

Gadgets: Going on vacation? Here's what to take with you

June 20 2013, by Troy Wolverton

You've packed your clothes, your shoes and hopefully your toothbrush. But before you head out on vacation, you need to pack the right gadgets.

It's a familiar dilemma for frequent travelers. Fortunately, as tech gadgets become smaller, lighter and ever more capable, you can pack a lot of tech punch without breaking your back. And you can boil things down to three essential devices - plus the accessories and applications to keep them going.

SMARTPHONE: Think of it as the [Swiss Army Knife](#) of our digital era. Smartphones can provide turn-by-turn or step-by-step directions, show you the best nearby restaurants, serve as your virtual guidebook and alert you to upcoming events. They can serve as a [music player](#) on your plane, a game player for children bored with driving, and even a movie player, if you don't mind holding them extra close.

In a pinch, they can take decent pictures and videos of your travels. And, of course, they can help you keep in touch with the outside world, whether through the phone, email, text or [instant messaging](#).

If you're heading overseas, consider getting an unlocked smartphone that you can connect to a local carrier in the country you are visiting. That's much cheaper than paying international [roaming charges](#) to AT&T or Verizon. If you're stuck with a locked phone or can't afford to pay up for an unlocked one, plan on using the device only when connected to Wi-Fi hotspots.

Before you head out, be sure to load your smartphone up with apps. The Google Maps app (free for iPhone; preinstalled on most Android phones) offers turn-by-turn navigation and up-to-date traffic conditions; TomTom's app (\$36, for iPhone with U.S. maps; \$28 for Android version) offers similar features, but also allows you to view maps and directions when you're out of range of cell towers.

The Yelp app (free for both iPhone and Android) offers ratings and directions to a broad range of local businesses, including restaurants and shops.

To keep yourself entertained in the car or in the air, iTunes Match (\$25 a year, iPhone only) and Google Music (free, official app is Android only) both allow you to store your entire music collection on the Internet and either stream it to your device or download particular songs to play offline. Podcasts (free for iPhone) and IPP Podcast Player (free for Android) allow you to download or stream numerous radio shows, and Spotify (\$10 a month, both platforms) allows you to listen to a wide range of music on demand.

For fun, check out the Geocaching app (\$10 for both platforms), which will send you off on real-world treasure hunts.

You should also consider bringing an extra battery or a car adapter if you'll be traveling by car, as you'll likely burn through your battery quickly. Mophie offers a line of cases for the iPhone and other smartphones called "Juice Packs" that include backup batteries.

And if you're planning on listening to music or watching movies on a plane, you're going to need some headphones that will block out the engine noise. There are plenty to choose from, but among the best are Etymotic's hf3's (\$179).

TABLET: A tablet can replace not only magazines and paperbacks, but also a dedicated e-book reader and all the travel guides and maps you once might have lugged along.

Tablets are also great for movie-watching and game-playing. And a tablet can stand in for a laptop if you need to do a little work on your trip, whether editing a document, reviewing a contract or sending a quick email.

You'll likely want to be able to connect to the Internet on your tablet even when you're not in your hotel room or near a cafe. You can buy tablets with built-in cellular data radios, or you can connect a Wi-Fi only tablet to the 3G and 4G networks via a portable hotspot, whether the one built into your smartphone or a through stand-alone battery-powered devices including the MiFi (\$50 with two-year contract from AT&T).

You'll also want an easy way to charge it and your other devices. Kensington offers a line of wall chargers with two or more USB ports, allowing you to plug your smartphone, tablet and other devices into just one outlet. Lenmar offers a similar charger that includes adapters for outlets in other countries.

Many tablets have limited storage space and may not have room for all the books, movies and music you want to take with you. Seagate, Kingston and other companies offer portable, battery-powered external drives on which you can store such files and stream them to your tablet.

As with a smartphone, you'll want to load your apps before you leave. Amazon (\$79 per year, both platforms), Netflix and Hulu (both \$8 a month for both platforms) provide streaming movies and TV shows. Amazon and Apple's iTunes (preinstalled on the iPad) also allow you to buy or rent movies on the go. Amazon's Kindle and Barnes & Noble's Nook eBook apps are available for free for iPads and most Android

tablets. The Nook app offers access to a wide selection of digital magazines, as does Apple's Newsstand app (included with the iPad).

GuidePal and Fodor's offer interactive travel guides for cities around the world (available on both platforms). Meanwhile, FaceTime (included with the iPad), Skype and Tango (free for both platforms) allow you to make video calls to friends or family back home.

DIGITAL CAMERA: While you can take pictures with a smartphone or a tablet, a digital camera will offer much higher-quality pictures, especially if you plan to zoom in on far away objects or people.

If you don't already own a camera or have an aging one, now may be a good time to get a new one. You can find a lightweight, high-quality point-and-shoot camera that is perfect for traveling for less than \$200. If you want to get higher quality images, but don't want to lug around a heavy DSLR, you can get a compact system camera. Those devices, which start at around \$300, offer interchangeable lenses and a large image sensor in a body that's little bigger than a point-and-shoot.

Regardless of what camera you take, make sure you've got ample room to store your pictures. You can find 64GB SD memory cards - which will hold thousands of photographs - for as little as \$40. You can find 128GB cards, which should be plenty of room for even longer vacations, for around \$80.

You'll probably also want to share your photographs. Some cameras now have built-in Wi-Fi radios that allow you to upload pictures to Facebook and other places on the Internet via a hotspot or through your smartphone. Eye-Fi offers a line of memory cards that offer similar wireless capabilities to cameras without built-in Wi-Fi radios. Meanwhile, Apple and Samsung offer adapters for their tablets that allow them to download photos from SD memory cards.

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