

THE SENSIBLE TRAVELER

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Lighten your burden from the inside out

By Bruce Mohl, Globe Staff | September 11, 2005

Underwear is it.

For travelers who want to lighten their load, avoid checking bags at the airport, save more room for gifts and souvenirs, and maybe retire old clothes more efficiently, "underwear" is the key.

A neighbor friend tipped me off to this trend when she casually mentioned her underwear strategy for a recent trip to Paris. She brought her rattiest underwear and, as she used each piece, she threw it away.

By the time she flew home, she had more room in her suitcase and didn't have to spend extra time packing to squeeze everything in.

"I'd rather spend more time walking around Paris than packing my bags," said my friend, adding that several New York friends have now adopted the same underwear strategy.

Some travelers go even further, going au naturel for the duration of the trip. Who knew?

I have never thought of underwear as a particularly heavy packing item. Men's underwear is a bit bulky, but women's underwear, particularly the lacy stuff, seems light and compact.

Yet the Web is full of companies trying to sell underwear for travel, both the quick-drying kind and disposables. Onederwear.com offers not only disposable underwear but also disposable socks, both mid-calf and ankle-length. There's even packinglight.net, a website that features disposable and quick-drying underwear.

David Harris, vice president of sales for DNA Products in New York, which markets disposable underwear, said the bulk of his company's sales goes to travelers who are either looking to travel lighter or are clean freaks.

"Many travelers have expressed how great it is to no longer have dirty underwear mixing in with the clean clothes in their luggage," Harris said.

Packaging for DNA's disposables is clear, which comes in handy. "Clear packaging allows for quick and easy visual screening so travelers can rest assured that airport security will no longer handle their underwear during random baggage checks," DNA says in its promotional materials.

There is a definite weight advantage with disposables. A five-pack of the DNA underwear weighs about 3 ounces and is 3 1/2-by-5 inches, about the size of a postcard. By contrast, five pairs of men's briefs weigh about 13 ounces on my kitchen scale.

Harris said DNA Products sold 10,000 packages of underwear last year and is on pace to double that this year. Most of the sales, he said, are for use on trips. He said some people also use them as partial cover-ups when visiting spas.

DNA charges \$3 for a five-pack of women's or men's briefs. Women get seven thongs and men three boxers for the same price. The disposables come with catchy names like LeBrief (women), Yo!Brief (men), El Boxer, and LaThong.

Shipping is \$2 for the first pack and \$1 for each additional pack, so someone who buys five packs of briefs would pay roughly 84 cents per pair.

The disposables are made of polypropylene, a synthetic used in some outdoor clothing, and which wicks away perspiration and moisture, keeping the user dry.

The disposables are so strong that Harris confesses he often washes his and reuses them five or six times before throwing them out. He said he washes his disposables in warm water and air-dries them.

"They're really made that well," he said.

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