

## Online Shopper

Michelle Slatalla

**UMBRELLA** The Wind-Defying Auto-Open umbrella from Hammacher Schlemmer, \$24.95.

**CLOTHES LINE** A seven-foot Flexo-line from Magellan's, \$7.85.

**LUGGAGE** Magellan's eight-pound rolling tote, \$129.

**LAUNDRY KIT** Walkabout's wash kit (sink stopper, detergent, scrub brush and clothes line), \$15.

# Travel Light, But Well

**A**FTER the first flush of excitement, I started to get nervous about how much our impending family trip to Paris is going to cost.

Even the usual rationalizations that I use to calm myself after a frivolous and expensive purchase of, say, shoes — opportunity of a lifetime, good for the whole family, educational experience, etc. — weren't working.

But then I realized that if we didn't spend another penny before we went to France later this month, we'd be fine. I did some quick back-of-the-book calculations, came up with a plan involving industrial-size cans of beans and hoped to convince my family that they will look back fondly on and maybe even learn to love leftover bean sandwiches.

The budget was on track — even the dog seemed willing to accept the memo on reduced portions — until one family member came into my office and asked how he was going to plug his digital camera thing into the wall in the Paris hotel to upload photos to some other gadget thing he owns. Or words to that effect.

"What are you talking about?" I asked.

This family member said I should go online and buy something called a voltage adapter.

While I was still reeling from that bombshell, another family member came into my office and asked how she was going to keep her feet dry because her friend Molly who just went to Paris said it rains all the time, and also had I considered how to dry out damp clothes in a hotel room?

"What are you talking about?" I asked, but with less certainty.

This family member suggested

looking into something called a portable laundry line.

By the time the smallest family member arrived at my desk — her concern was having enough umbrellas, because it turns out she's always the one who has to share, and then she ends up with a wet neck — I was resigned to the necessity of some pre-Paris purchases.

This was how I ended up browsing last week at Internet sites — like [Packlight.com](http://Packlight.com), [Orvis.com](http://Orvis.com) and [Travelessentials.com](http://Travelessentials.com) — that sell a wide array of travel gear. I saw lightweight luggage ([Magellans.com](http://Magellans.com)'s eight-pound rolling tote is \$129) and a hemp fanny pack (\$14.95 at [Goodhumans.com](http://Goodhumans.com)) and even foldable travel high chairs (\$19.99 at [Burlingtoncoatfactory.com](http://Burlingtoncoatfactory.com)).

Exhibiting great willpower, I resisted the urge to buy an adorable little travel sewing kit (\$3) at [Walkabouttravelgear.com](http://Walkabouttravelgear.com) and instead focused on the more pressing need to make my husband's huge collection of electronic equipment fully operational in Paris.

[Walkabouttravelgear.com](http://Walkabouttravelgear.com)'s comprehensive guide, "Solving the Riddle of International Electricity," included a voltage and adapter index with a pull-down menu to enable customers to shop by country. I clicked on "France," learned that I could buy a grounded adapter (\$7) that fits the standard European socket and phoned Brad Boyle, the company's owner, to ask whether I also needed a voltage converter.

"A laptop's needs are different from a hair dryer's," so it depends on what you're taking," said Mr. Boyle, who has spent 10 years writing text for and updating the many, many pictures of country-specific plugs illustrated in the electricity guide. ("There isn't a day I don't update.")

"I don't think my husband is taking a hair dryer," I said.

"Most newer electronics handle voltage worldwide, and you don't need a converter," Mr. Boyle said.

## Your trip is planned and paid for. But are you really ready?

"The best thing to do is look and see if it says anywhere on the device that it's dual voltage. Laptops always say it now and digital cameras almost always do."

Another item that Mr. Boyle recommended was a Pack-Mate storage bag set (\$17), in which you pack clothes, force out the bag's air and gain up to 75 percent more packing space. I was tempted, but since other family members had such a long list of demands, I restricted my purchases to the adapter.

At [Magellans.com](http://Magellans.com), a pull-down menu on the home page invited me to

Shop by Destination. For France the site's weather notes raised the specter of damp sweaters: "Precipitation can be expected year round."

A phone call to Lynn Staneff, a company spokeswoman, confirmed the threat. "In Paris it typically rains 112 days of the year," she said.

"You know that off the top of your head?"

"I did a lot of research for the site," she said.

"So I really do need a laundry line?"

"The Flexo-line, absolutely," Ms. Staneff said.

I ordered Magellan's seven-foot braided line with "three braids (not the usual two)," according to the site, for \$7.85. I was hooked by the authoritative product descriptions: "Forget those cute little suction-cup clotheslines," "Just loop its ends around a doorknob, hook, shower head or rod."

Also, because my husband said he would need at least two adapters — if not more — for reasons I begged him not to explain to me, I added another grounded adapter (\$6.85 here) to my cart before checking out.

Then, despite misgivings over a recently bungled order at [Target.com](http://Target.com), I authorized my two teenage daughters to purchase brightly patterned rubber rain boots from that site because the price was so cheap (\$19.99, available online only). Both the polka-dot and the lime green have been shipped, according to [Target.com](http://Target.com).

Still to buy: umbrellas. Having tested a number of models for a previous column this year, I have an uncontested favorite: the Wind-Defying Auto-Open umbrella from Hammacher Schlemmer. It's attractive and sturdy and has a "patented vented mesh system" to "eliminate umbrella inversion" on windy days. At [Hammacher.com](http://Hammacher.com), I found a collapsible one-pound version (\$24.95) and ordered two, dooming my youngest daughter to another year of sharing.

The only thing left on my shopping list was beans. Those I bought at the local market to save shipping costs.

Lars Klove for The New York Times