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Drip-Dry Through Europe

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Myra Scholten, H.JI. 4, who toured Europe last summer, tells how the American coed travels . . .

Drip-Dry Through Europe

You can spot American college tourists in Europe on sight. As they begin their tour at Harve, Amsterdam or Naples, they reveal a common pattern of actions, manners and dress.

Fresh from the pages of any American fashion magazine, healthy, young and eager, they are ready to strike a pose, gazing starry eyed at the Eiffel Tower. Neat as pins and fresh as daisies, they are obviously set for weeks of carefree travel. Each student has carefully coordinated her wardrobe to include practical, yet dashing clothes. She has examined every drip-dryable and wrinkle-shed item on the market and taken her pick. She confidently expects to look like a page out of Mademoiselle from port of entry to debarkation point.

Her wardrobe consists of dacron-cotton combination blouses (usually monogrammed) and a few buckle-backed skirts, freshly pressed and new. The very soles of her “ugly American shoes” are unmarred. Her tennis shoes, bought for conformity and comfort, are snow white.

The buttons and lining of her crisp tan trench coat are firmly anchored. Passport, traveller’s checks, vaccination certificate, identification cards, billfold and loose coins are carefully compartmented in a huge purse the size of a suitcase. To balance the weight of the purse, a camera hangs from the opposite shoulder. Sunglasses or “shades” give one that “continental look,” or so the wearer believes.

Between five and ten days are spent on the ship meeting all kinds of exciting people and breathlessly awaiting the first sight of foreign land. Every minute of every day is full of eating, bridge playing, dancing and little, if any, sleeping. Every minute is utilized to the fullest and every corner of the ship is explored the first day out. Conscientious care is taken with the new clothes, but every article is worn at least once. Extreme care is taken in repacking all items exactly as they were found.

In too short a time . . . and yet, not quite short enough, the ship has docked in Europe. The excitement is too hard to hide. At last she has reached foreign soil. Whether landing at night or in the daytime, it is thrilling. The lights reflecting in the harbor are French. The little tug boats bursting their motors to pull the big ship in to dock are French. The people are French. The little houses in the distance are French. Even the high wail of the train whistle in the distance is French. Everything is thrilling because it is new and different . . . and French!

Finally all the excited tourists are allowed to leave the ship. The student has on spic and span clothes, and her hair is either cut very short or has grown very long for an “easy to care for” hair style. Her motto is “good grooming the easy way.”

As the weeks fly by, time becomes more valuable. All leisure time enjoyed on the ship has disappeared. Suddenly there isn’t time for any-
thing. Days of travel begin to wear on the traveler. She experiences extremely hot and then cold weather. Just when she repacks her suitcase to comply with the weather, the temperature changes again.

After a long day on a bumpy bus, she collapses in her hotel room to write letters and go to bed early. But there is so much to see! She can’t waste one minute. She may never get back. She must see the city at night. “After all, the best way to get to know a city is on foot,” they say. Once more she puts off the drudgery of letterwriting, repacking and washing hair and clothes. Her feet ache and drag, her back hurts and her shoulders slump when she returns that night, stumbling through the hotel door. But she has seen the city; its small outdoor cafes, bright lights, narrow and mysterious streets and townspeople. Her exciting stories and adventures can top all others in her group. Her days become longer and nights shorter.

She begins to leave clothes packed and wear the same item day after day, falling asleep to the monotonous drip, drip, drip of her drip-dry blouse. She leaves behind holey socks and shoes to make room in her suitcase for precious souvenirs and treasures. Her trip becomes a marathon of decisions and sacrifices. Should she wash her hair or see the sights? Should she wash her clothes or see the town? Should she repack her suitcase of mangled clothes or go to bed?

The days become hectic and tiring. She discovers that it rains every day in Europe except on the sunny Riviera. Undaunted, she enjoys the sights, wet and dirty. Snow-white tennis shoes have a way of becoming grey very fast in Europe.

By the time the bus tour reaches Paris, the student is haggard-looking and exhausted. The drip-dry-ed-ness has dripped out of clothes, and the wrinkle-shed fabrics have permanent pleats in the wrong places. Her clothes have turned to a neutral grey due to hard water and poor washing facilities, and her tennis shoes have become open-toed from months of walking cobblestone streets. They too are a dirty grey with the canvas trim becoming fringed. One shoulder has become lower than the other from carrying her purse, camera and light meter all on one side. A trench coat, draped over the other arm, is wrinkled and dusty from stuffing it in a small compartment in the bus. She has acquired the Bridget Bardot look ... scraggly, bedraggled hair which is shaggy, dull, dirty and slightly stiff.

When she sets foot on American soil, she looks like a ragamuffin. Her trench coat now serves a dual purpose. The sleeves are sewn together and stuffed with treasures that won’t fit in her bulging suitcase. She has sentimentally thrown her tennis shoes overboard as a final tribute to Europe and is sporting a pair of Italian sandals. A great change has occurred in the student. The camera bug has suddenly become camera shy and never completes the “before and after” picture series. The pendulum of travel continues year after year and time observes many optimistic travelers going through the same, perpetual cycle.