

It's a good idea to travel light. As a woman alone, you'll be far less vulnerable and much more independent if you're not loaded down with heavy luggage and extra bags. Depending on your style of travel, a small suitcase on wheels or a backpack is a good luggage choice. Try to make sure you have at least one hand free at all times.

A few days before your departure, you might want to try some test walks. Pack your bag and make your way around the block. Visualize yourself climbing subway stairs or getting on and off a train unassisted. You'll probably go home and reduce the bag's contents by half.

A fanny pack, tote bag or small day pack is useful for shorter excursions. If you plan to do a lot of shopping, you'll need an extra lightweight bag to bring your souvenirs home.

It's smart to keep your luggage locked at all times. Carry several small locks and two sets of keys.

Avoid expensive-looking camera bags. They may only serve to

identify you as a wealthy tourist. Be creative. Try using a diaper bag instead.

Luggage tags with flaps that hide your name and address from inquiring eyes are a smart idea. They protect your anonymity and thwart would-be thieves who may try to identify the empty home you've left behind.

Taking a handbag? One that has zippered inner compartments for added security and a thick shoulder strap that goes over your head as well as your shoulder is ideal. The best way to carry your handbag is in front of you, next to your stomach. This way, it isn't easily accessible to pickpockets.

"The three most important things about travelling: pack light, always wear comfortable shoes and smile!"

*Erin Woodley, Canadian Olympic silver medallist, synchronized swimming, 1996*

In your handbag or fanny pack, carry only those necessities that are lightweight and that you can afford to lose or have stolen. You should conceal those items that are not easily replaceable and are crucial to your travel arrangements – your passport, traveller's cheques, cash, medical prescriptions, contact numbers for your doctor and a copy of your insurance policy – by carrying them close to your body.

You can use a cotton money belt that you wear around your waist or a cotton pouch that hangs around your neck and is concealed by loose-fitting clothes. Another

"Foreign women aren't seen as women per se in China, but first and foremost as foreigners. As such they won't be any more vulnerable than a male traveller."

*Jan Wong, Globe and Mail columnist and author of Jan Wong's China*

"As a woman, my fear of being cooped up in my home without new challenges, new conversations, new vistas, far outweighs any fears I might have at travelling solo in a strange land."

*Evelyn Hannon, editor, Journeywoman.com*

excellent option is a security half-slip worn under a skirt or dress. Hidden under the hem are three zippered compartments perfect for holding travel documents, cash and credit cards. If you plan to spend time at the beach, consider buying a waterproof pack worn around the waist. It's a practical method of keeping your valuables safe and dry.

Be sure to make duplicate copies of all your important travel documents. Store these in your suitcase and, if the originals are lost