

# Have pack



By NICOLE ROBINSON

**I**T HIT home how much backpacking had evolved when I queued for a room in a Paris hostel.

A girl in her 20s was in front of me and still carrying her backpack. A pair of boots was hanging from the outside of her pack, although they weren't the kind you'd expect.

No muddy hiking boots for this intrepid traveller. This girl was travelling in style — along with a pair of patent leather knee-high boots that were perfect for a night out on the town.

No longer is backpacking the domain of dreadlocked dropouts who survive on meagre daily budgets and cut corners any which way they can.

You are just as likely to be lining up for breakfast next to an elderly American man or a young married couple with a band of children in tow. Thankfully, some hostels have come to the party.

Savvy entrepreneurs, especially those in European countries such as Switzerland, Belgium and Austria, have realised there is a market for travellers who do not want to pay for unnecessary travel luxuries like fresh towels and sheets

every day or that complimentary chocolate on the pillow. However, they also don't want to put up with cold showers and bed lice.

Travellers with a moderate budget everywhere have been sighing with relief with the emergence of mid-range independent hostels, usually more personal than a YHA hostel but which are also just as concerned about maintaining a high standard.

Many hostels now offer fully licensed bars and cafes, internet access, private rooms, discounted tours and clean, hygienic kitchen facilities.

Then again, many don't. There are still the dodgy operators out there who care for nothing more than making a quick buck, so do your research thoroughly.

Even though backpacking facilities have come a long way, some places still have a long way to go.

Make sure you have a quick look around the place before you hand over your money. Complaining that the kitchen is putrid is unlikely to do much good when you've already paid for your accommodation.

There will also be times when you'll get dodgy service — because you're "just a budget traveller". You may be waiting to check in at the counter only to be standing there for ages while the staff, sometimes a fellow backpacker working for travel money, talks for ages on the phone oblivious to your angry stares.

Other times you'll get friendly, efficient service that rivals that of a five-star hotel. Well, almost.

A great strategy to uncover the best places is to take the opportunity to ask like-

## TOP FIVE SAFETY HINTS

- Never leave money in your room. You may think your room-mates are your new best buddies but trust no one. Cash-strapped travellers just might find your wallet too tempting to ignore, no matter how nice they seem.
- If travelling on an overnight train, chain-lock your bags to the baggage racks. It may seem overcautious but many thieves make their living ripping off sleeping passengers. If you need to go to the bathroom in the middle of an overnight journey,

- try to get someone to go with you.
- When sightseeing, always carry your day pack in front of you to make it harder for a thief to slash your bag straps. If sitting down to eat, always watch your bag.
- Be wary of hostel representatives at train stations. They may claim to have a great deal, but more often than not you're better off booking and finding a hostel yourself.
- If you have a Eurail pass treat it like money, it's irreplaceable.

## TOP FIVE CLOTHING ITEMS

- A sarong is a godsend. Besides wearing it, it can double as a beach mat, bathrobe or light sleeping sheet.
- If you're travelling in the northern hemisphere in winter, thermal underwear is a must. It saves wearing too many layers and can double as pyjamas.
- Thongs. You will be thankful for these if you encounter a shower or toilet area that is less than sterile

- They could save you from nasties such as licea.
- Long skirt or full-length pants might seem a bit formal for a backpacking trip but many churches and temples require that you cover yourself appropriately before you enter.
- Black and Whites. If you plan to work to subsidise your holiday, basic black pants or skirt and a white top will come in handy to pick up some hospitality work.

## TOP FIVE TOILETRY ITEMS

- A proper toiletry bag makes life easier. Try to get the fold-out type with clear plastic compartments. These often have a hook so you can hang them up in the shower instead of placing them on a wet floor.
- A few plastic bags are handy for such things as wet clothes, smelly shoes or to store leftover food.
- An absorbent, quick-drying towel will save

- you many drying hours. It can double as a bath and a beach towel.
- A medicine kit. You're bound to feel run-down or sick at least once. Take a kit with the necessary items such as aspirin, vitamin supplements, sore throat gargle, Band-aids, diarrhoea tablets, insect bite cream and water purification tablets.
- Don't forget your toothbrush.

...Backpacking ist nicht mehr die Domäne von langhaarigen Aussteigern, die ihre Tage mit minimalem Budget gestalten, und Geld sparen, wo sie nur können. Es ist genauso wahrscheinlich, daß man beim Hostelfrühstück auf einen älteren amerikanischen Mann trifft oder eine jungverheiratete Familie mit Kindern. Glücklicherweise haben einige Hostels diese Entwicklung angenommen. Geschäftstüchtige Jungunternehmer, besonders in europäischen Ländern wie der Schweiz, Belgien und Österreich, haben verstanden, daß es einen Markt gibt für Traveller, die unnötigen Luxus wie täglich wechselnde Handtücher und Bettwäsche oder das Stück Schokolade auf dem Kopfkissen nicht bezahlen wollen, trotzdem aber nicht kalt duschen möchten oder verdreckte Betten vorfinden wollen. Backpacker mit begrenztem Budget konnten in Europa in den letzten Jahren mit Erleichterung feststellen, daß es vermehrt unabhängige Hostels gibt, für gewöhnlich persönlicher als eine Jugendherberge und sehr bemüht, einen hohen Standard zu halten. Viele von ihnen bieten mittlerweile konzessionierte Bars und Cafés, Internetzugang, Einzel- und Doppelzimmer, Stadtführungen und saubere Küchen....