Traveling The Light

Pack up your troubles—and a few must-haves—for those changes in latitude and attitude.

June 1, 2000 By Greg Lugliani

Salutations, Maiden in Uniform!
Word on the street is you're quite the jet-setter, traveling hither, thither and yon for relaxation and inspiration. What packing advice have you for us travelers of tainted blood?

—Continental Drifter

Dear Drifter:
The world is your oyster, darling, so—observing a few precautions—go right ahead and suck it clean from its shell. But while my natural impulse is to rhapsodize on wanderlust, one reader has recently urged me to spill less ink in my flights of fancy and just get to the info I am bound by the rigid rules of my healing sorority and the big man above to furnish you. Well, Missie Mary All-in-a-Hurry, get over it! Humor is the best—and cheapest—medicine, one whose only long-term side effect is crow's feet.

Now, Drifter, first things first: Always check with your doctor about your travel plans, and be sure you're well stocked with those all-important meds. It's wise to keep a sizable supply close to your person when traveling by air or rail, in case checked luggage goes somewhere you don't. If you're taking drugs that require refrigeration, soft, travel-size, plastic cold packs can be had at sundry pharmacies and convenience stores. When possible, make sure your room is equipped with that travel must, the minibar, where you can store pills post-check-in; if it isn't, ask to use the hotel fridge, and make sure you have access to it when the clock strikes adherence hour. Those whose regimens require food in the tummy should be sure to carry a supply of protein bars or other convenient calories.

Speaking of food on the run, the positive voyager's biggest bother is travelers' diarrhea, an irksome and unwanted companion that can cause doubling up in doorways and sudden searches for the nearest loo. Those whose compass directs them toward developing nations are at particular risk and ought to pack an antimicrobial drug (such as ciprofloxacin [Ciloxan], 500 mg twice a day for three to seven days; for kids and pregnant women, an antibiotic alternative is Bactrim). No matter what your destination, you'd do well to tote an antidiarrheal such as diphenoxylate (Lomotil), loperamide (Imodium) or SB Normal Stool Formula (see New Drug Watch, page 87) in case travelers' trots turn up. (Stop these drugs if your tushy sitch still hangs loose after 48 hours,

or if you produce bloody stool or have high fever; also, they should not be used by kids.) Having discussed diarrhea, Nurse ought to point out that the opposite problem—constipation—may rear its ugly head, owing to “protective bowel syndrome” brought on by a disrupted routine, so bringing along a trusted laxative may smooth out this particular, er, strain of travel problem.

Because the world’s tropical paradises are home to ravenous mosquitoes and other winged pests smacking their proboscises for blood of any serostatus, pack a supply of insect repellant (Cutter’s saved Nurse’s heinie in the Yucatan). And since those lower latitudes are notoriously sticky, don’t forget a fave antifungal product to deal with any athlete’s foot, jock itch or yeast infection that may decide to enjoy your trip, too.

While I can’t personally inspect your suitcase before you hit the road, Drifter, I’m assuming you’ll pack sunscreen, aspirin or another pain reliever, a flashlight and batteries, travel books and maps, condoms and lube, and—what am I, your mother?—tickets, passport and visas. And positive peripatetics should make sure to have plenty of travelers’ checks, cash or available credit in the (fingers crossed) unlikely case a medical emergency requires treatment or an unexpectedly rapid return. Finally, while works of art or wonders of nature are grand indeed, I find the unique flavor of many a region to lie in its viticulture. To sample thereof, Nurse roams nowhere without her collapsible plastic travel corkscrew, compliments of the Albion River Inn of Mendocino County, California. All packed? Then there’s only one thing I’ve left to say: Buon viaggio

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