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Kosher On The Road

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It's the dead of winter and you're tired of the cold. So tired, in fact, that you're considering a getaway to Hawaii, Tahiti or another warm climate.

The problem: Kosher restaurants are rare, and the idea of eating tuna and protein bars for a week doesn't sound like much of a vacation.

The solution: A variety of delicious, fully cooked kosher meals are now available on-line and in retail stores. You can enjoy a solid meal, even a hot entree, with minimal effort wherever you go. What's more, with a picnic knapsack, you won't miss eating with real plates and cutlery.

So here are fresh tips for keeping kosher on the road, as well as a few other accessories to help make your travels worry free.

Instant dinner. Imagine stuffed cabbage at the beach or spaghetti and meatballs overlooking a waterfall. How about cheese ravioli with marinara sauce in an elegant hotel suite?

Three companies offer prepared kosher meals requiring no refrigeration or cooking.

Ingenious self-heating meals from LaBriute also include disposable cutlery, instant soup and cookies. To warm up the dinner, simply pour the small pouch of sodium water over a "food heater" pad in the foam tray. (The tray should be stabilized on a flat, heat-safe surface.) Place the sealed entree on the tray and slide it back into the carton for 14 minutes. (Meals can also be warmed and reheated by microwaving or immersing in boiling water.) LaBriute meals (about \$7 each) are under the supervision of Kof-K and Rabbi Shia Katz, Bishul Yisroel-Bais Yosef, Chasidishe Shechita. Labriutemeals.com, (866) 432-8522.

Two other companies also offer MSG-free prepared entrees, but without extras such as cutlery, cookies and warming units. TastyBite packages all-natural, somewhat spicy Indian cuisine in a silver "Smart Pouch." Kashmir spinach, Madras lentils, vegetable kofta pilaf and other dishes (about \$2.50 each) serve up great heated or at room temperature. Dairy and non-dairy selections, which are produced in India, are certified kosher by Rabbi Avraham Binyamin, director of the Sir Jacob Sassoon High School for Torah and Jewish Education in Mumbai, India. TastyBite.com, (888) 827-8900.

In 1996, My Own Meals were the first certified kosher meals introduced into U.S. military rations. Today the line includes a variety of meat, dairy or pareve meals, such as vegetarian or beef stew, chicken with black beans and cheese tortellini. My Own Meals (about \$4 each) are supervised kosher by Rabbis A. Soloveichik and M. Soloveichik. Myownmeals.com, (847) 948-1118.

Setting the table. When you're ready for takeoff, picnic kits and accessories offer both lightweight and deluxe choices for transporting

eats and dining in style. Magellan's markets a lunchbox-sized case (\$34.85) with service for two. Features include 6-inch plates, cutlery, cloth napkins, salt and pepper shakers, cutting board and cheese knife, unbreakable wineglasses, combination corkscrew/pocket knife/bottle opener and a 36-inch tablecloth.

Magellan's also offers an inflatable vinyl pillow (\$7.85) to wrap around specialty wine picked up on your travels or champagne you're bringing along to celebrate a special occasion. A sturdy Velcro strap keeps your bottle or a fragile souvenir safe. Magellans.com, (800) 962-4943.

Taking a long flight that doesn't serve meals? Headed to a hotel with a refrigerator and schlepping pastrami? Or day tripping with kosher perishables that need to stay cool? Igloo makes a wide assortment of soft-sided Collapse & Cool insulated carriers (about \$20 each) that easily fold flat to pack for the return home or load up on Parisian charcuterie. Their detachable backpack cooler (\$50) works as an easy carry-on. Igloo-store.com.

If you prefer a pre-loaded backpack (sans essen), PlumParty.com boasts a spacious insulated food compartment and everything to set the table. The super-sized "Ultimate" padded backpack (\$110) contains all the usual accoutrements with service for four and larger plates. It even includes a fleece blanket with water-resistant backing, an insulated, detachable wine bag and charming, decorative nickel cork stopper. Plumparty.com, (800) 227-0314.

Lock and load. To secure your checked luggage hassle-free when flying, Brookstone Easy Check Luggage Locks (\$20 for two) allow you to comply with Transportation Security Administration procedures. On a recent road test, I set these four-dial locks with my own combination in minutes. Each lock is marked with a number code and key hole, so when airport security inspected the contents for a one-way flight, I left the bags locked and TSA personnel used a secure passkey to have a look and then relock my luggage.

In the event an Easy Check lock is cut off bags, Brookstone advertises that it will replace the remains free at its retail stores. Other companies offer similar products, but double check for the Travel Sentry trademark to ensure the locks are TSA-friendly. Brookstone.com, (800) 846-3000.

You'll easily distinguish your black bags from everyone else's with surprisingly superior oversized luggage tags from Jetsetgo. Their hip, whimsical designs come in four fun categories — nature, animals, pastimes and, what else, fun. You'll find everything from handsome architectural icons and Americana to goofy comic book characters and neon-colored fruits and flowers.

Each Jetsetgo Bag Tag Set (\$7.50 each, free shipping with a pair) features a cool tag built to withstand abuse, a strong faux leather strap and a removable contact information card that can be swapped with a business card. Jetsetgobagtag.com, (800) 799-0549. n

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