But she was saying, she was like, "Well, if you can't get it today, then we can probably put you on a flight tomorrow." And I was just like, "Oh my gosh, how could I not look into this?" It just, yeah. So always check in advance, and check, the thing is like these things change so frequently, and so just because you heard, oh, I don't need a visa to get into this country 2 years ago, that doesn't necessarily mean you're not going to need one now. And so I, I recommend even if you've been to a destination before, still just check before you go.

Pam: Exactly. We do have a post all about visas. We'll link that in the show notes and you can always look at travel.state.gov for your particular destination that you're going to. And like the biggest thing is check well in advance, don't be surprised.

Okay, the UK ETA is completely new. And it's going to affect a lot of people because it is just such a main stop for travel, whether you're going anywhere in Europe or anywhere in the world, even. You should apply for it at least a week before your trip to the UK. It only costs 16 pounds to apply, and every single person needs an ETA. That includes babies and children. And you can apply for other children, other people besides just yourself. There are no refunds for it. So everybody needs it as an American citizen. You must have one if you're traveling to the UK. Transiting, taking a connecting flight, it's clear as mud as whether you need it.

So this is what I would do. Go to gov.uk. We also have a post written about this new requirement and there's certain questions that you ask, kind of a little, um, experience you take to see whether you need one or not. So I did it just before we started this because I thought, okay, I we don't need it just for a layover. So I

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put down that I was American, I put down that I was just transiting, and then it said that I probably needed one, but again, it was not clear as can be.

Alex: I had heard that you, they were originally going to have you do one when you're transiting, and then they said, "Never mind, you don't need one if you're transiting."

Pam: And now on the site, like I said..

Alex: But just to be safe, double-check.

Pam: You know what? It's 16 pounds and it lasts for 2 years. So, you know what? I think I will just always have one. Well, I have a daughter that lives in London, so I will, but she's moving eventually. So, I think I will just have one, you know? Um, it's good for a stay of up to 6 months. It expires in 2 years or when your passport expires, whichever comes first. I just... my husband, we did it last time we went to London, and I just yesterday had to get him a new passport because his is going to expire, he'll get a new passport number, so I'm pretty sure he's going to have to get that again.

Alex: Yeah.

Pam: So anyway, again, go to [gov.uk](https://www.gov.uk) if you have any questions, it, you know, explains it kind of.

Alex: Okay, and then the last thing we're going to talk about just really quickly is cell phone coverage when you're traveling internationally. This is another thing that comes up quite a bit. Jess and I both have T-Mobile, and with T-Mobile, if you're traveling to Mexico or Canada, our phones work just like they would here in the United States, and it's fantastic.

When now if we're traveling elsewhere in another country, we do get some free data. It is slow. We also get free texting. Calls are 25 cents a minute. What I like to do is I'll just connect to the hotel Wi-Fi and I'll just use FaceTime. So when I'm talking to my kid, if I'm like not with my kids or something or if I'm with these two and you know, I'm talking to Mitch, I'll just use FaceTime, use it on Wi-Fi, and

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then I'm literally like not paying for any other things. So T-Mobile is really great for international travel. I will say the data can be painfully slow. So that's something to keep in mind. Mom, what do you do?

Pam: T-Mobile does not work well where we live, so I have to use Verizon. I don't know, there's just something, maybe it's old school me that likes to be really connected. So I pay \$10 a day for a plan wherever I am. Now I do get free Canada and Mexico, but if I'm somewhere else, I just pay that \$10 a day. Now I am, I travel a lot, so it does turn out to be a decent amount of money, but it's just simple for me. I feel connected. I just, you know, and everybody that travels with me, I'm are glad that I do that because then they can, you know, talk to their family if they want to on my phone, or we just have that...

Alex: Or we'll use her phone as like the Google maps or something, because her data is faster.

Jess: She's our she's our navigator on trips.

Pam: Yeah. I just, you know, it's just, yeah, way too much money, but it makes me feel safe and secure.

Alex: One thing that we haven't ever done, but we, you know, we hear about them a lot are e-SIMs. So like, you know, those electronic SIM cards. Like I said, we haven't used these, but I was looking into them, and it actually seems really cool and pretty affordable.

So there's an app you can get, it's Airalo and I actually saw them on, I think it was a Chase offer, like when I was, you know those, you know, it was like 15% back or something like that on Airalo. So it's, it's obviously a reputable company if Chase has them as a, uh, one of their little, what are those? A Chase offers, that's they need a better name for those.

Jess: A partner.

Alex: Yeah. So you can just get the app, you choose your destination and your package, you install it, and activate the e-SIM. One example I saw, you could

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get a data plan. It was for 5 gigabytes, it was only \$6, and it was good for 7 days. So I'm like, you can also do plans where you have texting and you have phone calls, but it wasn't very many text messages, and I feel like those would go so fast. But I was thinking maybe I'll try this just so I have better data, like higher data speeds.

I don't need to be able to call, like if I'm in a situation, I need to make a phone call, 25 cents for a minute, like I'll talk to someone for 2 minutes, and I can get what I need to say across, and then I can call them back when I have free Wi-Fi. But, you know, that data plan seems pretty good. So I might give that a try next time I travel internationally. And so if I do, I'll let you all know how that goes.

Pam: Okay, you guys, there you have it. There's a lot of our travel tips and suggestions, and things that we're not doing so well, and things we could improve on. We hope that you found these tips helpful. If you have some that you'd like to share with us, please send them our way. If you enjoyed this episode, please share it with your friends and family.

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