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Good and Bad Travel Gear Trends for 2012

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I just spent three solid days checking out the new travel gear that will be hitting the shelves later this year, at a trade show where all the buyers come in and figure out what's going to be hot and should be in stock. You can catch individual reviews on Practical Travel Gear as they hit the market (and if you're a guy, go see a little eye candy on the PTG Facebook page.) Meanwhile, here's the big picture view of what's happening now and what's on the way—plus how it's hitting your wallet.

Are you looking for a new breathable waterproof jacket, a rolling suitcase, sunglasses, a water bottle, a pair of good socks, or a pair of lightweight hiking shoes? There are anywhere from 30 to 100 companies now supplying each of those items. All of them are fighting for their corporate lives to get your attention and get shelf space in stores so you can find them. So while prices simply have to go up for these guys to even break even, none of them has the ability to really sock it to you as a consumer. So it's really hard to find travel gear that's a bad value these days. Sure, you may find items that are more technical than you need or are aimed at upper-end travelers who are less price-conscious, but you can be fairly secure that if you buy a (legit) name brand item, you're not going to get something crappy. The stakes are too high. With some companies, they'll even guarantee anything in their line for life: Eagle Creek, Briggs & Riley, **Osprey**, Tilley Hats, and Gore-Tex for a start.



The technology in travel gear, apparel, and shoes has progressed so far so fast that if you have a backpack or jacket from even five years ago, there's a good chance it weighs twice as much as what you would buy now to replace it. I'm routinely running into backpacks I can pick up with one pinky, wheeled suitcases I can pick up with a forefinger. This wheeled carry-on from Osprey weighs all of four pounds.

