



Forget Marie Kondo, it's travel that teaches you to let go of 'stuff'

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Living out of a suitcase that you have to haul around lays bare what you truly require in life.

ARNEL HASANOVIC/UNSPLASH/STOCK

“Mine!” barked the man in the row behind me, aggressively, ridiculously staking his claim to the limited overhead storage space on a flight from Toronto to Bordeaux, France. My tiny dav

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With all the maturity of a seventh grader, I rolled my eyes and donned my noise-cancelling headphones. I used to be more than a little uptight about my stuff: don't touch it, don't move it and do not try to take it away from me. Luckily for that Dutch stranger – and the flight crew and my fellow travellers – I've changed. Insert meditative chant here.

Decluttering guru Marie Kondo says that every item in our lives needs to be evaluated based on the criteria of whether it “sparks joy.” For a lot of people, this is too porous a filter – having nine blue-and-white horizontal-striped shirts sparks genuine joy in me. Nine separate, equally vibrant sparks of joy. So how did I learn to care less about my stuff? Travel.

My early experiences with travel went like this: I'd lug an overstuffed suitcase plus a bulging carry-on through the airport and then deposit them in a hotel room at the other end of my flight. On one two-week trip to Latvia, a security scanner operator at the Frankfurt airport asked me whether I was in the process of moving to the continent (note: my checked baggage had already been checked).

Resort vacations or trips to visit family allowed for these kinds of packing indulgences: Once the bags arrived at their first and only destination, I didn't have to move them for weeks. But as travel became a more regular part of my life and work, that kind of luggage leeway ceased to exist. When someone else sets the parameters for space and agility – say, the small square footage of a river cruise cabin or the weight restrictions imposed by a charter flight – a traveller is left with no choice but to pare down their belongings or remain alone and sad at home.

Returning home from those early trips and surveying the pile of items that remained completely undisturbed inside my luggage raised the obvious question: Might I be an overpacker? There are very few places on Earth where you need a chunky-knit wool cardigan in July and yet here one was, taking up an eighth of my roller bag. The answer was embarrassingly obvious.

Travel taught me how little in life I actually need. It showed me that luxury isn't a pile of nice things dragged behind me wherever I go; it's the experience of meeting new people and exploring new places.

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longer own, for example, a back-up to my back-up winter coat, or so many sweaters that the

ones at the bottom of the drawer turn into wrinkly, compressed squares of wool (do you know how hard it is to press a wrinkle into wool?). For gifts I ask for good olive oil, a bottle of Scotch, or merino wool socks – a replenishment of supplies rather than more “stuff.”

Once, I was comforted by the way my stuff anchored me in place, now I crave the freedom and flexibility of a spontaneous, unencumbered escape.

Which is not to say I have evolved into some kind of unflappable free spirit when it comes to travel. The idea of lost luggage keeps me awake the night before each new trip and I refuse to compromise on carry-on necessities such as my bulky Bose headphones, fold-up slippers and eye mask from Muji, a strong decongestant and Australian pawpaw ointment (a miracle balm that works for everything from chapped lips to mosquito bites).

But I've come a long way.

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JANUARY 7



throughout southwest France in Bordeaux wine-growing towns. In rolling, romantic St.

Emilion, strolling the village's steep, narrow and unevenly paved *tertres* with only a small tote reaffirmed my belief that when it comes to packing, you can't and shouldn't take it all with you.

While it is perfectly natural to want to feel well-equipped in an unfamiliar place, hauling around all the stuff your anxiety says you might need for the coming four hours to four weeks is absurd. You're a tourist, not a Doomsday Prepper. Besides, if Armageddon does strike as you're winding your way through a picturesque French village, the only thing you'll want is a bottle of good merlot.

The writer was a guest of Uniworld River Cruises. It did not review or approve this article.

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