

TRAVELING WITH NEEDLEPOINT

I wonder what people who don't do needlework do when they travel. I had a job where I traveled about 80 percent of the time. Having needlepoint to do kept me happy in the evenings in my hotel room, kept me content during the inevitable plane delays, and allowed me to make many lovely things. Now that I mostly travel by car, I find that having a needlepoint project with me always makes the time go faster and my life easier.

A part of traveling with needlepoint is stitching in places which aren't the best environments -- the beach, dimly lit hotel rooms, airports after security has taken away your scissors. Traveling successfully with needlepoint can mean taking these environments into account and planning for them. Once you do, you may find it more fun to stitch on the road than at home.

When you are traveling, pack a 100-watt bulb to replace the bulb in a lamp in your hotel room. Most hotel lamps are too dim for stitching.

Going on an airplane anytime soon? Prepare stitching kits which will be in anything carried on. I bought a plastic case of gum to hold my traveling supplies. It has in it extra needles, but only a few, blunt scissors and a needle threader. Drop this in my project bag and I'm ready to go.

If the poor light in hotel rooms is a problem for you, put a bright lightbulb in your checked luggage, well wrapped, and replace the hotel bulbs with that. Just remember to bring it home with you!

Going to the beach or pool and want to do some needlepoint? Make sure it is something which is lightweight (this is not the time for the wool pillow) and has colorfast threads (in case it gets wet).

Put into your stitching kit for trips or classes a portable ort container. This could be a mint tin, an origami box, or even a small cardboard jewelry box. Use it during class and then empty it before leaving.

Stuck for an ort container when away from home? Use an empty cup.

Traveling with a floor stand? Disassemble it and use masking tape to tape it together. Put the hardware in a plastic bag.

Never travel with your expensive scissors. Buy an inexpensive pair (Mass Marketed are great for this) and put them with your travel project. Then you won't mind if they get thrown out.

Look for blunt scissors (for kids) or baby nail scissors for travel.

Do you spend lots of time in the car? I keep a small, not too hard, needlepoint project in the car to work on while I wait. They need to be small and on stretcher bars so that they fit with the wheel in the way. They shouldn't have stitches which require pulling or couching. I love Christmas ornaments for this.

If you are going on a beach vacation, think about doing a plastic canvas project; it is far more resistant to water than canvas. 14 mesh plastic canvas uses the same threads as 18 mesh canvas. Since it's easy to finish the projects, you can complete them while there.

From my friend Michelle of Come to the Point!: If you are working on plastic canvas and it starts to get soft because of the heat, put it in the fridge for an hour to stiffen it.

Traveling by car? Work on projects which don't need stands or use large frames. Many people find these uncomfortable (not to say dangerous) in cars.

There is probably nothing in the world worse than the fare in airport bookstores. All your favorite magazines are between issues, there isn't a paperback in sight you want to read, and all the hardbound books are too expensive. It's hours until your flight. Needlepoint can come to the rescue. In my traveling days, I always kept a "plane project" in my briefcase. It had to be small, easily portable, and something I liked but that wasn't urgent to do (this isn't the place for projects with deadlines).

I put the project, any instructions, and the threads and some needles, into a zipper bag and carried it in my bag.

You don't know how many times those little projects have saved me when I finished my other projects and was stuck at an airport.

Lighting in airports and on planes is poor. Pick projects to work on which have easily distinguishable colors.

When traveling by air, bring a self-addressed, stamped padded envelope with you. Anything you can't bring past security and can't live without, you can put in the envelope and send home.

I have added a “car piece” to my rotation system. This is the piece which goes along with me everywhere. The car piece needs to be mostly or completely Basketweave, should be small (so it is easy to carry) and be easy to see.

I like geometrics for my travel projects, the repetitive stitching in many areas makes them easy to stitch when the lighting is poor.

If you are stuck in a plane or an airport for many hours, don't forget to take breaks. Look around every couple of minutes to avoid eyestrain and get up and stretch, or take a little walk every hour or so. This prevents fatigue and is good for you — even if it's only a walk to get more coffee.