

Travel Wise / Carol Pucci

## Travel gadgets that resourceful readers can't live without

It's a pillowcase. No, it's a towel. Actually it's a window covering that converts into a nightgown or swimsuit cover.

It's a 45-by-60-inch rectangle of rayon — a sarong, sometimes called a pareo or Indonesian wrap skirt.

"I *have* used mine as a skirt," wrote the Rev. Diana Kruger of Renton about the item she has come to value as her most important travel accessory. But the \$10-\$15 pieces of colorful material she buys at summer street fairs often serve other purposes. She remembers the time she used one to create a bedside table by folding it into several thicknesses and laying it on the hotel's luggage rack.

"The pareo has served as a pillowcase, towel, lightweight blanket on air-conditioned buses, tablecloth, hobo-sack-type laundry bag, window covering, and clothing divider in my luggage," she wrote. "I've used it as a sundress, jacket, nightgown, swimsuit cover, head covering in cathedrals, and a dramatic shawl/scarf to dress up a skirt and blouse at a nonprofit group's anniversary celebration in Bombay."

Kruger, 53, a minister, adjunct professor and writer who has helped organize mission trips to Costa Rica and Mexico, was among 40 of you who e-mailed or wrote in response to last month's column about favorite travel accessories.

As our winner, she'll be receiving the Lonely Planet guide to Mexico to help her plan her next trip.

"Accommodations can run the gamut from church camps to private homes to hotels," said Kruger. "And as a minister, I must pack not only with weather, weight, launderability and wrinkle-resistance in mind, I must also be prepared to dress appropriately for speaking in front of groups in a variety of settings."

The trick to turning a rectangle of material into a skirt, she says "is to form a box-pleat in the front just before the fabric is tucked into the waistband. This pleat enables one to squat down without the knees spreading the fabric open at the slit. One way of fashioning a sundress is to wrap the pareo around the body and tie two corners behind the neck. A jacket is made by tying the corners together in pairs to form wing-like 'sleeves.' "

Rarely does she have room in her luggage to take more than one pareo, but when she does, she uses one for wardrobe purposes and the other for household needs. "As a towel," she recalled, "the pareo came in handy at the Malligi Tourist Home in the village of Hospet, India, where the bath linens for each two-person room were a total of two bath towels and one hand towel."

### Gift ideas

Many of you came up with homemade inventions or ideas on how to put everyday household items to use. Some of you found your favorite items in stores or travel catalogs. The common denominators were lightweight and inexpensive — something to keep in mind if a traveler is on your holiday gift lists.

Some items you said you won't leave home without: convertible pants (available at REI); ear plugs; pillows, U-shaped neck pillows filled with millet hulls and made by Bucky of Seattle ([www.bucky.com](http://www.bucky.com)); plastic utensils; clip-on book lights; travel hair dryers (used by some to warm up clothes or beds!); small calculators, folding alarm clocks; and, in addition to bags by Ziploc, fold-up carryalls by Baggallini ([www.baggallini.com](http://www.baggallini.com)).

Like Kruger, whose pareo brought back memories of a cultural mission to India with her daughter a few years ago, many of you had a special memory attached to your favorite accessory.

### Which way to the beer hall?

The first item into Jim Schopp's carry-on is a half-inch, \$4 compass that slides onto his watchband.

"I realized I needed one when my wife and I emerged from a metro station at night in Prague, trying to find a beer hall that we had seen earlier in the day," wrote Schopp, of Gig Harbor.

He went out and bought one at a Seattle sporting-goods store when he arrived home, and since then, has used it to orient himself when exiting subways in New York and Paris and while driving in rural France and Italy.

### **Keeping it clean**

Judy Morgan, of Seattle, still uses the 4-foot-long string of red elastic clothesline with plastic hooks on each end that she bought at REI 13 years ago. (REI sells a similar clothesline today for \$9.95.)

"It's so red that it's easy to spot in my suitcase and is small enough that it doesn't take up much room. If I add a small bottle of dishwashing soap as I pack, I can wash anything," she wrote.

Her clothesline has been on a cruise to Southeast Asia, to Central Europe and to Hawaii and Mexico, and she keeps with her a memory of a relaxing afternoon, spent — of all things — doing her laundry in Gimmelwald, Switzerland.

"One afternoon, when I was tired from the high altitude, I washed every bit of clothing in my backpack and hung it to dry with the window open and then washed myself, air dried and took a nap. It feels so good when you have been wearing semi-clean clothes, to know that all your clothes are clean again."

### **Not just for babies**

Carol Lee Moses, of Carlsborg (Clallam County), takes along baby wipes. A bag of 150 costs around \$8. "A few fit in see-through baggies," she reports, "and fit easily in a purse or carry-on. They work great for face, hands or other areas."

### **All-purpose wash**

A bottle of Mountain Suds accompanies Seattleites Alonda and Jim Droege on their trips. It's an all-in-one biodegradable soap that rinses clean in saltwater and cold water. "When we travel, we wash the dishes, clothes and ourselves in it," says Alonda Droege. "I guess you could brush your teeth with it if you really wanted to ..."

### **Dish rags and coffee lids**

Erik Connelly and his family plan to visit Italy next, and when they go, there will be a few disposable dish rags and plastic coffee-can lids in their carry-ons.

The dish rags cost \$1.75 and come in handy to use as napkins, wash rags (many hotels in other countries don't provide them) and for polishing shoes. The coffee-can lids double as cutting boards, coasters and plates.

Best of all, Connelly reports, "both items can be left in the trash at the end of the trip."

### **Pillows and blankets**

Daphne H. Davies, of Bainbridge Island, believes in packing in comfort and style. Her favorite items: a pillow and blanket.

The pillow — a real feather travel-sized pillow she bought locally for \$15 — rolls up so it fits inside a small carry-on. The "blanket" is a shawl, either made of silk and wool or pashmina. "They also help when hotel bedding is too hot."

Another small indulgence: cocktail napkins "to brighten up the little moments and give class and style to downscale environments (like the hotel I thought would be nice, and it isn't)."

### **Staying organized**

Travel document organizers sell for \$12-\$15 or more, but Jan Schwert, of Seattle, has a cheap solution to storing copies of her important papers: She buys plastic pen and pencil holders usually put into three-ring binders by students.

"I've used this item to carry copies of my passport, credit cards, and prescriptions; travelers' check receipts; labels for postcards; important phone numbers; and anything else that lies flat and needs to be kept safe and dry," she wrote. "The cost of this item is 79 cents."

### **My name is ...**

Marguerite David, of Seattle, saves the plastic badge holders she gets at conferences.

"Instead of buying an ID holder for going through airport security, save the next necklace-type, plastic badge holder you get," she advised. "Store it in your carry-on bag, pull it out the next time you go to the airport and put your driver's license on one side and your folded boarding pass on the other."

### **Anytime is tea time**

When you're jet-lagged, you wake up at odd hours and sometimes want tea in the middle of the night. Or sometimes flights or trains leave early and you'd like something to go with the croissants you bought the night before.

Amelia Galvan, of Tallahassee, Fla., takes along a dual-voltage, plastic mini tea kettle purchased on sale for \$20. It boils 11 ounces of water in about three minutes, and comes with an adapter plug for use in other countries. (A similar product, called the Dual-Voltage Hot Beverage Maker, is available at [www.magellans.com](http://www.magellans.com) for \$29.85).

"We have also used it in campgrounds with no electric at our tent site, just outlets in the bath houses, for example, and even made instant couscous to go with store-bought rotisserie chicken," she wrote. "A couple of sturdy plastic cups with snap-on lids and plastic spoons are the only other 'equipment' you'll need."

Galvan's other tip: "Never underestimate the usefulness of a cheap bungee cord from the dollar store — three for \$1."

### **Survival kit**

Patricia Allison, of Federal Way, starts her packing with a 4-by-7-inch clear plastic bag that she buys for \$2.98.

"I fill it with ear plugs, eye mask, small flashlight, a few Band-Aids, nail clippers, sewing kit, sample packets of Tylenol, Pepto Bismol, Blistex (lip balm) and a pen," she wrote. "I call this my survival kit, and I never go on a trip without it."

### **Silence please**

When it comes to ear plugs, there are dozens of different kinds, but Sheridan Botts, of Tacoma, says he found the best at Pacific Industrial Supply, 2960 Fourth Ave., in Seattle. They're "Pura-Fit" soft-foam plugs made by Moldex, and cost 25 cents per pair. (And yes, if they have them in stock, they will sell you just one pair.)

"Cut them in half," Botts advised. "Then you can sleep on your side and the ear plug will stay in place."