



Packing for Cold and Windy Destinations

Description

By Laura Newcomer & Wanderers Compass

Whether packing for a long weekend or a 10-day excursion, stuffing a suitcase with cold-weather essentials can be challenging. Warm clothing tends to be bulky, and knowing exactly what to pack is hard. Given airplane luggage restrictions, shoving your entire closet into a bag won't cut it.

Luckily, a little planning goes a long way. Here's how to make intelligent packing choices to help you stay warm and comfortable at any cold, windy destination.

Packing for Cold and Windy Destinations

Use these packing tips to maximize suitcase space and ensure you stay comfortable once you've reached a chilly locale.

Start with base layers that wick moisture

One of the challenges with dressing for cold weather is that your body temperature fluctuates as you move between indoors and outdoors and when you exert yourself or rest. That's where [layering comes in](#) — so you can peel off layers one at a time if you get hot and pile them back on when you're chilly.

If you plan to be out and about, it's helpful to start with a base layer(s) made from moisture-wicking fabrics that won't trap sweat and lead to chills. Wool (or a wool mix) will keep you warm but not sweaty; look for smooth merino wool options if you're worried the material will feel scratchy. Avoid cotton as it [soaks up moisture](#) and doesn't dry quickly, which can lead to hypothermia in extreme conditions.

As you select your base layers, aim for a snug fit so the material touches your skin all over and can effectively wick moisture from your skin. Selecting [the weight depending on the extremity of the cold](#) you'll be exposed to is a good idea. Choose heavyweight base layers for sub-freezing temps and

low activity and lighter-weight options for milder temps and/or higher activity levels.

Next, pack the middle insulating layers

Layering an insulating layer(s) over a base layer will **ensure your core stays warm** without getting sweaty. Fleece layers work well for this task since they're warm and cozy and tend to layer well over thinner base layers. Merino wool sweaters are another great option; they're lightweight, warm, and can layer easily. A thin, puffy jacket that fits under a shell could also work, particularly if you anticipate exposure to extremely cold temperatures. Don't neglect your bottom half — fleece tights or leggings will do the trick.

Planning a trip to a cold destination in Europe? Check out our [Country Travel Guides](#)

Finish off the layering system with an outer shell

To top off your layering system, bring along a windproof and waterproof shell (or at least water-resistant). This layer seals in the warmth generated by your base and insulating layers. Choose a high warmth-to-weight ratio jacket so you can stay warm without feeling burdened — so you don't have to juggle a bulky coat in the airport. (Accurately identifying the warmth-to-weight ratio can be tricky; check out this guide to inform your search.) Consider shell pants and a jacket, so your lower half stays toasty, too.

How to Pack for a Cold and Windy Destination



Iceland's Longs Glacier

1. Start with base layers that wick moisture

Pack base layer(s) made from moisture-wicking fabrics that won't trap sweat and lead to chills.

- Wool (or a wool blend) will keep you warm but not sweaty
- Merino wool is less scratchy
- Cotton is not a great choice because it soaks up moisture and doesn't dry quickly

Make sure your base layers fit snugly so the material can effectively wick moisture from your skin.

Choose heavyweight base layers for sub-freezing temps and low activity and lighter weight options for milder temps and/or higher activity levels.

2. Next pack middle insulating layers

Pack options like:

- Fleece quarter or full-sip sweatshirts
- Merino wool sweaters
- A thin puffy jacket that fits under a shell
- Fleece tights
- Leggings

3. Remember sun protection

Pack sunscreen, a pair of polarized sunglasses, and lip balm that contains sunscreen.

Planning a trip to Iceland? Check out our [Iceland Travel Guide](#)

4. Keep certain items out of your suitcase

Wear your jacket on the plane and pack gloves and a hat in the pockets of the jacket.

- Look for gloves with a waterproof outer shell and insulating material inside.
- If you will be in extreme cold, pack well-insulated waterproof mittens instead.
- Choose a wool or synthetic moisture-wicking hat.

Wear your boots on the plane

- Look for waterproof, insulated boots with plenty of traction.
- Consider boots without laces so you do not hold up security lines.
- Make sure you break the boots in before you travel.

5. Finish off the layering system with an outer shell

Pack a shell that is windproof and waterproof (or at least water resistant).

Choose a jacket with a high warmth-to-weight ratio so you can stay warm without the bulk.

Consider shell pants as well as a jacket so your lower half stays warm and dry, too.

6. Give some thoughts to your socks

Pack thinner wool socks to hand-wash every few days.

Pack additional socks to layer over a base layer of wool socks.

Check out the [Wanderers Compass Amazon Storefront](#) to find must-have travel items and clothing for your next cold-weather destination. You can find other sites where great cold gear is available, such as Patagonia, on our [Travel Resource Page](#).

Keep gloves and a hat in your coat pockets, and wear your coat



Packing for cold weather in Iceland

One of the hardest parts about packing for a chilly destination? Cold-weather clothing tends to be bulky. You can save tons of room in your suitcase by wearing your coat instead of stuffing it into a checked bag or carry-on. Save even more space by tucking gloves and a hat into the coat's pockets so you can fit other layers and accessories into your luggage. Be mindful of taking up precious overhead storage space with your jacket; it's probably best to wear your coat on the plane and sit with it underneath you or over your lap until all passengers have boarded. Then, if there's still room overhead, go ahead and stuff your jacket into a nearby storage bin (or use it as a blanket if the plane gets chilly).

While selecting a hat, look for [wool or synthetic beanies](#) designed to wick moisture and feature insulation (such as fleece) inside. Pack gloves with a waterproof outer shell and an insulating material inside. If you'll be in extreme cold, [opt for mittens](#) over gloves since they allow fingers to feed off each other's warmth.

Interested in visiting a really cold destination? Check out our [Ultimate Guide to Iceland's Glacier Lagoons](#) article

Give some thought to your socks

Socks may not occupy much of your headspace on a typical day, but give them your attention while packing for a cold, windy destination. Bring thinner wool socks, which won't take up much suitcase space. You can hand-wash them every few days, and they'll dry quickly. Plan to layer a second pair of socks over a base layer of wool socks so you can re-wear the top layer without having to wash them. Again, avoid cotton, as this material traps moisture and can lead to chills. Better options include IsoWool, shearling, fleece, or other synthetic materials that wick moisture.



Siglufjörður, Iceland

Wear your boots on the plane

Like a winter jacket, boots are bulky and take up tons of real estate in a suitcase, so [pack them on your feet](#) instead! If you're worried about hassles at the airport, consider boots without laces, so you don't hold up security lines. Look for waterproof, insulated boots that offer traction to keep your footing on snow or ice. Ensure these boots are comfortable and at least slightly broken in before you depart to prevent painful blisters.

Staying healthy while traveling is especially important in a cold climate. Check out our article on [How to Stay Healthy During Travel](#)

Remember sun protection

Many of us associate the need for sun protection with warm-weather destinations such as the beach. However, sun damage should be top of mind in any locale. In fact, sunlight reflecting off snow [can tax eyes](#) and [burn skin](#). Pack sunscreen, a pair of polarized sunglasses, and a lip balm containing sunscreen to protect yourself from the sun. While you're at it, bring along some moisturizer to soothe sunburned or wind-chapped skin.

Conclusion

By layering strategically, choosing fabrics carefully, and wearing your bulkiest items onto the plane, you can show up to any cold, windy destination properly outfitted for indoor and outdoor activities. Bonus? You'll do it without having to pay for multiple checked bags.

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About the Guest Author

Laura Newcomer is a writer, editor, and educator with multiple years of experience working in the environmental and personal wellness space. Formerly Senior Editor at the health site Greatist, Laura now lives and works in Pennsylvania. Her writing has been published in Washington Post, TIME Healthland, Greatist, DailyBurn, Lifehacker, and Business Insider, among others. An avid outdoorswoman, she can often be found hiking, kayaking, backpacking, and tending to her garden.

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To empower you as a consumer, we suggest you read our [blog post](#) on the importance of travel insurance and how to get the best coverage from top-rated companies for an affordable price.

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They are the premier global air medical transport. One caveat to travel insurance is that medical evacuation usually gets you to the closest facility to care for you. Medjet gets you back to the U.S. to the hospital of your choice once you are stable enough to fly. They cover COVID-related transport as well.

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To learn more about how Medical Evacuation membership with Medjet Assist works, check out our [blog post](#) for a more detailed review.

[Expedia.com](#)

Hotels, home rentals, BNBs, flights, and other transportation & tours

[Expedia](#) is a US-based company whose mission is to power global travel for everyone and everywhere. Whether planning a family vacation, booking for business, or organizing the trip of a lifetime, they are a fantastic resource. Wanderers Compass focuses on independent travel, and using sites like [Expedia](#) makes that possible. Every aspect of travel you need, from airfare, accommodations, rental car, and cruises to activities to do at your destination, can be booked on [Expedia](#).

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Hotels, Home rentals, BNBs, Flights, and other Transportation & Tours

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We always check Expedia and Booking.com to verify prices. At times, one is sold out of rooms while another at the same place has rooms. We also often find some European hotels, especially smaller ones, on Booking.com but not on Expedia. It could be they are a Europe-based company. Try both before booking accommodations.

[Vacation Rental By Owner \(VRBO\)](#)

Are you traveling with a family or having an extended stay at your destination?

With over 2 million bookable vacation rentals, [VRBO](#) connects homeowners with families and vacationers looking for something more than a hotel for their trip. The [VRBO](#) community offers families or groups various rental property types such as condos, cabins, lake rentals, beach houses, etc.

[VRBO](#) is now under the Expedia group's ownership, which many were worried about, but it hasn't panned out to be a concern. It is a massive network with access to all lodging forms should issues arise. Joelle has used VRBO for many years with her family and has had no problems with it.

[Viator](#)

As the leading marketplace for travel experiences, [Viator](#) believes that making memories is what travel is all about. And with 300,000+ experiences to explore—everything from simple tours to extreme adventures (and all the niche, interesting stuff in between)—making memories that will last a lifetime has never been easier.

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[Amazon.com](#)

An excellent source for travel essentials and guides

We now have our own Amazon Storefront with all our favorite travel accessories and gear in one place. Check out our travel store at the link below.

[Wanderers Compass Amazon Storefront](#)

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We buy most of our travel books, accessories, and luggage from Amazon. We have ordered up to two days before travel and get what we need.

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(Airport and sightseeing service)

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