



Dash Carry-On

ROAD-TESTED TRAVEL GEAR



E-Pad Laptop Desk

BY HOPE S. PHILBRICK

The right tool makes any job easier. Traveling is no exception. Consider how much easier it is to lug a heavy suitcase around when it's on wheels. As someone afflicted with a severe case of wanderlust—in 2008, I was in Atlanta for three consecutive weeks only twice—I know from experience how packing the right stuff can help minimize stress on any trip. During the year, I road-tested several different travel products with varied results:

DASH

FIRST IMPRESSION: This rolling hardside carry-on is cute and colorful. (It's available in a rainbow of colors including taxicab yellow, yacht blue, berry red and funky green.) It's lightweight (less than eight pounds), rolls or spins on four wheels and has a telescoping handle.

ROAD TEST: Whether driving to a destination like New Orleans or flying to Aruba, I found this bag is sized right for quick trips.

FINAL ANALYSIS: Excellent carry-on that's easy to push or pull through airports. My light-colored Dash scuffs up easily, so I have avoided checking it. I also avoid packing liquids into it, because it's awkward to open in crowded security lines. I prefer it for short trips when I'm not checking my other larger suitcase, as it seems challenging to

maneuver two wheeled bags.

GET IT: For \$79.95 at www.brookstone.com.

E-PAD LAPTOP DESK

FIRST IMPRESSION: This laptop desk is stylish and comes in four colors to coordinate with your decor. It seems perfect for when you want to stabilize a laptop computer while working in bed or on a chair.

ROAD TEST: The hard surface is sized right, as long as I'm content to use my laptop's built-in mouse (there's not enough desktop surface for an external mouse). The soft padding on the underside conforms to my legs without making me sweat.

FINAL ANALYSIS: Comfortable and sized right, but bulky for travel. This item would be most appropriate to bring along when driving to a destination rather than flying.

GET IT: For \$39.95 at www.brookstone.com.

TRANQUIL MOMENTS TRAVEL ALARM CLOCK

FIRST IMPRESSION: Honestly, I read "immerse yourself in eight therapeutic sound programs, including clean white noise, designed to help you achieve healthier states of mind ... and guide you into deeper sleep" and thought, *give me a break*. I already had a travel alarm that was smaller and simple to use. Did I really need this thing?

ROAD TEST: Rhythmic sounds of rain, ocean surf, cicadas and more help drown out distractions like elevators ringing in the hallway outside my hotel room in Jamaica,

my upstairs neighbors in Atlanta bouncing their bed against the hardwood floors, and my husband snoring on the pillow next to mine, wherever we are. To invite soothing sleep, yes, I need this thing. The alarm clock has dual settings so it's easy to juggle two time zones, and I can set sounds to play continuously or in 30, 60 or 90 minutes.

FINAL ANALYSIS: Love it. This is an item that I now routinely use at home as well as on the road.

GET IT: For \$99.95 at www.brookstone.com.

BOTTLEWISE DUO

FIRST IMPRESSION: I rarely go anywhere without buying at least one bottle of the local wine or spirit, so I had to try this product that's "designed to keep wine safe during air travel" and comprised of two liquid-tight padded pouches in a canvas shell.

ROAD TEST: Since receiving the BottleWise Duo, I've successfully brought home dozens of glass-bottled liquids without breakage. I can usually fit smaller bottles into the liquid-tight pouch alongside one bottle of wine or spirit: I brought home three bottles of hot sauce and two bottles of rum from Jamaica and a bottle of salad dressing and a jar of mustard, in addition to two bottles of wine from New York's Finger Lakes region.

FINAL ANALYSIS: I've always had good luck when packing bottles into my checked baggage: I once transported five bottles of olive oil home from Italy padded with my laundry and, thankfully, nothing broke. But

using BottleWise minimizes worry about any potential disaster. (Since nothing I transported broke, I can't validate the claim that the product would contain spills, but it does seem likely.) I discarded the bulky outer canvas shell, since it takes up valuable space without enhancing performance.

GET IT: For \$58.95 at www.bottlewise.com.

LIGHTLOAD TOWELS

FIRST IMPRESSION: A biodegradable towel that's super-absorbent and fits into your pocket as easily as a stack of five silver dollars? Really? This I had to see for myself.

ROAD TEST: This past August, I brought a lightload towel onboard the Hurtigruten's MS Nordlys while cruising Norway's coast. As part of its green initiatives, the ship line encourages guests to use bath towels multiple times, as is common practice in hotels around the world. Since no bathmat was provided in my cabin's tiny bathroom, I opted to test the lightload towel. Though it took time to unwrap and was very wrinkled, it absorbed the water that splashed out from the shower very well and was easily wrung out for reuse.

FINAL ANALYSIS: More absorbent than paper towels, lightload towels are reuseable yet disposable and don't add much weight or take up much space. They can also work as fire starters, coffee filters, wind scarves and more.

GET IT: In multi-packs starting at \$2.75 at www.ultralighttowels.com or 1-888-lightlo (544-4856). **SP**

TRAVEL

Travel Tranquil Moments



BottleWise Duo