

Priceless items for travelers

The question on the front of the flier asks: "How Could Anyone Travel Without Flexo-Line?"

The answer. We couldn't. And wouldn't. Ever since we were sent one to try out by the Flexo-Line people of Dunbridge, O.

But this simple product — the only freebie we've ever received in 13 years of writing this column and therefore very dear to our hearts — is just one of many small, light, and vital travel accessories that we wouldn't go anywhere without. Period.

So here, in no particular order of preference, price, or priority are some of the items that find their way into our carry-on bags trip after trip after trip.

■ Flexo-Line is a braided rubber clothesline that eliminates the need for clothespins and is virtually indestructible. As committed one-bag packers, washing out laundry every few days is a socially responsible requirement, and the basic Flexo-Line model that can be stretched to seven feet and hold 12 pounds of clothes has surprised and amused hotel maids from Alaska to Australia.

They — the Flexo-Lines, not the maids — can also double as straps and tie-downs, and even emergency tourniquets.

The Traveler's model No. 101 costs \$6.99 and weighs less than an ounce. It is available through travel accessory catalogs and stores or direct from the Flexo-Line Company, P.O. Box 1262, Dunbridge, OH 43414.

■ A dual-voltage immersion heater allows us to wake up to an early morning cup of tea wherever we happen to be. Packets of tea, coffee, and dried milk in a zipper bag and a couple of easily packed ceramic or enamel mugs complete this life-saving operation.

With the price of hotel breakfast overseas approaching the ludicrous, this water heater will pay for itself after a single use.

There are many different brands available through catalogs and speciality stores. The price is around \$12 and the weight of the heater and two mugs is 11 ounces.

Warning. Make sure you order the dual-voltage version or you'll

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end up with a mass of burnt plastic and hot metal!

■ Our lightweight binoculars are not just for bird watching or sporting events, but also a valuable companion for every kind of sight-seeing. We've found them particularly useful for picking out details in dimly lit churches and cathedrals.

■ Universal sink stoppers are hardly glamorous or high-tech. But how many times have you been in a hotel and found that the bath or basin won't hold water?

This flat bit of plastic, available in most hardware stores, can save an awful lot of aggravation at an insignificant price or weight. And the rubber ducky will be very happy!

■ Pocket flashlights moved high up on our indispensable accessory list following our early forays into Eastern Europe, where streets and apartment buildings had minimal or zero lighting.

Since then they have proven their worth in nocturnal map reading and electrical outages, and they generally add to the comfort and safety zone.

■ Magnifying glass. Ever tried deciphering the small type on a subway map? It's tough enough with young 20-20 eyes, let alone our more ancient models. An increasingly important addition.

■ Shortwave radio. As news junkies who need to keep up with the latest happenings wherever we are, a compact radio (with earphones) is always with us.

News and features in English are available on any number of frequencies on the BBC World Service, Voice of America, Armed Forces Radio, or the English-language programs offered by many international broadcasters.

Our current Grundig World Band Receiver RK-709 with two AA batteries weighs 12 ounces, is the size of a small paperback and costs \$166.50.

And finally, don't forget the corkscrew . . . and the Swiss army knife . . . the alarm clock and the pocket calculator . . . the fanny pack and money belt . . . the dual-voltage hair dryer, the electrical plugs and adapters . . . and a tiny brass bobby's whistle that can summon up help or scare off intruders.

Happy travels!